

Service Plan

Children's Services Department 2025-29

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Temporary Executive Director

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Foreword

Welcome to the Children's Services department Service Plan 2025-29. This Plan outlines how children's services are going to support the delivery of the Council Plan. The Council Plan 2025-29 sets out a plan which will see us working as One Council, with partners, residents, communities, businesses and other stakeholders, including the East Midlands Combined County Authority (EMCCA) to improve lives across Derbyshire.

Local communities, the Council and Children's Services operate in exceptionally challenging and fast-changing circumstances. Alongside many councils in the country we face a very challenging financial situation in light of the increasing cost of care and limited sufficiency of homes and services for children. This context is providing a vehicle to enable strengthening of our focus on those areas where growth is required to meet increasing demands and other areas where cross-departmental innovation has been identified as creating potential to deliver more positive outcomes for children effectively and efficiently.

We have already made huge strides in addressing the consistency of the experience of children and families and have made improvements across social care services as demonstrated in our good grading achieved in our most recent inspection of local authority children services. Plans have been developed to reflect the significant improvements that are required of the partnership in light of the poor outcome of the recent special education needs and disability (SEND) inspection and we are confident that the stakeholders will work together at pace to improve outcomes and experiences for children with SEND and their families.

This strategy sets out the key priorities and actions to enable Children's Services to continually improve and grow to deliver better outcomes for children and their families.

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 3,820 appointments (over 2,159 FTEs) and an annual budget exceeding £164m for 24/25, 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.

Early Help and Safeguarding

Adele Glover – 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.

Education

Helen Wallace – Temporary 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.

Strategic Commissioning, Quality and Performance

Temporary Director Provides a number of strategic enabling services such as: Participation and children's rights; business intelligence; quality assurance; ICT, 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.

Vision and Outcomes

Vision

The Council's vision is:

Working together to improve lives across Derbyshire

Outcomes

The outcomes the Council is aiming to achieve, working with partners and communities are:

People: Empowered communities where people live safe, happy, healthy and independent lives

Place: Prosperous, green and sustainable places with opportunities for all

The Council: A resident focused, efficient and effective organisation delivering value for money

Employee Values

To deliver our Vision and Outcomes for Derbyshire we have agreed a set of values that will help shape our culture.

Accountable - We hold ourselves and others to account

Collaborative - We listen and engage to deliver shared goals

Innovative - We are curious, embrace change and continuously improve

Empowered We support, trust and value each other

Customer Commitments

In delivering our services, and as part of our Customer Experience Strategy, we have three commitments that we have made to our customers. These commitments are what customers can expect when dealing with the Council.

We will be responsible, open and honest

We will work together to achieve positive outcomes

We will listen and be open to new ideas

Achieving the Council's Vision and Outcomes

The Council has identified in its Council Plan 2025-29, a set of 24 Strategic Objectives which describe the key activity the Council must focus on during 2025-29, alongside its business-as-usual activity, to achieve the Council's vision and outcomes.

Children's Services leads on the delivery of four of the strategic objectives and supporting actions. These strategic objectives reflect our priorities to: continue to deliver our financial strategy to address rising demand; achieve sufficiency of accommodation and develop and reform our fostering service to ensure children are cared for in the right home and the right time; to strengthen our strategic partnerships and to drive improvements in education for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The department will also be supporting 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 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 24 Strategic Objectives have been plotted against the 2025-29 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 Base Plan is set out below, with detail on the Strategic Objectives which are led or supported by the department. 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

Strategic Objectives

Outcome 1 - People: Empowered communities where people live safe, happy, healthy and independent lives

Achieve sufficiency of accommodation to ensure children are cared for in the right home at the right time

- Review the children in care operating model
- Develop and implement a placement sufficiency strategy
- Drive development and reform of our fostering service to maximise opportunities to locally care for our children

Deliver improved outcomes for those with special educational needs and disabilities through timely analysis of need and support services in collaboration with stakeholders

- Develop and embed a successful Improvement and Assurance Board
- Strengthen the overall effectiveness of the joint area partnership for children with special educational needs and disabilities

Outcome 3 - The Council: A resident focused, efficient and effective organisation delivering value for money

Develop new operating models to provide enhanced services to children and families, strengthen workforce development and explore commercial opportunities

- Develop a new operating model to support the effective delivery of children's services
- Empower schools to deliver a consistent approach to inclusion and equitable access to education for all children and young people
- Deliver an effective workforce and organisational development strategy
- Transform home to school transport provision
- Drive strategic and commercial development of schools and learning

Strengthen the effectiveness of strategic partnerships to drive improved outcomes for children .

- Support the partnership to deliver effective early intervention and prevention
- Strengthen the Council and Partnership approach to corporate parenting
- Build and establish an effective education partnership.

- Build and establish an effective early years strategic partnership

Deliver our four-year budget savings programme to achieve financial sustainability with a focus on delivering £37.5m savings in 2025-26 (year 1- to be refreshed annually).

Delivery of agreed Children's Services departmental savings in 2025-26

Budget and Savings for 2025-26

The department's service delivery is supported by a budget of £175.772 million for 2025-26. Full details of the department's budget are set out in the appendix to this Plan. The departmental budget includes agreed additional funding for service pressures for 2025-26 of £23.998 million ongoing funding, as set out in the table below:

Service Pressure funding given as £Million Ongoing

Childrens social care demography - £14.800

SEND home to school transport demand - £4.000

Inflation - children's social care - £3.225

Inflation - SEND home to school transport - £1.640

Inflation - historic pensions - £.0333

The department will be managing the delivery of total proposed budget savings for 2025-26 of £3.258 million.

Budget saving proposal - £3.258m

Description Ongoing One-Off Total savings

Review ICT equipment and digital services across Children's Services £32,000 one-off

Review Education Psychology management structure £32,000 ongoing

Review Quality Assurance model £29,000 ongoing

Review of Traded Service support team management £263,000 ongoing

Review of wider Traded Services team £49,000 ongoing

Children's Centre review £833,000 ongoing

Review home to school transport post 16 policy £500,000 ongoing

Review fees and charges: home to school transport £250,000 ongoing

Review Short Break Service and support for children with a disability £610,000 ongoing

Review of the Educational Psychology service £200,000 ongoing

Review alternative funding source for SEND through early intervention £400,000 ongoing

Fees and Charges: charges for Children In Care £60,000 ongoing

TOTAL 3,226,000 ongoing £32,000 one-off £3,258,000 total

Monitoring the Plan

The Plan is supported by an implementation plan which outlines how each of the Strategic Objectives 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 key performance measures for the department will also be monitored.

Key Performance Measures

Strategic Objective 1: Achieve sufficiency of accommodation to ensure children are cared for in the right home at the right time

- Outcomes for children in care (monitored through reflective practice reviews)
- Number of DCC foster carers and foster care utilisation rate
- The number/ percentage of children in care living with council foster carers
- The number/ percentage of children returning home from care
- The number/ percentage of children leaving care through a special guardianship order
- The number/ percentage of children in care with a placement step down
- The number/ percentage of children being supported to remain at home rather being admitted to care.
- The percentage of DCC children's residential homes graded 'good' or 'better'
- Utilisation rate within DCC residential provision

As well as the above measurable targets, the department will also monitor progress through:

- An embedded sufficiency strategy 2025-29 to inform our commissioning approach
- Revised and embedded child in care operating model to strengthen consistency in practice
- Embedded reunification practice model across children's services to ensure children are looked after by their families when safe to do so
- Further development of Derbyshire's internal children's homes estate
- Reduce the number of placement moves for children in care

Strategic Objective 2: Deliver improved outcomes for those with special educational needs and disabilities through timely analysis of need and support services in collaboration with stakeholders

- Outcomes for children with SEND (monitored through multi-agency QA activity)
- Number of complaints and escalation rates for SEND

- Sufficiency of special schools and enhanced resource places
- Proportion of all new Education Health and Care plans issued within 20 weeks -including exceptions (rolling 12 months).
- Proportion of all new Education Health and Care plans issued within 20 weeks - excluding exceptions (rolling 12 months).
- SEND appeal rate based on appealable decisions.
- Improved quality of EHCP content through assessment and annual review

As well as the above measurable outcomes, the department will also monitor progress through:

- Successful delivery of the SEND improvement action plan through an effective improvement and impact board
- Embedded and effective Participation and Engagement Strategy

Strategic Objective 13: Develop new operating models to provide enhanced services to children and families, strengthen workforce development and explore commercial opportunities

- Reduction of fixed exclusions due to a strengthened inclusive approach
- Percentage of workforce with a PDR
- Percentage of workforce completed core learning pathways
- Staff satisfaction as recorded in survey feedback results
- As well as the above measurable targets, the department will also monitor progress through:
- Revised and embedded leadership structure in schools and learning with strengthened governance of the commercial and traded services
- Revised and embedded social care operating model in line with social care reform requirements
- Revised and embedded operating models within schools and learning to maximise efficiency and in response to improvement plans

Strategic Objective 14: Strengthen the effectiveness of strategic partnerships to drive improved outcomes for children

- Revised and strengthened terms of reference for the corporate parenting board to include impact measures relating to co-production
- Improved corporate parenting offer to be embedded within the Council, including a commitment from all council departments

Establish an early intervention and local prevention partnerships that will deliver jointly agreed objectives with a defined set of impact measures determined through the strategic partnership