

# **Service Plan Refresh 2024-25**

## **Children's Services**

Carol Cammiss

**Executive Director**

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# Foreword

Welcome to the Children's Services Service Plan 2024-25. This plan outlines how we are supporting delivery of the Council Plan and provides an overview of the breadth of support to children and families the department provides. We are progressing well in line with our Children's Strategy 2022-25; The strategy sets out how we will drive the continuous improvement and transformation needed to deliver better outcomes for all children, young people and families in Derbyshire. The ambition set out in the strategy is:

**We will work creatively and collaboratively to inspire and empower children, young people and their families to be the best they can be. Our ambition is that all children and young people in Derbyshire are safe, healthy, happy, learning, and ready for work.**

We continue to operate in exceptionally challenging and fast-changing circumstances. The combination of sustained pressure on public finances; rising pressures associated with cost of living; and increased demand for services and inflationary uplifts to costs of services all impact and set up challenges for the future. We are also implementing changing legislation and expectations from central government coupled with significant reform agendas affecting all areas of children's services. This all gives rise to extremely challenging conditions in which to achieve our ambitions for all children and young people in the county. The priorities and actions set out in this strategy represent the best possible route to achieve our goals. We have made huge strides in addressing consistency of the experience of children and families and have made improvements across all services, this has been recognised in our recent Ofsted Inspection. This outcome has been supported by our robust quality assurance process and high-quality performance data.

As corporate parents, we take particular pride in the amazing achievements of our children in care and care experienced young people who have overcome significant challenges in their lives, and we remain tireless advocates for them in ensuring improved outcomes. Partnership working has also improved with further exciting partnership work planned for 2024-25. We have an established Education Partnership, SEND Strategy, SENDCO network and panel arrangements, all linked to new operating models. Everything we are doing is focused on the delivery of the children's strategy with children and young people at the heart of what we do.

*Carol*

# Our Services

The children's services department plays an important role in supporting the council to achieve its ambition to be an enterprising and value for money council, enabling people and communities to thrive. With just under 4,400 appointments (over 2,410 FTEs) and an annual budget exceeding £151 million, the department works collaboratively with a range of stakeholders including local communities, residents, service users, businesses, partners, other local authorities, government and its agencies to deliver key services and support functions for the council, as set out below.

## Strategic Commissioning, Quality and Performance

James Gracey – Director

Provides a number of strategic enabling services such as: Participation and children's rights; business intelligence; quality assurance; ICT, casework systems and children services websites; transformation, change management strategies and programmes; future service development; process improvement; traded services and music hub partnership. Statutory roles include the child protection service, independent reviewing officers for children in care, advocacy, independent visitors, and complaints management.

## Early Help and Safeguarding

Alison Noble – Director

Delivers children's social care services including early help, children's social work, children's centres, youth services, careers, troubled families, youth justice, fostering, residential, adoption, specialist services for disabled children, children in care and those with care experience.

## Schools and Learning

Vacancy – Director

Delivers services relating to early years and childcare, education improvement, special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), alternative provision, the virtual school for children in care, school place planning, the school capital programme, admissions and transport, adult community education, school catering, sport and outdoor education, and access and inclusion.

# The council's Ambition and Outcomes

“We will work together with our partners and communities to be an enterprising council, delivering value for money and enabling local people and places to thrive”

We want Derbyshire to have:

Resilient, thriving, and green communities which share responsibility for improving their areas and supporting each other

Happy, safe, and healthy people, with solid networks of support, who feel in control of their personal circumstances and aspirations

A strong, diverse, and clean economy which makes the most of Derbyshire's rich assets and provides meaningful opportunities for local people to achieve their full potential

Great places to live, work and visit with high performing schools, diverse cultural opportunities, transport connections that keep things moving and a healthy and sustainable environment for all

High quality public services that work together alongside communities to deliver services that meet people's needs

# Strategic Objectives – achieving the council’s ambition and outcomes

This year the council has introduced a new approach to integrated strategic planning, designed to achieve a closer integration of service and financial planning. The council has identified in its Council Plan 2024-25, a set of 33 strategic objectives which describe the key activity the Council must deliver during 2024-25, working with partners, communities and residents, to achieve the Council’s Ambition and five key outcomes.

Children’s Services leads on the delivery of seven of the strategic objectives and supporting actions. These strategic objectives reflect our priorities to: deliver our financial strategy to address rising demand; strengthen our strategic partnerships; develop and implement a placement strategy to ensure sufficiency of accommodation and educational provision; develop and reform our fostering service; implement our ‘Stronger Families’ team; develop our new operating model; and drive improvements for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The department has a key role to play in support of the council’s objective to address climate change by reducing carbon emissions across all its operations. We will continue to support improvement in relation to customer experience and developing our workforce.

Alongside the delivery of the strategic objectives, the department will continue to work to fulfil its statutory duties and to deliver business as usual activity; this work is set out in internal divisional and team plans.

The council’s 33 strategic objectives have been plotted against the 2024-25 timeline and this has been represented as a Base Plan, enabling a single overview of the council’s key planned activity throughout the year to be created. The Base Plan promotes a better understanding of the full range of planned activity and resource requirements across the organisation, assisting the council to evaluate its strategic options and to prioritise activity. This supports the alignment of the budget to the council’s priorities, assists effective resource planning and enables the council to ensure that its ambitions match the organisation’s capacity to deliver. The seven strategic objectives lead by the department are outlined below. The strategic objectives which are led by the other departments are set out in the Council Plan and in departmental service plans.

# Strategic Objectives and Base Plan

**Outcome 2 - Happy, safe, and healthy people, with solid networks of support, who feel in control of their personal circumstances and aspirations**

## Strategic Objectives

**10 Implement our 'Stronger Families' team to support families in crisis, reduce admissions to care, and reunify families where safe to do so**

- Governing the effectiveness of the Stronger Families model and identifying the savings/ cost-avoidance that the service achieves
- Develop and embed an effective performance management approach including a “dashboard” to track performance, capture learning, and enable benefit-realisation

**11 Develop and implement a Placement Strategy for children and ensure sufficiency of accommodation and educational provision across Children's Services**

- Identify cohorts of children that can return home or be stepped down into suitable, cost-effective placements
- Aligning sufficiency capacity requirements with the Property Strategy in order to maximise utilisation of council assets and options for enhancements to internal residential provision
- Form and implement a monthly Placement Board, with supporting workstreams, to govern delivery of the Placement Strategy and key objectives around strengthening sufficiency, placement quality and efficiency in placement expenditure

**12 Drive development and reform of our fostering service**

- Implementation of Recruitment Strategy to drive an increase in foster carers
- Implementation of Retention Strategy to maintain and support our current foster carers

## **Outcome 4 - Great places to live, work and visit with high performing schools, diverse cultural opportunities, transport connections that keep things moving and a healthy and sustainable environment for all**

### **Strategic Objectives**

#### **20 Drive improvements to schools and services for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)**

- Monitoring and recording SEND Workstream progress against goals and targets
- Drive effective governance through the SEND Executive Board
- Implementation of the SEND Strategy and Self-Evaluation
- Drive preparation for SEND inspection

## **Outcome 5 - High quality public services that work together alongside communities to deliver services that meet people's needs**

### **Strategic Objectives**

#### **21 Strengthen effectiveness of strategic partnerships to drive improved outcomes for children**

- Work with partners and staff at all levels of the department to identify and implement an alternative model to Locality Children's Partnerships (LCPs)
- Deliver a programme of partnership events (including operational attendees) focused on development and delivery of partnership approaches to Early Intervention and Prevention
- Strengthen multiagency working in key areas of Children's Services
  - Quality assurance and performance against outcomes in the Children's Strategy
  - SEND and educational outcome performance
  - Safeguarding



- Develop and embed multi-agency partnership working in relation to early help and the “Stronger Families” edge of care/ crisis support model

## **26 Develop a new operating model to support the effective delivery of Children's Services**

- Reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of top-level structures within Children’s Services’ directorates
- Reviewing the efficiency and effectiveness of lower-tier structures within Children’s Services
- Analysing the impact of new structures – and making adjustments where necessary
- Work through the implications of the new operating model for processes including business processes and workflow; systems and ICT requirements; performance management

## **27 Deliver the Children’s Services Financial Strategy to improve outcomes for children and address rising demand**

- Identifying areas for savings, cost-avoidance and financial mitigations with particular focus on reducing placement expenditure
- Review and develop invest-to-save cases for use of resources to achieve long-term financial sustainability
- Implement activities associated with growth bids, subject to approval
- Ongoing monitoring of key lines of expenditure, risks to achievement of financial targets and identify emerging opportunities for savings/ cost-avoidance
- Develop a programme of efficiencies and value for money to be implemented through the Finance Strategy Board
- Identifying areas for utilisation of internal provision between Early Help and Safeguarding and Schools and Learning
- Establishing options for commercialisation of services within Schools and Learning, including but not limited to further commercialisation of services which are already traded
- Drive reform across Schools and Learning in relation to the academisation agenda

# Budget and Savings for 2024-25

The department's service delivery is supported by a budget of **£151.708 million** for 2024-25, which includes agreed additional funding for pay and price inflation for 2024-25 of £6.464 million ongoing. In addition, £10 million one-off funding will be held in contingency, as set out in the table below:

Service Pressure funding given as £million ongoing or £million one off

**Home to School Transport Inflation** - £1.479 million ongoing

**Children's Social Care Inflation** - £4.985 million ongoing

**Children's Social Care Demography Contingency** - £10.000 million one off

The Department will be managing the delivery of total proposed budget savings for 2024-25 of **£12.528 million** through a range of efficiencies across staffing and reviewing the delivery model of some services. Full details of the department's budget are set out in the delivery plan.

**SCQP function efficiency savings** - Removal of vacant posts in the SCQP Division - £106,000

**Review ICT equipment and digital services across Children's Services** - Repurpose unused IT equipment in the Children's Services department that was provided during COVID to enable agile working - £37,000

**Postpone Mosaic Mobile project** - £44,000

**Review Education Psychology management structure** - Removal of a post in the Education Psychology Service - £58,000

**Review Quality Assurance model** - Removal of post in the QA Team - £35,000

**Review of Traded Services team** - Removal of posts in the Traded Services team - £3,000

**Review of Elective Home Education service** - Removal of posts in the EHE Service - £100,000

**Centralise procurement in Children's Services** - More efficient and effective spend on support and services to families - £1,100,000

**Review ad hoc spending to support children and families** - More efficient and effective spend on support and services to families - £2,400,000

**Review posts across Children's Services for efficiency savings** - Reduction in posts across Childrens Services - £2,100,000

**Children's Centre Review** - Reviewing the delivery of Children's Centres operations and exploring the sustainability of grant funding for Children's Centres - £100,000

**Early Help Review** - Review of Children's Services Early Help service - £800,000

**Review home to school transport contractual arrangements** - Improve Home to School transport sourcing - £500,000

**Review home to school transport for alternative provision** - Review of decision making to enable better value for money in home to school transport - £250,000

**Review Short Break Service and support for children with a disability** - Review of short break and support services for disabled children - £1,288,000

**Review funding for all external contracts** - Reviewing of funding contributions for contracted services to ensure value for money - £900,000

**Review alternative funding source for SEND through early intervention** - Review alternative funding source for SEND through early intervention - £100,000

**Review school catering utilisation of grant funding** - Review school catering utilisation of grant funding - £300,000

**Fees and Charges: charges for Children In Care** - Exploring options in terms of recharging some families for children in care - £50,000

**Payroll Vacancy Factor** - 3% vacancy factor to reflect expected proportion of vacant posts due to staff turnover - £2,257,000

# Monitoring the Plan

The ambitions set out in the Plan are supported by an implementation plan which outlines how each of the Strategic Objectives set out in the Plan will be delivered, the details of the departmental budget and the department's forward plan of procurement. As well as monitoring the progress of the Strategic Objectives, the following measures will also be monitored:

## Key Performance Measures

### Linked to the Strategic Objectives

#### Outcome 2

- The number of children in care living with Council foster carers (target for 2024-25 increase from 2023-24)
- The number of children returning home from care (target for 2024-25 increase from 2023-24)
- The number of children leaving care through a special guardianship order (target for 2024-25 increase from 2023-24)
- The number of children in care with a placement step down (baseline to be established during 2024-25)
- The number of children being supported to remain at home rather being admitted to care (baseline to be established during 2024-25)

#### Outcome 4

- Proportion of all new Education Health and Care plans issued within 20 weeks (target for 2024-25 to exceed the national average)
- Proportion of new Education Health and Care plans (excluding exceptions) issued within 20 weeks (target for 2024-25 to exceed the national average)

#### Outcome 5

- Proportion of practice areas within reflective case reviews judged to be good or better (target for 2024-25 to maintain performance above 70%)
- Children's social work assessments completed within 45 days (target for 2024-25 maintain upper-middle or better national quartile performance)
- Initial child protection conferences held within 15 days (target for 2024-25 maintain upper-middle or better national quartile performance)
- Percentage of Council run children's homes rated as 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted (target for 2024-25 maintain performance above 90%)

- Rate of improvement in the proportion of pupils in 'Good' or better primary schools (target for 2024-25 to exceed the rate of improvement nationally)
- Rate of improvement in the proportion of pupils in 'Good' or better secondary schools (target for 2024-25 to exceed the rate of improvement nationally)
- Percentage of pupils achieving the expected level in Phonics (target for 2024-25 to exceed the national average)
- Percentage point gap between disadvantaged pupils in Derbyshire and non-disadvantaged pupils achieving the expected standard in Phonics (target for 2024-25 to narrow the national gap compared to the previous year)
- Percentage of pupils achieving a grade 4 or above in English and Maths at GCSE (target for 2024-25 to maintain an outcome significantly better than the national average)
- Percentage point gap between disadvantaged pupils in Derbyshire and non-disadvantaged pupils nationally achieving a grade 4 or above in English and Maths at GCSE (target for 2024-25 to narrow the national gap compared to the previous year)
- Percentage of 16-17year olds in employment, education, and training (target for 2024-25 to exceed the national average)