



**Brighter
Futures for
Children**

Business Plan 2022-2025

Our three-year vision and aspiration
and detailed one-year business plan
for 2022-23

OWNER: Di Smith
Board Chair
Brighter Futures for Children



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Introduction from the Board Chair

I am delighted to introduce this business plan which sets out our vision and aspirations for children, young people and their families over the next three years and our outcomes-focused priorities for the next 12 months.

In developing the business plan, we have been mindful of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on children and young people. This plan includes two COVID-19 recovery initiatives, one concentrating on the learning and development of under 2s and the other focused on ensuring that more young people can access earlier help with mental health needs. We also intend to address the impact the pandemic has had on outcomes for disadvantaged children and our education focus for the year will be on narrowing the gap.

Across the four priorities in the plan, we aim to provide the right help and support to children and families as early as possible to prevent more intrusive and costly intervention at a later stage. We are committed to adopting an *'early prevention, less intervention'* approach and to working together with our partners to support prevention and earlier help.

Our children's social care redesign is now ready to be fully implemented with a renewed focus on the child combined with a better understanding of parents, particularly in relation to domestic abuse, substance use or mental health and wellbeing.

The delivery of our priorities needs to be enabled by an effective support offer from the Finance and Resources team. This will be secured through maintaining a focus on building a stable workforce of permanent staff, improving quality impact and outcomes, and ensuring effective financial control and value for money.

As an arm's length company wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, we are clear about our contractual responsibility to deliver children's services on behalf of the Council. But to maximise our positive impact on children and young people we also need to make a broader commitment to the place where they live. That is why we have ensured that our business plan complements and enhances RBC's Corporate Plan and in particular its themes around Thriving Communities and Inclusive Economy.

In the Delivering Outcomes section (page 12) we have outlined how we will measure our success. It's vital that we all focus on what success looks like. For most it will be better relationships, children thriving – either with their families or in our care – and being both safe and secure. Our Company name speaks volumes in articulating what we want to achieve in Reading. That is, brighter futures for children.



Di Smith
Board Chair
Brighter Futures for Children

Our three-year vision

By 2025, Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) will have delivered children's services in Reading for six years.

Our vision, from the start of the Company in December 2018 was – and still is – to protect and enhance the lives of the children of Reading and help families find long-term solutions to ensure children lead happy, healthy and successful lives.

By 2025 our aspiration is that we will have developed and embedded new ways of working with – and for - the community to help families avoid situations which compromise the safety and wellbeing of children and young people and prevent them from reaching the thresholds for statutory intervention.

Our ambition is that the services we provide will be better co-produced with the community, meaning we're offering the support they need at the time they need it and that we'll be working together – doing things *with* families not *to* them, to help keep more children and young people at home, safely.

Safeguarding and protecting children and young people is our primary concern. We will intervene, in a statutory capacity, to protect children and young people when we need to. Our aim is to work in a trauma informed and holistic way, so families feel the benefit of working with us.

To achieve this, we need to work more closely with the whole family. We need families to want to work with us, to trust us and to be able to clearly see how working alongside us will help them grow in confidence and equip them with the skills to manage situations at an earlier stage.

We must continue to listen to the voice of the child, not only when they are telling us how things are for them but also, when they are using our services, what they say about how we could do things differently to better meet their needs. This includes looking at ways to communicate with and listen to children who cannot use their own voices but need to be heard.

We are fully committed to the central importance of partnership working with families by developing and consolidating the foundations we have already built with ONE Reading Children & Young People's Partnership and Berkshire West Safeguarding Children's Partnership.

Our aim is to further 'tip the balance' towards more preventative work at an earlier stage, with families working with us – and partner agencies – to prevent issues from escalating unnecessarily.

We need to be aware of past and present traumas, to work in an informed, intuitive and collaborative way, so that we can help change families' dynamics and support them to thrive.

With the foundations of the Company now firmly set and with new ways of working, culture, values and improved practice more integrated, we can, as a maturing organisation, now look strategically at what success – defined by better outcomes for children, young people and their families - would look like in a much clearer way.

Never before have we been able to summarise our strategic aim and vision in just a few words. Our new, overarching principle is '*Early prevention, less intervention*'.

These four words give meaning to our work and will provide a focus for the next stage in BFfC's improvement journey.

Our achievements

BfFC has come a long way over the past three years. Our Company website shows the [key milestones](#) in BfFC's improvement journey.

Key achievements include the following:

- In October 2019, we moved out of 'Inadequate' status, just ten months after BfFC had taken over children's services. Inspectors rated the service as 'Requires improvement to be good' in all four judgement areas.
- In February 2021, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families officially confirmed that Children's Services in Reading had been removed from Government intervention, as a result of the continuing improvement of children's services.
- In July 2021, the findings of the Ofsted & CQC Local Area SEND inspection were published and showed how much services had improved
- In February 2022, our Independent Fostering Agency was elevated from 'Requires improvement to be good' to 'Good' by Ofsted.

Our immediate challenges and focus

We are fully aware of challenges that have arisen from the COVID-19 pandemic and what we need to do to address these. We enter Year Four of our service delivery with these in mind. We know there are key areas which need to be addressed – a marked increase in children who have been removed from the school system for home schooling; others who have been disadvantaged by the disruption to their schooling; many who have become disengaged and are harder to reach.

In addition, there are the 0-2s whose preparation for nursery and onward education has been disrupted, the very young children with emerging special educational needs and/or disabilities which need to be addressed.

We have seen more referrals for issues with young people's mental health and, sadly, an increase in domestic abuse and families in crisis.

Operational plans, which sit under and align with this business plan's strategic vision and its priorities, have been drawn up, with activity and workstreams to look at solutions for these issues.

Where our maturity now shows is in our ability to spot these emerging areas of concern earlier and to take a more strategic view on how we are going to manage them and prevent further escalation.

Our own relationship with partners has improved and we think more as a whole system. We now need to look more closely at the inequality and to tackle emerging issues alongside the 'levelling up' agenda.

We bid for – and won – funding of £915,886 for a data accelerator partnership project, which will give us meaningful data to address emerging concerns; we secured funding over two years of £1,095,074 from Reading Borough Council for preventative work in the 0-5 and 13+ age brackets, to address concerns that have arisen from the 'shadow of Covid'.

We will continue to monitor government updates on the raft of new funding announced in the spending review and we have a careful eye on the reports and good practice suggestions already

coming out of the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), which will be published later on in 2022.

Our one-year plan 2022-23

It is likely that we will have the next Ofsted ILACS visit within the 2022/23 financial year. Our ambition remains to get to 'Good' with a clear plan for delivering 'Outstanding' services having established a firm foundation.

We cannot deliver on the change ahead if the conditions for delivery are not right. It's up to us to make sure they are. Our vision is: *'to unlock resources to help every child and young person to have a happy, healthy and successful life'*.

Unlocking resource means being able to recognise potential value and have better financial control. Adding value, rather than cost, means taking a holistic view rather than a specific focus on behaviours and risks that children and young people may present.

Being proactive means not being reactive and taking a solutions-focused approach, rather than looking to contain 'problems'. Having better measurement of outcomes means detailing our achievement for children, young people and their families, in terms of their happiness, health and success, not just our output or activity.

And working in better collaboration means realigning how we work with partners rather than the way things have 'always been done'; shaping the market to respond to need rather than not meeting needs and, if we achieve this effectively, having a clear story on our improvement that we can properly evidence.

Building on our success with securing the Data Acceleration Project, we will work to sustain current grant income wherever possible, generate income and will continue to monitor Government updates on the raft of new funding announced in the spending review to clarify what may come as allocation, what we have to apply for and ensure we're bid ready.

We will, over the next 12 months, work closely with the ONE Reading Children and Young People's partnership to scope out what co-located community-based support we could offer, by way of the new 'Family Hub' model which the Government would like to see in place by 2024.

We are aware that the pandemic has led to an increase in families experiencing domestic abuse. We will continue to contribute, alongside partners, to develop good strategic needs assessments as required under the 2021 Domestic Abuse Act.

We will continue to work closely with – and support - RBC on its domestic abuse strategy and will continue to encourage collaboration through the domestic abuser strategic partnership.

In addition, we will strengthen our preventative work with an increased focus on our parental support and the community support we offer to young people, especially through our *'shadow of Covid'* work, funded by RBC.

We can't deliver any of this without an inspired workforce and we have a Company-wide focus this year on improving our listening skills. We need to hear what our staff are saying and suggesting, improve two-way communication and further involve all levels of the organisation in new and innovative ways of working and making sure we all have the right tools to do that.

This business plan outlines our focus over the next 12 months for our three key operational areas – early help and prevention, children’s social care and education (including SEND) – and the Company-wide ‘enablers’ which support that work.

To achieve our priorities and deliver the enablers, we have collectively committed to the following underpinning principles:

- Our focus is summed up in our key principle, which is: *Early prevention, less intervention*
- Our practice will be relational, strength-based, trauma-informed, restorative and will focus on the whole family (through our practice model - Architecture for Professional Practice)
- The impact of our work will be evidenced by a sustained shift in impact and outcomes for families, so our approach must be outward focused and, wherever possible, co-produced
- Our priorities can only be achieved if supported by enablers which help shape and develop the operational framework needed for success. We will work collaboratively and corporately to deliver these.

Our priorities 2022-23

BFFC is now three years old. We are a maturing organisation and most of the foundations and stepping-stones needed are now in place. Post pandemic, our focus has returned to prevention.

Building on last year’s priorities, this year’s are focused on our operational work, with enablers in place for support services to help us achieve our ambitious goals.

Success measures will be built into all action plans which underpin our priorities and enablers. Ultimately, we will measure our success through positive outcomes.

Priority 1:

We will work together and across local partnerships to recognise and provide support and services at the earliest opportunity, maximise the impact and outcomes for children and families and use our collective resources wisely.

Priority 2:

Deliver effective early help services which prevent the need for later, statutory involvement while contributing to increased resilience across the partnership to intervene at the earliest opportunity.

Priority 3:

Deliver a sustainable Children Social Care service through practice rooted in relational and ‘earliest’ statutory engagement with families.

Priority 4:

Use our expertise to influence and support education settings to offer high quality teaching and learning to support achievement for all, including a relentless focus on those who require bespoke or specialised support. All within nurturing and accessible environments.

Enablers

None of our operational priorities can happen without the support of finance and resource colleagues and the services they deliver. While frontline services are key, other work is necessary to sustain and grow the Company so that it is sturdy, stable and able to promote and provide quality services for Reading residents.

For 2022-23, our enablers are:

Enabler 1: Focus on building a stable workforce of permanent staff

Enabler 2: Improved quality and ways of working

Enabler 3: Make full use of our finance and resources.

Below we outline each priority and enabler in detail, as well as the ways in which we will track, measure and evidence better outcomes for children, young people and their families in Reading.

Priority 1

We will work together and across local partnerships to recognise and provide support and services at the earliest opportunity, maximise the impact and outcomes for children and families and use our collective resources wisely.

Key theme: **Collaboration**

There are over 37,000 children and young people in Reading. While our services are, in the main, centred on a relatively small number of those who need specialist support to improve and sustain safe and healthy family lives, we are also mindful that our preventative work – and that of our partners – is aimed at all children and young people in the borough. We also need to ensure we are providing the right type of support and services based on levels of need and that need may change over time.

Our priority is for our *'early prevention, less intervention'* approach to support the identification of need at an early stage and to work strategically across our partnerships to better align how and when services are delivered with the aim of reducing the need for children and their families to be involved with statutory services.

In Year One of our tenure, BFFC was instrumental in driving the set-up of the ONE Reading Children & Young People's Partnership. With an agreed consensus of approach, all partners have worked hard to align their individual strategies, so we are working better – and more effectively – together to support prevention and earlier help. This approach also helps us address areas for improvement and to capitalise on areas of strength.

Managing community demand for support and services from the Company centres on the principle that we provide the right help and support to children and families as early as possible to prevent more intrusive and costly intervention at a later stage.

Priority 1 will encompass the following elements:

- Wherever safe and appropriate, provision of support and services first comes from universal services already operating within the local community
- When the services are met through the Early Help and Prevention offer, it will be with the aim of supporting children, young people and families to find their own sustainable solutions

and to be involved for as short a time as relevant so that families can again receive support at the universal level

- Our aim is to manage new contacts at the 'front door' effectively and efficiently, to support children and families receiving time-limited services from us, and ensuring resources are expertly deployed where support or services are required over mid-longer terms.
- Where children and families are accessing support and services at a statutory level, wherever it is safe and appropriate, children and families 'step down' to an early help offer
- For children and young people who are in our care, there are regular reviews of whether there are safe and more appropriate alternatives
- Where provision of support and services is the only safe and appropriate option for a child or young person, the procurement and commissioning arrangements, and market development, offer quality and impactful provision
- Our workforce is skilled, appropriately equipped in terms of tools and processes, and there is a positive and supportive culture across the Company.

Our aim is to further develop an effective, efficient and consistent approach, where BfC provides support and services in line with our improved business model and agreed thresholds and our partners do the same, so 'early prevention, less intervention' becomes just that for children, young people and their families in Reading.

Priority 2

Deliver effective early help services which prevent the need for later, statutory involvement while contributing to increased resilience across the partnership to intervene at the earliest opportunity.

Key theme: **Prevention**

Our focus for 2022/23 in early help and prevention is just as the name implies. The earlier the help and the more prevention work we undertake, the less likely children and young people will need interventions for our statutory services.

In 2022/23, we will continue to monitor progress against priorities and review activity against positive outcomes and to work on partnership prevention projects with a multi-agency approach.

To this end, we have mirrored our priorities with those of the ONE Reading Children & Young People's Partnership and our own revised Early Help and Prevention strategy, so we work collaboratively across all the key agencies.

One of our key challenges – and targets – will be to further capture what other early support partners are providing so the service is more streamlined and helpful for families. We must continue with our contribution to resilience across partnerships and work towards what can we all do – together – to be more effective.

We must influence and use our negotiation skills so that, as a partnership across Reading, we can evidence the effectiveness of how we work both collaboratively and coherently, especially support those children whose needs cross over into different services, at different levels.

Priority 2 will encompass the following elements:

- We plan to concentrate on the under 5s and also our work with older young people, delivering the two new projects, funded by RBC for COVID-19 recovery initiatives.

- The 0-2s project will focus on the development and learning of 0-2s impacted by the lockdowns. It will ensure opportunities are made available to help children catch up and avoid long term needs requiring later interventions.
- As accessing support before statutory school age is a choice, this new programme will engage health partners support to identify and reach families. The programme will run for two years.
- In addition – and following on from the Local Area SEND inspection in July 2021, continue to work on earlier identification of 0-2s with emerging SEND and ensure all children are ready for school.
- We have identified some promising opportunities for developing partnership local accountability. This includes partnership outreach workers engaging with schools and nurseries and having an outreach worker in the Royal Berkshire Hospital.
- Our work on adolescent risk will build on our 2021/22 achievements in setting up our Reconnect team to identify and support young people at risk (particularly those at risk of extra familial harm) and those who have been and those who become disengaged from their families or support circles.
- We will expand the Mental Health Support Teams (MHST) project we currently offer in 16 Reading schools, so more young people can access earlier help with mental health and also offer support for those not attending school due to mental or emotional well-being concerns.
- The mental health and emotional well-being of children and young people has been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The worsening of mental health results from disruptions to access to mental health services, school closures, isolation from peers and support systems. Lockdown brought increased risks from family functioning, conflict, abuse and neglect.
- Over 2 years, the project aims to support young people’s emotional wellbeing and reduce the risk of them being excluded from school or entering the youth justice system.

Finally, as part of our strategic approach, we will maximise opportunities to secure new Government funding in Reading, so we can continue with initiatives such as the Holiday Activity Fund, the Better Together Partnership, Household Support Grant and, in 2022, the creation of Family Hubs by 2024 so we can deliver on the prevention agenda.

Priority 3

Deliver a sustainable Children Social Care service through practice rooted in relational and ‘earliest’ statutory engagement with families.

Key theme: **Relationships**

Children’s social care has a renewed focus on the whole family, not just on a child or young person. Our practice model, Architecture for Professional Practice, centres on us being trauma informed and restorative but also relational.

To work well with families, we must develop good and trusting relationships where the family’s needs are central. It’s about doing *with*, not *to*, families and the outcomes must be clearly focused on happier, safer and more stable lives for children and young people, within their families. We must be able to better demonstrate that we see the people, not the problem.

We have, as demonstrated in our achievements, made huge stride in Children's Social Care, both in terms of practice quality and being able to safely reunite more children with their families or close relatives, or keep them at home, with ongoing support in place.

We can now confidently state that we have sustained our improvements. During the next 12 months – and beyond - we want to focus on embedding service delivery where a family and child has a social worker allocated to them for the rest of their statutory journey.

Priority 3 will encompass the following elements:

- This social worker will undertake an assessment, deliver the intervention (whether that's Child in Need plan, a Child Protection Plan or Court proceedings) and will only transfer the family to another social worker if the child has to come into care as a Child Looked After. This will allow for relational social work practice to flourish, with a focus on the child but a better understanding and service delivery to parents, in terms of understanding their needs, whether that may be domestic abuse, substance use or mental health and wellbeing.
- We will work with parents – from pre-birth onwards - to increase their resilience, and, by doing this, increase their confidence to be able to parent better and become less reliance on statutory services. This will allow for the greatest opportunities to help families so children can remain at home.
- Alongside this shift, we will continue to address operational practices and cultural issues associated with past practice, which focused on need and not the relational issues and develop our practice framework, which builds in quality assurance and learning, so we continuously improve.
- The move to be more family focused will help us to futureproof our service delivery. We need to focus on the lowest – but safest – level of intervention within the statutory arena. And, of course, to rebalance our work *with* children and parents, not to do things *to* them.
- By strengthening these relationships, social workers will be able to work with the extended family and the realities around Children Looked After and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children.
- In the next 12 months, we will also look at further improving our support for families who are looking after children with disabilities. We are revising our strategy for short breaks and for the SEND residential and drop-in facilities we offer, in tandem with the work of our education colleagues, who are working to provide more SEND places locally and improving SEND service provision from 0-25.
- Our focus will, as stated, be on the lowest level of statutory intervention – Child in Need (CiN) - to prevent escalation to Child Protection plans or a child or young person being entering into care proceedings.
- We want to work preventatively and in collaboration with others. We have created a team of family support workers who will primarily work alongside social workers, to provide parental support at a CiN level. Ongoing community support and regular, meaningful contact is our vision.
- We have invested in Pause, a programme for expectant mothers, which creates space and helps change take place. We hope that Pause will prevent recurrent removals of children from their mothers' care.
- We believe in creating a sustainable service through this culture shift; allowing relational, trauma informed and restorative practice that focus on the whole family and their needs – and not only the child in isolation - will make a difference.

- We are changing our Child Protection Conferences to align with this practice and not be a punitive process, but a supportive ‘team around the family’. We have Family Group Conferences as another tool to support families and their support network; and for them to collaboratively create the plans and support they need to safely care for their children. This practice has already provided some impact by reducing the number of children in care proceedings. We have also created an extra-familial harm social worker post and a pathway that will support young people and their families, when they do not require child protection plans, but need support in dealing with risks that lie outside the family.

Our emphasis on the importance of relationship building and paying credence to the five underlying principles of trauma informed practice - safety, choice, empower, trust, collaboration- will underpin all of our work in 2022-23.

Priority 4

Use our expertise to influence and support education settings to offer high quality teaching and learning to support achievement for all, including a relentless focus on those who require bespoke or specialised support. All within nurturing and accessible environments.

Key theme: **Achievement**

The COVID-19 pandemic has helped us forge stronger relationship with schools and we will build on this during 2022/23 to secure education and wellbeing recovery. The pandemic has led to a greater gap for those children and young people who have, in so many ways, been disadvantaged and our educational focus for the year is on ensuring that all children keep up in learning the knowledge they need to succeed in the next stage of their education.

We will be relentless in our bid to champion our most vulnerable children and young people by challenging where we see barriers to educational access, lack of aspiration and inappropriate outcomes. We will continue to work closely with RBC to drive up attainment and skills linked to inclusion.

We will work with schools on attendance, persistent absence, creating a sense of belonging and will emphasise the importance of engagement activities, such as performing and visual arts and sport.

Priority 4 will encompass the following elements:

- A focus on our most vulnerable children - those who are missing education, who have EHCPs, complex situations, as well as those with mental health or eating disorders and those who are at risk of slipping through the net or of not getting the most out of their years of education and priority groups whose outcomes are poor
- Our input will be to provide system leadership, to influence and negotiate, not to directly control. By influence we mean we will contextualise our interactions with schools and other partners with the needs of children and young people at the centre, calling on research and evidence-informed practice to demonstrate what can be achieved on their behalf
- We will champion effective pedagogy and system leadership practice through continuing professional development opportunities, and we will provide opportunities for strategic debate and collaboration between education settings and partners
- We will work towards earlier identification of additional educational needs (at age and stage) aligned with an appropriate continuum of provision. To achieve this, we will work together

with education settings, parents/carers and partners, particularly health, early help and children's social care

- We will facilitate setting-to-setting support and develop partnerships using research and evidence-informed practice
- We will work to identify circumstances in which young people may become NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training). Our Elevate team will work in partnership with Reading Borough Council teams, schools, colleges, universities, businesses and enterprise to ensure that Reading young people access a widening range of opportunities and possible futures
- Our key focus will be on support and measures to make sure children are properly engaged in learning, continue to be included in school activities and are not disadvantaged; with reference to a range of factors such as special educational needs and/or disabilities; ethnicity and gender
- Our Virtual School will continue to work in partnership with schools to help children looked after achieve their full academic potential; and
- We will continue to support our schools to implement effective therapeutic and trauma-informed approaches to behaviour and relationships to further reduce exclusion, particularly of children with SEND and or vulnerability.

Finally, but of equal importance, we will support our school system leaders' mental health and well-being to provide resilience and sustainability across the education landscape.

Delivering outcomes

Much work has been outlined, underpinned by our key principles and detailed actions plans on how we intend to deliver on our promises in 2022-23. However, the big question to ask is how we will demonstrate improvements in all the areas we describe.

The answer is that positive outcomes for children, young people and their families will be effectively measured through a new dashboard. The dashboard and monthly data sets will encompass all the performance areas that will indicate progress in terms of positive outcomes and accurate portrayal of our performance as a child moves through – either out of or, if necessary for their safety, into – statutory services.

In addition, we will have monthly audit work which provides another layer, and feedback, through complaints, compliments, participation and engagement activity that further provide an accurate understanding of our service delivery, the impact it has and how we can further learn and improve.

We collate our achievements quarterly, not only in terms of activity and output but in terms of outcomes for children, young people and their families. It's not good enough to list what work we've done. We will measure that against what impact that work has had for families and better outcomes for them.

Enablers

To help with the operational priorities, the enabler needed to support their work will come from the 'central' corporate support offers by the Finance & Resources team.

Enabler 1: *Focus on building a stable workforce of permanent staff*

- Plan our workforce requirements; in particular to meet objectives around *Early prevention, less intervention* but also to meet financial challenges facing BFC

- Continue to move towards a workforce of permanent employees, particularly in the field of qualified social workers by continuously refining our offer and establishing our brand
- Ensure that our managers and leaders are skilled and supported to lead on and implement major organisational change
- Work towards a more diverse and inclusive organisation, particularly at a senior level where there is under representation from certain groups
- Create a culture where staff feel a connection with the leadership. To establish staff forums and listening events as well as continuation of roadshows
- Support our staff with agile and flexible ways of working including promoting well-being for all, including those working remotely
- Help frontline workers to feel rooted in the community through having workspaces that enable easy access to children, young people and their families
- Investing in and promoting talent retention and succession planning
- Creating a culture where appraisals and feedback are instant and contribute to high performing services
- Enhancing and tailoring our learning and development programme by making more use of online and experienced learning ensuring that people are given the right skills to be effective
- Get the ratio right between newly-qualified and experienced practitioners. Balance the 'new ideas' against the 'seasoned understanding' which comes with experience and to work towards greater stability of our frontline workforce.

Enabler 2: *Improved quality and ways of working*

- Provide a stronger focus across the Company on 'telling the story' about quality, impact and outcomes (not just data)
- Work with staff to further identify the right tools for their job and to embed these in our agile and flexible ways of working
- Consolidate our office space in line with agile working and community presence
- Promote innovation and find new ways the Company can truly add value
- Learn from others/best practice elsewhere and make that meaningful to us
- Improve participation and engagement with families and partners
- Engage children, young people and their families, so we co-commission and co-produce services which meet their needs
- Deliver the Participation and Engagement strategy and its associated action plans
- Deliver projects to improve customer experience, partnership collaboration, such as updates to our education data management system, and our reading SEND Local Offer and Family Information service websites
- Digitalisation and effective use of ICT has and will continue to be a key focus, so we can work smarter, more efficiently, with better tools.

Enabler 3: *Make full use of our finance and resource*

- Embed our new culture of working together to fund and achieve our shared priorities
- Harness our flexibility to support the priorities e.g. maximising funding opportunities, collaboration and income generation
- Embed improved financial controls at all levels
- Look for additional value from our assets and contracts
- Holding ourselves – and others – accountable for using resources wisely and to the greatest effect
- Benchmark ourselves to influence value for money and quality of service is achieved
- Actively engage in contract monitoring with Reading Borough Council to seek best possible value for money and quality of service.

Our financial plan

We are at the start of Year Four of our operational delivery of the seven-year contract with Reading Borough Council. We are in the process of agreeing a fixed fee for the financial year 2022/23 (see **page 15** for Core Contract Sum figures and **page 16** for Medium Term Financial Strategy and).

Review of 2021/22 Budget Position

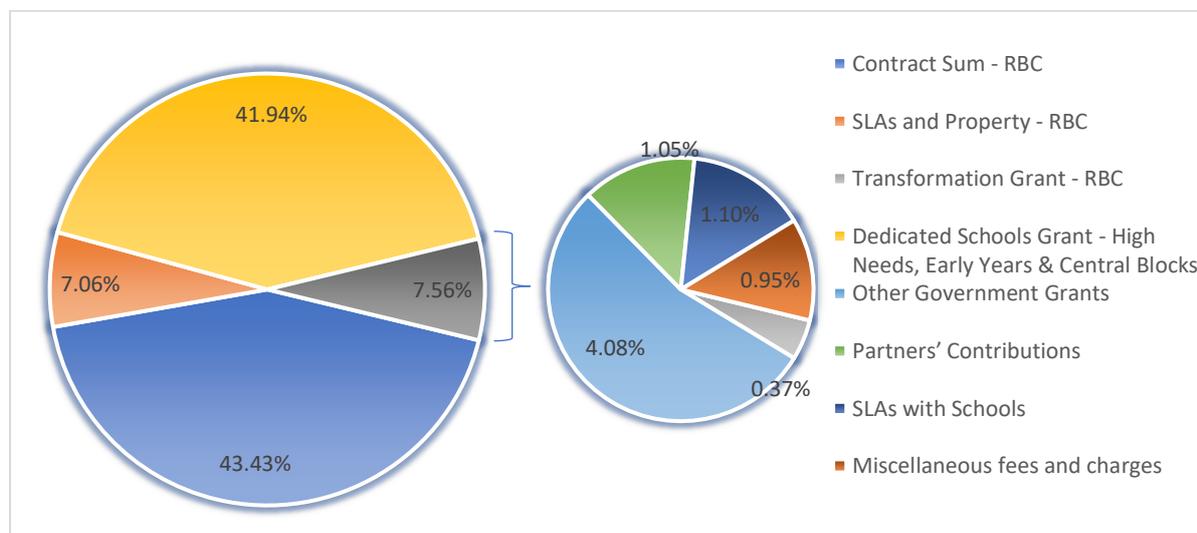
In 2021/22, our savings target was £4.660m. As at Period 9, we had achieved £3.486m savings and were predicting an anticipated overspend of £0.592m but are working towards a balanced budget outturn by the end of the financial year.

Unusually, due to two high-profile criminal cases in the borough, we had a particularly high level of remand expenditure which had affected our savings plan as we cannot expect to recover the costs within this financial year.

In 2021/22, leading on from a difficult year due to the pandemic, we implemented a budget recovery plan and a robust savings tracker was introduced.

Sources of Funding 2022/23

Sources of Funding 2022/23	£m	%
Contract Sum - RBC	41.309	43.43%
SLAs and Property - RBC	6.716	7.06%
Transformation - RBC	0.356	0.37%
Dedicated Schools Grant - High Needs, Early Years & Central Blocks	39.889	41.94%
Other Government Grants (incl Pupil Premium and Youth Offending Service)	3.884	4.08%
SLAs with Schools	1.049	1.10%
Partners' Contributions	1.003	1.05%
Miscellaneous fees and charges	0.903	0.95%
TOTAL	95.109	100%



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.

RBC Funding Streams	2022/23	2023/24*	2024/25*	TOTAL
	£m	£m	£m	
RBC Core Contract Sum	41.309	40.809	40.309	122.427
SLAs pass through including Property	6.716	6.716	6.716	20.148
National Insurance increase (1.25%)	0.226	0	0	0.226
Subtotal	48.251	47.525	47.025	142.801
RBC Transformation Funding*	0.356	0.356	0	0.712
TOTAL	48.607	47.881	47.025	143.513

**Figures yet to be finalised*

Government Grants

The Government Grants (as seen in the sources of funding chart on **page 14**) 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)

Supporting Families – a national programme to help vulnerable families

Data Accelerator Fund - to support data projects that improve services for children and families

Pupil Premium Grant – allocated by the Virtual Head for Children Looked After to Reading's schools

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

Holiday Activity Fund – for food and activities for children and young people in receipt of pupil premium free school meals.

Other Income Sources

Other income sources (also on **page 14**) 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.

In 2022/23 we will maximise opportunities to secure new Government funding in Reading, as well as sourcing external funding and exploring income generation avenues.

Medium-Term Financial Strategy

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 is likely to be funded by Reading Borough Council and via additional savings/income generation.

Net Operational Budget	2022/23	2023/24*	2024/25*
	£m	£m	£m
Base Budget	40.679	41.309	40.809
Pay inflation and increments	0.701	0.715	0.729
Contract inflation	0.437	0.487	0.498
Other Pressures	0.667	0	0
Savings	(1.175)	(1.702)	(1.727)
Budget – Contract Sum excluding SLAs & National Insurance increase	41.309	41.809	41.309

**Figures yet to be finalised*

Budget setting

The contract sum for 2022/23 is not yet finalised but initial contract negotiations have been reported at £48.025m (does not include transformation requests and National Insurance increase). When we agree the budget, we make assumptions for the following five adjustments:

- Pay inflation
- Increased National Insurance contributions
- Other inflation
- Pressures
- Savings

The Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) for BfFC is presented in the expenditure budget table on the next page and covers the three-year financial period of 2022/23 to 2024/25. The table shows high level funding requirements for the organisation.

Expenditure budget	2022/23	2023/24*	2024/25*
	£m	£m	£m
Employee Costs	27.885	28.600	29.326
Running Costs	60.467	59.651	58.469
SLAs	4.497	4.497	4.497
Property - Rents	1.140	1.140	1.140
Property – Facilities Management	1.120	1.120	1.120

Gross Expenditure	95.109	95.008	94.552
Income			
Grant Income	43.773	43.973	44.173
Other Income	2.955	3.155	3.355
Transformation Funding	0.356	0.356	0.00
Total Income	47.084	47.484	47.528
Net expenditure	48.025	47.525	47.025
<i>*sums still in negotiation as of Jan 2022</i>			

CLA numbers

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

Number of CLA	Target numbers	Budgeted numbers
2022/23	240-230	262
2023/24	230-220	245
2024/25	220-210	245

Our targeted and budgeted numbers are for Reading children and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC).

The UASC funding instructions to local authorities 2021 to 2022, dated 29 July 2021, states that local authorities looking after volumes of UASC at or above the 0.07% threshold will be paid a higher rate. Local authorities looking after UASC amounting to less than the 0.07% threshold will be paid the lower rate. The threshold is calculated by finding 0.07% of the child population according to the ONS Population estimate. The ONS population estimates by single year of age and sex for local authorities in the UK, mid-2014, is recorded in Reading as 37,761 young people between the ages of 0 to 18 years, therefore 0.07% totals 26 young people.

Capital Funding

For 2022/23 we have applied for one capital bid of £0.150m to develop our children's home to improve delivery of community SEND services.

Next Steps

BfFC is acutely aware of the need to generate additional income to support the future development and sustainability of children's services. This will involve:

- Improving traded services and offering them more widely
- Fundraising and grant bidding opportunities.

Appendices

Appendix 1: Governance

Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC) became operational on 3 December 2018. It is a company limited by guarantee. The company is wholly owned by, but independent of, Reading Borough Council and is governed by an independent Board, executive committee and senior leadership team, to ensure operational autonomy.

1.1 The Board of Directors

The Non-Executive Board Chair and Non-Executive Directors (NEDs) bring professional skills and expertise from different sectors. A representative of RBC sits on the Board as a Non-Executive Director and the 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.

Member of the senior leadership team and specialist areas such as health & safety and staffing & personnel report to the Board and attend parts of the Board meetings 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.

1.2 Board Committees

The Board operates through committees to monitor progress in detail and report back to the full Board:

Audit and Risk (ARC), which monitors the resources and risk register

Finance Committee, which monitors the finances

Quality Assurance and Improvement (QAIC), which monitors both quality and performance across all strands of the organisation. There is also a sub-committee of the QAIC which provides oversight of our work on education outcomes for vulnerable children.

Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Committee, which ensures the company can fulfil its obligations as an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

Adoption Committee, monitoring our work as a Voluntary Adoption Agency (VAA)

Working Groups: The Board also has a limited number of working groups, where intensive scrutiny and/or additional Board level support is needed.

1.3 The Executive Directors' Meetings (EDM) and Senior Leadership Team (SLT)

The Executive Directors' Meeting (EDM) takes place fortnightly to oversee the corporate and strategic direction of the company. This meeting is chaired by the Chair of the Board. The EDM includes the Executive Directors of the Company.

The remit of EDM is:

- Oversight of Board agenda and reports
- Strategic decisions relating to:
 - Risk
 - Finances
 - organisational restructures etc
- Complex or urgent issues requiring a steer/resolution from EDM
- Approval of strategy.

The Senior Leadership Team (SLT) meets fortnightly to provide cross company leadership with a focus on shaping and delivering the strategic priorities of the Company. It includes EDM members, plus all operational and corporate leads, to discuss and report on the performance of the day-to-day operations of the company.

The remit of SLT is:

- Strategic and operational planning
- Shaping the culture and behaviour of the organisation
- Identifying and managing risk
- Organisational delivery and performance management
- compliance

In addition, the operational and corporate (finance and resources) leaders meet (separately) for fortnightly management meetings.

Appendix 2: Brighter Futures for Children Contractual KPIs

KPI Category						
Category 1: KPIs are the most important in the portfolio. They are the most closely managed, where potential risk of failure must be escalated immediately to the BFFC board for formal resolution.						
Category 2: KPIs are important to achieve and must be actively managed. Potential risk of failure must be escalated promptly to the SLT for resolution. The Council may request formal resolution at board level if they feel risk of failure is sufficiently urgent or important that informal resolution is inappropriate.						
The TARGET column relates to the target percentage to be achieved after a full year , not to the end of the appropriate reporting period (monthly, quarterly, annually).						
Description	KPI category*	Children's Social Services (Y/N)	Reporting period (frequency)	Target Year 4	Target Year 5	Target Year 6
Timeliness of contact decision making (Children's Single Point of Access).	1	Y	Monthly	>=90%	>=90%	>=90%
% of referrals with a decision made within 24 hours*	1	Y	Monthly	>=95%	>=95%	>=95%
% children in care (CLA) who have been looked after for 2+ years in the same placement	1	Y	Monthly	>=70%	>=70%	>=70%
% care leavers who are not in education employment or training (NEET) - 17-21 year olds	1	Y	Monthly	<=32%	<=32%	<=32%
% Education health care plans including exception cases completed within 20 weeks	1	N	Annual	> 90%	> 90%	> 90%
% 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%	< 10%
% of referrals which are rereferrals within 12 months	2	Y	Monthly	< 20%	< 20%	< 20%
CLA who have experienced 3+ placements in last 12 months	2	Y	Monthly	< 11%	< 11%	< 11%
% of CLA placements more than 20 miles from Reading (i.e. from home address of child)	2	Y	Monthly	<28%	<23%	<21%
Child Participation (measured as CLA aged over 4 who attend or contribute to their own reviews)	2	Y	Monthly	> 90%	> 90%	> 90%
% Pupils provided with a school place on offer day (primary)	2	N	Annual	95%	95%	95%
% Pupils provided with a school place on offer day (secondary)	2	N	Annual	95%	95%	95%
Youth Offending Service: Re-offending rate	2	Y	Quarterly via YJB	<=37%	<=37%	<=37%