



Brighter  
Futures for  
Children



# Business Plan

2020-23

## SUMMARY

This document outlines Brighter Futures for Children's 2020-21 business priorities, objectives and how we intend to deliver these, plus our outlined budget and allocation against resources.

## OWNERS

**Di Smith,**  
Board Chair  
**Antony Kildare,**  
Managing Director

## VERSION

1.5

## DATE

February 2020. Updated April 2020

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Registered company in England & Wales:  
11293709

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## 1. Foreword

Last year, in our first business plan, we stated that our ambition was to achieve a 'Good' Ofsted rating for children's services in Reading within three years. For 2020-21, we have raised our ambition to aim for 'Outstanding' services for children and young people in care, on the edge of care, in schools, further education services and apprenticeships across Reading within the next three years.

We started operational delivery in December 2018 and our first full, financial year in April 2019. In September, we got that 'Monday morning call' to confirm that Ofsted inspectors would be here for a two-week, standard ILACS inspection the following week.

We told staff to be honest but not to panic. We told them to be proud of what they'd achieved and of how hard they'd all worked in our first, set-up year. Not only did we make it through, we were delighted that Ofsted regraded all four judgement areas. We did it. We moved from 'inadequate' to 'requires improvement to be good'.

The whoops of joy when we told staff could be heard throughout the Civic Centre offices. The boost to morale, to confidence and to the atmosphere in all of our offices was palpable. It was confirmation that when you're in a difficult place and you all pull together, rather than apart, you can achieve. It was evidence that together, we really could achieve something much better for the children and young people of Reading.

We didn't achieve this alone and we are indebted to Reading Borough Council's Chief Executive, Peter Sloman, Cllrs Brock, Terry and Pearce for their support and help. We are acutely aware that it was a joint effort. We needed our partners to work alongside us, our suppliers to go that extra mile for us, our staff to embrace new ways of working and our leadership team to lead and lead well. We needed our stakeholders to challenge us but also to be fair and not overly critical, given the amount of work we have had to do and the vast challenge we have taken on.

We know there is still much to do. Our Children Looked After numbers are too high and we need to make significant changes to consistency of practice and decision-making in children's social care, with a greater emphasis on safe family reunification.

Our financial position is challenging too but, with our foundations in place, our values beginning to embed and our priorities clearly set, we are gathering the right tools to speed up the pace of improvement. Section 15 includes our ambitious but well thought through funding gap bid, which we firmly believe will bring long-term savings and improved services while capitalising on the expertise of the transformation team we currently have in place and the increasing appetite for cultural change across the company.

This year our emphasis will be on safely reunifying as many children as we can; on those leaving care and, in terms of education, for everyone leaving school. Entering the world of independence should be with a job or further training, an apprenticeship or a place at university. We want young people to thrive, to be well, both physically and mentally and to realise their full potential.

Year Two will be about building on our foundations, about developing smarter partnership working in helping us to reach our goals. We clearly identified the sequence of our approach in Year One. This document does the same for Year Two.



Di Smith  
**Board Chair**  
**Brighter Futures for Children**



Antony Kildare  
**Managing Director**  
**Brighter Futures for Children**

## 2. Welcome

The care, education and other services we provide to children and young people in Reading are improving. We are delighted this has been recognised by Ofsted.

When we took the decision to create Brighter Futures for Children, we did so in the knowledge that the Council would continue to have a vital role to play. We do not shy away from our responsibility to ensure every single child and young person in Reading gets the best possible start in life; we are as a Council the corporate parent for the children in Reading in need.

The first year of setting up the new council-owned company to deliver education and children's services in Reading, while simultaneously striving to deliver 'on the ground' improvements, is no easy task. Working in collaboration with the Board of Directors at BFFC and its leadership team, we have had a successful first year. We are proud of our achievements and we are proud of the many staff - both transferred from the council and those newly recruited - who have worked so hard to make this happen.

Of course, it goes without saying that this is just the start. It is essential the improvements we have seen so far are accelerated, and while Ofsted found improvements across the board, they also identified areas for improvement. These must be tackled with urgency. We want to see more children who are under the care of the council located in Reading, with their families, or with support from local foster care families wherever it is possible. We want all Reading's children enjoying the benefits of attending good or excellent local schools and for them to have excellent cultural and leisure opportunities. We want teenagers and young adults to be working towards independence, including a job and good local housing opportunities.

This updated business plan is about building on the good foundations. Its vision cannot be achieved without effective working across a range of organisations. The improvements we have seen so far could not have happened without the support of these many partners. BFFC, Reading Borough Council and all our partners - especially in health, police and schools - have an equal stake in giving children and young people the best start in life and protecting those who are vulnerable. The ONE Reading Partnership is a big part of Team Reading - we are all working for the same thing.

Finally, our personal thanks go to the staff on the ground - the ones driving our journey towards outstanding. A positive Ofsted judgement is one thing, but you will know what really matters is translating this into better life outcomes for vulnerable children, young people and families in the town. Thank you for your tremendous efforts - and don't forget to tell all your peers that Reading is on the up!



**Peter Sloman**  
Chief Executive  
Reading Borough  
Council



**Cllr Jason Brock**  
Leader of the Council  
Reading Borough  
Council



**Cllr Liz Terry**  
Lead Councillor for  
Children  
Reading Borough  
Council



**Cllr Ashley Pearce**  
Lead Councillor for  
Education  
Reading Borough  
Council

### 3. Executive Summary

**This document outlines the ambitions and priorities for Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) for its second full year of operation (Year Two). It also includes a summary of achievements in Year One and reference to Years Three and Four.**

The standard ILACS Ofsted inspection took place in September 2019 and everyone at BFfC was delighted when all four judgement areas were upgraded from 'inadequate' to 'requires improvement to be good'.

At the same time, we identified and delivered cost savings equivalent to 10% of our base budget and plan to deliver a further £3m savings in Year Two.

In Year Two, our aim is to consolidate work started in Year One and to action new plans which have been developed from the analysis of 'as is' processes and working practices.

Our set priorities give focus to the work that needs to be done – particularly in the area of children's social care – and the action plans we have developed (summarised in our Plans on a Page in **Appendix 4**) will drive forward our improvements.

The new Senior Leadership Team has additional skills and expertise needed for a company structure and for the new ways in which we intend to roll out improvements across children's services.

Our Executive Committee is strengthened through the appointment of a permanent Director of Children's Services, whose role is to focus on frontline practice and the Head of Transformation (not as an executive director but as an important lead in our improvement journey), who will drive new processes and approaches.

And the Board will continue to offer expertise, challenge and scrutiny of the company and the achievement of objectives it has set for itself.

There is no doubt that the revised Ofsted rating has strengthened our recruitment message and will help us attract more social workers but we are actively working on new and innovative ways to build our reputation and encourage more people to work with us and stay alongside us for the benefit of children, young people and their families in Reading.

In this plan we have outlined our financial position, in terms of time-limited grants and allocated funds and how we intend to implement budgetary controls to spend less (but more wisely) to succeed in what we have set out to do

In Year One, we gave an early indication of our intention to generate income for the business by trading services. This year, we are building on the foundation work we completed in Year One and have indicated here what we plan to do during the year to improve existing revenue and develop further trading options.

By Year Three, we hope to grow the company by providing services to other authorities and independent children's services providers, modelled on demonstrable improvements achieved in Reading.

By Year Four, we hope to have consolidated these activities and expanded our traded services to include the provision of training social workers for other regional authorities through our 'Academy of Excellence'.

But we cannot run before we can walk and Year Two sets out our plans to stabilise the foundations for BFfC and start to build a brighter future for all.

## 4. Our Vision and Values

**Our overall objective is to deliver the best possible opportunities for the children of Reading.**

### Our Vision

To unlock all the resources in the borough of Reading to help every child have a happy, healthy and successful life.

### Our Values

Our company values were developed early on in Year One and we continue to promote and embed them in everything we do.

#### Honest

We will always be transparent and open

#### Creative

We will always look for creative approaches and solutions, not be bound by convention

#### Caring

Every decision we make and action we take will be in the best interest of the child

#### Respectful

We will value diversity

#### Quality Driven

We will work to high standards of efficiency, effectiveness and professionalism

#### Responsible

We will always be a good partner, mindful of our duty to use resources wisely and well

## 5. Our Services

**Brighter Futures for Children has the statutory responsibility, on behalf of Reading Borough Council, for:**

### Children's social care

Social care services provide support to children in need of help and protection. Our services include statutory assessment and care planning for children at risk of significant harm, provision for children looked after and those leaving care, as well as fostering and adoption services.

### Education, Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

Our services include school improvement support and traded services to schools, special educational needs and/disabilities, home to school transport and children missing education.

The statutory responsibilities for pupil place planning (ensuring there are sufficient and suitable school places), admissions and elective home education are also managed by Brighter Futures for Children.

We support schools and parents on exclusions and provide guidance for schools and alternative providers on improvement and safeguarding.

Our services also include support in relation to educational psychology, therapies and emotional health and wellbeing support.

## Early Help

Early help services provide targeted support to children, young people and families at the earliest point of identified need.

The aims of early help are to support families to support themselves, to prevent problems escalating and to reduce the number of children and young people needing statutory interventions.

The umbrella of early help also covers Early Years, including registered childminders, nurseries and children's centres, the Youth Offending Service, young people's drug and alcohol support, support for young parents, support for young people not in employment, education or training and, at arms-length (and independent), information and advice and guidance for young people with special educational needs (IASS).

## Fostering

Our fostering service is registered with Ofsted as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA), and has a registered – and approved – manager. The IFA manages the recruitment and retention of in-house foster carers, covering all placement options, from emergency to short term, long term and staying put arrangements.

## Adoption

Brighter Futures for Children is registered with Ofsted as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA). The service is run, on our behalf by Adopt Thames Valley (ATV). ATV is a partnership of seven local authorities and three voluntary adoption agencies across Berkshire, Oxfordshire and the Swindon area. ATV works on behalf of Brighter Futures for Children and other partners, to recruit and support a range of adopters, and to find forever families for children both locally and nationally.

## 6. Governance

**Brighter Futures for Children is a company limited by guarantee and not-for-profit, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council (RBC) and run by an independent Board of Directors. It was created on December 3, 2018.**

In our first few months of operation, it was recognised that the governance structure was, understandably, complex and that it needed to be simplified, articulated and embedded (see **Sections 6.2 and 6.3**).

### 6.1 The Board of Directors

The Non-Executive Board Chair and our Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) bring professional skills and expertise from different sectors (*NB: We are currently recruiting for a further two NEDs, who are expected to be in post by the time this plan is*

*implemented*). A representative of RBC sits on the board as a Non-Executive Director and the three Executive Directors, responsible for the day-to-day operation of the company, are Board Members and, with the Board Chair, are registered as the company's directors at Companies House.

The Board is responsible for setting the strategy for Brighter Futures for Children; driving high performance and quality; ensuring that the contract objectives are met and promoting the interests of children and young people throughout Reading.

The operational directors for children's social care, early help & prevention and education services, plus our lead on the Transformation Programme, are also in attendance, as required. They present updates to the Board and ensure there is connectivity across the company in terms of operational delivery and appropriate challenge against set targets.

### 6.1.1 Board Committees

The Board has three committees to monitor progress in detail and report back to the full Board:

**Audit and Risk**, which monitors the finances, resources and risk register

**Quality and Improvement**, which monitors both quality and performance across all strands of the organisation

**Fostering and Adoption**, which ensures the company can fulfil its obligations as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) and as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA).

**Workforce Groups:** The Board also has ad hoc, task-and-finish working groups, where intensive scrutiny and/or additional Board level support is needed. In Year One these focused on workforce and retention, finance and a special, time-limited Rapid Action Group to tackle solvable issues quickly and efficiently.

### 6.1.2 The Executive Committee (ExCo) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The Executive Committee (ExCo) meets each week to oversee the corporate and strategic direction of the company. It is led by the Managing Director and also includes the Director of Children's Services (DCS), the Director of Finance and Resources, as executive directors and also the Head of Transformation who is not an executive director.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meets fortnightly and follows the ExCo meeting. It includes ExCo members, plus all operational and corporate leads, to discuss and report on the performance of the day-to-day operations of the company.

SLT is a flat structure, with all members being equal, in terms of risks, issues, leadership, decision-making, contribution and financial authority under the Scheme of Delegation. SLT has a collective responsibility for the direction and leadership of the company and the delivery of its operational and corporate services.

The structure of the Board and the Senior Leadership Team and governance arrangements can be seen in chart format on the following pages.

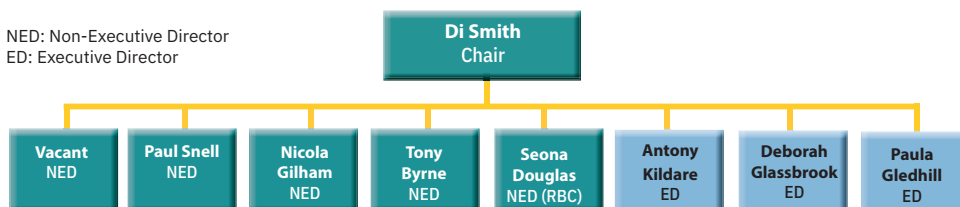


## 6.2 Brighter Futures for Children - Our Board and Senior Leadership Team

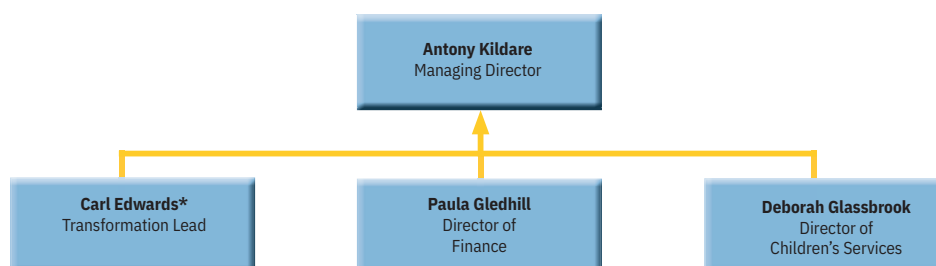


### THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS

NED: Non-Executive Director  
ED: Executive Director



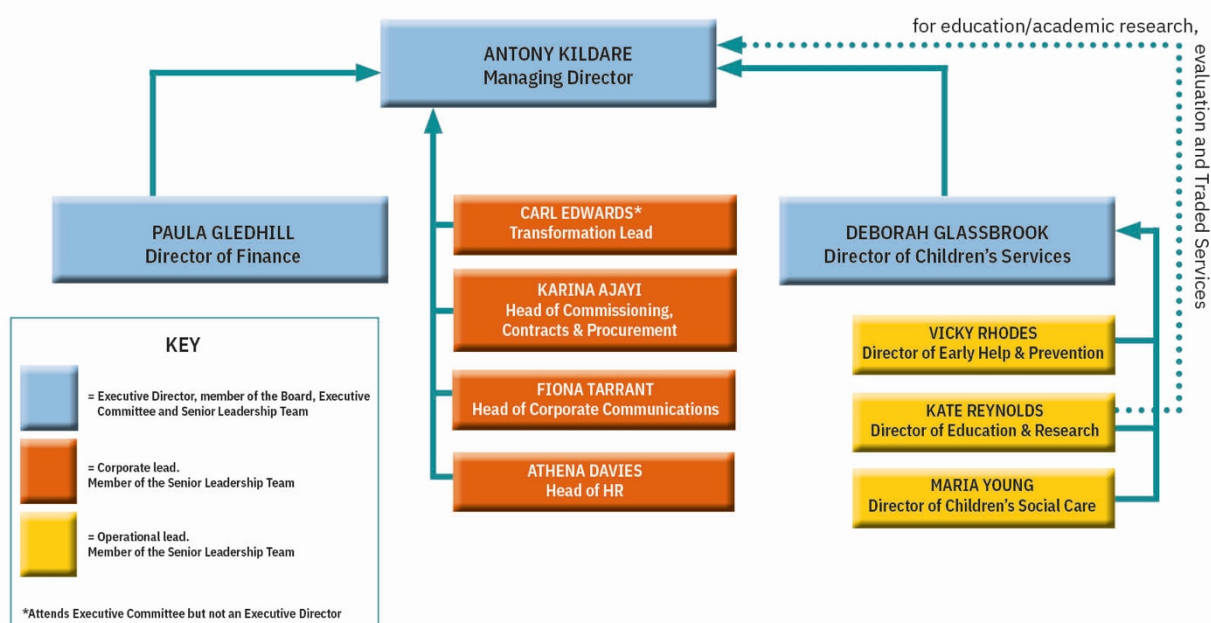
### EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



\* Operational director and not an executive director/non-executive director but with a crucial, time-limited, senior role for delivery of the Transformation Programme and quality improvement in children's social care

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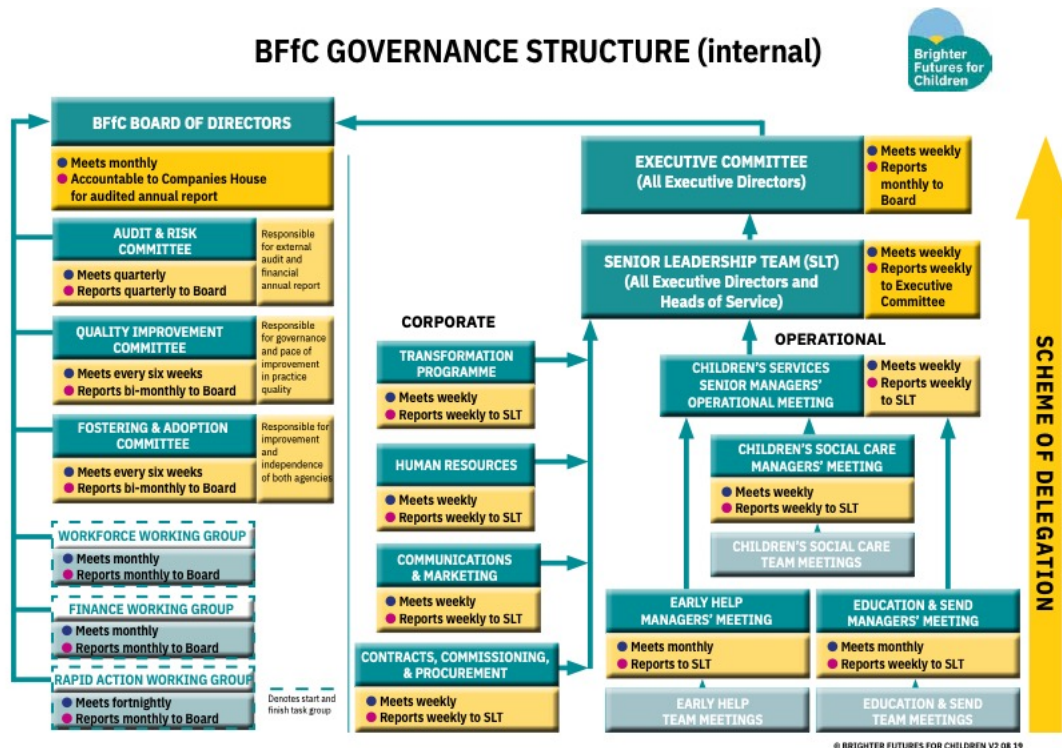
### SENIOR LEADERSHIP TEAM



## 6.3. Internal and external governance structure

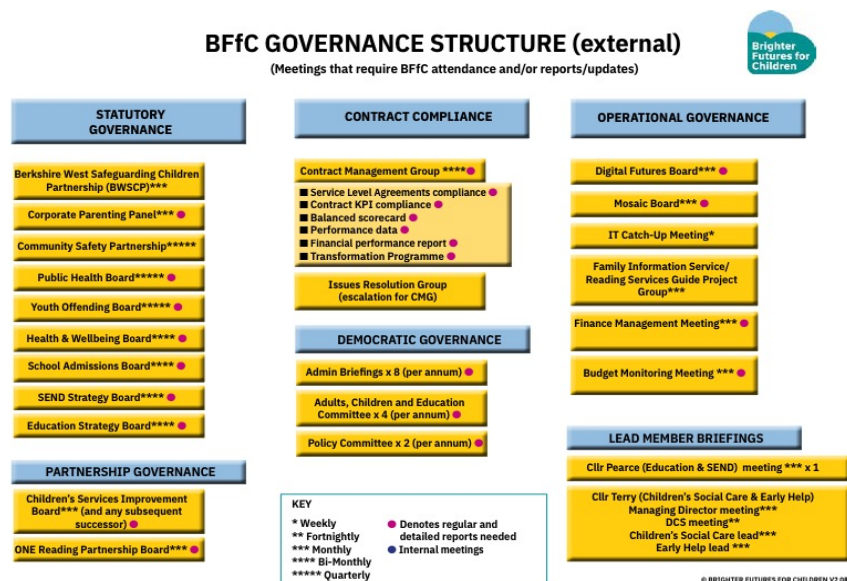
### 6.3.1 Internal

There is a clear reporting line within BfFC, with meetings at all levels reporting upwards and a two-way communication flow up/down and down/up. Year Two of operation will see a tighter adherence to reporting lines, to ensure decisions are not made in isolation and that pockets of risk are not allowed to build unseen. In Year One, leadership and management training was rolled out to improve communication and process flow.



### 6.3.2 Stakeholder meetings

Brighter Futures for Children holds regular contractual meetings with RBC, as well as providing performance data for the Children's Services Improvement Board plus other multi-agency statutory and other partnership meetings, as seen in the chart below.



## 7. Context

### 7.1 National Context

**The Department for Education has overall policy responsibility for children's services, and has the strategic vision that all vulnerable children, no matter where they live, should have access to high-quality support by 2022.**

Most funding for children's services comes from the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG), and services are inspected by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted). Local authorities are responsible for ensuring that funding for children's social care is spent with regularity and propriety and achieves value for money.

According to the National Audit Office (NAO) latest figures (published in the January 2019 report *'The Pressures on Children's Social Care'*), £8.8bn was spent by the 152 local authorities (or their designated responsible agents, such as our company or a children's services trust) in 2017/18.

During that same period, there were 655,630 new referrals into the system and, of the 152 LAs, 91% overspent on children's social care, which equates to £872m.

Between 2010-11 and 2017-18 initial referrals increased by 7% while child protection assessments carried out by local authorities increased by 77%. It is not clear if the disproportionate increase in assessments is because of lower risk thresholds applied by local authorities, a change in the nature of referrals made, or other factors.

The number of cases where local authorities consider actual harm or neglect to have been demonstrated (marked by the introduction of a child protection plan when targeted resources are committed to support a child) was much lower than the rise in assessments, increasing by 26%.

Over the same period the 0–17 population of England experienced broadly similar growth, increasing by 5.2%. The increase in the number of children in need episodes between 2010-11 and 2017-18 was actually below population growth, rising by only 2%, from 735,470 to 753,840. A child is recognised as being in need under the Children Act 1989 if they need local authority services to achieve or maintain a reasonable state of health or development; to prevent significant or further harm; or because they are disabled.

The most expensive cases, where children are taken into care, have risen nationally by almost triple the rate of population growth. Between 2010-11 and 2017-18 the number of children in care at year end increased by 15% to 75,420 children.

The national average gross expenditure on Children Looked After is 48% compared to 57% for BfFC. The national increase in gross expenditure for CLA has increased by 3% from 2017-18 to 2019-20, with BfFC's costs increasing by 4% over the same period

There has been a notable increase in the number of children over 16 taken into care, which increased by 78% between 2010-11 and 2017-18, from 3,210 to 5,710.

The cost of children in care is rising. Although the number of children placed in residential care by local authorities increased by 9.2% between 2013-14 and 2017-18, the cost of residential care increased by 22.5% over the same period, from £1.02 billion to £1.25 billion in real terms (NAO figures).

There has been an increase in the use of residential care, which has exposed the lack of suitable placement capacity available. Local authorities pay widely different prices for the same standard of residential care and there has been particular concern – and publicity – over the past year about the number of unregulated and unregistered

residential (and education) settings appearing. Unscrupulous people have spotted a hole in the market and are taking advantage. We have to do all we can to plug that and look to our own provision.

In addition, despite employing an increased number of children's social workers, local authorities have also had to increase their use of expensive agency staff.

## 7.2 Local context

With the lack of a clear understanding, at national level of what is causing increases in demand and activity in children's social care, we are left, at a local level, with the need to understand our drivers of demand, as well as the need for a much clearer understanding of our own staff's actual and perceived demand management.

Our immediate analysis in children's social care found:

- Legacy of weak and poor social care practice
- Culture of seeking legal advice and deferring decision making on children's cases to the Joint Legal Team
- Silo behaviours which prevented innovative solutions between social care and early help teams
- Impact of staff and management churn which resulted in a 'start again' approach to practice and some staff disengagement
- Emergency placements being reactive and unplanned
- Staff shortages and poor placement planning (post immediate decision to take children into care) resulted in the unnecessary continuation of costly placements and care packages.

In Year One, we spent a considerable amount of time on business analysis and on mapping the 'as is' processes being followed, as in the list above. Without that clear understanding of what our starting point was and some quantitative and qualitative data to back up new ways of working, we knew we would not succeed.

Crucial too, was a common understanding by all staff of the journey ahead and the importance of new ways of working. We have approached this in a collegiate way, including staff in the mapping process, asking for their views on what works well and what doesn't and asking them to contribute to new processes. In this way, changes are owned from the bottom up, staff feel valued and involved and not 'done to' or having to change things for change's sake.

The ONE Reading Partnership, which we have been instrumental in setting up but in which we play an equal role to all other partners, is key in helping us to determine community factors which could be contributing to our own increase in referrals and, indeed, in the number of children being taken into care.

However, we cannot shy away from the fact that our number of Children Looked After is too high and takes up 57% of our gross expenditure. This is the highest proportion of expenditure amongst the statistical neighbours, where the average is 50%.

Yet our Early Years spend of 4% is the second lowest among the statistical neighbours, compared to the highest spend of 10% by Hillingdon. Hillingdon has a much lower proportion of expenditure on CLA. The average of the statistical neighbours is 6%, which is a reduction of 1% between 2017-18 and 2019-20.

Tackling issues which lead children to cross the threshold into social care must be our priority. Deprivation, domestic abuse, substance misuse and adult mental health are around 'need' and all create demand pressures on us but only a partnership consensus around local practice and how we each respond to need will further help us identify pressure points locally.

While the national response to the financial pressures on children's services has been to increase statutory children's social care activity and reduce spend on non-statutory children's services, we, unashamedly, want to buck that trend.

Preventative services are, to us, crucial in the long-term aim to reduce the number of children meeting that social care threshold. We will start modestly because the majority of funding is currently targeted towards statutory – and more costly provision but it is our aim to increase targeted family support and intervention.

Preventing cases from escalating by offering the right help and support at the right time much earlier in the process seems, to us, to be a fundamental, as does working closely with partners in a multi-agency approach. This business plan will show that we have extended that thinking across all aspects of children's services.

In the same vein, we are working hard to reunify children and young people with their families, where it is both safe and appropriate to do so. Again, with an increase in community-based support from us, this is more likely to succeed.

Over the past year, we have become a trailblazer in introducing therapeutic thinking skills in schools and the demand for our trauma informed practice training in all early help and school settings is positively snowballing. This year we launched the weekly partnership and youth diversion hubs. Early indications are that these are helping reduce re-referrals by coordinating a partnership response to children and families who need help.

We have analysed our Child in Need (CiN) cases and the pressure this puts on the front door, access and assessment and family intervention teams. The result is a supportive, pilot project to take new, lower risk CIN cases out of that 'system' and to work alongside families in the community, with specially-trained, social worker supervised teams. This will be a key focus of our Year Two work.

Much of our Transformation Programme work, like the CiN project (see **Appendix 3**), is about building community capacity to prevent cases from escalating. This is particularly important in the 16+ age range, where there has been an increase in the number of children over 16 taken into care. This is in line with the national trend, with an increase of 78% between 2010-11 and 2017-18, from 3,210 to 5,710.

With more complex needs and harder to place in local foster care, this group of young people needs considerably more intensive and care packages, often including residential care, where demand outstrips capacity and is also more costly.

We are tackling this through the ONE Reading Partnership but also through an edge of care project for adolescents and an exploration (via an impact study) of our own housing provision, whether that be for emergencies, a 'crash pad' space to offer respite during a crisis or, indeed, our own children's home, where we can keep children who need a residential setting safe, locally.

Our own analysis of variations in children's social care demand and activity, plus a greater awareness of the characteristics of our own practice and cultural 'custom' in children's social care and local market conditions and characteristics of children and their families we serve, will drive our planned Year Two activity.

We hope it will lead to a reduction in the number of children and young people crossing the threshold but also to smarter, faster, more appropriate and more confident decision-making when they do.

However, all plans need financial backing and we need to do all we can to secure funding from as many sources as possible.

In Year One we achieved what we set out to achieve. We delivered £4m in savings through the Transformation Programme through better placement solutions, building greater community capacity through our early help offer, a further £900K through top-slicing budgets and, for the first time in many years for children's services in Reading, our accounts were unqualified and approved by UHY to be filed at Companies House.

In Year Two we have ambitious plans. Plans, we would argue, that our research shows are right for Reading. We have provided evidence to both RBC and the DfE in a Transformation Programme Funding Gap bid for a further £2.857m. It evidences our achievements to date, both in terms of service delivery and savings and outlines the way we hope to extend both by further investing in our demand management strategy and early help offer. This will continue to improve outcomes for children and families and further deliver savings.

In doing so, we firmly believe the number of CLA will decrease significantly, the number of 16+ cases more so and the community support and intervention we offer will significantly improve lives.

We know our funding is finite and we must operate within our means. The benefit of the company model is that we have the skillset within our Senior Leadership Team and their services to look at innovative ways of working that may never have been possible within a local authority. This is particularly relevant in the Transformation Programme and commissioning, where different models will become our norm.

## 8. Our Business Model

We are ambitious for the future. Our first priority was to develop and embed consistently good and safe practice in children's statutory social care services.

We have successfully created the framework in which we deliver statutory children's social care; embedded in strength based, relational practice. We have invested in training practitioners in restorative and trauma-informed practice to support our principles of service delivery. It gives us a more informed understanding of human behaviour and the impact of past trauma, which means interventions can be more purposeful and thoughtful. This now gives us a base and better understanding on which to further develop and improve the quality of children's social care practice.

Our business model is to be collegiate and to look for ways to be innovative and to offer





excellent services through wider partnerships. In Year One, we achieved this in the early help arena through the establishment of the ONE Reading Partnership and its consensus approach. That model can be seen on the right.

There is much to be done. Our business plan is overarching, under which the Transformation Programme, the Children's Social Care Improvement Plan (including the Ofsted Action Plan), the Education and SEND Plan and all other corporate and operational plans will target specific areas of work essential to our success (see **Appendix 4**).

Looking ahead, we hope to grow the company by providing services to other authorities or providers of children's services, but that will depend on our ability to prove that we are truly excellent at home first.

We take a robust approach to risk, captured in our Risk Register which is regularly reviewed by both ExCo and SLT. This is to identify, review and mitigate those risks which impede, or may impede, us in making progress in the delivery of our services and offerings. We have a Scheme of Delegation for our financial and decision-making authorisations, a Quality Assurance Framework in place for children's social care, which is overseen by the Quality Improvement Committee and a company-wide Business Continuity Plan is in place to ensure business carries on if, due to circumstances beyond our control, our workplaces are affected.

## 8.1 Our focus for Year Two

### April 2020 – March 2021: Growing/Embedding Quality Practice

Year One was focused on improvement and development. Year Two will focus on embedding quality of service, growing partnerships to develop innovation, engaging the wider community in our work and exploring the potential for growth.

We have developed a clear reporting line for updates from all associated action plans in the areas of transformation and improvement, supported by finance, HR, commissioning, communications and marketing. This will help us to report to our key stakeholders – Reading Borough Council and the Department for Education – as well as our staff and partners, on our achievements.

## 8.2 Our 9 Priorities for Year Two

### **Our priorities are based on our local operating context.**

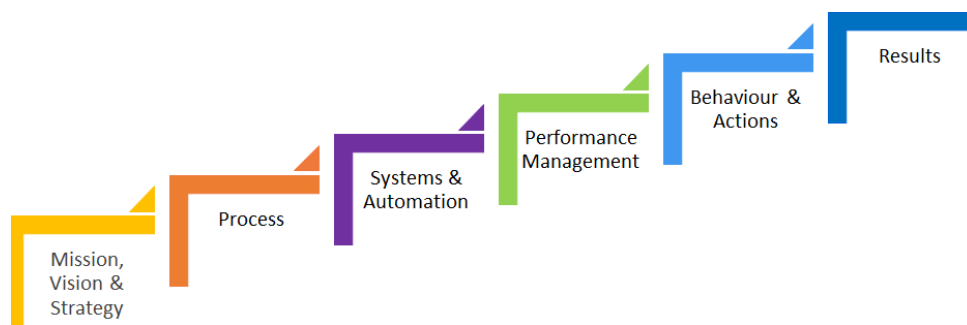
To deliver these, we have analysed and assessed current working practices. This has taken time but was essential to ensure how we operate was fit for purpose and producing the right outcomes for children, young people and their families.

Our approach is based on developing and streamlining our operating procedures and processes with Lean Six Sigma methodologies as part of our drive for a continuous improvement culture.

These methodologies will help drive efficiency and productivity in our operating model and will ensure we have an essential framework to define results to be a high-performing, high-value company.

This will also take the form of end-to-end reviews of our operations including forensic analysis and the provision of solutions driven by technological improvements and the engagement of our staff.

The diagram below shows the steps we are taking to transform ourselves from 'Required Improvement to be Good' to 'Outstanding':



We have completed step one and most of step two. Steps three, four and five will be our focus for Year Two, which should, ultimately, consolidate into step six – results.

**While working through these steps, we will focus on the following priorities in Year Two to maximise our budget and deliver improvement in services for children and young people in Reading:**

### 1. Embed and improve our work on social care staff recruitment and retention

Continue with our work to stabilise the workforce and to ensure staff are happy, properly supported and well led. We will continue to build on our recruitment and retention strategy and will continue to attract more permanent, quality social workers to Reading, through our innovative, multi-entry point approach and the further development of our bid to become a training 'centre of excellence'.

We have embarked on management training across the company to address skills gaps and training needs and will build on this, with all non-mandatory training identified in annual appraisals.

In Year Two, we see a continued need for social work agency staff, however we need to reduce the balance of permanent and interim staff significantly (16% by 2022).

### 2. Action the priorities outlined in the new, revised Children's Social Care Improvement Plan (incl the Ofsted Action Plan) and address inconsistencies in social work practice

We want to offer services of the highest quality. Achieving the highest standards and improvement in children's social care services for the most vulnerable children and young people in Reading remains firmly at the top of our agenda.

Our ILACS inspection and previous Ofsted monitoring visits have clearly highlighted areas for us to concentrate on and we must ensure that measures we have put in place to address missing or inconsistent practice are actioned in the delivery of our improvement plan and Ofsted action plan.

### 3. Establishing a strong network of stakeholders and partners across Reading and beyond to support our work

We believe that developing and operating in constructive partnerships is essential to achieving the best outcomes for our children and young people. This will help us prevent children and young people from entering care and also allow us to safely reunify children in care with their families. To help us with this, we need partners and we will further strengthen the ONE Reading Partnership and build on the work from Year One.



We will continue to work in an integrated way with RBC and our partner organisations to ensure that services are delivered by a suitably qualified and experienced workforce and deliver optimum value for money.

#### 4. Deliver the early intervention and prevention partnership strategy to help children and families

We are committed to offering help before situations worsen, enabling families to resolve their problems. We believe that this is the route to resilient and sustainable communities. In Reading, not enough of our families receive help early enough and, as a result, more receive statutory services than is necessary, either through a child protection plan or by becoming looked after.

We will extend our own services through a project to work with Children in Need, as well as furthering our work through the transformation programme to build community capacity and reduce the number of children and young people crossing the children's social care threshold.

#### 5. Supporting our education providers to give the best possible start to our children and young people

Working in partnership with schools we will support school leaders to continue to raise standards and to address the disadvantage gap so all our children can fulfil their educational potential.

We will ensure effective services are delivered for children with disabilities and their families and support for children with additional needs. Our services include support in relation to educational psychology, therapies and emotional health and wellbeing support.

We are committed to helping all children in our care to thrive at school. We will develop and improve support offered through our Virtual School to children looked after to ensure their needs are met and they are given the chance to meet and exceed all Key Stage milestones.

#### 6. Driving a robust change programme which will deliver excellent and efficient services within a tight budget

The financial climate for services requires that more is achieved with less. This necessitates innovation and efficiency. Efficiency can mean spending less, or exercising better budgetary control, but it can also mean using resources better to achieve better value or re-engineering processes to become more effective. The urgent budget pressures we face make clear that efficiency must be a priority that is meaningful for all of our staff and managers.

These pressures are being addressed by our Transformation Programme, which is providing investment in our Early Help prevention and intervention services for families, and through the development and application of our social care demand management strategy.

#### 7. Listening to and engaging with the people we are here to serve

Our children and young people will always remain at the centre of everything we do and their needs will continue to inform our service delivery and commissioning arrangements.

We will work with our young people to further embed and widen the use of Mind of My Own, to increase their voice in meetings, reviews and conferences. We will continue to promote active participation in our Children in Care Council and widen knowledge of our Reading Youth Council. We will also work with our partners to ensure that our children, young people and their families have a voice and a real impact on decisions that affect them and the services they receive.

#### 8. Deliver the children's services for Reading within an agreed fixed fee, being £91.7m gross funding for 2020/2021 (£41.7m core funding)

As already detailed, the aim is to deliver quality services within a limited financial envelope. There is now strong budgeting and financial management in place with a move towards an organisational culture to work within set budgets and recognise the financial restrictions faced by us all. A budget training programme has been developed and introduced for all budget managers and will continue into 2020/21. Financial policies and procedures are in place and will be reviewed annually at the Audit and Risk Committee. This enabled us to have a set of our first audited accounts for 2018/19. Finance reports have been developed and now provide meaningful, accurate and relevant information supporting key company decisions.

#### 9. To strengthen our commercial Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) leading to increased children being cared for within the 20-mile radius

Our 'Re-imagining Fostering' project is one of the top priorities within our Transformation Programme. We set the foundations in Year One for a strong foster carer recruitment strategy and will widen that in Year Two to include a retention strategy, as well as support for our foster carers to place children when an emergency arises. We will widen our recruitment drive to include and encourage the backing of the whole Reading community.

### 8.3 Communications & Marketing

Good communication is everyone's job but effectively communicating with staff, partner agencies, our service users, the media and the wider community needs strategic direction and detailed action plans.

We have developed a strategy for internal, inter-agency (stakeholder) and external communications, as well as associated communications, marketing and campaign activity plans.

We recognise the need to further improve Brighter Future for Children's digital capabilities, as well as visibility and reputation. In Year One we embarked on a series of external campaigns to raise awareness of the company and our Independent Fostering Agency.

Actively marketing our brand and our offer to potential foster carers and adopters in our residential and business communities has helped increase the number of foster carer enquiries by more than 200. But we need to do more. Year Two will see a new, robust and targeted campaign to help increase in-house foster carer numbers and as a result, prevent children from having to live far away from Reading while their home-life situation is stabilised.

We have built a small but strong communications and marketing team to deliver this strategy - tied into business priorities. In addition to targeted campaigns and improved digitalisation, another key objective is to improve engagement with children and young

people, to hear their voices and allow them to help shape the services we offer. In Year One, we worked with the Children in Care Council to develop new logos, guides for children in care and to publicise their film on being in care. In Year Two, we will do more to ensure their wishes and ideas are incorporated into everything else that we do.

## 8.4 Commissioning, Contracts and Procurement

In order to improve our relationship with suppliers, we worked hard in Year One to address unpaid supplier invoices.

We established a contracts' register and begun to implement contract and performance management frameworks, which will be continued throughout Year Two.

The golden thread which weaves throughout our work is the voice of the child. It is essential our planning and decision making particular for children in our care. In late 2019, we invested in and rolled out across our social work teams Mind of My Own, a specialist app, which further helps our children and young people to be listened to, heard and their wishes acted upon.

To support our care leavers on their journey to adulthood, we successfully procured a semi-independent framework consisting of a number of providers offering standard group living; high support group living; supported tenancies and floating support and supported lodgings.

## 9. Organisational structure and staffing plan

### 9.1 National context

The provision of high-quality social work services relies upon a well-trained, supported and motivated workforce. At a national level there has been a heavy reliance on agency staff.

According to the National Audit Office's January 2019 report, [\*Pressures on Children's Social Care\*](#), the number of full-time equivalent children's social workers increased by 7.5% between 2014 and 2017, from 26,500 to 28,500. However, the children's social care workforce is also characterised by high vacancy and agency rates.

The report states that, on average, local authorities had a vacancy rate of 17% in 2017 – an increase from 14% in 2013. This increased to 27% in outer London and was even higher in certain outer London boroughs, which have a highly competitive labour market for social workers. Reading, with its proximity to London, falls within that competitive market area.

The report also highlights the difficulty of retaining social workers. Sixty-three per cent of social workers leave their local authority within five years - a figure which has been increasing since 2015. As a consequence of increased demand, increased activity and rising vacancy rates, local authorities have increased the use of agency social workers, who are more costly.

Agency worker use by local authorities increased nationally from 12% in 2013 to 16% in 2017. Across the country, overall expenditure on children's social workers increased by 15.1% between 2013-14 and 2016-17 in real terms, from £1.75 billion to £2 billion, at a time when numbers increased by only 7.5%.

The Local Government Association (LGA) has said that by 2020, there will be a £2bn funding gap in children's services spending as a result of rising demand for children's social care. It has to be recognised that this figure includes an increased cost in the

recruitment of social workers and Brighter Futures for Children must work hard to improve both permanent recruitment and retention of its staff.

## 9.2 Local context

Staff are our most valuable resource. Developing a stable and motivated workforce, well-supported and well-led was a key focus for Year One.

During Year One, we developed an HR Strategy, alongside operational development, in terms of learning and training priorities, to address gaps in skills, knowledge and capacity.

The six headlining HR priorities for Year Two (2020/21) are:

**Priority 1: Robust Recruitment practice** - to recruit sufficient permanent quality staff with suitable qualifications and experience

**Priority 2: Improved retention** - of all employees through improved reward and benefits for existing employees by supporting them to carry out their roles effectively and by ensuring our offer for new and existing employees is competitive within the market place

**Priority 3: Support children's social care improvement action plans** - ensuring Brighter Futures for Children meets Ofsted requirements to achieve a 'good' or even 'outstanding' rating.

**Priority 4: Engaged workforce** – to develop a positive culture across the company and to ensure all staff are fully engaged in their roles, their views are heard and they are genuinely engaged in all aspects of the company

**Priority 5: Workforce Development** – supporting the Transformation Programme to develop workforce excellence

**Priority 6: Accurate HR data** – to ensure that our business can make effective, well informed decisions, and track trends through effective HR data

The Board, recognising the importance of a new approach to attract more, permanent social workers to Reading, set up a workforce task group in Year One, to concentrate efforts on both recruitment and retention. A business analyst was assigned to the group to research and analyse local data to enable the group to make informed decisions.

This work has been shared with RBC, who will take forward the shape and implementation of retention proposals.

We have developed a new induction process and we are investing in staff through career development opportunities. We have mapped our processes to reduce the need for staff to duplicate data entry, as well as investigating and implementing a new IT system for training.

Staff well-being is important to us and we will continue to support the people who work with us through open and transparent communication to ensure we listen and act on what we hear, to support ill health through occupational health advice and explore staff benefits which support staff to stay well.

## 10. Strategic analysis (initial SWOT)

|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p><b>STRENGTHS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Committed and highly skilled Board of Directors, ExCo and Senior Leadership Team</li> <li>• Refreshed and stable leadership</li> <li>• Revised Ofsted rating, which recognises achievements made</li> <li>• Business plan and associated workstream plans in action</li> <li>• Long, stable contract</li> <li>• Increasingly permanent and skilled workforce</li> <li>• Transformational funding from RBC and DfE</li> <li>• Good quality premises</li> <li>• Early Years and Early Help are well regarded</li> </ul> | <p><b>WEAKNESSES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Educational standards below national average. Number of NEET 16+</li> <li>• Quality &amp; assessment, planning and provision for children in need, 16 &amp; 17 year olds who are homeless, children living in private fostering arrangement and those with connected carers</li> <li>• Participation and engagement of partners in protection cases</li> <li>• Foster carer records, the number of children placed locally, quality of oversight of commissioned placement arrangements</li> <li>• Care leavers' access to health histories, understanding of rights and entitlements</li> <li>• Impact of quality assurance processes on children's cases</li> <li>• Number of permanent social workers</li> <li>• Staff on multiple sites</li> </ul> |
| <p><b>OPPORTUNITIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agency social workers – decreasing numbers</li> <li>• Stabilise and secure permanent senior leadership team</li> <li>• Further develop use of IT and technology</li> <li>• Digitalisation</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Early intervention opportunities</li> <li>• Greater engagement and investment from partners</li> </ul>  | <p><b>THREATS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brexit and political context outside our control</li> <li>• Inter-dependency and competition for limited sources of grants/funding</li> <li>• Reading children's services poor historical reputation</li> </ul>   |

## 11. Outline of our Transformation Programme and Children's Social Care Improvement Plan

### 11.1 Transformation Programme

The Transformation Programme focuses on five workstreams, with a senior responsible officer identified to lead each one. Within the workstreams there are projects, which currently number 30 although further projects will materialise as the analysis and review of operations continues. Financial details for this Programme are in **Section 14**. A full list of the Transformation Programme projects can be found at **Appendix 3**.

**Details of the workstreams are below:**

#### **Workstream A - Improving Practice Standards**

The aim of this workstream is to improve the inadequate practice and high turnover of staffing which have been highlighted for improvement by both Ofsted and Achieving for Children (AfC). The investment in this workstream will lead to recruiting experienced specialists to model high quality practice, coach and mentor social workers and managers.

#### **Workstream B – Developing Workforce Excellence**

The aim of this workstream is to reduce the number of agency social workers that are currently employed and to introduce a Practice Framework which becomes Brighter Future for Children's model of practice. The investment in this workstream will lead to a stable and skilled workforce following a Practice Framework which will result in consistent and good practice for all social workers.

#### **Workstream C – Building Community Capacity**

The aim of this workstream has two strands; the first is to coordinate partnership support in Reading to deliver the Preventative and Early Intervention Strategy. The second is the development of Edge of Care projects to address the number of Children Looked After (CLA) within Reading.

The first aim will result in a partnership approach ensuring all partners are engaged in the programme which will reduce the demand on children's services. The second aim will be the successful reduction in CLA numbers by embedding three new teams: Pre-birth Team, Family Reunification Team and the additional Community Adolescent support Team.

Significant savings can be achieved with effective Preventative and Early Intervention Services, which ensure young people and their families are supported to enable them to improve outcomes outside of the looked after care system.

#### **Workstream D – Stronger Stability for Children**

The benchmarking exercise which was undertaken as part of the transfer of children's services to Brighter Futures for Children highlighted Reading as an outlier both in terms of cost and number of CLA.

This statistic applies both in terms of regional neighbours, statistical neighbours and the national average. Our aim is to address this and reduce costs and numbers through two key projects - introducing a Placements Solution Team and Re-imagining Foster Care. The success of these will be measured by achieving significant savings and a reduction of CLA placements by ensuring children and young people are safely and appropriately

returned to immediate or extended birth families or placed with a greater number of local Brighter Futures for Children's foster carers.

### **Workstream E – Consolidating Corporate Resilience**

For Brighter Futures for Children to succeed long-term it is essential to develop an entrepreneurial culture and to have a properly resourced and experienced commercial team. The benefits of investing in this will enable us to have an improved and innovative commissioning and procurement function which will achieve value for money in the contracts it negotiates to realise cost savings.

## **11.2 Children's Social Care Improvement Plan (incl Ofsted Action Plan)**

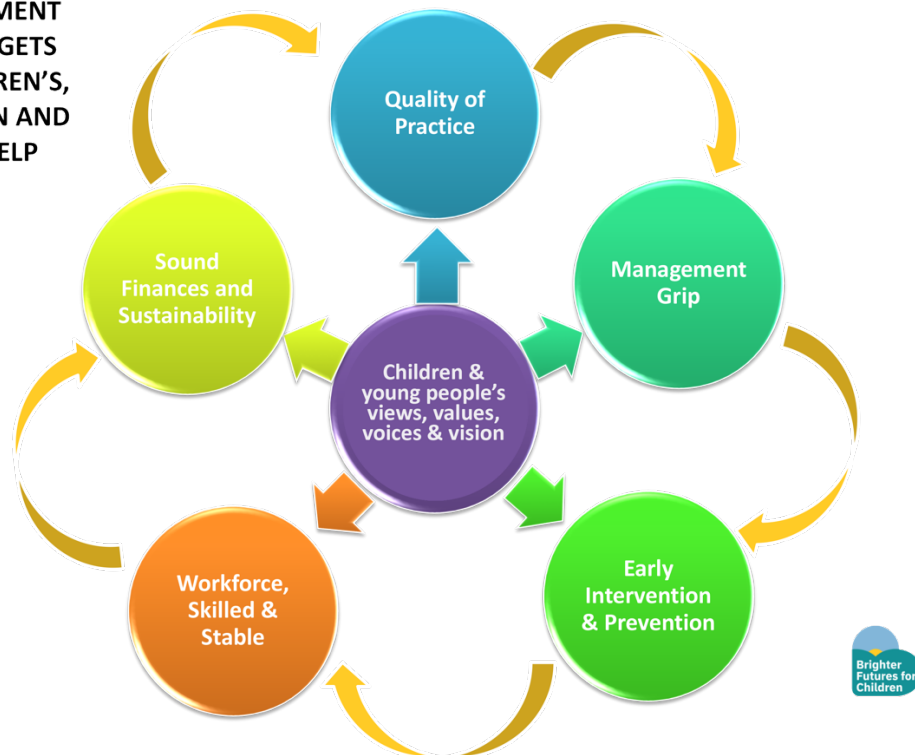
Following the Ofsted ILACS inspection in September 2019, we have a set of seven improvement targets. We will focus to improve:

- The quality of assessment, planning and provision for children in need, 16 and 17-year-old young people who are homeless, children living in private fostering arrangements and children living with connected carers
- The participation and engagement of the police in child protection processes
- The timeliness of initial health assessments for children in care
- The number of local placements for children in care, the completeness and accuracy of foster carer records, and the quality assurance oversight of commissioned placement arrangements
- Care leavers' access to their health histories, and staff and young people's understanding of care leavers' rights and entitlements
- The impact of quality assurance processes on children's cases
- The stability of the workforce to reduce the numbers of changes of social workers for children.

During Year One, these were incorporated within an Ofsted Action Plan underpinned by three of the six Improvement Priorities - Quality of Practice, Management Grip and Children and Young People's Voices. This Action Plan, which will proceed at pace in Year Two, reflects the new focus and pace of improvement for children's social care.

The plan has six clear improvement priorities, as identified in the diagram overleaf.

## IMPROVEMENT PLAN TARGETS FOR CHILDREN'S, EDUCATION AND EARLY HELP



Activities and action plans to improve practice have been divided into workstreams for each of the six priorities. Much of this work is inter-dependent on the work of the Transformation Programme projects and the HR strategies being developed. The intention is for day-to-day operational practices to improve continuously, as new processes are implemented into frontline practice to deliver better outcomes.

### 11.2.1 The six priorities

#### 1. Quality of practice:

Ensure the core elements of social work practice are of a good standard in line with the DfE knowledge and skills statement:

- Assessment
- Planning
- Direct work
- Review

#### 2. Management oversight and direction

Social work and early help managers will lead their teams and services effectively, ensuring their staff are supported, trained and challenged to deliver good quality interventions that improve children's lives

They will provide regular, clear, developmental and assertive management direction and oversight, supervision to practitioners, with rigour and support in

- setting case direction
- ensuring a prompt response to risk and need
- monitoring and driving case progression, ensuring contingencies are applied when necessary



- providing opportunities for critical reflection
- providing advice and guidance on quality and professional development
- ensuring compliance with legislation, statutory guidance and corporate policy.

### 3. Early intervention and prevention

We will work in collaboration with others to deliver our early intervention strategy and develop and embed new partnership arrangements which improve use of early help assessment and whole family working arrangements.

We will provide mechanisms to deliver help before concerns escalate and improve early identification and intervention in cases of neglect.

In addition to the focused projects which form an integral part of our Transformation Programme objectives, we will also concentrate on embedding partnership working practices to get it right for families first time.

### 4. Workforce is skilled and stable

- **Culture:** Develop a company-wide culture that puts children at the centre of everything we do
- **Capacity:** improve the recruitment and retention of permanent social workers and managers
- **Capability:** ensure we recruit, develop and retain staff who are capable of delivering high quality help to children and families
- **Competence:** ensure our workforce is competent to deliver high quality services for children and families.

### 5. Sound finances and sustainability

We will ensure good quality services are delivered within sustainable and balanced budgets. We will maximise opportunities for cost-sharing and operate within the financial policies and procedures in place for the company.

**6. Voice of the child:** All of the above priorities feed into this sixth - and most important - priority. We will ensure the views of children and young people clearly inform interventions and service developments. We will maintain a regular programme of meetings between senior leaders and the Children in Care Council, which is called *Care 2 Listen*, and ensure the child's voice is the 'golden thread' throughout our practice and our work.

## 12. Education and SEND Services

Reading should be one of the top places in the country for educational achievement. However, we can only be the best if certain groups, especially the vulnerable and disadvantaged, achieve above national averages.

In particular:

- Academic achievement at all key stages is around the national average
- This pattern begins in the early years and becomes established.
- Outcomes at KS2 remain below average with scores in writing deteriorating. At KS4, results over the three year remain around average

- Performance at A level is good but our figures for those not in education, employment or training (NEET) at 16 remain stubbornly high
- The performance of vulnerable and disadvantaged is lower than the national average, in some cases, substantially lower – at all key stages.

The SEND strategy, which is a cornerstone of our approach, has been refreshed and co-produced with our key stakeholders to continue to deliver the very best for this group of children and young people.

The Education strategy will be refreshed in the autumn of Year Two (2020) to coincide with any new Government to ensure we meet national as well as local priorities. This will be subject to full consultation with all key education and other stakeholders, particularly children and young people.

### **Specifically, this means we will:**

- work with schools and other partners, voicing the interests of the child and the views of parents while encouraging schools and partners to find and deliver solutions to challenges;
- foster a consensus with all partners and using this to focus school2school support.
- encourage the formation of more teaching schools, National Leaders of Education (NLEs), National Leaders of Governance (NLGs) and the use of local leaders of education and building on expertise and good practice already available in our school community
- encourage schools to form structural arrangements that benefit learners, improve outcomes, deliver efficiencies and empower parents
- work specifically with maintained schools: monitor and challenge performance and share good practice
- ensure that parents/carers and pupils' voices are at the heart of all we do
- increase SEND stakeholders' responsibility and involve them in SEND services
- ensure robust financial control of services and seek opportunities to provide traded services wherever the market allows
- Further develop our post 16 participation and engagement.

## **13. Measuring progress and success**

We have developed a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure our key statutory duties are met and, where possible, exceeded (see **Appendix 1**).

In addition, we have developing progress and success measurements against all of our projects and long-term strategies and associated action plans, which are regularly scrutinised by the Brighter Futures for Children Board of Directors.

The plans are monitored through the respective management and governance arrangements. Achievement of objectives and targets are reported to the Board quarterly and lack of progress is reported by exception quarterly.

Progress on service and team plans are monitored monthly by the relevant management team.

Where an exception report is necessary, the responsible manager must, at the same time, present a remediation plan, outlining what actions are being taken to bring performance back into line with expectations.

The Board of Directors does not rely exclusively on written reports, but seeks, in line with the Assurance Framework, a variety of evidence of progress. This includes visits to service teams, focus groups with staff, meetings with young people and parents, discussion with partner agencies and others.

But perhaps the most significant measure of our success so far has been a visible increase in the engagement of children and young people in shaping the services we provide to and for them.

In Year Two, we plan to build on that, through our priorities and demonstrate the effectiveness of our actions.

## 14. Our financial plan

**The decision to move education and children's services into Brighter Futures for Children means we must manage limited resources but deliver best value in a time of rising demand and great complexity.**

We are just over a full year into a seven-year contract to deliver children's services for RBC. We have agreed a fixed fee for the financial year 2020/21 (see **pages 29-31** for Medium Term Financial Strategy and Core Contract Sum figures).

### 14.0.1 Review of 2019-20 Budget Position

For BFFC to set a balanced budget for 2019-20 following the contract negotiations, we had to deliver an additional £2.2m savings to meet the contract sum. This was in addition to the savings target agreed for the three-year total saving target of £11.2m. BFFC met the £2.2m savings to set a balanced budget and we have exceeded the savings of £3.046m for 2019/20.

Up to period 8, BFFC had savings of £3.2m verified. We anticipate that our savings will increase further between now (Feb 2020) and March 2020. A large number of placements were safely stepped down and stepped out of care to ensure that these savings could be achieved. If this had not happened then the projected overspend would have been significantly higher.

The forecast overspend for 2019/20 was £2.5m, with a mitigation plan approved by the BFFC Senior Leadership Team of £900k, to reduce this to a £1.6m overspend for the year. The overspend arose due to the increase in the number of Children Looked After (CLA), which, in November 2019, was at its highest figure of 290. The budget for CLA in 2019/20 was agreed at 267 based on actual numbers during the contract negotiations.

Further analysis of these CLA placements found that the increased number of CLA was due to the number who were in the Public Law Outline (PLO) arena prior to the creation of the company. This meant a number of sibling groups entered the care system during the period and accounted for the increase.

The analysis also identified 14 children found to be living with connected carers, which was not legal arrangements. In correcting this, our figures have also risen.

Financially this impacted on the budget for BFFC. An analysis of the external CLA placements, supported by the cost drivers provided in the Budget Monitoring pack, showed an increase in the number of external placements compared to our in-house

provision. During the financial year 2019/20 additional residential placements occurred including one secure provision.

Unexpected or unplanned placements highlight the complexity of the CLA in the system. As an example, 12 external residential placements, at an average cost of £6,014 per week each, equates to £3.8m for the full financial year. The pressure to stop this rising and of finding alternative, safe solutions is high.

The company has done all that it can to mitigate this situation. In the past year we have increased the number of children placed under the Special Guardianship Order (SGO) arrangement by 16, which subsequently reduced costs and the CLA numbers. However, the children who entered the system have been at a significantly greater cost than the children leaving. An analysis indicated the additional cost of the net movement is circa £2m per year.

#### 14.0.2 National and local context

Nationally it is reported that only four local authorities are underspending for children's services and that there is an increase in the cost of CLA nationally. From 2017/18 to 2019/20 the budgeted section 251 statement indicates an increase of 17% for CLA.

Locally, in Reading, the increase in the average weekly cost for CLA increased from £3,740 per week in 2018/19 to £4,556 per week in 2019/20. This was an increase of 21.8%, but this reflected the complexities of the children coming into care.

During the 2019 ILACS Ofsted inspection, all of the CLA placements were reviewed and no child was deemed to be in an inappropriate placement or unsafe.

BFFC felt the finance mechanism of the contract needed to be discussed in more details between the two parties, as there has been a significant increase in the number of CLA entering the system since the contract was agreed.

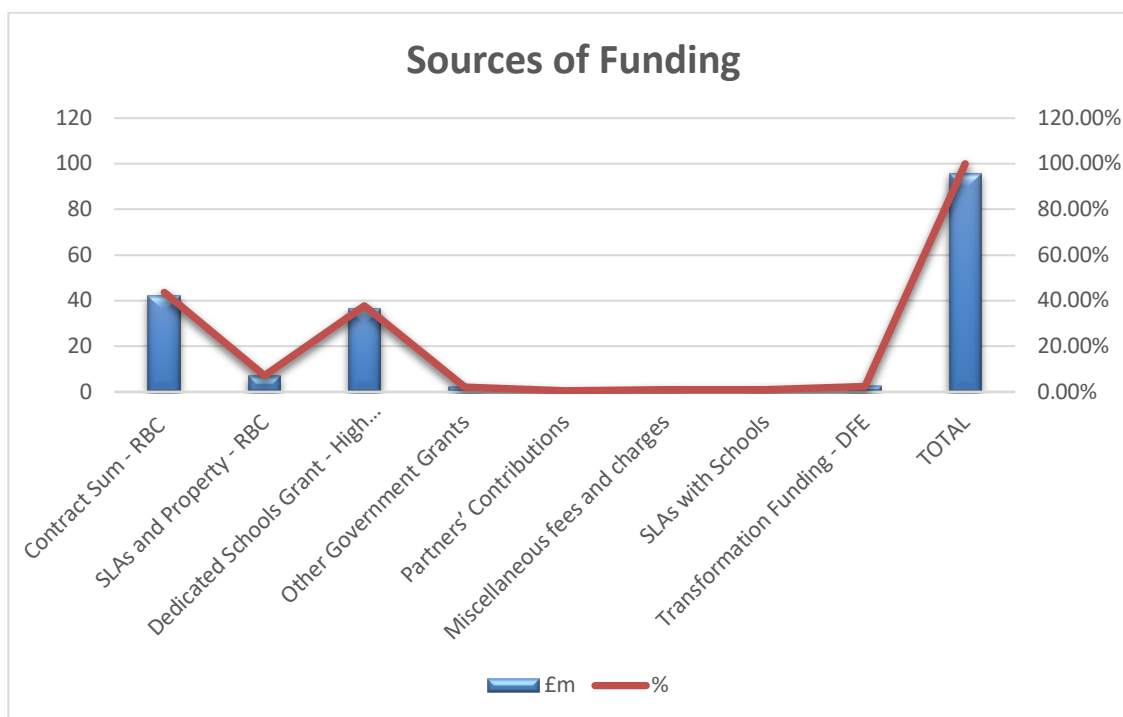
In November 2019, BFFC alerted RBC to the fact that the increase in cost was greater than the contract sum. Despite mitigating the pressure by £900k, BFFC was unable to absorb all of the increased spend and was facing a £1.6m deficit.

Work was undertaken to put in additional placement panels. This resulted in a review of 49 placements and a safe, further reduction in Children Looked After costs.

### 14.1 Sources of Funding

The chart below highlights the funding sources for BFFC for the financial period 2020/21. The funding can be summarised into four key funding streams, as follows:

|  |              |
|--|--------------|
| <b>Reading Borough Council – Contract sum and SLAs</b>             | <b>52.8%</b> |
| <b>Government Grants including Dedicated Schools Grant</b>         | <b>41.8%</b> |
| <b>Transformation Funding – DfE only</b>                           | <b>2.6%</b>  |
| <b>Other income sources – schools SLAs, partners contributions</b> | <b>2.8%</b>  |



#### 14.1.1 Sources of Funding

| Sources of Funding   | £m          | %           |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Contract Sum - RBC   | 41.7        | 45.5%       |
| SLAs and Property - RBC  | 6.7         | 7.3%        |
| Dedicated Schools Grant - High Needs, Early Years & Central Blocks | 36.2        | 39.5%       |
| Other Government Grants  | 2.1         | 2.3%        |
| Partners' Contributions  | 0.5         | 0.5%        |
| Miscellaneous fees and charges                                     | 1.1         | 1.2%        |
| SLAs with Schools  | 1.0         | 1.1%        |
| Transformation Funding - DFE                                       | 2.4         | 2.6%        |
| <b>TOTAL</b>   | <b>91.7</b> | <b>100%</b> |

#### 14.1.2 Reading Borough Council

The funding from RBC is for the statutory and non-statutory services for children's services, covering children's social care, early help, adoption and fostering and preventative services and education services. This funding includes the SLAs costs to be recharged to us.

#### 14.1.3 Government Grants

The Government Grants are administered by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of RBC, and include the following key grants:

- Dedicated Schools Grant – including Schools (administered by RBC), High Needs, Early Years & Central Blocks (all administered by BFFC).
- Pupil Premium Grant – allocated by the Virtual Head for CLA to Reading's schools

- Youth Justice Grant – source of funding for the Youth Offending Service

The Troubled Families Grant, which includes payments by results funding to provide preventative services working with families, has not yet been included for 2020-21 as there is no clear indication of the funding allocation for 2020-21 at this time. The spending review announced the continuation of the Troubled Families Grant for an additional year. The allocation announced is a significantly lower amount than the previous five-year programme allocations. As this budget is cost-neutral, we will adjust our work for troubled families accordingly.

As a result, we have taken the PBR element out of our funding streams but will adjust our budget if more funding is forthcoming.

#### 14.1.4 Transformation Programme Funding

Transformation Programme structure, funding and related savings has been discussed in detail in **Section 11 and Sections 14.0.1 and 14.2.3.**

#### 14.1.5 Other Income Sources

Other income sources include SLAs with schools for education services, partnership contributions, health funding, selling of placements to other local authorities, fees and charges and other miscellaneous income.

During 2019/20, we re-evaluated our offers and traded services to schools, to make sure that what we were offering was of quality, affordable and sustainable. This has resulted in a refreshed website with a clearer, more professional and targeted offer to schools, which we hope will be picked up by more schools out of area.

In 2020 and 2021 we are looking at additional bids to secure funding for emergency accommodation to support Reading children to stay in local provision, as well as increasing the number of Reading-based foster carers, to reduce our out-of-area placements and associated costs.

### 14.2 Medium-Term Financial Strategy 2020/21 – 2021/22

The contract sum for 2020/21 was agreed at the contract negotiations as £41.701m and included the following adjustments:

- Pay inflation £0.852m
- Increased pension contributions £0.163m
- Other inflation £0.385m
- Pressures £3.319m
- Savings £4.128m

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for Brighter Futures for Children is presented in the expenditure budget table below and covers the three-year financial period of 2020/21 to 2022/23. The table below shows high level funding requirements for the organisation including Transformation Programme funding from DfE:

| Expenditure                      | 2020/21      | 2021/22      | 2022/23      |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|
|                                  | <b>£m</b>    | <b>£m</b>    | <b>£m</b>    |
| Employee Costs                   | 26.8         | 25.3         | 25.4         |
| Running Costs                    | 58.3         | 57.0         | 57.0         |
| SLAs                             | 4.5          | 4.5          | 4.5          |
| Property - Rents                 | 1.1          | 1.1          | 1.1          |
| Property - Facilities Management | 1.0          | 1.0          | 1.0          |
|                                  |              |              |              |
| Gross Expenditure                | <b>91.7</b>  | <b>88.9</b>  | <b>89.0</b>  |
|                                  |              |              |              |
| <b>Income</b>                    |              |              |              |
| Income - including grants        | -40.9        | -40.9        | -40.9        |
| Transformation Funding - DfE     | -2.4         | 0            | 0            |
|                                  |              |              |              |
|                                  |              |              |              |
| Total Income                     | <b>-43.3</b> | <b>-40.9</b> | <b>-40.9</b> |
|                                  |              |              |              |
| Net Expenditure                  | <b>48.4</b>  | <b>48.0</b>  | <b>48.1</b>  |

The funding source for the main operational budget is summarised in the funding streams table below for the three years:

| Funding Streams                      | 20/21         | 21/22         | 22/23         | TOTAL          |
|--------------------------------------|---------------|---------------|---------------|----------------|
|                                      | <b>£m</b>     | <b>£m</b>     | <b>£m</b>     | <b>£m</b>      |
| RBC Core Contract Sum                | 41.701        | 41.357        | 41.476        | 124.534        |
| SLAs pass through including Property | 6,669         | 6,669         | 6.669         | 20.007         |
| DfE Transformation Funding           | 2.350         | 0             | 0             | 2.350          |
| RBC Transformation Funding – tbc     | 0             | 0             | 0             | 0              |
| <b>TOTAL</b>                         | <b>50.720</b> | <b>48.026</b> | <b>48.145</b> | <b>146.891</b> |

The RBC Core Contract Sum budget figures for the next 3 years are for 20/21 - £41.701m, for 21/22 - £41.357m, and for 21/22 - £41.476m as shown in the Funding Streams table above. The funding stream includes £2.35m Transformation Funding from the DfE for 20/21.

These figures exclude a £4m Transformation Programme Funding Gap Bid, which BFfC presented to RBC and the DfE in January 2020 to further expand early help provision through innovative invest to save initiatives (see also **Section 14.2.3**).

**Appendix 2** shows the map and location of those properties that transferred to Brighter Futures for Children in December 2019.

### 14.2.1 Key Factors and Budget Assumptions

The Net Operating Budget table below provides details of the key factors included in the budget calculations for the next three years, covering pay increments and pay inflation, contract inflation, pressures, and savings. Inflation has been separated to reflect pay award and pay inflation (2%) and the contract inflation elements. Inflation within the operational budget will be funded by the savings programme below, and additional savings/income generation are required in Year Three to meet the inflationary costs.

| Net Operational Budget               | 2020/21 | 2021/22 | 2022/23 |
|--------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|
|                                      | £m      | £m      | £m      |
| Base Budget                          | 41.110  | 41.701  | 41.357  |
| Pay inflation and increments         | 0.852   | 0.963   | 1.066   |
| Increased pension contributions      | 0.163   | 0.178   | 0.194   |
| Contract inflation                   | 0.385   | 0.438   | 0.448   |
| Other Pressures                      | 3.319   | 2.139   |         |
| Savings                              | -4.128  | -4.062  | -1.411  |
| Fees and Charges                     | 0       | 0       | -0.178  |
| Budget - contract sum excluding SLAs | 41.701  | 41.357  | 41.476  |

The key pressures included in the table above are the high CLA costs and numbers and the increase of transport costs for pupils with SEN. The figures also reflect the increase in employer's contribution costs from 20/21. The updated benchmarking exercise shows that Reading remains an outlier for the number of CLA and the high cost residential placements. The MTFs assumes the Transformation Programme will reduce costs and the number of CLA in the longer term.

Inflation has been separated to reflect pay award and pay inflation (2%) and the contract inflation elements. Inflation within the operational budget will be funded by the savings programme (see **section 14.2.3**), apart from the third year where additional savings/income generation is required to meet the inflationary costs.

The 2019/20 in year budget pressure has been mitigated within year and has been reflected in the MTFs, with the Transformation Programme minimising the risk in future years. New controls have been implemented, introducing one decision maker for the placement of children coming into care.

The average number of CLA reflected in the overall budget for each of the next three financial years is:

|                          |     |
|--------------------------|-----|
| 2019/20 – actual numbers | 290 |
| 2020/21                  | 275 |
| 2021/22                  | 260 |
| 2022/23                  | 255 |



The figures reflect the CLA profile continuing through to care leavers. The CLA figures anticipate the success of the Transformation Programme reducing the costs and number of CLA within the system. The aim is to reduce costs through implementation of our demand management strategy.

By addressing the recruitment and retention of social workers, we will help to reduce the use of agency social workers and achieve the objective of improved practice and better stability of placements.

#### 14.2.2 Proposed changes to Employees' Terms and Conditions

The company would like to introduce a market supplement for occupational therapists following difficulties in recruiting permanently to roles. The proposal is to allocate a similar market supplement rates as for social workers to all occupational therapist posts. The annual cost to the company would be £18,000, with a rate of £8,000 for a senior occupational therapist and £6,000 for an occupational therapist. The cost of this market supplement has been built into the contract sum for 2020/21 and will not create a budget pressure.

The review of the market supplement rates is required for social workers in August 2020 as part of a three-year review. The market supplement costs have been factored into the budget for the next three years. If the review on retention and recruitment decides to change or implement a different scheme and costs are higher than the current rates, additional savings would be required to cover additional costs.

The second proposal is to increase the annual leave entitlement for all employees within the company by one day. The actual cost to the company is the loss of productivity estimated at £48,375 for 2020/21. The cost of implementing changes to iTrent to amend annual leave entitlement is £2,250. The cost of this will be absorbed within the contract sum and there will not be an additional request to RBC.

#### 14.2.3 Savings

The additional funding to be secured for the Transformation Programme is essential to deliver a three-year savings programme.

In summary, total funding of £9.1m (£3.7m from RBC and £5.4m from DfE) was secured to deliver an ambitious and challenging savings programme of £11.2m over the three-year period.

It is important for Brighter Futures for Children to transform and deliver value for money and the successful delivery of the savings programme is core to managing current and future levels of demand as well as the relevant inflationary pressures.

Investment in early intervention and prevention, coupled with effective demand management strategies - including development of local placement provision - will enable us to remain within the contract sum. Improving practice will also deliver efficiencies.

The Transformation Programme was set up to deliver sustainable savings and improvement. To date, it has delivered £3.5m of savings for the year 2019/20 and is on target to deliver £4m for the full year. It will continue to invest and develop across the company to deliver its improvement and savings targets within budgetary constraints.

Further savings have been identified in the Transformation Programme Funding Gap Bid, presented separately from this business plan.

There is a risk that savings achieved to date may be adversely affected by our ability to fully embed the demand management strategies if the funding gap isn't addressed. Failure to secure additional transformation funding will also put at risk savings included in the MTFS for 2021/22.

#### 14.2.4 Capital Funding

To meet requirements identified in the company's sufficiency strategy and to help reduce unit costs of provision the company needs to produce a business case for capital funding through the Strategic Assets Group. The immediate requirement will be for the development of an emergency provision/children's home. This could range from £0.2m to refurbish an existing asset or up to £1.2m to purchase a new property. Further discussions will be required on how this funding will be allocated to BFfC to progress with this development and whether a loan is required from RBC.

Other capital requirements are for the relocation of three of our services at a provisional cost of £1.3m in total. The three services that will be relocated during 2020/21 are the Youth Offending Service at a cost of £0.3m, Whitley Wood at a cost of £0.5m and the relocation of the Contact Centre at an estimated cost of £0.5m.

#### 14.2.5 Next Steps

Brighter Futures for Children's MTFS does not currently include the impact of increasing commerciality for the company. The direction of travel over the next 12 months is, as outlined in our priorities, to continue to develop excellent traded services which can be offered to schools and academies.

The two key areas to market and develop funding opportunities are (1) increasing the education services (including school improvement and educational psychology services, but not exclusively these) and (2) financial services to schools and academies.

As there is a clear demand for high quality services, BFfC has an opportunity to market its services in Reading and more widely across Berkshire and beyond. This has the potential to become an excellent funding source creating additional income to re-invest in existing and new services.

## 14. Appendices

### Appendix 1: Brighter Futures for Children Contractual KPIs

These KPIs are reported regularly through the Contract Management Group.

#### KEY:

**Difference between KPI categories 1 and 2:** The primary purpose of a distinction is to allow for failures of different categories of KPI to be dealt with in slightly different ways. In brief, category 1 KPIs are escalated more quickly to reflect the fact that there are monitored more closely and are the most important KPIs. The escalation process for KPI failures is set out in Paragraphs 5 to 9 of Schedule 6 (Performance Framework).

**Management Information:** KPIs not included in the target percentages but included for information and for the BFFC Board, Department for Education and Reading Borough Council to see and note direction of travel.

**PLEASE NOTE:** The % of file audits rated good or outstanding will be a Year Two target. In Year One we worked on achieving a consistency of marking audits, as well as training and developing staff understanding of what 'Good' looks like. In our Year Two target, we will be able show a demonstrable change in grading from audit to audit.

The TARGET column relates to the **target percentage to be achieved after three years**, not to the end of the appropriate reporting period (monthly, quarterly, annually). The tolerances set for Contract Year 1 reflect the different stages of improvement each service area is at.

Management Information KPIs are informally managed, and do not require escalation unless they impact operationally or put safeguarding principles at risk of failure.

| KPI ref | Description   | KPI category* | Children's Social Care (Y/N) | Reporting period (frequency) | Three-year TARGET | Tolerance for Contract Year 1 (19-20) | Position at Nov 2019 |
|---------|---|---------------|------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------|----------------------|
| 1       | Timeliness of contact decision making (Children's Single Point of Access). Decision within 24 hours*                  | 1             | Y                            | Monthly                      | 100%              | >95%                                  | 81%                  |
| 2       | % of referrals with a decision made within 24 hours*  | 1             | Y                            | Monthly                      | 100%              | >90%                                  | 99%                  |
| 3       | % of children who become subject of child protection plan for second or subsequent time within the last two (2) years | 2             | Y                            | Monthly                      | <10%              | <10%                                  | 13%                  |
| 4       | % of referrals which are re-referrals within 12 months  | 2             | Y                            | Monthly                      | <23%              | <25%                                  | 29%                  |
| 5       | % children in care (CLA) who have been looked after for 2+ years in the same placement                                | 1             | Y                            | Monthly                      | >85%              | >60%                                  | 66%                  |
| 6       | CLA who have experienced 3+ placements in last 12 months  | 2             | Y                            | Monthly                      | <10%              | <12%                                  | 13.6%                |
| 7       | % of CLA placements more than 20 miles from Reading (i.e. from home address of child)                                 | 2             | Y                            | Monthly                      | <15%              | <30%                                  | 32%                  |
| 8       | % care leavers who are not in education employment or training (NEET) - 17-21 year olds                               | 1             | Y                            | Monthly                      | <20%              | <35%                                  | 45%                  |
| 9       | Voice of the child (measured as CLA aged over 4 who attend or contribute to their own reviews)                        | 2             | Y                            | Monthly                      | 93%               | >85%                                  | 96%                  |

|    |   |           |   |                   |   |                       |       |
|----|---|-----------|---|-------------------|---|-----------------------|-------|
| 10 | Social worker turnover (no of FTE leavers / average FTE employed)                                   | Mgmt Info | Y | Quarterly         | <15%  | 20%                   | 7.9%  |
| 11 | Social work agency staffing rate (agency staff FTE as % of total)                                   | Mgmt Info | Y | Quarterly         | <16%  | 35%                   | 39%   |
| 12 | Percentage of days lost to sickness / number of children and families social workers x working days | Mgmt Info | N | Quarterly         | <3%   | 3.5%                  | 3.0%  |
| 13 | % of families who achieve sustained improved outcomes (and secure a Payment By Results (PBR))       | Mgmt Info | N | Quarterly         | 80%   | >70%                  | 76%   |
| 14 | % Pupils provided with a school place on offer day (primary)  | 2         | N | Annual            | >95%  | >90%                  | 100%  |
| 15 | % Pupils provided with a school place on offer day (secondary)                                      | 2         | N | Annual            | >96%  | >92%                  | 100%  |
| 16 | % Education health care plans including exception cases completed within 20 weeks                   | 1         | N | Annual            | >72%  | >62%                  | 49%   |
| 17 | Youth Offending Service: Re-offending rate  | 2         | N | Quarterly via YJB | Annual target 35.8% (PCC target) 40.5% (South East average) | No more than 5% above | 29.2% |
| 18 | Reduction in secondary school fixed term exclusion  | Mgmt Info | N | Annual            |   | 750                   | 238   |
| 19 | Key Stage 2 results (R,W, Ma expected level+) - gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils          | Mgmt Info | N | Annual            |   | 25%                   | 10%   |
| 20 | Key Stage 4 results (Attainment 8) - gap in attainment for disadvantaged pupils                     | Mgmt Info | N | Annual            |   | 19                    | 17    |
| 21 | Increased percentage of schools rated good or outstanding (LA maintained only)                      | Mgmt Info | N | Termly            |   | 90%                   | 92%   |
| 22 | SEND: number of successful appeals against number of EHC plans                                      | Mgmt Info | N | Annual            |   |                       | 88%   |

## Appendix 2: Property

Location of Brighter Futures for Children sites. All lease transfers completed December 2019



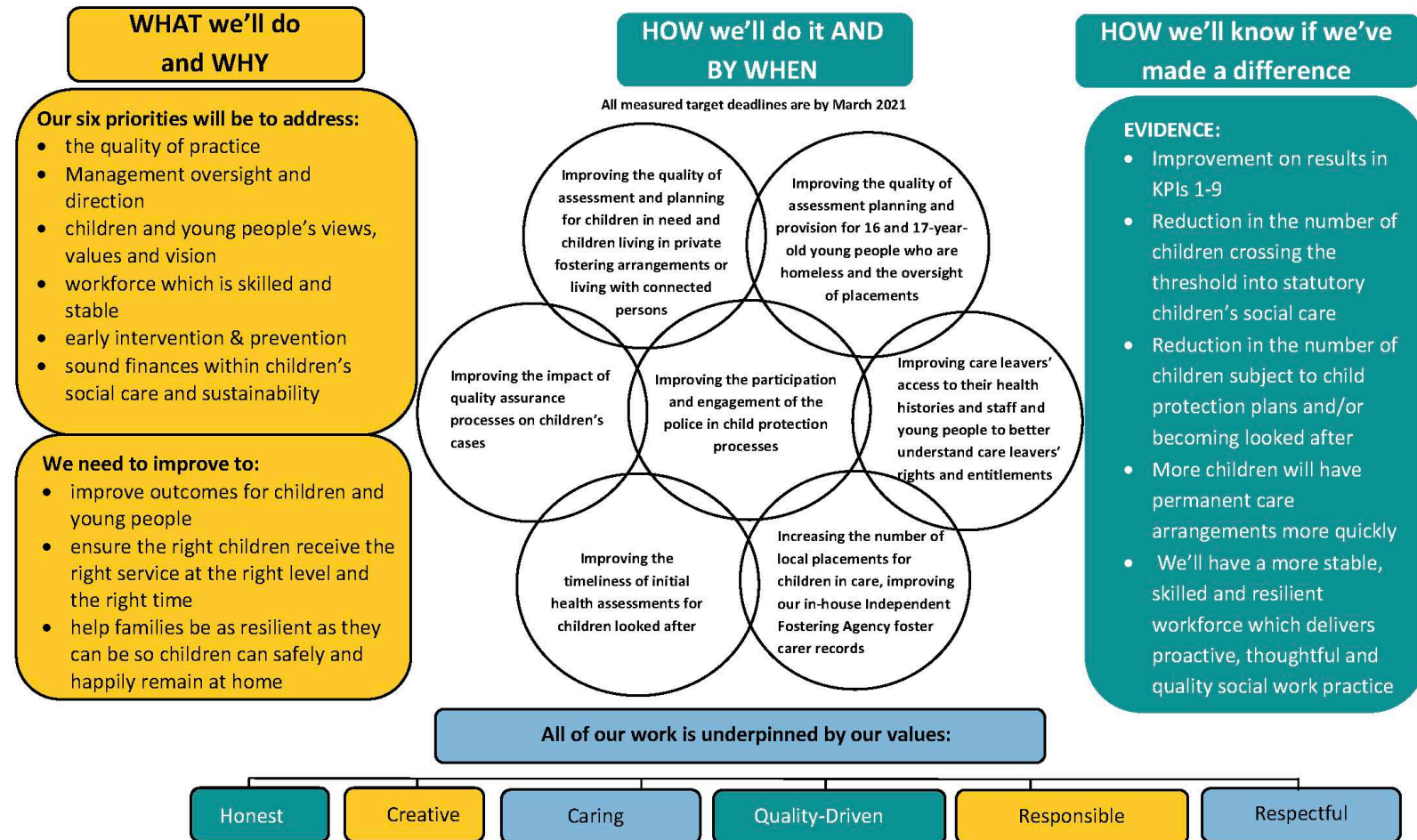
| MAP NO. | SITE                        | USAGE                       | ADDRESS                      | POSTCODE |
|---------|-----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|----------|
| 1       | Pinecroft Children's Home   | Children's home             | Known but not published      |          |
| 2       | Cressingham Children's Home | Children's home             | Known but not published      |          |
| 3       | Civic Centre                | Head Office                 | Civic Offices, Bridge Street | RG1 2LU  |
| 4       | Avenue Centre               | Early Help / Education      | Conwy Close                  | RG30 4BZ |
| 5       | Southcote (1)               | Children's Centre / Nursery | 85 Coronation Square         | RG30 3QP |
| 6       | Southcote (2)               | Youth & Community Centre    | Coronation Square            | RG30 3QP |
| 7       | Whitley Health Building     | Early Help / Education      | 268 Northumberland Avenue    | RG2 7PJ  |
| 8       | Sun Street*                 | Children's Centre           | Sun Street                   | RG1 3JX  |
| 9       | Ranikhet Children's Centre  | Children's Centre           | Spey Road                    | RG30 4ED |
| 10      | Youth Offending Service     | Youth Services              | 16 North Street              | RG1 7DA  |
| 11      | Caversham Children's Centre | Children's Centre           | 114 Amersham Road            | RG4 5NA  |
| 12      | South Reading Community Hub | Children's Centre / Nursery | 252 Northumberland Avenue    | RG2 7QA  |

\*Lease to be finalised on completion of refurbishment works (expected in May 2020)

## Appendix 3: Our Transformation Projects

| WORKSTREAM                                   | PROJECTS   |
|--|--|
| <b>A: Improving Practice Standards</b>       | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Safeguarding Transformation team</li> <li>2. Practice Improvement Leadership</li> <li>3. Principal Social Worker – excellence of practice</li> <li>4. Court proceedings</li> </ol>   |
| <b>B: Developing Workforce Excellence</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Achieve a stable workforce by recruiting permanent staff in children's social care</li> <li>4. Management skills training</li> <li>5. Training and development for social workers</li> <li>6. Training for Safety Standards Model</li> </ol>   |
| <b>C: Building Community Capacity</b>        | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>7. Pre-Birth Support Team</li> <li>8. Family Reunification Team</li> <li>9. Edge of Care Team (adolescents)</li> <li>10. Revise Under 5s offer of Early Years and Children's Centre provision</li> <li>11. ONE Reading Partnership</li> <li>12. Children in Need cases</li> <li>13. Increased income for Education Welfare Officer and Youth Services</li> </ol>  |
| <b>D. Stronger Stability for Children</b>    | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>13. Re-imagining Foster Care</li> <li>14. Placement Solutions Team</li> <li>15. 18+ care leavers</li> <li>16. Education and therapeutic support for young people moving within 20 miles of Reading</li> </ol>   |
| <b>E: Consolidating Corporate Resilience</b> | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16. Strengthening commissioning function</li> <li>17. Improved contract management</li> <li>18. Design and implementation of supported lodgings for 16+</li> <li>19. Review direct payments</li> <li>20. Renegotiation of SLAs</li> <li>21. Review continued health contribution</li> <li>22. Enhanced utilisation of capacity at our children's homes</li> <li>23. Additional children's home for high needs young people (feasibility study)</li> <li>24. Housing benefit claims for 18+</li> <li>25. SEND Commissioner</li> <li>26. Business improvement, digitalisation and Traded Services</li> <li>27. Transformation Programme team</li> <li>28. Contingency for Restructure Funds</li> <li>29. Funds to be allocated to projects post further diagnostics and evaluation</li> <li>30. Creating the company</li> </ol> |

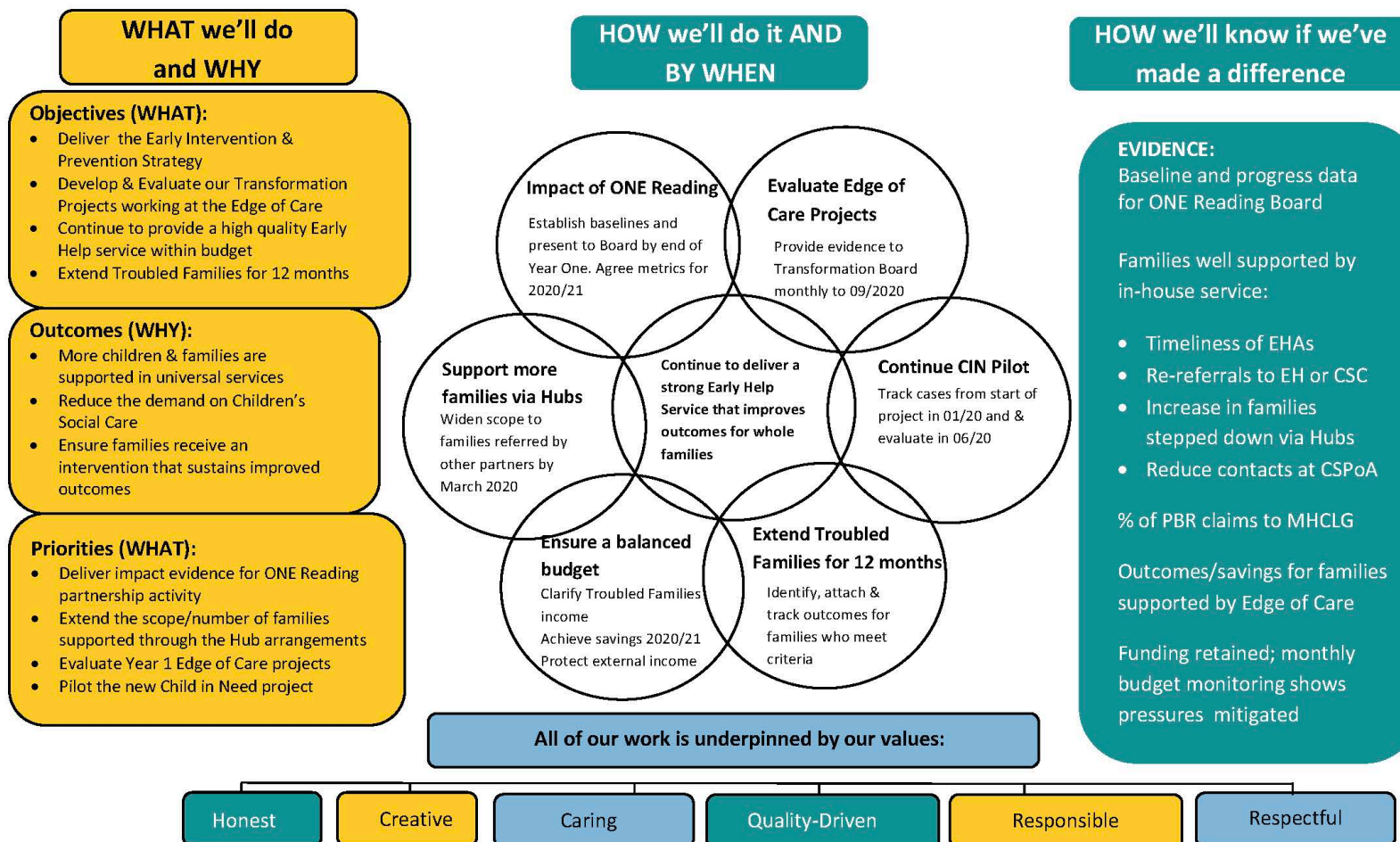
## Plan on a Page. The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE 2020-21





## Plan on a Page: The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for:

### EARLY HELP & PREVENTION 2020-21





## Plan on a Page. The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for EDUCATION 2020-21



### WHAT we'll do and WHY

#### Raise standards by:

- Continuing to tackle the disadvantage gap  
Implement the post-16 engagement plan to address the high number of NEETs.

#### Improve outcomes for CYP with SEND and for CLA

- Continue to expand local provision through the delivery of a SEND school focused on ASC and SEMH
- Continue to improve our Virtual School and the results our CLA achieve.

#### Ensure we meet the educational needs of our children and young people:

- Work with Reading Borough Council to ensure sufficiency and suitability of school places.

### HOW we'll do it AND BY WHEN



### HOW we'll know if we've made a difference

#### EVIDENCE:

- Performance at KS2 (KPI19)
- Reduction in NEETs (KPI8)
- Sufficient secondary places
- More local provision for CYP with ASC and SEMH

#### GLOSSARY OF TERMS:

ASC: Autism Spectrum Condition  
CLA: Children Looked After  
CYP: Children & Young People  
EHCP: Education, Health & Care Plan  
KPI: Key Performance Indicator  
LLE: Local Leader of Education  
NEET: Not in Education, Employment or Training  
SEND: Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities  
SEMH: Social, Emotional and/or Mental Health

### All of our work is underpinned by our values:

Honest

Creative

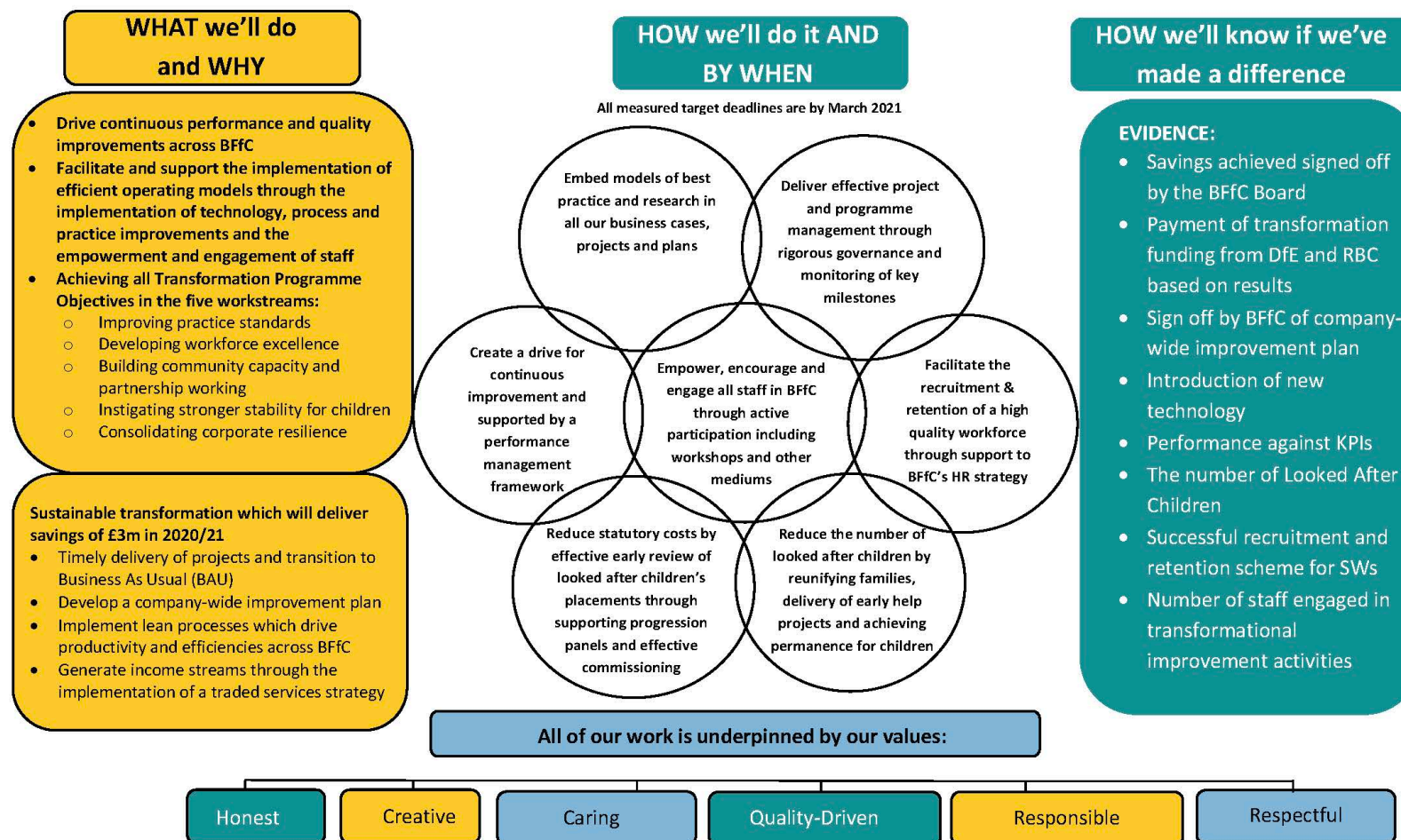
Caring

Quality-Driven

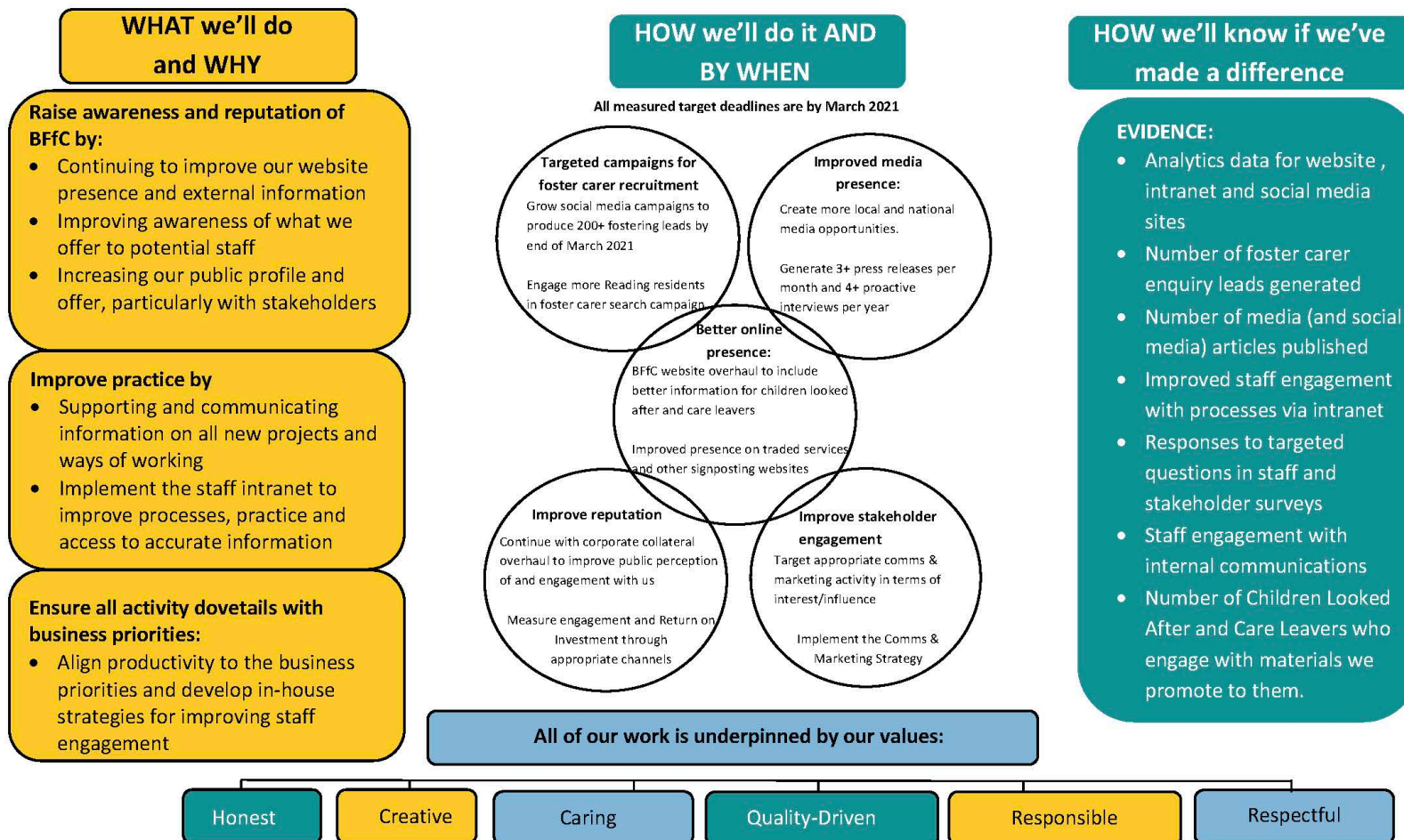
Responsible

Respectful

## Plan on a Page. The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for TRANSFORMATION PROGRAMME TEAM 2020-21



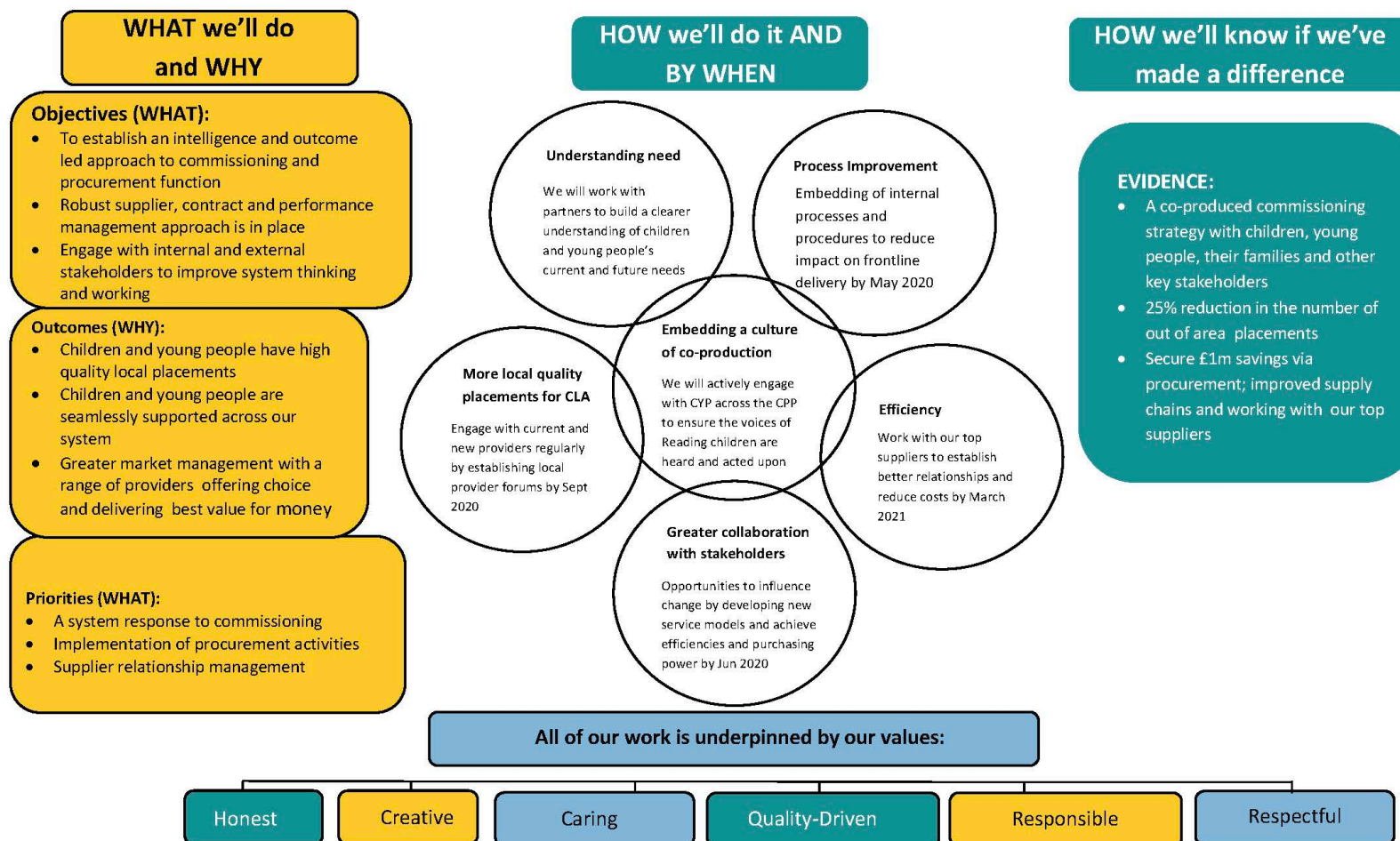
## Plan on a Page. The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for COMMUNICATIONS & MARKETING 2020-21



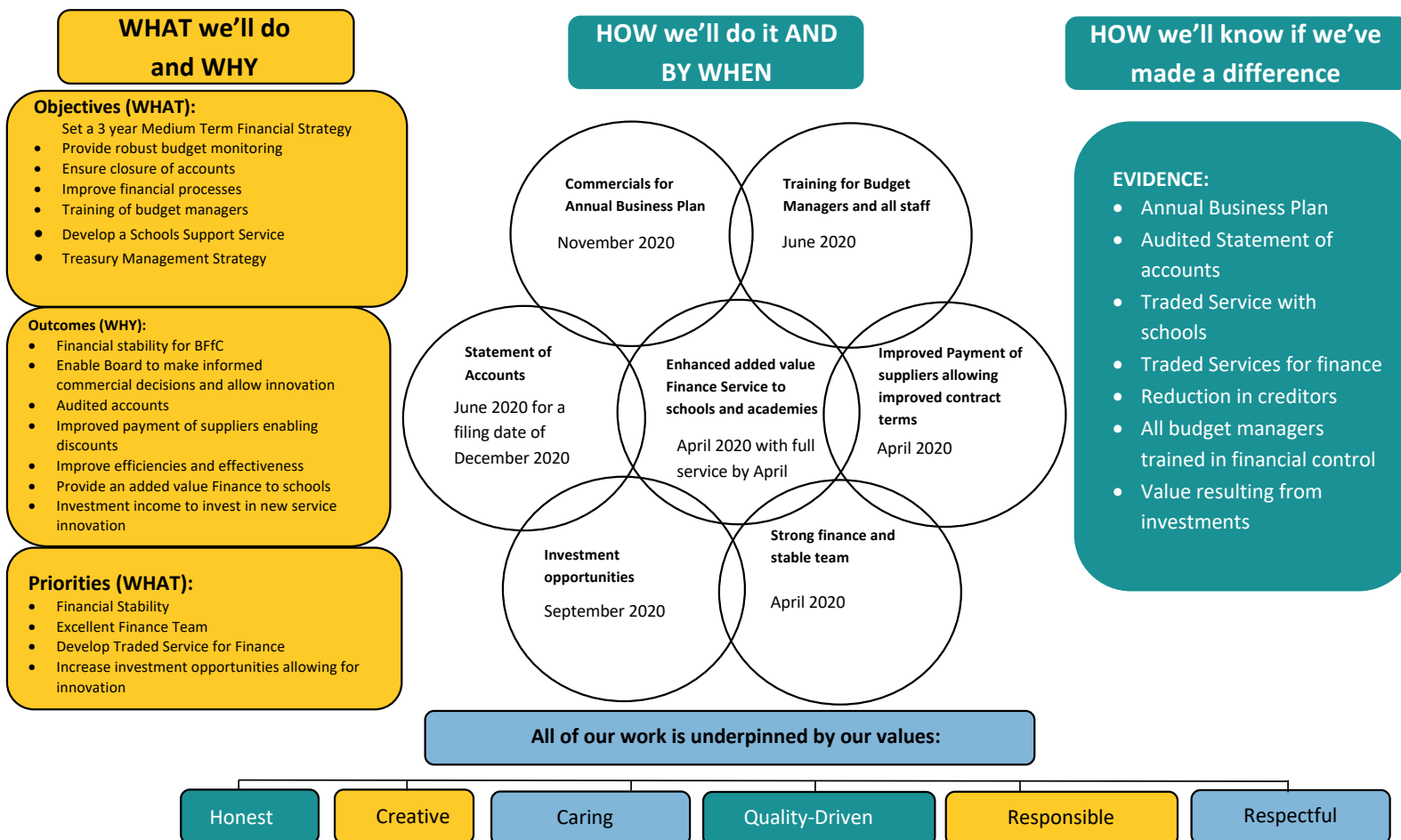


## Plan on a Page: The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for:

### Commissioning, Contracts and Procurement 2020-21



## Plan on a Page: The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for: FINANCE



## Plan on a Page. The WHO, WHAT, WHERE, WHY AND WHEN for:

### HUMAN RESOURCES 2020-21

