

To: Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair)
Councillors Gavin, Ballsdon, Cresswell,
Davies, Edwards, Gittings, Hoskin, Keane,
McEwan, McGoldrick, O'Connell, Robinson,
Tara and Woodward

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9 January 2024

Your contact is: **Jemma Durkan - Committee Services**

**NOTICE OF MEETING - ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION
COMMITTEE 17 JANUARY 2024**

A meeting of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee will be held on Wednesday, 17 January 2024 at 6.30 pm in the Council Chambers, Civic Offices, Reading. The Agenda for the meeting is set out below.

	<u>WARDS AFFECTED</u>	<u>Page No</u>
1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST		
Councillors to declare any disclosable pecuniary interests they may have in relation to the items for consideration.		
2. MINUTES		5 - 14
3. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES		15 - 28
Health and Wellbeing Board - 6 October 2023		
4. PETITIONS		
Petitions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been received by Head of Legal & Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting.		
5. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS		

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Questions submitted pursuant to Standing Order 36 in relation to matters falling within the Committee's Powers & Duties which have been submitted in writing and received by the Head of Legal & Democratic Services no later than four clear working days before the meeting.

6.	MENTAL HEALTH UPDATE	BOROUGH WIDE	29 - 54
	An update provided to the Committee by the Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust on mental health and neurodiversity services provided to people of all ages across the 6 local authority areas in Berkshire.		
7.	ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS REPORT	BOROUGH WIDE	55 - 70
	A report providing an overview of complaints, compliments activity and performance for Adult Social Care for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.		
8.	CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS REPORT	BOROUGH WIDE	71 - 92
	A report providing the Committee with an overview of complaints, compliments, SARs activity and performance for Children's Social Care for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.		
9.	LEAVING CARE SERVICE ACTION PLAN	BOROUGH WIDE	93 - 118
	A report providing the Committee with an update on the progress made on achieving the actions identified in the BFFC Leaving Care Action Plan 2023/2024.		
10.	SCHOOL ADMISSIONS POLICY	BOROUGH WIDE	119 - 170
	A report inviting the Committee to determine:		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The admissions arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2025/26. • The coordinated scheme for primary and junior schools for the 2025/26 school year. • The coordinated scheme for secondary schools for the 2025/26 school year. • The Relevant Area 2025. • Maps of the Primary catchment areas. 		
11.	HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY	BOROUGH WIDE	171 - 194
	A report for the Committee to consider a consultation on the School Transport Policy for 2024.		
12.	MAIDEN ERLEGH CHILTERN EDGE SCHOOL TRANSPORT	BOROUGH WIDE	195 - 202

A report provided to the Committee to consider a consultation process on revising the School Transport Policy to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School and to change current transport arrangements.

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- Present:** Councillor Mpofu-Coles (Chair);
Councillors Gavin (Vice-Chair), Ballsdon, Cresswell, Davies,
Edwards, Gittings, Hoskin, Keane, McEwan, McGoldrick, O'Connell,
Tarat and Woodward
- Apologies:** Councillors Robinson

(Councillor Ballsdon was unable to attend in person, so attended and contributed remotely via Microsoft Teams, but did not vote on any of the items, in line with the requirements of the Local Government Act 1972)

8. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that engagement work was being undertaken by the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB) to re-procure its Non-Emergency Patient Transport Services (NEPTS) contract. The ICB was currently undertaking a six-week programme of engagement talking to current service users and their families/carers to learn more about how to improve their experience with transport services in BOB, this had been launched in September and had closed on 27 October 2023. Further information was available on the BOB ICB online engagement website as follows: <https://yourvoicebob-icb.uk.engagementhq.com/non-emergency-patient-transport-services-in-bob>

The Chair noted that it was Black History Month and saluted all black women in the Borough and the Council.

9. READING YOUTH COUNCIL CONSTITUTION

The Committee received a report providing an overview on how the Youth Council was operated and the various roles and responsibilities of different positions within the Youth Council. A copy of the refreshed Reading Youth Council Constitution was appended to the report. The reviewed constitution clarified the roles, responsibilities, and associated procedures of Reading Youth Council.

The report explained that it had been a successful year for the Reading Youth Council. Following the pandemic young people had been able to engage more actively with the Youth Council, and its members had engaged more actively and directly in their roles.

Members of the Youth Council were present at the meeting and the Chair, Deputy Chair and Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament for Reading addressed the Committee. They provided a summary of achievements for the past year and future work to be carried out. The past achievements included:

- Attending the British Youth Council's annual meeting at the House of Commons

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023

- Attending and supporting the Youth Climate Festival
- Collaboration with Reading Borough Council on apprenticeships, work experience and mentoring programs
- Involved in the selection of the Reading Borough Council Chief Executive
- Outreach work with schools
- Organisation of the Reading Youth Council Conference for 2023
- Attending the Reading Young People's Hub
- Work with the Reading Düsseldorf Association
- Hosting self-defence classes with Youth Council Members

The Deputy Member of the Youth Parliament for Reading explained that the Youth Council worked cohesively as a team and debated, discussed, and created actions to tackle issues effecting the youth of Reading. Campaigns being undertaken were the environment campaign which included work with Cubs and Beavers to educate them about the environment. A jobs, money, home, and opportunities campaign would include a careers fair for young people, and a social media campaign to raise awareness and profile of the Youth Council.

The Deputy Chair of the Youth Council provided information on a new outreach programme to schools. A school ambassador programme was being undertaken to work with students at schools to help promote the Youth Council initiatives in schools. Also, regular outreach events were taking place with schools and the wider community where the Youth Council had little or no presence. The Youth Council were also using gap analysis to identify schools with no youth council presence to help create a more influential group in Reading.

The Committee were informed that all 23 members of the Youth Council had been elected to their positions and their main role was to take part in planning and delivering services to young people as stated in their Constitution.

The Committee thanked the Youth Council members for their presentation.

Resolved -

- (1) That the work of the Reading Youth Council in 2022/23 be noted;**
- (2) That the Reading Youth Council priorities for 2023/24 be endorsed;**
- (3) That the revised Youth Council Constitution be agreed.**

10. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cresswell declared a non-pecuniary interest in item 9 on the basis that he worked in alternative provision in education.

11. MINUTES

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. MINUTES OF OTHER BODIES

The Minutes of the following meetings were received:

- Health and Wellbeing Board - 14 July 2023.

13. QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC AND COUNCILLORS

Two questions on the following matters were submitted by Councillor Cresswell.

Question	Subject	Reply
Councillor Cresswell	Education Transport Policy for over 16s	Councillor McEwan
Councillor Cresswell	NHS Dentistry	Councillor McEwan

The full text of the questions and replies were made available on the Reading Borough Council website.

14. DENTISTRY UPDATE

The Committee received a report from Hugh O’Keefe, Senior Programme Manager, Pharmacy, Optometry and Dental, Buckingham, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board on NHS dental services in Reading.

The report explained that on 1 July 2022 the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board had taken on delegated responsibility for Dentistry, alongside Pharmacy and Optometry. Integrated Care Boards (ICBs) had an explicit purpose to improve health outcomes for their whole population and the delegation would allow the ICB to integrate services to enable decisions to be taken as close as possible to their residents. The ICB were working to ensure that residents could experience joined up care, with an increased focus on prevention, addressing inequalities and to achieve better access to dental care and advice.

The following points were noted:

- Dental practices delivered services via cash limited contracts with the NHS and were required to deliver agreed levels of activity each year.
- Dental services faced major challenges since the onset of the pandemic including enhanced infection control procedures that had led to reduced dental capacity.

ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023

- Since July 2022 practices had returned to full capacity however there remained a backlog of care.
- Since July 2022 practices were recovering from the pandemic and access to NHS dentistry in Reading was recovering better than other parts of the southeast.
- Some practices were choosing to reduce their NHS commitment or were leaving the NHS.
- Contract delivery had dropped to 30% during the pandemic; this was usually around 95%.
- Contract delivery was now in recovery and in Reading was at 88%.

Actions were being taken to address the challenges, these included arrangements for practices to provide Additional Access sessions for patients who struggled to access care and needed urgent treatment. However, the take up for this scheme had been low with one practice in Reading and one in Buckinghamshire currently involved. Also, a flexible commissioning scheme would support patients to access the system, such as, patients who had not attended a dentist for more than two years, patients relocating, Looked After Children, Asylum seekers and refugees, Families of Armed Forces personnel, and other groups identified by the dental practice. The pilot scheme was being undertaken from 1 June 2023 to 31 March 2024 and 30 practices in the BOB area were taking part.

There was also a significant backlog of patients that were awaiting treatment in a clinic and hospital for treatment under general anaesthetic. To help the service Restoration and Re-set monies had been invested with Royal Berkshire Hospital NHS Foundation Trust to provide significant improvements in waiting times.

The Committee thanked Hugh for the information and requested that a further update be provided to the Committee in six months times.

Resolved - That a further presentation/report be provided to the Committee in six months.

15. SEXUAL HEALTH SERVICES UPDATE

The Committee received a presentation from Martin White, Consultant in Public Health, Reading Borough Council; Rachel Smart, Lead Nurse, Florey Clinic, Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust; Alan Tang, Consultant in Sexual Health and HIV, Florey Clinic, Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust on the integrated sexual health service in Reading.

The presentation included the following points:

- A report from the United Kingdom Health Security Agency (UKHSA) in June 2023 had said that overall infections rates were lower in the Southeast, however, some areas such as Reading were reporting rates above the national average.
- An overview of the commissioning arrangements for the integrated sexual health service in Reading which included the local authority, Integrated Care Boards and NHS England.
- The local integrated sexual health service was provided by the Royal Berkshire Hospital Foundation Trust (RBFT) following an award of contract in 2020 and would

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

run for 10 years. This was joint funded by the three local authorities of Berkshire West.

- The contract value was £2.56m with Reading Borough Council contribution of £1.4m.
- The service included screening and STI testing and diagnosis of HIV, and additional services including sexual health advice and contraceptive services.
- Pre-pandemic testing rates for STIs in Reading had been significantly above Regional and National averages. Following the pandemic testing rates in Reading had not reduced to the same degree as the England rate.
- New STI diagnoses had dropped dramatically with the onset of COVID 19 and had continued to decrease in 2021 and 2022.
- There had been a decrease in diagnosis rates in Reading accompanied by a decrease in percent positivity. The opposite pattern was seen in the Southeast and England.
- Due to good access to remote and face to face testing during various lockdowns the rebound in STI service provision between 2021 and 2022 seen nationally was not reflected in the GUM and Contraception attendances at the Florey Clinic. However there had been an increase in more complex patient cases with more social or sexual health care needs during this period.
- The service met regularly with the Reading commissioning team and West Berkshire and Wokingham to consider the current key performance indicators. The KPIs had been reviewed over the year.
- Significant work had been undertaken to improve the uptake of chlamydia testing for 15-24-year-olds. This had included an improved outreach service, improving social media campaigns, attending University and colleges, and enabling under 18s to access the service.
- Following service user feedback other improvements had included changes to the opening hours at the clinic with late and early start times, adoption of a walk-in and appointment services, and improving and developing online services.
- The Florey Clinic had established additional funding for groups of service users such as refugee and asylum seekers and the LGBTQA+ community.
- Improvements were being undertaken to data and joint working on KPIs with commissioning teams.
- Additional work of the service had included promotion of other services for high risk STIs by working with universities, colleges, charities, and PRIDE, improvements in outreach work, and new projects providing education sessions and STI testing.
- Other work was undertaken with social care and police with staff members attending child exploitation meetings. Also, dealing with mental health and domestic violence concerns, as the service actively asked about domestic violence and this was often disclosed during private meetings with patients.
- The team had also continued to work with the Royal Berkshire Hospital to improve opportunistic testing for sexually transmitted infections and education on testing.
- Reading had seen an increase in overall positive STI diagnoses but this was less than seen nationally. However, STI rates would be monitored and reviewed to consider any continued rise.
- Work of the service would continue to be supported via the wider safe sex educational campaigns and prevention activity commissioned by the local public health teams.

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

- Work would also continue with the service provider to assess and ensure the longer-term sustainability of the service in the face of increasing activity and cost pressures.

The Committee thanked Martin, Rachel and Alan for the information and requested that a future report be provided on the work with young people and the sexual health service.

Resolved - That a further report/presentation be provided to the Committee in 12 months and for it to include the work being carried out with young people.

16. YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN

The Committee received a report on the Youth Justice Plan 2023-24. The report explained that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 and a condition of the Youth Justice Board Grant, had placed a duty on the Local Authority to produce an annual Plan. The Plan had been produced and signed off by the Youth Justice Partnership through the Youth Justice Management Board, which was independently chaired. The plan reported the performance of Youth Justice Service (previously the Youth Offending Service) for 2022/23 against the national and statistical family comparators in the period.

The Youth Justice Plan also highlighted achievements and work with parents and children within the service. It also outlined the Youth Justice Service implementation of the Child First approach understood as the framework for those working with young people in the criminal justice service.

A peer review had been requested by the Youth Justice Board, had taken place in November 2022 and recommendations were also incorporated into the plan. The plan had also incorporated information on the youth justice cohort for 2021-23.

The annual report identified the following areas as priorities for 2023-24:

- Reducing first time entrants into the criminal justice system
- Addressing disproportionality within the justice system
- Reducing the impact of serious violence
- The increased participation and engagement of children, young people and their families in the service.

It was reported that the Youth Justice Management Board had oversight of the plan and performance against the targets, and these were reported through the mechanisms of the management board structure.

During the discussion it was noted that the Youth Justice Management Board recognised work needed to be undertaken regarding the disproportionality in the numbers of black children that were open to the Youth Justice Service and were stopped/searched. It was also noted that there were dedicated roles within the Youth Justice Service to support restorative justice. Work was also being developed through the Turnaround programme within the service to ensure young people were offered support and interventions.

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

Resolved - That the content of the Youth Justice Plan be noted.

17. EXCLUSIONS UPDATE

The Committee received a report providing an update on actions being taken to prevent and reduce exclusions and suspensions and an overview of suspensions and permanent exclusions.

The report provided information on the learning of local and national research into steps to reduce exclusions and increase support for children and young people in schools. This included the 'HearME' project a research project led by young people on their experiences of permanent exclusion in Reading. The final report had been published in 2023 with a response and recommendations document co-authored and shared with schools and stakeholders that had focused on young people's voices. Also, all recommendations made in the government commissioned Timpson Review of School Exclusions that had been published in 2019, had informed the action plan to ensure that schools had the best conditions for children to thrive and progress. Termly strategies had been developed with the Education Leadership Team and the Director of Education to ensure a focused response to the increase in suspension and permanent exclusions. Also, the impact of the child voice related to exclusions were regularly reviewed through monthly meetings to monitor various areas of the service.

The report provided data on suspension and permanent exclusions since 2018 until 2022 in comparison to the national average and statistical neighbour data. Reading was below the national average and the southeast for suspensions until the spring term 2019-20 and spring terms 2020-21 and had moved back to below the national average from summer 2020-21 onwards. In relation to permanent exclusions Reading schools were down by one in 2022-23 in comparison to the previous academic year but had increased from 8 to 11 for Reading children in out of Borough schools. Information was also included on rescindments and overturned permanent exclusions and it was noted that out of 45 issued, 12 permanent exclusions were rescinded or overturned over the course of the academic year, including 7 for children with identified SEND.

Disproportionality suspension data with regard to ethnicity was also included and it was identified that the global majority were children of black Caribbean, mixed white black Caribbean, mixed black African and pupils of any other black background. Continued action in this area was being undertaken included the Anti Racist Project undertaken by the School Effectiveness Team. Work and information on this data was being shared with the Education Partnership Board to ensure that actions plans were reviewed to ensure focus.

Work was also being undertaken with the Youth Justice Board to enable the link between exclusions and suspensions and the increase in the likelihood of young people entering the criminal justice system. Work continued to ensure strategies were closely linked and services were working together to improve the outcomes for young people.

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

The Committee requested that a further report regarding the work being undertaken and data regarding disproportionality relating to ethnicity and suspension and exclusions be submitted to a future meeting.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report and the current work being undertaken to prevent and reduce exclusions and suspensions be noted;**
- (2) That a report with further information on disproportionality regarding ethnicity and data on suspensions and exclusions be submitted to a future meeting.**

18. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Resolved -

That pursuant to Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended), members of the press and public be excluded during consideration of items 19 and 20 below as it was likely that there would be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 specified in Part 1 of Schedule 12A to that Act.

19. SUFFICIENCY UPDATE IN RELATION TO PLACEMENTS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

The Committee considered a report on the sufficiency of placements for children and young people.

Resolved - That the information and the steps being taken by Brighter Futures for Children Ltd, as outlined in the restricted report, to improve the sufficiency of placements for children and young people be agreed and noted.

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraphs 1, 2, 3, and 5)

20. RESPONSE TO A LGSCO REPORT RELATING TO A COMPLAINT IN BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN

The Committee received a report providing findings from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

Resolved - That the action against the recommendations made by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) be noted.

(Exempt information as defined in Paragraph 2)

**ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE MEETING
MINUTES - 18 OCTOBER 2023**

(The meeting closed at 9.03 pm)

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Present:

Councillor Ruth McEwan (Chair) John Ashton	Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health, Reading Borough Council (RBC) Interim Director of Public Health for Reading and West Berkshire
Councillor Paul Gittings Alice Kunjappy-Clifton Gail Muirhead	Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care, RBC Lead Officer, Healthwatch Reading Prevention Manager, Reading and West Berkshire, Royal Berkshire Fire and Rescue Service
Rachel Spencer Sarah Webster	Chief Executive, Reading Voluntary Action Executive Director for Berkshire West Place, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)
Melissa Wise	Executive Director – Community & Adult Social Care Services, RBC

Also in attendance:

Ramona Bridgman Andy Ciecierski Alison Foster	Reading Families Forum Clinical Director for Caversham Primary Care Network Programme Director, Building Berkshire Together – Hospital Redevelopment, Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust (RBFT)
Emma Garside	Local Policing Commander, Oxfordshire, Thames Valley Police
Roxanna Glennon Brian Grady Chris Greenway	Strategic Lead, SEND, Brighter Futures for Children Director of Education, Brighter Futures for Children Assistant Director for Commissioning and Transformation, RBC
Pauline Hamilton Christine Harding Claire Holloway Councillor Alice Mpofu-Coles Bev Nicholson Amanda Nyeke Katie Prichard-Thomas Andy Statham	Reading Families Forum Director of Midwifery, RBFT Fifi's Vision SEND Support Group Chair of the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee, RBC Integration Programme Manager, RBC Public Health & Wellbeing Manager, RBC Chief Nursing Officer, RBFT Director of Strategy Transformation and Partnerships, RBFT
Martin White	Consultant in Public Health, RBC

Apologies:

Tehmeena Ajmal	Chief Operating Officer, Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust (BHFT)
Councillor Jason Brock Councillor Graeme Hoskin Steve Leonard	Leader of the Council, RBC Lead Councillor for Children, RBC West Hub Group Manager, Royal Berkshire Fire & Rescue Service
Nicky Lloyd Steve Raffield Belinda Seston	Chief Finance Officer, RBFT LPA Commander for Reading, Thames Valley Police Interim Director of Place Partnership Development, BOB ICB

11. MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 July 2023 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

12. READING AREA SEND STRATEGY 2022-27 – UPDATE ON PROGRESS

Brian Grady submitted a report giving an update on the delivery of the Reading partnership Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2022-2027.

The report summarised the further progress made in 2023 on the ambitions and actions set out in the strategy. The over-riding key performance indicator for the new strategy, as previously reported to Health and Wellbeing Board in October 2022, was that any local area inspection in the future rated Reading as one of the best local areas in the country for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The strategy had gone 'live' from January 2022 and work strands had driven priority actions, reporting to the monthly SEND strategy group, co-chaired by the Brighter Futures for Children Director of Education, and the Designated Clinical Officer for SEND (0-25), Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB).

The report explained that the Strategy was being delivered through the following work strands:

- Strand 1: Improving communication
- Strand 2: Early intervention through to specialist provision
- Strand 3: Consistent approaches to emotional wellbeing
- Strand 4: Preparing for adulthood
- Strand 5: Support for families – short breaks

Each work strand was overseen by a steering group, with representation from Reading Borough Council, Brighter Futures for Children, NHS, and parents and carers. Examples of the further progress made for children with SEND in 2023 on each strand was set out in the report, building on the strong partnership working recognised by Ofsted and CQC in the Local Area SEND inspection of June 2021, and the report also identified next steps for 2024. The report stated that the updated action plan for 2024 would be presented to the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in January 2024.

Ramona Bridgman, Pauline Hamilton and Claire Holloway attended the meeting and addressed the Board, and some of the points made included:

- Whilst there were lots of good things happening, a recent survey had shown that families were still having difficulty accessing the right support for their children at the right time.
- There was a significant issue on transition at 18, 19 or 25, especially for more complex cases who needed 24/7 care and stimulation and activity, as demand far outstripped provision.
- Fifi's Vision Support Group for SEND, which was voluntarily-run by Claire Holloway, had no funding and had an open-door policy for any additional needs of any age. The Group had seen an increase in school avoidance, both emotional or due to needs not being met, as well as mental health signposting to the wrong areas, or people being told there was no provision for them because of an Autism diagnosis. The Group was currently supporting 525 families.

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

Roxanna Glennon gave a presentation on the 'RISE' programme – Reading Inclusion Support in Education, to help children with SEND to be better supported in mainstream schools. This had come out of the work done with the Department of Education on their Delivering Better Value (DBV) project to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. Reading had been successful in receiving a £1m grant from the DBV to improve the local offer by supporting the goals and aspirations of children and young people in mainstream education without an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or with an EHCP but preventing transfers into another provision type by improving school and parental confidence. She gave details of how the RISE programme would work to improve the quality of 'ordinarily available provision' for all children in Reading, and how it would support schools, families and children.

The meeting discussed the report and the points made included:

- The mental health crisis for young people was still both a local and national problem.
- CAMHS capacity, crisis response and support for children with Learning Disabilities and Autism was still a concern for parents and carers, but the new Specialist CAMHS service for Learning Disability and Autism was part of the partnership response and the partnership would continue to explore ways to support an improved CAMHS offer.
- It was suggested that a focused look at the work being carried out by the new Specialist CAMHS service for Learning Disability and Autism be brought to a future Board meeting, with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust.
- Due to the rising demand for SEND, there was insufficient money in the system for children with SEND, which is why the DBV programme had been commissioned.
- It was unclear what was causing the increase in demand for SEND and Public Health analysts had been asked to do some research on this, but it was not known how long this would take.

Resolved -

- (1) That the report, the progress on delivering the partnership SEND Strategy for Reading 2022-2027 and the key challenges for the year ahead be noted;
- (2) That the next steps to continue to deliver the 2022-2027 strategy through the end of 2023 and into 2024 be endorsed;
- (3) That a report be submitted to a future meeting with Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust taking a focused look at the work being carried out by the new Specialist CAMHS service for Learning Disability and Autism;
- (4) That the Board's thanks to Reading Families Forum members for their work and for sharing their experiences be recorded.

13. HEALTH AND WELLBEING STRATEGY QUARTERLY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN NARRATIVE AND DASHBOARD REPORT

Amanda Nyeke submitted a report that provided an overview of the implementation of the Berkshire West Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2021-2030 in Reading and gave detailed information on performance and progress towards achieving local goals and actions set out in both the overarching strategy and the locally agreed implementation plans.

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

The Health and Wellbeing Implementation Plans and Dashboard Update was attached at Appendix A and contained detailed narrative updates on the actions agreed for each of the implementation plans and included the most recent update of key information in each of the five priority areas:

- Priority 1 - Reduce the differences in health between different groups of people;
- Priority 2 - Support individuals at high risk of bad health outcomes to live healthy lives.
- Priority 3 - Help families and children in early years;
- Priority 4 - Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all children and young people;
- Priority 5 - Promote good mental health and wellbeing for all adults.

The report set out details of updates to the data and performance indicators which had been included since the last report.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

14. BETTER CARE FUN INTEGRATION UPDATE AND PLAN FOR 2023-25

Bev Nicholson submitted a report giving an update on the Integration Programme and its performance against the Better Care Fund (BCF) targets at the end of 2022/23 (Q4) and for April to June 2023 (Q1). The report also outlined the spend against the BCF Plan and the Adult Social Care (ASC) Discharge Fund Plan (2022/23), an additional fund provided by NHS England to be used to support hospital discharge over the Winter period, and the spend to date from the 2023/24 additional funding for discharge.

The report also gave an overview of the Better Care Fund End of Year return for 2022/23, which had met the four National Conditions and had been submitted by the deadline under delegated authority by the Executive Director of Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education & Public Health. The full end of year return was attached at Appendix 1.

The Better Care Fund Plan for 2023/25 had been submitted in line with the national timeframe as set out in the BCF Policy Framework 2023/25 and had been signed off through the delegated authority process due to submission deadlines falling outside the Health and Wellbeing Board schedule of meetings. Confirmation that the plans had met national conditions and had been approved had been received on 18 September 2023. An overview of the Plan was set out in the report and the full plan and supporting narrative was attached at Appendices 2 and 3.

The report stated that a Section 75 Framework Agreement would be drawn up and signed off by 31 October 2023, in relation to the BCF Plan for 2023-25.

The report noted that the BCF metrics had been updated in the planning guidance for 2023/25 and the targets against the revised metrics had been agreed with system partners during the BCF Planning process. The outcomes as at the end of March 2023 (Quarter 4 – year end) and the position in Quarter 1 as at the end of June 2023 were as follows:

- The number of avoidable admissions (unplanned hospitalisation for chronic ambulatory care) (2022/23 Q4 Met, 2023/24 Q1 Met)

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

- The number of emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people aged 65 and over, per 100,000 population. A new metric for 2023/24 (2023/24 Q1 Met)
- An increase in the proportion of people discharged home using data on discharge to their usual place of residence (2022/23 Q4 Met, 2023/24 Q1 Met)
- The number of older adults whose long-term care needs were met by admission to residential or nursing care per 100,000 population (2022/23 Q4 Met, 2023/24 Q1 Met)
- The effectiveness of reablement (proportion of older people still at home 91 days after discharge from hospital into reablement or rehabilitation) (2022/23 Q4 Not Met, 2023/24 Q1 Met)

Further details of the delivery against each of the targets were set out in the report demonstrating the effectiveness of collaborative work with system partners. Spend against the BCF Plan and the ASC Discharge Fund was also outlined in the report.

Resolved -

- (1) That the Quarter 4 (2022/23) and Quarter 1 (2023/24) performance and progress made in respect of the Better Care Fund (BCF) schemes as part of the Reading Integration Board's Programme of Work be noted;
- (2) That the contents of the End of Year Return for Better Care Fund (BCF) 2022/23 and the compliance with the BCF National Conditions be noted;
- (3) That the contents of the Better Care Fund (BCF) Plan and Narrative for 2023/25, including the National Conditions and Metrics against which BCF performance would be measured be noted;
- (4) That it be noted that the final BCF Plan and Narrative for 2022/23 had been formally submitted by the due date of 28 June 2023, using the delegated authority of the Executive Director for Adult Social Care, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Education & Public Health, in order to comply with the national deadlines which fell outside the cycle of Board meetings;
- (5) That the Executive Director of Communities & Adult Social Care be authorised to enter into the Section 75 Framework Agreement in relation to the BCF Plan for 2023-25.

15. RIGHT CARE, RIGHT PERSON – PRESENTATION

Emma Garside gave a presentation on the roll out in Thames Valley of "Right Care, Right Person" (RCRP), a national initiative to ensure an appropriate response from the appropriate agency was given to incidents where there were concerns for welfare linked to mental health, medical or social care issues.

In many cases, the police were not the right agency to respond to calls related to mental health but were often the default first responder. There were many circumstances where partners in health or social care were best placed to offer the necessary help and support and people in need could feel stigmatised or criminalised by police involvement, and the presentation set out the changes in police responses in the new model. This did not mean that the police would stop attending incidents where there was a threat to life or of serious harm, as the police had a mission to protect communities and would continue to do so. RCRP was focused on situations where the skills and support needed were not

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

those of a police officer, and health or social care practitioners would be better suited to address the incident.

The Thames Valley was one of three early evaluation forces which were rolling out RCRP with Home Office support, for evaluation and shared learning, and they would value feedback on what was going well and what was not. There was a phased roll out which had started in May 2023; TVP had gone live with three of the six areas of the RCRP model but was not currently applying the model to under 18s in the Thames Valley. TVP had created ten dedicated mental health officer posts to support the implementation, two of which were in Berkshire West.

The presentation covered the following areas:

- What is RCRP?
- RCRP Principles
- RCRP Model
- RCRP in Thames Valley
- Call Handler Toolkit
- RCRP in Thames Valley – Strategic Engagement
- Next Steps – Thames Valley

The meeting discussed the RCRP and the points made included:

- There were some concerns being expressed by partners about the lack of prior engagement, the demand shift and the impact of RCRP and it would be helpful for partners to know how they could feed back about decisions or ask for a review if necessary. It was noted that one of the identified next steps was to introduce feedback loops and formal review processes with partners.
- It was acknowledged that the police had taken the lead on starting the project and there was a need to formalise the stakeholder engagement across all partners, both strategic and operational. Locally, multi-agency implementation teams were being set up and the Berkshire one would be meeting soon.
- It would be helpful if there were clear measures being monitored to be able to judge whether the initiative was working.

Resolved –

- (1) That the presentation be noted;
- (2) That Emma Garside circulate further information to members of the Board on Right Care, Right Person (RCRP), including on how partners could provide feedback on or ask for a review of decisions made in relation to RCRP;
- (3) That Emma Garside bring back an update on the implementation and impact of the RCRP model to a future meeting of the Board.

16. INEQUALITIES AND PREVENTION: REDUCING PREMATURE PREVENTABLE MORTALITY PROJECT

Sarah Webster submitted a report on the developments to date on a Berkshire West joint project around a Community Wellness Outreach Programme, ultimately aiming to reduce premature mortality and improve residents' health and wellbeing, which was due to start

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

in October 2023. The report had appended draft Key Performance Indicators and draft Health and Wellbeing checks training requirements.

The report set out how ICB 'prevention and inequalities' funding allocated to Berkshire West (covering Reading, Wokingham, and West Berkshire) totalling £2.6m over two financial years (23/24 and 24/25) would be deployed, including elements that would be consistent across the patch and elements that were tailored to the needs of local residents in each borough.

The pilot Community Wellness Outreach model would have a consistent 'core' offering across the three Local Authority areas to focus on adult cardiovascular disease prevention, the leading cause of all preventable premature deaths in the UK, along with supplementary 'local' offerings reflecting local need.

The report stated that an element of the funding was top-sliced for Berkshire West-wide elements, and the remaining funding was allocated to the three partnership Locality Integration Boards (LIBs) for Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire to determine the most appropriate local delivery vehicle, local offerings, and the local residents/communities most in need. The expectation was that the model would complement/enhance existing arrangements in place rather than be a reinvention/uncoordinated addition. Funding allocated to the LIBs had been based on an approximate split of 52% to Reading and 24% each to Wokingham and West Berkshire using NHSE's national health outcomes calculation.

For Reading, this had resulted in £811k of funding over the two years being allocated directly to the Reading Integration Board to determine the best vehicle for taking enhanced health checks into the hearts of the communities most in need.

The LIBs had each developed an approach for implementing the Community Wellness Outreach health check pilot and further details would be submitted to the Board at a future meeting.

A supporting project co-ordinated by the Directors of Public Health would use the remaining funding from the £2.6m allocation (£270K) to invest in live Population Health and Prevention intelligence to inform future programmes of work, including undertaking an impact evaluation of the pilot.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

17. ACCESS TO MATERNITY SERVICES

Further to Minutes 3 and 4 of the previous meeting, when the Board had received reports which had included concerns regarding the provision of maternal healthcare services, including for ethnic minority communities, Christine Harding gave a presentation on access to maternity services.

The presentation covered the following areas:

- Continuity of Care Teams - a work stream to improve antenatal and postnatal continuity of care
- Staffing
- New role of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Midwife, with the aim to achieve equity of health outcomes for all social groups accessing the Maternity Service

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

- The Equality Delivery System - a tool to support active conversations between service users, the public, community groups and staff, used to review and develop an approach to address the inequalities in health access, experiences, impact and outcomes.
- The launch of 'Your Personalised Care and Support Plan' for women
- Cost and availability of classes
- Perinatal mental health referral pathway and next steps in maternal mental health support
- New role of Perinatal Equity Befriender

The meeting discussed the presentation and it was noted that, whilst it was positive that there was work going on to improve the situation, this needed to be better communicated to the public, especially those in the communities most affected by inequality, and it was also important that women's feedback was received. It was suggested that Healthwatch Reading could help with this and Christine Harding said that they would be happy to work with Healthwatch Reading on this large task, and with any organisation that could help reach women.

Resolved –

- (1) That the presentation be noted;
- (2) That Christine Harding bring back an update on the progress of the work on access to maternity services to a future meeting of the Board.

18. BUILDING BERKSHIRE TOGETHER - UPDATE

Further to Minute 42 of the meeting held on 20 January 2023, Alison Foster gave a presentation updating the Board on the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust's (RBFT) Building Berkshire Together (BBT) project for the redevelopment of the Royal Berkshire Hospital. A copy of the presentation slides had been circulated with the agenda papers.

The presentation explained that RBFT was in Cohort 4 of the national New Hospital Programme (NHP) which aimed to deliver 40 new hospitals across the country by 2030. This would mean that RBFT would be full adopters of the new approach to building new hospitals 'Hospital 2.0', with standardised designs, centralised processes and modern methods of construction, which should deliver economies of scale.

£20bn funding for the NHP had been announced in May 2023, of which £3.7bn had already been allocated, but five additional hospitals with Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RACC) had been added to the programme and some hospitals on the scheme would not be able to be delivered before 2030, due to funding allocation restraints and supply chain issues. RBFT did not have RACC and its scheduling had not yet been decided. This would depend on work with the NHP over the next five months to finalise the scheme and on the results of geotechnical surveys to understand the current site's suitability for a significant redevelopment using Hospital 2.0, with the final survey report expected in April 2024.

RBFT had received an initial funding allocation range in June 2023 which appeared to be aligned to a part redevelopment on the current site, and did not facilitate a move off site, but in June 2023 the RBFT Board had approved a proposal for the preferred way forward being a new hospital on a new site. Two possible sites – Thames Valley Science Park and Thames Valley Park – had been identified as most closely meeting criteria and further

due diligence work was being carried out to understand their suitability. Discussions were being held with Council planners to explore options within the Borough and the aim was to identify other possible sites in the area by the end of October 2023.

The presentation gave details of engagement on the BBT and Alison Foster noted that the responses to the previous survey had not been as diverse or representative of the population as wanted, so some more focussed and targeted engagement was being carried out with groups not represented in the survey. It was also noted that hospital site visits were being arranged for Councillors to walk around the hospital and see some of the issues for themselves. The presentation also summarised the next steps, which included working with local integrated care system partners on how the hospital would support transformation.

Resolved:

- (1) That the presentation be noted;
- (2) That the plan for site visits to RBFT to be arranged for Councillors be welcomed.

19. ROYAL BERKSHIRE NHS FOUNDATION TRUST – INTEGRATED PERFORMANCE REPORT

Andy Statham submitted a report summarising the Royal Berkshire NHS Foundation Trust's performance as at 31 July 2023 against the eight strategic metrics measured for its five strategic objectives, three breakthrough priorities and a range of watch metrics.

The report stated that during the reporting period, the Trust had continued to experience high levels of demand across non-elective pathways. For eight days in July 2023, the Trust had been affected by consultant and junior doctor industrial action which had resulted in the cancellation of over 600 outpatient appointments and almost 180 inpatient and day case procedures. Despite the sustained pressure, staff had continued to provide high quality, safe care and the highest quality of care indicators had remained at expected levels.

The Trust had remained challenged across the Deliver in Partnership objectives and performance against the diagnostic waiting standard and cancer waiting times standards had continued to fall below national standards. The former continued to deteriorate, driven by high levels of demand and capacity challenges and, whilst actions including contracting for insourcing capacity were in place to address these areas, performance would remain challenged during 2023/24.

The Trust continued to perform well on the national elective care standard with the number of patients who had waited over 52 weeks on RTT pathways remaining at very low levels. This would come under pressure during the remainder of the year as the impact of capacity lost to industrial action took effect.

The Trust's vacancy rate remained above target. However, the rate of turnover had fallen further still below target, reflecting the increased focus on this area from across the organisation - at its lowest for over a year.

Financial performance at Month 4 was £0.61m behind plan, driven by continued spend on workforce and supplies and challenges in unlocking efficiency savings. Additional

focus had been placed on this area by Trust senior management as indicated by a new breakthrough priority.

The report gave further details of performance against each of the metrics, also setting out actions and risks.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

20. ACCESS TO GP-LED SERVICES IN BERKSHIRE WEST – PROJECT SUMMARY

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton submitted a report on a Healthwatch Reading project being carried out to explore the public understanding of access to GP-led services in Berkshire West.

The report explained that GP access and quality of GP services had been found to be the top priorities for local people in a recent Healthwatch survey and that many people registered with local GPs were not aware of the new ways of working in GP practices and therefore their expectations did not match what they might experience when contacting their practice or seeking help.

The project would explore this further to understand what the public did know, where there were gaps and how communication could improve, in order to address the gaps.

The report explained what the new “GP-led services” way of working was and set out the project’s aims, processes, methodology, communications and timescales, which involved publication of the final report in February 2024 and a follow up in August/September 2024 to re-request data and ascertain changes made as a result of the project.

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton asked Board members to help raise public awareness of the project so that the public could contact Healthwatch and contribute to the project.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

21. EXPLORING THE ORAL HEALTH OF UNDER 10S IN NORCOT, CHURCH AND SOUTHCOTE

Alice Kunjappy-Clifton submitted a report on a Healthwatch Reading project being developed to find out more about the oral health of children in the Norcot, Church and Southcote areas of Reading as part of the Community Connectors programme funded by NHS England.

The report explained that in Reading 31.6% of 5 year olds had one or more obvious untreated dentally decayed tooth (national prevalence 29.3%) and 2.5% had had one or more teeth extracted due to dental decay (2022 National Dental Epidemiology Programme Survey).

As part of Core20PLUS5 targeted action, Healthwatch Reading, in partnership with BOB ICB, Healthwatch Bucks and Healthwatch Oxfordshire were undertaking a project to find out more about the oral health of children in three of the most affected areas of Reading, as part of the Community Connectors programme funded by NHS England.

The project had the following aims and outcomes:

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

- To identify issues, including barriers and ‘what worked’, for parents, carers and children when: accessing oral health information; helping children with good dental hygiene and to develop good habits early; and experience of accessing regular dental checks.
- To understand what was/should be happening at Place and ICB-wide, mapping against NICE recommendations provided to NHSE on oral health promotion and disease prevention.
- To connect communities with decision-makers and make recommendations that would lead to change, for example in the way oral health advice and information was provided.
- To empower a group of Community Connectors to feel more able to speak up for themselves and others.

The report set out the project’s processes, methodology and timescales, which involved publication of the final report in February 2024 and seeking updates on changes made following the report in August 2024. The report stated that Reading Borough Council did not currently have an oral health strategy but it was hoped that the project would provide information to go into a new strategy.

Further to Minute 4 of the previous meeting, Sarah Webster informed that Board that an update on dentistry was going to be submitted to the next Adult Social Care, Children’s Services and Education Committee.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

22. COMMUNITY HEALTH CHAMPIONS PROGRAMME UPDATE

Martin White submitted a report providing an update on the Community Health Champions Programme (CHC), the next phase of the Reading Community Vaccines Champion programme (CVC) which had ended in October 2022. The CHC was a development of the previous CVC campaign which had been focussed on promoting the uptake of the Covid vaccination amongst disadvantaged communities; CHC would have a programme plan that included a wider range of health priorities in addition to the uptake of vaccines.

The report explained that, since the end of CVC, additional grant funding had been secured for the CHC programme. Planning for the next phase had progressed well, with increasing activity taking place in the second quarter of 2023-24 to recruit to the CHC support team, design programme branding and develop training for the network of champions. The intention was to have a fully-functioning supported network of around 50 champions by November 2023.

The report gave further details of current progress, noting that the CHC aimed to develop health knowledge of communities and to strengthen community action, self-help and engagement with health-promoting activities and interventions.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

23. SEASONAL BERKSHIRE INFLUENZA CAMPAIGN

Martin White submitted a report on the 2023-24 seasonal influenza (flu) campaign across Berkshire West and the arrangements for employees and frontline employees at Reading Borough Council.

The report explained that the seasonal flu and an accelerated Autumn Vaccination Programme had begun (accelerated as a precautionary measure due to the emergence of a new variant of Covid-19) and was supported by a communications campaign and equality projects that aimed to encourage uptake amongst eligible vulnerable groups. Further details of the programme were set out in the report.

The programme was supported in Reading through targeted projects, details of which were set out in Appendix 1 to the report, and a voucher reimbursement scheme available for Reading Borough Council frontline employees.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

24. BOB ICB UPDATE BRIEFING

Sarah Webster submitted a report presenting a briefing on the development of the BOB Integrated Care Board, its contribution to the delivery of the Integrated Care Strategy and the progress of place-based partnership structures. The report had appended the briefing and a summary of the ICB's Winter Communications Plan.

The report covered the following key areas:

- BOB NHS Joint Forward Plan
- Industrial Action
- Update on recent ICB executive appointments
- ICB Board Meeting
- Covid-19 and Flu Vaccination Campaign
- Berkshire West-focussed updates

Resolved – That the report be noted.

25. BOB ICB ANNUAL REPORT JULY 2022-MARCH 2023

Sarah Webster submitted a report presenting for information the final BOB ICB Annual Report covering the period July 2022 (when the ICB was formed) to March 2023.

The Annual Report incorporated the following key sections:

- Performance Report – consisting of a performance overview and a performance analysis and outlining the ICB's purpose and statutory duties, going on to describe how these duties had been executed. It looked at how the organisation had performed since its establishment in July 2022 and the key risks it faced.
- Accountability Report – incorporating Corporate Governance Report, Statement of Accountable Officer's responsibilities and Annual Governance Statement.
- Remuneration Report
- Staff Report

The report stated that a Parliamentary Accountability and Audit Report was not required, but the ICB had opted to include disclosures on remote contingent liabilities, losses and

READING HEALTH & WELLBEING BOARD MINUTES – 6 OCTOBER 2023

special payments, gifts and feeds and charges (none recorded for this period). Appendix 1 included the ICB's financial accounts for the period ended 31 March 2023.

Resolved – That the report be noted.

26. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Resolved – That it be noted that next meeting would be held at 2.00pm on Friday, 19 January 2024.

(The meeting started at 2.00 pm and closed at 4.57 pm)

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Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee

17 January 2024



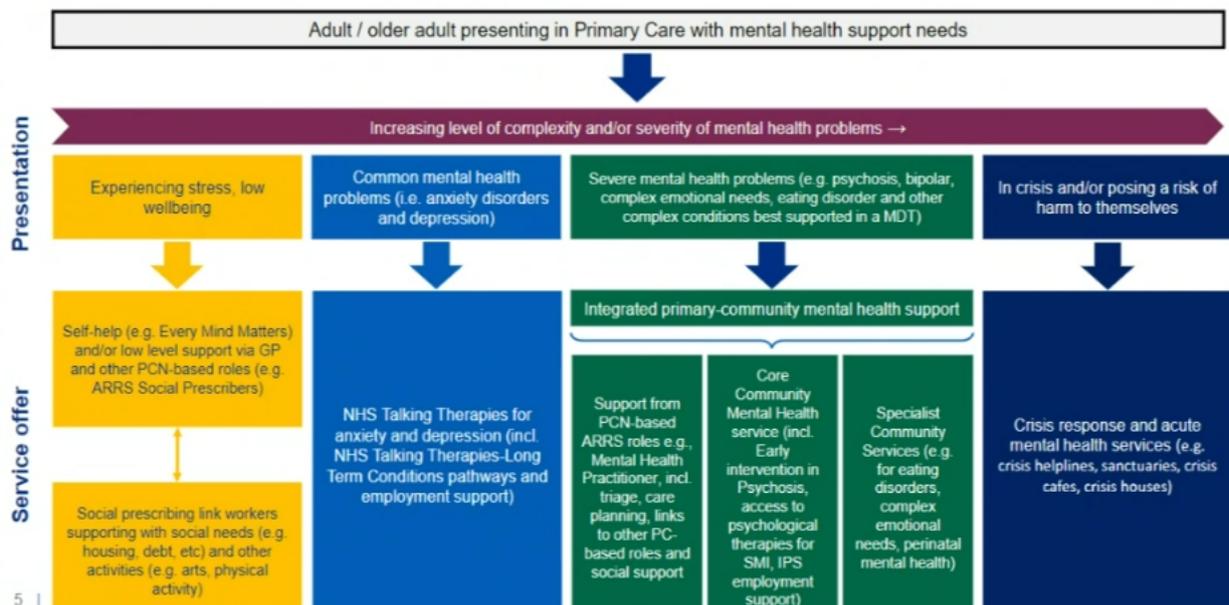
Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

<p>Title</p>	<p style="text-align: right;"> Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust</p> <p>Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust Mental Health & Neurodiversity Provision, Waiting Times and Trends in Reading</p>
<p>Report authors</p>	<p>Kishan Waas, Louise Noble and Mary Jane Stroud</p>

Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust provide mental health and neurodiversity services to people of all ages across the 6 local authority areas in Berkshire. This paper provides information on service provision, waiting times and trends across three specific areas of provision: working age adult services, children and young people's mental health and neurodiversity and is therefore written and presented in three parts.

Working Age Adult Services - Kishan Waas

Provision of a spectrum of support for people with mental health problems presenting to primary care services



Summary of Service

ARRS

Berkshire Healthcare in collaboration with PCNs have recruited specialist primary care mental health practitioners under the additional roles reimbursement scheme (ARRS). These practitioners work within GP surgeries and offer triage, assessment, and signposting to primary care patients who present with a mental health need.

Let's Connect

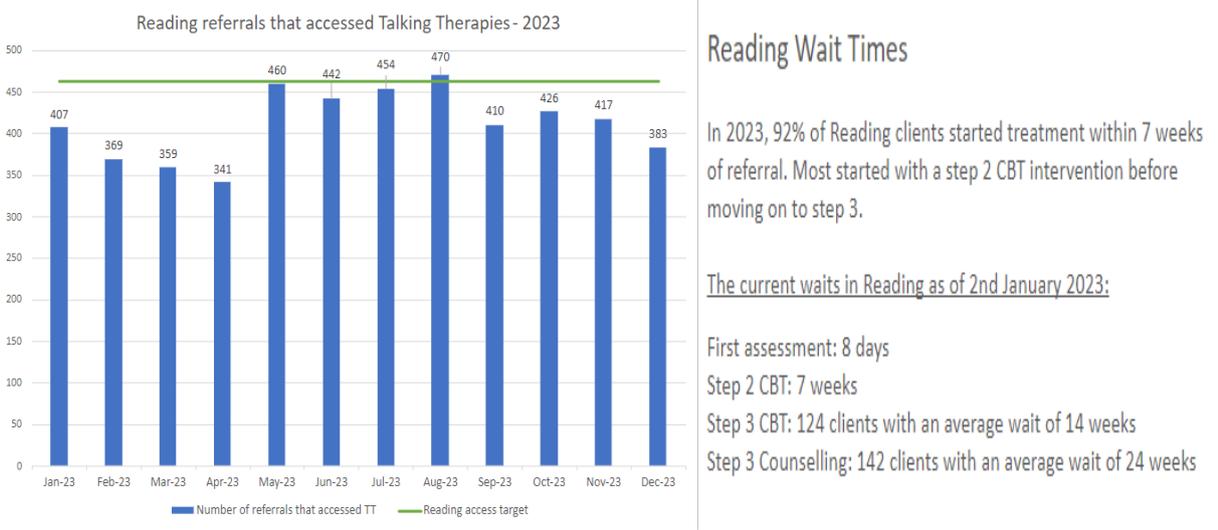
Let's Connect is a social network to support the wellbeing of citizens over the age of 18 by connecting with each other, with organisations and services and with the many opportunities in our community. Those who join the network will bring their own strengths as well as gaining from the support of others, based on their own personal choices.

[Let's Connect Community Wellbeing Network | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

IAPT

The NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression programme (formerly known as Improving Access to Psychological Therapies, IAPT) aims to improve the delivery of, and access to, evidence-based, NICE recommended, psychological therapies for depression and anxiety disorders within the NHS.

Referral and Waiting Times -



[NHS Berkshire Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression \(berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk\)](http://berkshirehealthcare.nhs.uk)

[NHS England » NHS Talking Therapies, for anxiety and depression](#)

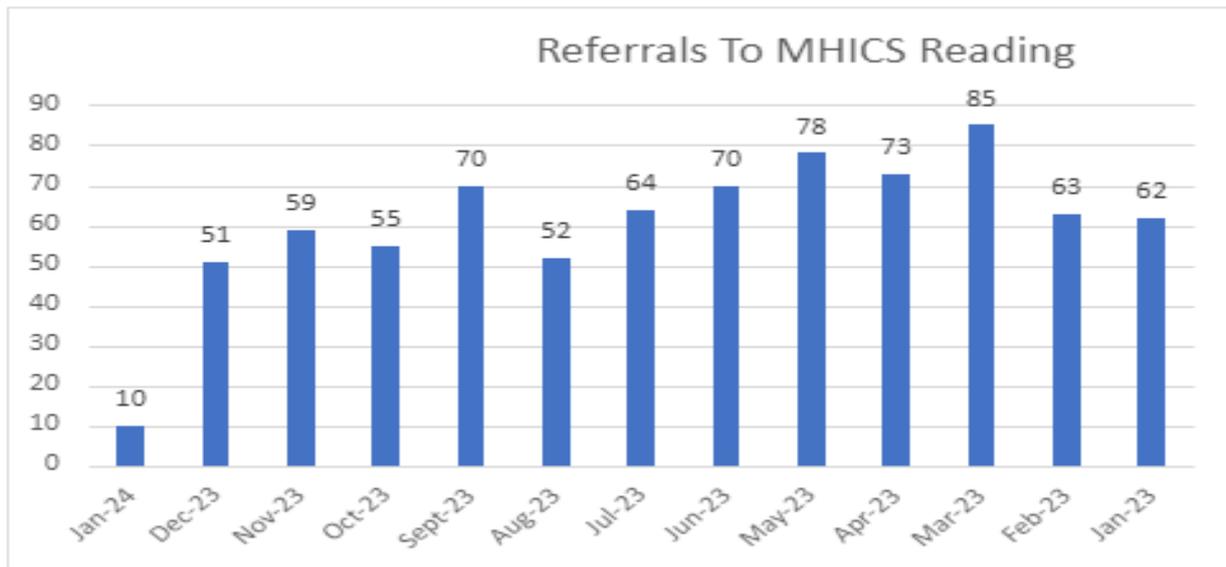
Mental Health Integrated Community Service (MHICS)

The central remit of MHICS is to offer a service to patients in primary care with significant mental health difficulties, who previously would have fallen in the gap between primary and secondary care. Flow into the MHICS service is through primary care, and referral from secondary care (stepdown), with an emphasis on an 'easy in, easy out', no wrong door approach to patient care, underpinned by a 'One Team' approach which includes close partnership working with local VCSEs. MHICS teams MDT include psychiatrists, pharmacists, psychologists, Mental Health Practitioners, Community Connectors (employed through the charity MIND), and Lived Experience Practitioners.

This is a New and integrated model of primary and community mental health care to support adults and with severe mental illness. The place-based offer will include access to psychological therapies, improved physical health and social care, employment support, personalised and trauma-informed care, medicines management and support for self-harm and coexisting substance use. MHICS offers brief assessment, formulation and interventions. A holistic (biopsychosocial) approach is taken to facilitate understanding and support management of presenting difficulties, and where helpful, support access to and engagement with other supporting agencies, including bridging patients to other mental health services and community assets when appropriate.

Referral and Waiting Times – average 2 weeks

Currently has an active caseload of 257patients



[Mental Health Integrated Community Service \(MHICS\) | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

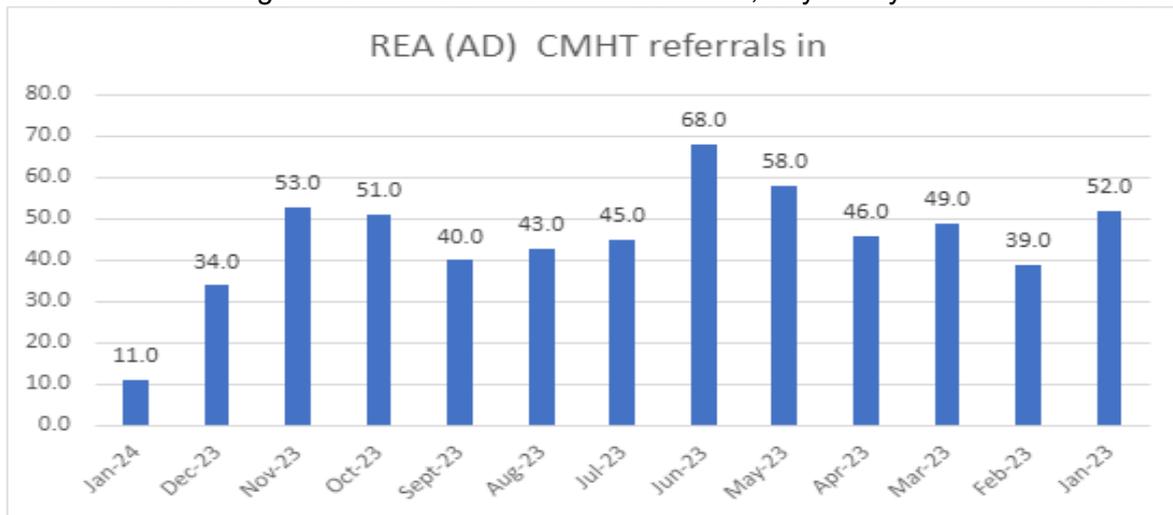
Community Mental Health Teams (CMHT)

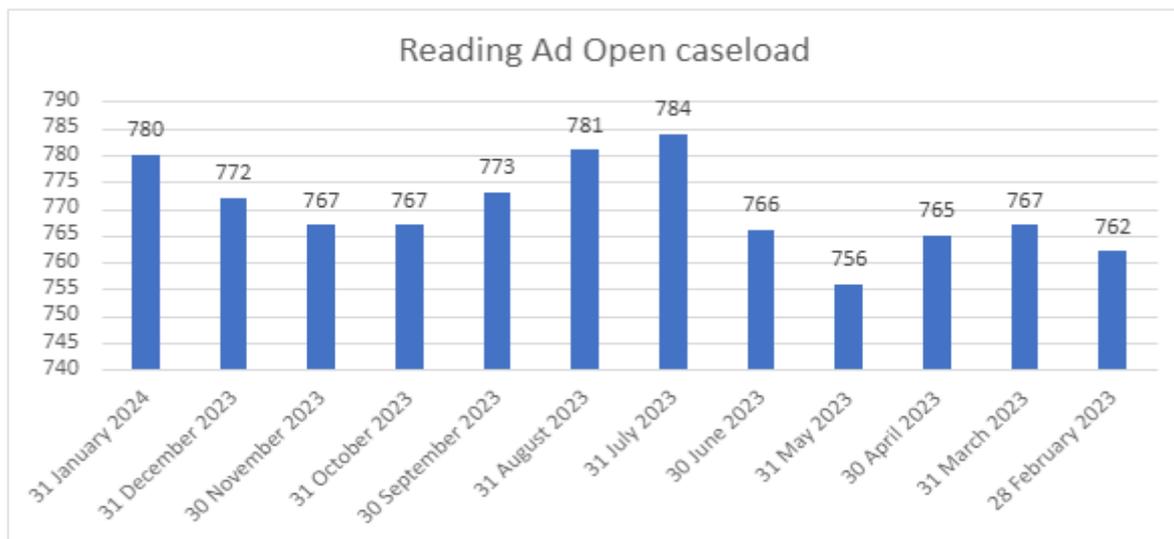
Reading CMHT is a non-integrated service. The service provides care and treatment for people with serious mental health difficulties, including but not limited to psychotic illnesses, mood and personality disorders, and other disorders.

Referrals to the CMHT should be made via the CPE/Gateway. Patients are allocated to a community mental health team based on where their GP practice is, or if they don't have a GP, we will use their address. The service is a multi-disciplinary health service with range of professionals including nurses, doctors, psychologists, occupational therapists, and specialist workers providing employment support, benefits advice and social inclusion.

It provides a broad range of medical and psychological treatments and interventions, and works closely with acute and crisis services, and mental health services in primary care to ensure that service users receive the right care at the right time.

Referral and Waiting Times – Care Coordination 4 weeks; Psychiatry Assessments 9.1 weeks





IPT (Psychology waiting times)

Reading Locality Dec-23	
Longest overall wait [awaiting assess+treat]	Feb'23
Awaiting Group	15
Total number waiting for groups	
Awaiting Individual	5
Total waiting for individual	
Totals	
Total awaiting treatment	20
Total waiting for Assessment	10

[Access mental health support | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

[Community Mental Health Team \(CMHT\) | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Individual Placement & Support Employment Service (IPS)

IPS is an employment support service integrated within CMHTs, MHICS, and EIP for people who experience severe mental health conditions. It is an evidence-based service that aims to help people find and retain employment.

The service will assist people find a paid job as close to their work preferences as possible and work closely with our health teams and employer to support the individual throughout their journey into work.

The service can also support individuals if in work, such as help to maintain their current role if they're struggling due to their mental health.

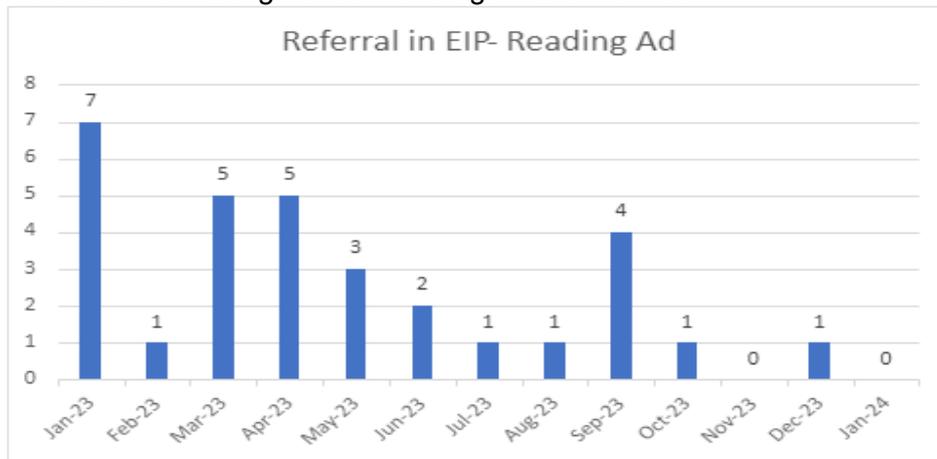
[Individual Placement and Support \(IPS\) | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Early Intervention in Psychosis (EIP)

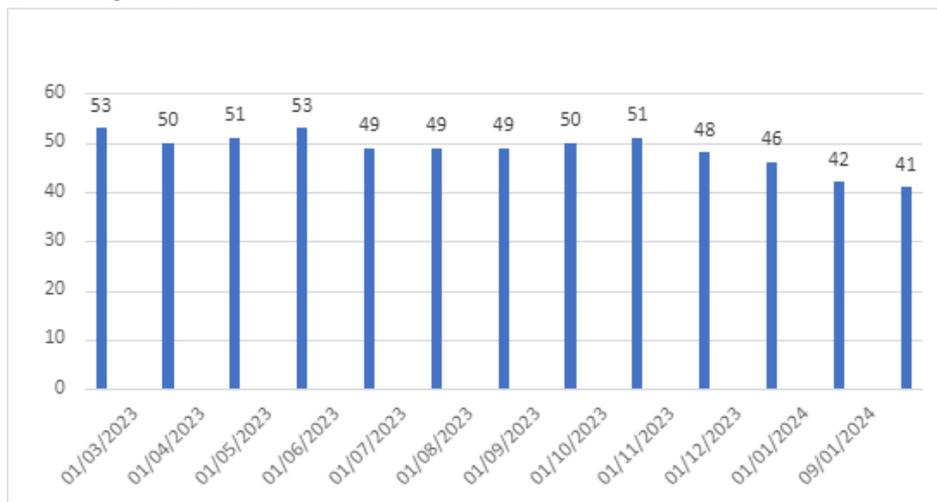
EIP team provide specialist treatment and care for people aged between 14 and 65 who have signs of psychosis. The service works with people who are experiencing a first episode of psychosis.

The service is made up of a team of professionals (including nurses, psychologists, psychiatrists, occupational therapists, and social workers employed as care co-ordinators) who have lots of experience in working with people with psychosis.

Referral and Waiting Times – average waits 1-2 weeks



EIP Ad Caseload



[Early Intervention in Psychosis | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Crisis Resolution Home Treatment Teams (CRHTT)

CRHTT provides intensive support for patients experiencing an acute or ‘crisis’ episode during their mental illness. The service is available 24 hours a day, 365 days a year. CRHTT teams are made up of psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, and support workers. The service operates as the gatekeeper for hospital admission. Once a patient starts to feel better, no longer needing the support of our Crisis Resolution Home Treatment teams but still requiring ongoing support, they’ll be referred back to their local Community Mental Health Team.

Referral and Waiting Times – Crisis - daily stat example 28/12/23

R.A.G	READING
REFERRALS IN	8
RED	4
AMBER	10
GREEN	14
7 DAY F/U	1
LEAVE SUPPORT	0
Chiron Care	0
TOTAL	37

[Crisis Resolution and Home Treatment Team \(CRHTT\) | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Intensive Management of Personality Disorders and Clinical Therapies (IMPACTT)

The service helps patients better understand personality disorders and support with developing coping strategies to help manage the difficulties with both emotions, and interpersonal issues. The service provides specialist assessment to identify type of personality disorder and provide information on one of two psychological treatments available. One is Mentalization Based Treatment (MBT) and other is Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT). Both treatments focus on understanding and learning how to manage emotions and relationships.

The length of both treatments depends on many different things, but they are both long term approaches.

Referral and Waiting Times -

Waiting times for assessments – 4 patients (average wait 4-8 weeks)

Waits for Treatment –

MBT – 3 patients (average wait 3-4 months)

DBT – 8 patients (average waits 4-5months)

[Managing Personality Disorders | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Liaison and Diversion

L&D services identify people who have mental health, learning disability, substance misuse or other vulnerabilities when they first come into contact with the criminal justice system as suspects, defendants or offenders.

The service can then support people through the early stages of criminal system pathway, refer them for appropriate health or social care or enable them to be diverted away from the criminal justice system into a more appropriate setting, if required.

L&D services aim to improve overall health outcomes for people and to support people in the reduction of re-offending. It also aims to identify vulnerabilities in people earlier on which reduces the likelihood that people will reach a crisis-point and helps to ensure the right support can be put in place from the start.

[Liaison and Diversion Service | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Reconnect

Reconnect is a care after custody service for adults, that seeks to improve the continuity of care of people leaving prison or an immigration removal centre (IRC) with an identified health need. Its aims:

- Increase access to and uptake up of healthcare or relevant support services for individuals who have identified health needs upon release from prison or IRCs who would otherwise struggle to engage.
- Ensure that the health needs of individuals who are leaving prison or IRCs are met.
- Ensure a safe transition from prison or IRC to community-based healthcare and support services in England.
- Provide follow-up to ensure engagement is maintained.

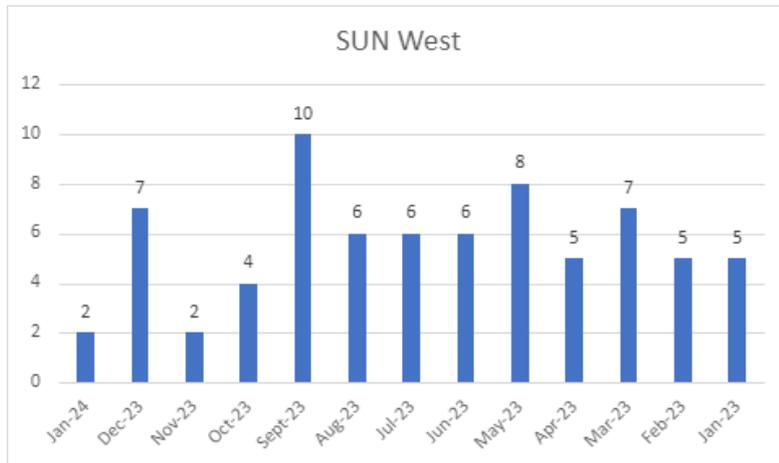
[RECONNECT | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

SUN

The SUN user network offers support through peer groups, which means people helping others by using their own experiences as a guide for others. The service can help those living with an individual who has emotionally unstable personality disorder.

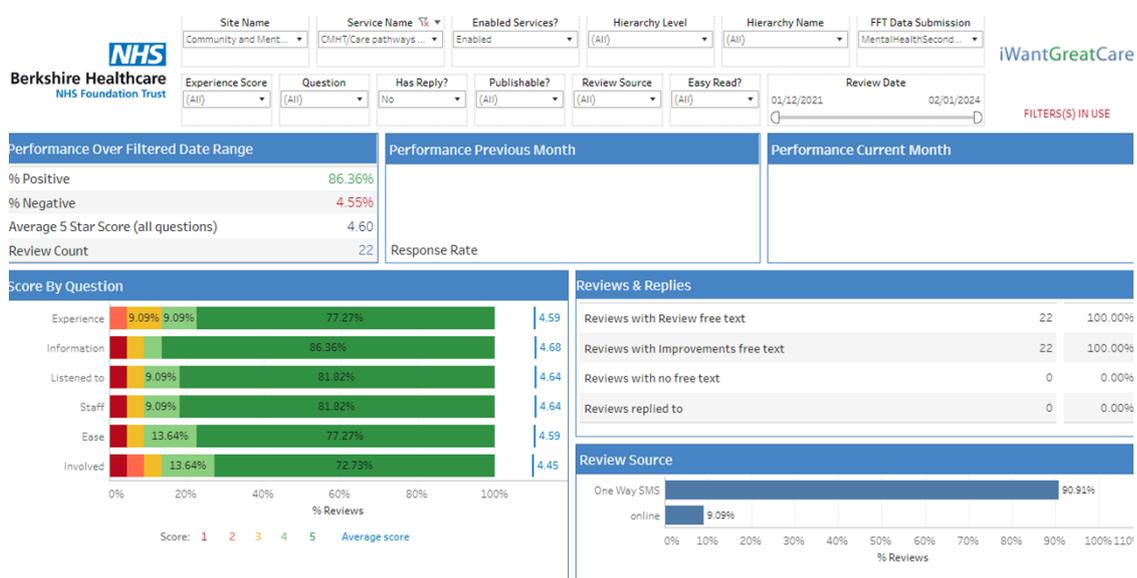
The aim is to support people in the community and reduce the need for further intervention from crisis services.

Referral and Waiting Times -
40 self-referrals during 2023



[Service User Network \(SUN\) service | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust](#)

Patient Experience of Community Mental Health Services



Improving Flow & Waiting Times - New Service Developments

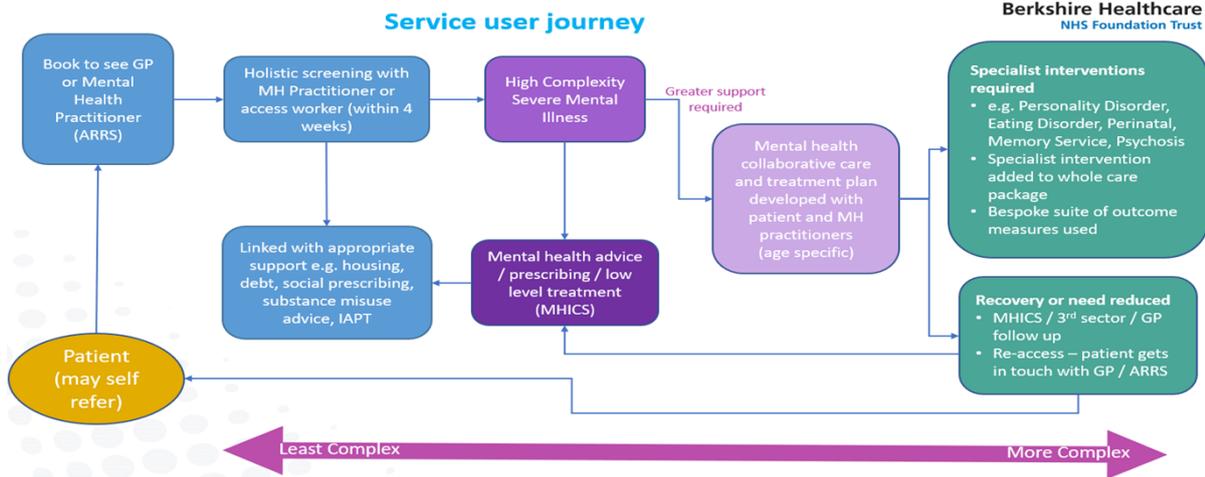
ONE Team Aims

Develop a Berkshire-wide specialist CMH offer that provides specialist, step-up interventions and develop processes to enable step up/step down and easy in/easy out approach to care.

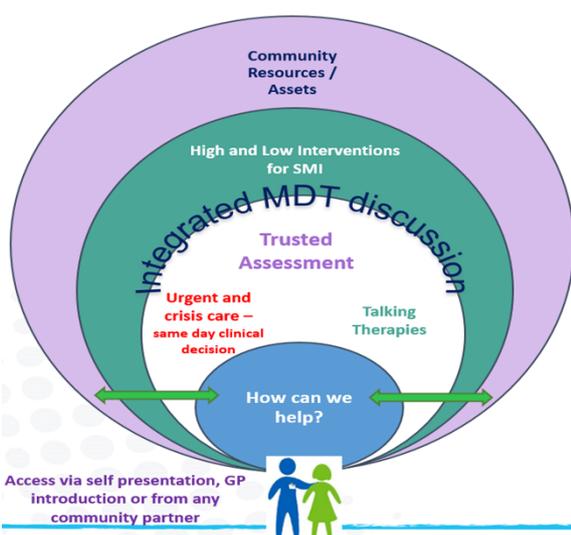
Main aims:

- Improve access and flow between CMH services.
- Reduce boundaries and barriers between primary/secondary care/VCSE, as well as those between existing secondary care services.
- Reduce unwarranted variation across the six CMHTs and OPMHs within BHFT.
- Improve patient and staff experience of using and delivering services.
- Support delivery of the alternative to CPA project
- Consistent access to specialist evidence-based interventions across all 6 localities
- Support outcome measure CQUIN
- Share good practice and roll out across all six localities following PLACE based discussions.

The vision for our patients



The One Team approach – right care at the right time in the right place, by the right professional



- Provides **clarity** of individualised, evidence based / high quality MH interventions
- **Clear pathways and interface** arrangements
- **Holistic** – considers physical & mental health; ‘social determinants’ of health, recovery focus and community assets
- Reduces or eliminates unnecessary thresholds such as **age barriers** (transitions and OPMH pathways)
- **Works across multi-agency boundaries** – mental/physical health; health and social care; and promotes partnership working with VCSE
- Allows earlier intervention, and **improves access** and interfaces between **primary and ‘secondary’** (or specialist) care
- Is **inclusive** to ‘under-served’ communities or people who may not access traditional clinical models.

Children and Young People Mental Health Services – Louise Noble

Summary of Service

Berkshire Healthcare are commissioned to provide evidence-based mental health services for children and adolescents across the West of Berkshire. The services we provide would have been described as tier 3 and tier 4 level services under the tier model of provision. Under the Thrive framework, the majority of services we provide in Reading are within the Getting More Help and Getting Risk Support needs-based groupings.

The THRIVE framework conceptualises five needs-based groupings for young people with mental health issues and their families. The image on the left describes the input that is offered for each group; that on the right describes the state of being of people in the that group – using language informed by consultation with young people and parents with experience of service use.

Each of the five groupings is distinct in terms of the:

- Needs and/or choices of the individuals within each group ⁶
- Skill mix required to meet these needs
- Dominant metaphor used to describe needs (wellbeing, ill health, support)
- Resources required to meet the needs and/or choices of people in that group.

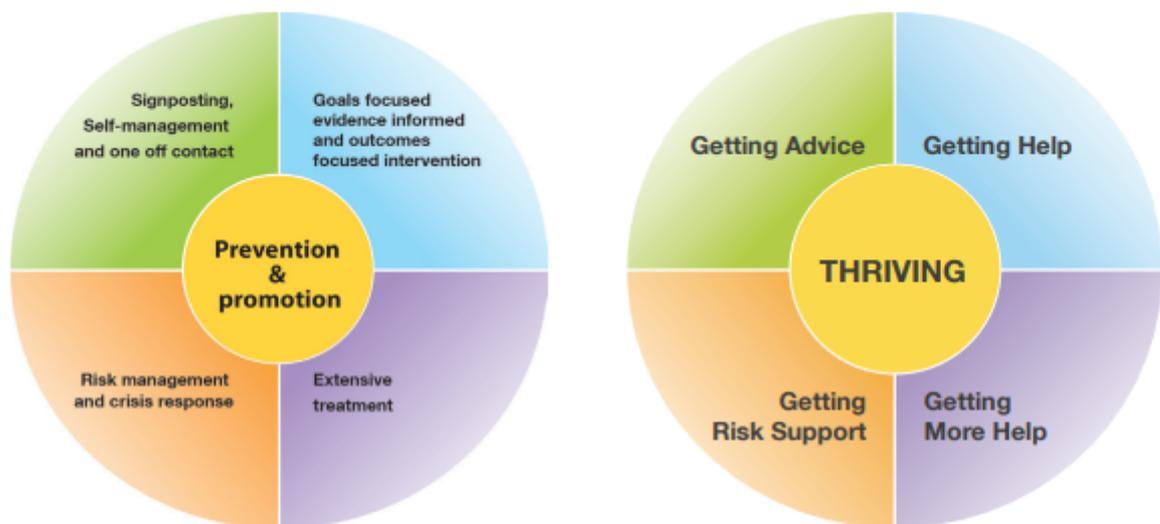


Figure 2:
THRIVE framework

⁶ Need is taken to refer to “the minimum resource required to exhaust capacity to benefit”. Choice is taken to refer to the shared decision making between a young person or family member and those providing help and support.

Getting Advice: Within this grouping would be children, young people and families adjusting to life circumstances, with mild or temporary difficulties, where the best intention is within the community with the possible addition of self-support. This group may also include, however, those with chronic, fluctuating or ongoing severe difficulties, for which they are choosing to manage their own health and/or are on the road to recovery.

The THRIVE model of provision would suggest that wherever possible, this provision should be provided within education or community settings, with education often (though not always) the lead provider and educational language (a language of wellness) as the key language used. Health input in this group should involve some of our most experienced workforce to provide experienced decision making about how best to help people in this group and to help determine whose needs can be met by this approach.

Getting Help: This grouping comprises those children, young people and families who would benefit from focused, evidence-based treatment, with clear aims, and criteria for assessing whether aims have been achieved. This grouping would include children and young people with difficulties that fell within the remit of NICE guidance and where there are interventions that might help. For example CYP presenting with an anxiety or mood disorder.

The THRIVE model of provision would suggest that, wherever provision for this group should be provided with health as the lead provider and using a health language (a language of treatment and health outcomes) with a greater emphasis on ending an intervention if it was felt to be not

working or of it was felt gains no longer outweighed costs or potential harms. Health input in this group might draw on specialised technicians in different treatments, possibly allowing less specialist professionals to provide more procedurally defined interventions.

Treatment would involve explicit agreement at the outset as to what a successful outcome would look like and how likely this was to occur by a specific date, and what would happen if this was not achieved in a reasonable timeframe.

Getting More Help: This grouping comprises those young people and families who would benefit from extensive long-term treatment which may include inpatient care but may also include extensive outpatient provision. CYPF would have difficulties that indicate likelihood of need for substantive resource use such as eating disorders, psychotic symptoms, or multiple severe problems.

Provision for this group should be provided with health as the lead provider and using a health language (that is a language of treatment and health outcomes).

The THRIVE framework proposes that there may be some people currently allocated to this grouping who are not benefitting from intervention and are being held in services solely because of concerns about risk or safeguarding (hypothesised to be around 50%, who might appropriately be reallocated to getting risk support).

On this basis, 10% of the episodes of care were considered to be potentially appropriate to include in this grouping. Of these, around a quarter would potentially benefit from interventions described in one of the 3 NICE guidelines in this grouping, while the other $\frac{3}{4}$ belong to the non-NICE specified 'difficulties of severe impact'.

Hypothetical average no. of sessions: 30

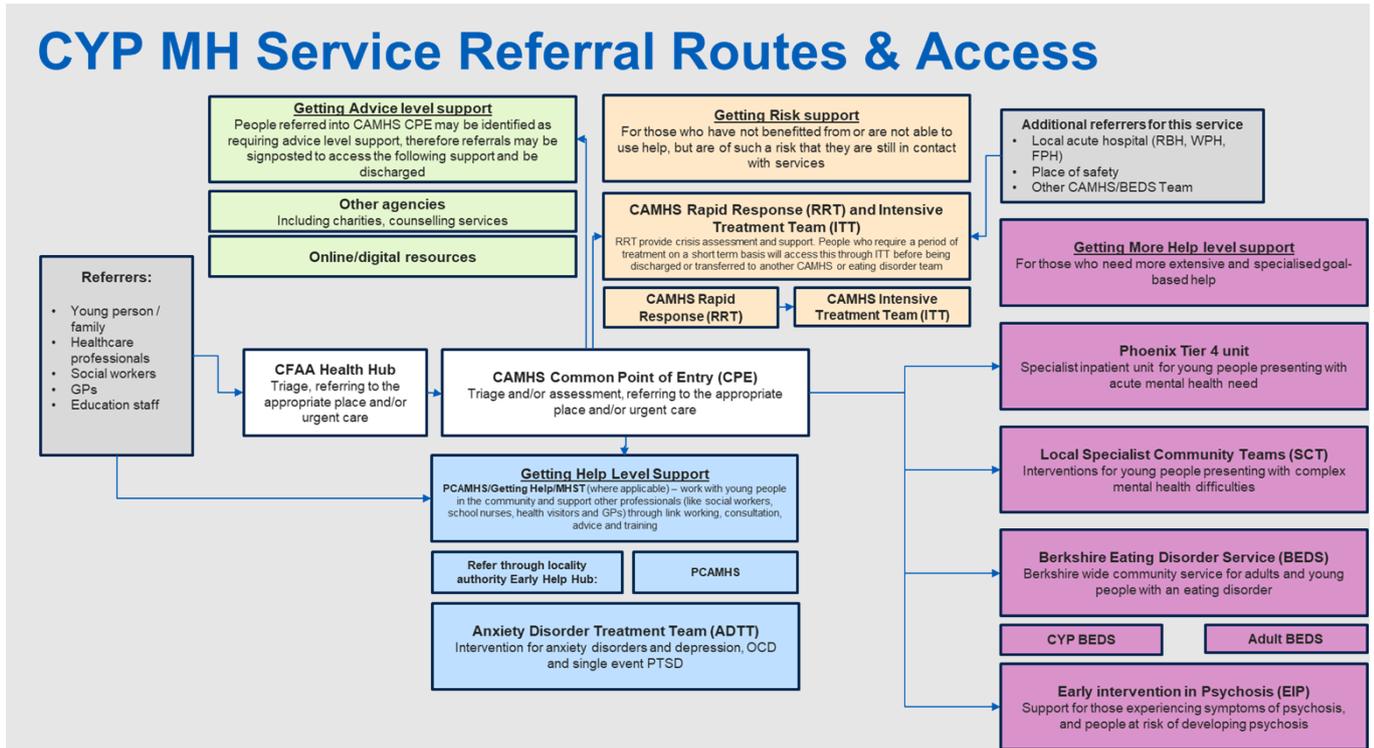
Getting Risk Support: This grouping comprises those children, young people and families who are currently unable to benefit from evidence-based treatment but remain a significant concern and risk. This group might include children, young people who routinely go into crisis but are not able to make use of help offered, or where help offered has not been able to make a difference, who self-harm or who have emerging personality disorders or ongoing issues that have not yet responded to treatment.

It is important to note that there are likely to be risk management aspects in **all** groupings, however, in the context of high concerns but lack of therapeutic progress for this in this group, risk management is the sole focus.

The THRIVE model of provision would suggest that, for this group, there needs to be close interagency collaboration and clarity as to who is leading. Social care may often be the lead agency and the language of social care (risk and support) is likely to be dominant. Health input should be from staff trained to work with this group and skilled in thinking with colleagues in social care, but with explicit understanding that it is not a health treatment that is being offered.

The pictogram below gives an overview of the service based on the 5 needs-based domains of Thrive and shows access points to services.

CYP MH Service Referral Routes & Access

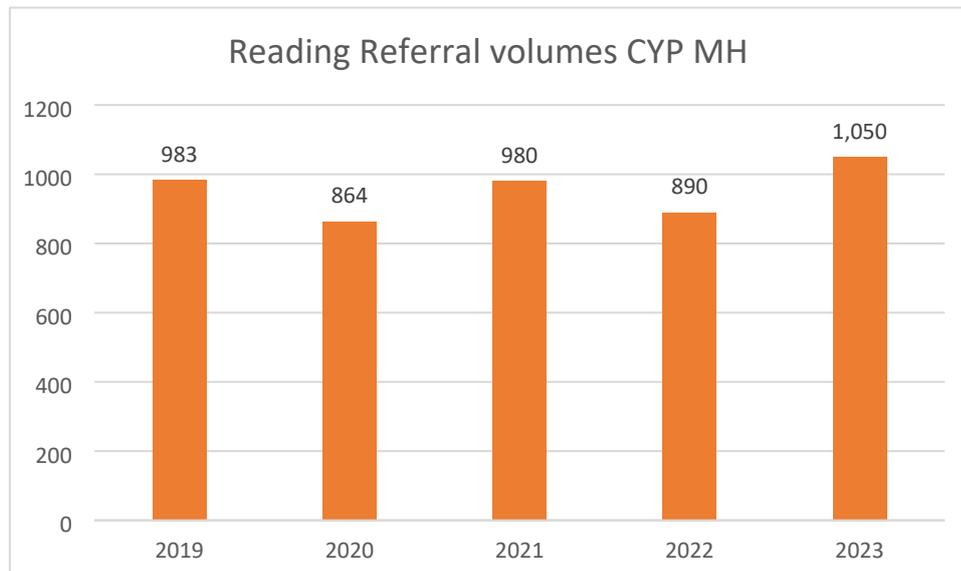


Berkshire Healthcare do not provide schools based mental health service or primary mental health services in Reading, (which would be part of the provision of Getting Advice/Support and Getting Help) however we are commissioned to provide specialist mental health expertise as part of the mental health in schools service and work closely with those teams in Brighter Futures For Children.

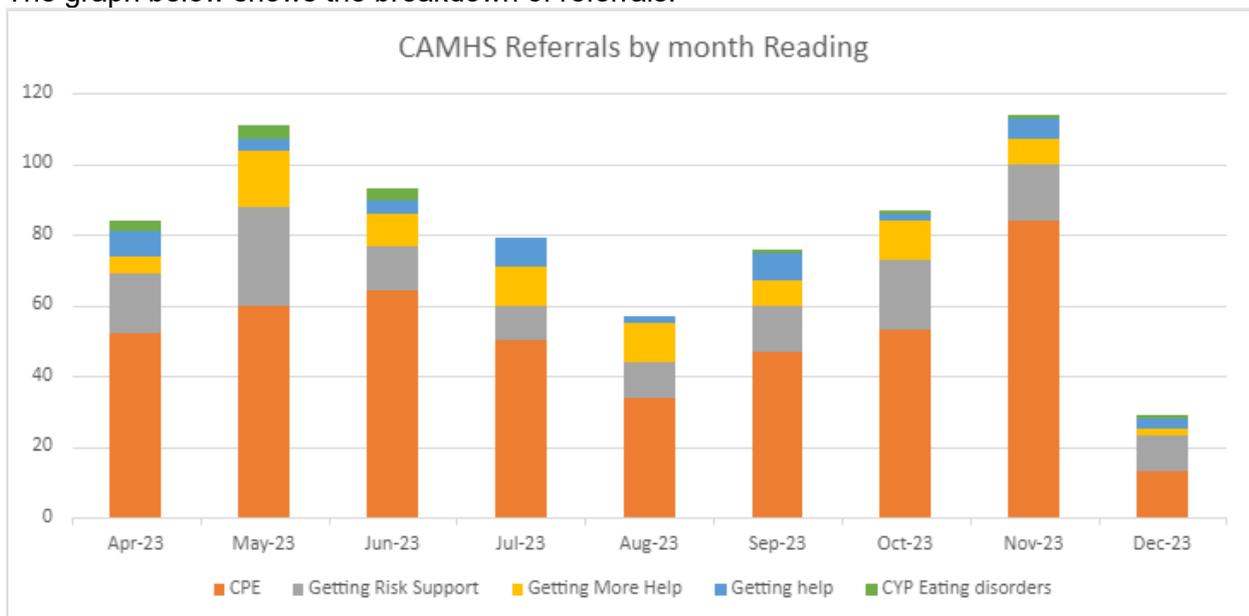
Capacity and Demand

The total number of referrals to the service from the Reading locality has increased by approximately 7% since 2019 (pre-pandemic). This is similar to the national picture and to other areas of Berkshire where we provide the same portfolio of services. .

Referrals



The graph below shows the breakdown of referrals.



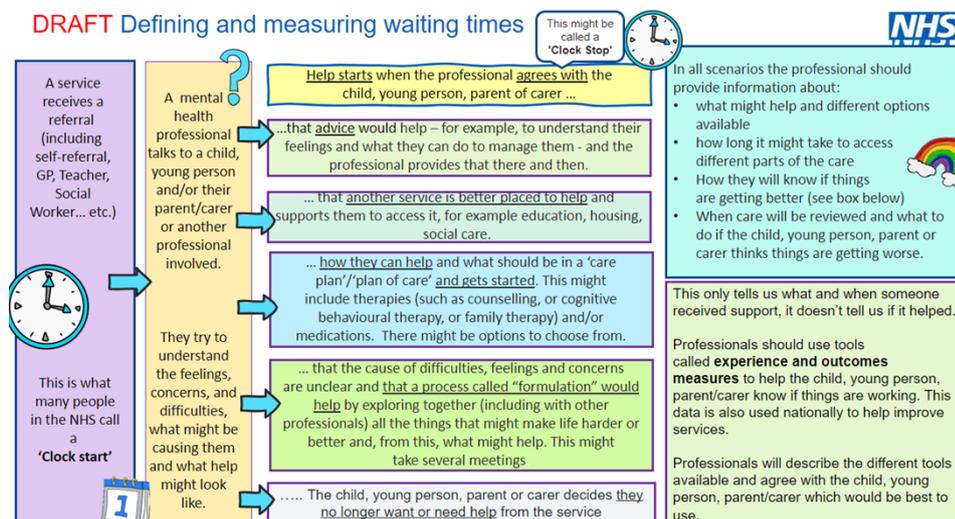
Approximately 12% of the service caseload are Reading children and young people. This appears low given the population however we provide schools based and primary mental health services in the 3 Berkshire East localities and primary mental health services in Wokingham so provide a wider range of services in those localities.

All CAMH services are delivered by multidisciplinary teams including child and adolescent psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, psychological therapists, family and systemic psychotherapists, nurses, allied health professionals including occupational therapists, dietitians and support workers

Waiting Times

There are currently no national access and waiting time standards for general CAMH services. Nationally, CAMH services have had long waiting times. Prior to the pandemic, NHSE had been undertaking a number of national pilots to determine how best to set and achieve such targets. Their first step has been to introduce national guidance to provide a standard definition of waiting. The guidance (given below) has been introduced this year.

NHSE Defining and measuring waiting times



Berkshire Healthcare CAMHS benchmark at the mean for waiting time to first and second appointment, which are used as proxy measures for assessment and treatment. In 2023 mean waiting times were 10 weeks and 21 weeks respectively for routine referrals.

However this hides significant variation in waiting times across services.

There are two areas of community service where there are national access and waiting time targets (NAWT). Those are children and young people’s eating disorders services (ED) and early intervention in psychosis (EIP) services.

For ED, NAWT are 7 days for urgent and 28 days for routine referrals and for EIP, 14 days.

Tracker 1 Metrics



Berkshire Healthcare
Children, Young People and
Families services

CYP referred for an assessment or treatment of an ED will access NICE treatment <1 week (urgents) %

Stop the Clock Activity By Month of Stop the Clock (STC) Activity Appointment Date		Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23
Urgency	Achieved / Breached												
Urgent (MH)	Achieved	62.5% 5	100.0% 6	66.7% 4	50.0% 2	42.9% 3	83.3% 5	75.0% 6	100.0% 5	75.0% 3	100.0% 3	100.0% 5	100.0% 7

CYP referred for an assessment or treatment of an ED will access NICE treatment <4 weeks (routine) %

Stop the Clock Activity By Month of Stop the Clock (STC) Activity Appointment Date		Dec 22	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23
Urgency	Achieved / Breached												
Routine (MH)	Achieved	71.4% 5	100.0% 4	78.6% 11	75.0% 3	83.3% 5	75.0% 9	85.7% 6	60.0% 6	100.0% 3	100.0% 5	100.0% 8	100.0% 8

EIP 2 week wait

Tracker is **green** for current reporting period No action required

True North Area	Driver	Target	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23	Jun-23	Jul-23	Aug-23	Sep-23	Oct-23	Nov-23
Patient experience	EIP 2 week wait	95.0%	100%					100%	100%		100%	100%		100%	100%	

Tracker is **green** for current reporting period No action required

Berkshire Healthcare services are meeting those targets. Monthly referrals to those services are small so data is county-wide.

Average waiting times to the locality based specialist community teams are longer and the focus of quality improvement work in those teams.

Driver Metrics



Berkshire Healthcare
Children, Young People and
Families services

Average time from referral to help (first appt) – Getting More Help Teams (Anxiety, SCTs)

Average Weeks between Original Referral Date to First Attended Appointment with the first attended appointment in the Month shown												
CurrTeam	Thresh.	Jan 23	Feb 23	Mar 23	Apr 23	May 23	Jun 23	Jul 23	Aug 23	Sept 23	Oct 23	Nov 23
Grand Total		15.4	13.5	11.7	12.8	11.6	14.1	12.7	10.6	14.3	13.2	9.5



To support planning for the development of national access and waiting time targets, NHS introduced a number of new metrics – the proportion of referrals waiting 4 weeks or less for first contact, the median time waited and the maximum time waited among the highest 10% of waiters, in the latter part of 2023/24. That data is given below for Berkshire.

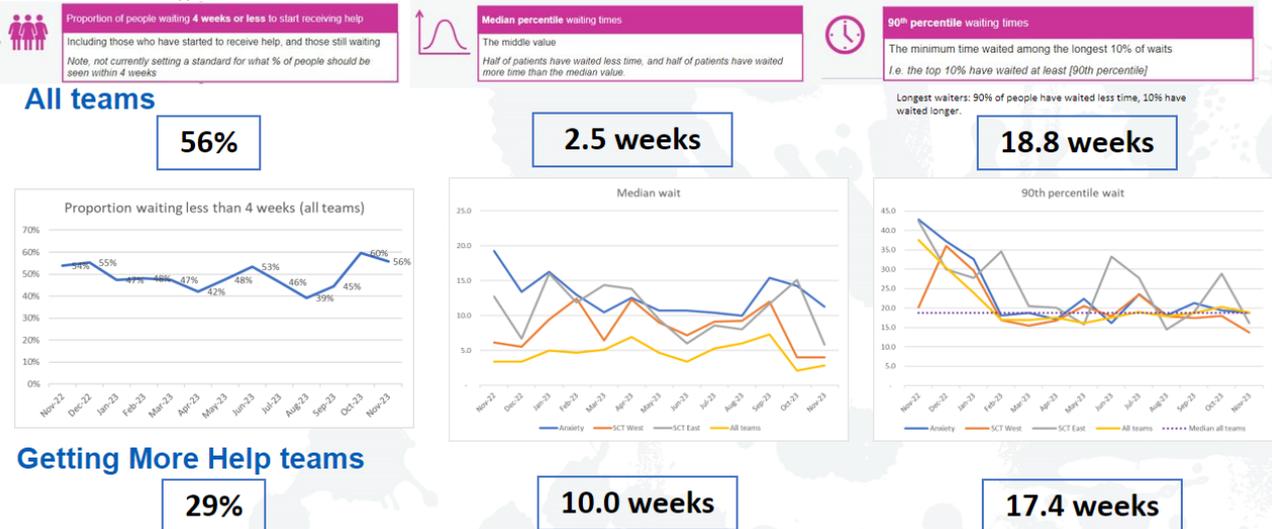
New NHSE waiting times metrics



Berkshire Healthcare
Children, Young People and
Families services

Proportion waiting 4 weeks or less, median wait, 90th percentile wait

Based on first attended appointments in November 23 Dash 5c



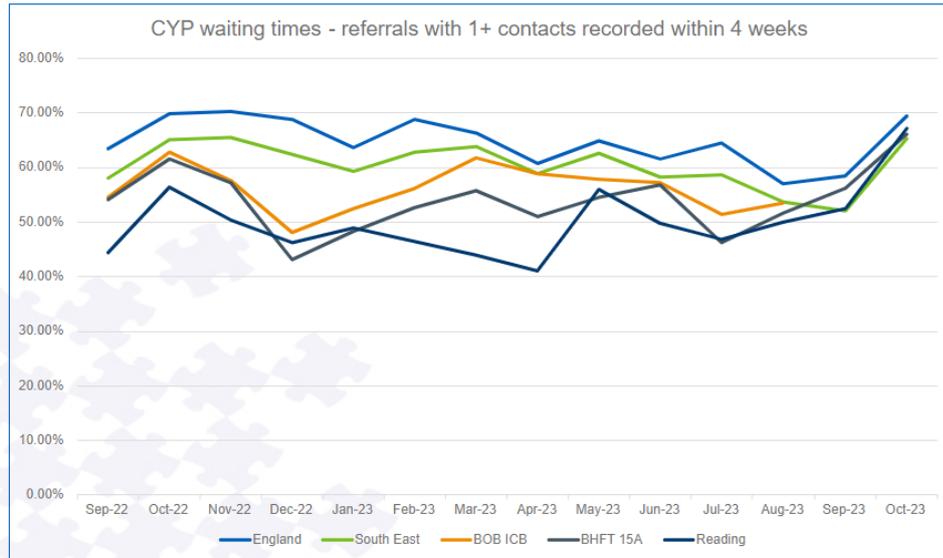
The graph below shows the latest data on proportion of CYP waiting for weeks or less published via the MHSDS. The graph shows data for all England, the South East Region, BOB ICB, Berkshire Healthcare and Reading specifically. We have been tracking slightly below the rest of the BOB and the South East region but are on an improvement trajectory, with rates exceeding partners since August 2023.

Latest data to end Oct-23

BOB ICB CAMHS Waiting Times

(excluding, Autistic spectrum disorder service, and Neurodevelopment service)

Source: [CYPMH Dashboard - Mental Health, Learning Disability and Autism Resource Hub - FutureNHS Collaboration Platform](#)



Improving Flow & Waiting Times

The Trust have been working to improve waiting times for CAMH services for many years. There is no single solution to this challenge, which was exacerbated by the increase in demand and acuity seen through the pandemic and is not unique to Berkshire.

There are a number of service transformation, service development and quality improvement projects underway that form a programme of work to address these issues and contribute to reduce waiting times.

- CAMHS Clinical Care Pathways Programme – implementation phase
- Workforce development. Service-wide Deep Dive with dedicated QI projects focused on specific areas (top contributors) to improve recruitment & retention to key clinical posts.
- Referrals: QI Project to improve referral management systems and improve data & efficiency through automation where possible.
- Data Quality Improvement & implementation of new NHSE waiting time definition, which includes guidance and SNOMED codes for direct and non-direct activity.
- Digital Projects including a pilot digital service offer initially for children and young people waiting for an intervention for anxiety or a mood disorder at Getting More Help level, alongside development of the online resource, RiO transformation work and other digital opportunities.
- QI work in specific teams aimed at increasing clinical activity, throughput and flow.
- Pilot projects with VCSE providers aimed at improving throughput and flow

Transformation/Improvement/Development



Weekly on Wednesdays for West SCT, focussing on implementing improvement opportunities suggested by staff and from feedback from YP and families

CAMHS Driver Metrics (improvement priorities)

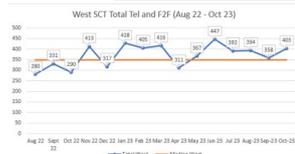
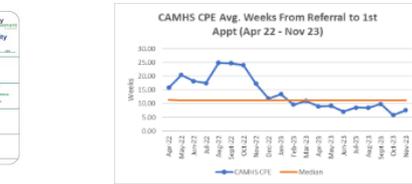
- Overall service:
 - To reduce waiting times to first appointment for Getting More Help Teams
 - To increase response numbers to our patient experience tool
- Team: CPE = Reducing waiting times
- Team: West SCT = increase clinical activity to increase caseload flow



- QI project on improving risk documentation in West SCT led by team psychiatrist
- Rapid Response staff retention project – improving staff joy
- Anxiety Team – reducing waiting times and improving access
 - ROMS
 - iWGC/ESQ
 - addressing inequalities

Other projects/developments

- CAMHS Clinical Care Pathways Implementation
- Digital CAMHS Project
- Pilot projects with VCSE providers
- Schools integration projects
- New service developments



In addition to the focus on quality improvement, the service are also active in research. The picture below gives a snapshot of the research we have been engaged in over the past 12 months.

Research



Study Name	Summary	Status
Interventions to Improve Patient Safety for CAMHS treated Adolescents	The study is looking to develop an app for mobile phones that adolescents could use if they were having thoughts of self-harm.	Feasibility – we are going through local processes to ensure we are able to support the study locally
Dissociative Experiences in Adolescents	This study aims to investigate the role of specific details of traumatic events in the subsequent development of posttraumatic dissociation.	In Set Up – we have gone through the feasibility process and we are now completing relevant checks before issuing confirmation to open the study
IVY	The overarching aim of this research is to establish the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of Intensive Community Care Services compared with Usual Inpatient Care, Treatment As Usual (TAU) in young people with severe psychiatric disorders	Open and recruiting patients
TOGETHER	The aim of the proposed study is to conduct a feasibility randomised controlled trial of the Groups 4 Health (G4H) intervention, delivered to young service-users who are currently experiencing mental health difficulties	Open and recruiting staff
iPOF	To develop a programme theory to understand the underlying mechanisms by which online mental health communities impact on people's mental health and wellbeing. To use this programme theory to develop best practice tools to improve uptake, safety and usefulness of online communities.	Open and recruiting staff and patients via the SHARON platform
STADIA	The aim is to evaluate the clinical and cost-effectiveness of the DAWBA SDA tool, as an adjunct to usual clinical care for CYP presenting with emotional difficulties referred to CAMHS.	In Follow Up – the research team are completing data collection for recruited participants

New Service Development

There have been a number of service developments in line with priorities mandated in the NHS Long Term plan and local priorities identified as part of the CYP MH local transformation programme.

CAMHS Crisis Service

The CAMHS Rapid Response service was formally implemented in 2017/18 following a successful pilot in Berkshire West using winter pressure funding. The service expanded to enable access via NHS111 in 2021/22, developed a crisis response intensive treatment function that went live in September 2022 and extended operating hours to 24/7 in 2023.

The service is now compliant with the NHS long term plan targets for CYP MH crisis services.

A deep dive audit into 200 cases undertaken earlier in 2023 identified the following:

47% of referrals to CAMHS RRT are from Berkshire West, with 38% from Berkshire East, 10% from Buckinghamshire who present to Wexham Park Hospital & the remainder are other OOA presenting to our local acute Trusts. This is no change from 2021.

- 75% of crisis presentations are the CYP first presentation to CAMH services
- 5% waiting mental health assessment
- 5% waiting mental health treatment
- 21% had a diagnosis or were waiting an autism assessment
- 16% had a diagnosis or were waiting an ADHD assessment
- 40% A&E presentations do not require emergency medical attention
- Issues related to school & relationships were the top contributors to crisis

Following crisis presentation, approx 35% are referred to Getting Help level CYP MH services at locality level, 10% for an ND assessment, 10% to CIC and 5% to a BHFT Getting More Help CAMHS team.

We are using this data collaboratively with partners to support work to improve understanding of crisis, self-harm and to improve prevention and early response, particularly in relation to children and young people with SEND.

CAMHS Children in Care Service

This new service formally launched across the 3 Berkshire West localities in 2023. The service is a Berkshire-west place-wide team, enabling the right mix of skilled clinicians however staff work as integrated members of the Children in Care team in each of the local authorities.

Interventions are based on the:

- Trauma recovery model
- Mentalisation based approaches
- Whole system approaches

CAMHS Learning Disability Team

This has been a longstanding gap in service provision, identified as a priority in the Berkshire West local transformation plan process. A dedicated new service has now been commissioned and goes live in January 2024. The small team will work to deliver improved outcomes for CYP (and their families) with a moderate/severe learning disability and a mental health condition.

While not a CAMH service, Berkshire Healthcare are the providers of the Dynamic Support Register and Keyworking service for Berkshire West. This is a national initiative to improve support for children and young people with a learning disability and/or autism, who are at risk of admission to a mental health unit/hospital. The team support and guide children, young people and their families through the health, education and social care system. The new CAMHS LD service will work closely with this team, which will be extending the age range up to 25, and is co-located with the adult LD service to enable development of streamlined pathways of care.

Thames Valley Link Programme

The Thames Valley Link Programme is a vanguard pilot, implementing a new programme of support for children and young people aged 0-18 years who meet the broad complex needs criteria outlined in the 'Framework for Integrated Care,' namely their difficulties are:

- Multiple (i.e. not just in one domain, such as mental and physical health)
- Persistent (i.e. long term rather than transient, including learning disability, autism or both)
- Severe (i.e. not responding to standard 'clinical' interventions)
- Framed by family and social contexts (such as: early family disruption, loss, inequality, prevalence of Adverse Childhood Experiences)
- Where there are significant concerns about ongoing emotional, mental health or neurodevelopmental difficulties which cannot/are not being addressed by existing provision – not meeting 'threshold' for such provision but risks are present

These young people often present with challenging and high-risk behaviour, poor mental wellbeing, inability to regulate emotions etc. but don't meet diagnostic criteria for mental illness/they aren't ready/able to undertake therapy

In addition there may be:

- Lack of a clear formulation of the young person's situation, needs and difficulties
- Systemic blockage or failure of a plan to progress because of cross-agency disagreement.

The programme has national funding via NHSE Health & Justice until 2027/28 and is delivered via a hub and spoke model, with the hub led by Oxford Health, and in partnership with a VCSE provider (RAW). The Berkshire Link team (spoke) will go live in January 2024

Using the complex need definition of the framework, there were four overlapping groups of children and young people identified in the Thames Valley:

1. Those with challenging behaviours/presentations who may be '**bounced around between health, social care and other agencies**', because their presentations don't 'fit' existing services or because their presentation changes;
2. Those with whom services **cannot/find it difficult to engage** or those who cannot maintain progress within existing services and who cannot be referred further on to other services;
3. Those **known to social care, police and other agencies**, for whom there is lack of security of family/ safe home and who are more vulnerable to exploitation; and
4. Those **who are out of school** (whether elective by parents/family, whether emotional-school avoidance, whether at risk of being or having been permanently excluded).

The service will work through offering:

- Initial consultation – signposting/advice as required
- Ongoing therapeutic consultation to the system around a young person
- Direct assessment and short-term specialist interventions where necessary
- Youth work & psychosocial support via VCSE partners.

Interventions are based on the:

- Trauma recovery model
- Mentalisation based approaches
- Whole system approaches
- Training to teams

Referrals will be through a request for consultation initially, similar to the model employed for the Children in Care, Health & Justice & Forensic CAMHS services.

CYP MH in Primary Care

Currently c. 35% of CAMHS referrals come from Primary Care. Demand through this route is continuing to increase however our data shows that around two thirds of referrals through this route are for children and young people whose needs would be better met by other, locality-based advice, support and getting help services including schools-based mental health support teams, primary CAMH services and neurodiversity support services. CAMHS CPE provide advice, signposting and where possible, support families to access the right service following assessment but there is a delay to the young person receiving help that would have been avoided.

With the expansion of the additional roles reimbursement scheme in primary care to include CYP MH roles, we are piloting new roles in primary care, including one pilot in Reading, with the University Medical Centre Primary Care Network.

A specialist CYP MH practitioner based in the medical centre will provide triage, assessment and mental health advice to children and young people presenting for help to the GP surgeries in the University Medical Centre PCN. They will be able to then refer young people to the most appropriate service to meet their needs, whether that is a Berkshire Healthcare service or an alternative service.

We anticipate that the benefits from these pilots will be:

- Reduced inappropriate referrals to CAMHS CPE from piloted PCNS
- Increased referrals to appropriate Early help services or self-management
- Quicker access to help and support for CYP and families
- Reduced demand on GP's, enabling them to focus on other clinical work

In Reading, the CYP MH worker will be linked closely with colleagues in the Schools Mental Health Support Teams and the Primary CAMHS service in Brighter Futures for Children. We are undertaking other pilots in the East of Berkshire where we provide the MHST and Primary CAMH services and will use the learning from both pilots to inform the model moving forwards.

Evidence of Impact

The service uses a wide range of measures covering symptoms, functioning, bespoke goals, and service/session feedback, collecting information from different perspectives, i.e. children and their parents or carers.

Improving outcome measures recording and positive experience of care are Driver Metrics for the service.

Outcome measures are included within all clinical pathways and have been built into the RiO electronic record system to enable data to flow to the MHSDS.

National CQUIN for services to achieve 10-40% paired ROMS based on all cases open to the service and/or discharged from the service with a minimum of 2 contacts.

Internal Service Target – 20% Achieved in Feb 2023. Current month 36%

We are also members of the Child Outcomes Research Consortium which enables us to benchmark against other NHS mental health providers. Our last report indicated measureable improvement through the use of GBO, CORS, RCADS in line with the rest of CORC

Experience of Service we use the Experience of Service Questionnaire (ESQ) at the end of an intervention and the Trust have introduced a new tool I Want Great Care, which is offered routinely and available to young people, parents and carers at any point in their treatment journey.

ESQ – used at the end of an episode of care. Data flows to CORC so enables national comparison. Links to NHSE definitions of Waiting time for help’
 iWGC – feedback can be given at any point in a YP’s journey, provides immediate information, enables Trust service comparison.

Service user feedback via these tools and also through compliments, complaints and any incidents, is monitored via the service leadership team through our Patient, Safety and Quality meetings. All teams have monthly data on service user feedback. Any compliments are celebrated at team Quality Improvement huddles. Any concerns are taken to the huddle as opportunities for improvement (tickets).

Neurodiversity Services – Mary Jane Stroud

Context

Referrals for autism and ADHD services have long outstripped the service capacity and this has resulted in large numbers waiting and long waits. This is a national picture with services across the country facing similar pressures.

There continues to be a high and growing demand for our service, with a huge increase in the numbers of referrals for autism and ADHD assessment year on year. This has combined with additional pressures from Covid-19 and the national shortage of qualified staff. Services are also experiencing more complex presentations for both adults and children/young people. In addition the ADHD service is a ‘balloon service’ as the number of referrals outweighs the number appropriate to discharge and the team caseload continues to grow. The recent global shortage of ADHD medication has also placed additional pressures on the services. The service understands how difficult waits can be for adults, children, young people and their families and reducing the waiting time remains a top priority.

Current position

Adult – Berkshire wide	Autism	ADHD
Number waiting	1203	2083*
Average wait in weeks for those waiting	81	68
Average wait in weeks for those who attended appts in December 23	154	72
% waiting more than 2 years	29%	15%**

**this refers to waits for all types of appts, i.e. assessment. medication initiation, medication review*

***this refers specifically to those waiting for ADHD assessment*

Referral patterns generally show a 60% West and 40% East pattern. Assessments completed this financial year indicated that 48% waited up to 2 years and 52% waited 3-4+ years.

Children and Young People – Berkshire wide (Reading in brackets)	Autism	ADHD
Number waiting	4261 (902)	3940 (683)
Average wait in weeks for those waiting	56 (59)	56 (56)
Average wait in weeks for those who attended appts in December 23	92 (97)	94 (107)
% waiting more than 2 years	2% (2%)	10% (8%)

In Reading, West Berkshire and Wokingham, autism referrals are higher as the service also hosts the Under 5 autism assessment service (this is not the case in East Berkshire). ADHD referrals for Reading also tend to be higher and we currently have less psychiatry time for complex assessments.

Wait times for those who attend appointments in the month will go up and down depending on how many of those booked in that month are long waiters and how many have been prioritised (meaning a shorter wait).

Actions and support available

Across the services

Services offer a holistic assessment, which includes consideration of differential and/or co-occurring conditions. Assessment report focuses on support (regardless of a diagnosis is made) with recommendations for identified challenges and needs along with any signposting, resources or onward referral required. Assessment includes psychoeducation component where diagnosis is made.

- At referral and if concerns increase, we consider whether prioritisation is appropriate. For example in the CYP service automatic prioritisation includes children/young people who are in care, on a child protection plan, involved in Criminal Justice System, unable to access education/when educational placement requires formal diagnosis or present with high levels of risk that an assessment may help to reduce.
- An ongoing programme of quality improvement service transformation is underway. One of the priority areas is to identify any further opportunities to create additional efficiencies, release capacity and to improve experience, including using digital solutions and automation of some tasks.

Children and Young People's Autism and ADHD

- **Increasing capacity:** Despite the national shortage of qualified staff, the service has been able to recruit to a number of new posts. We have also offered a number of weekend clinics. The service is also working in partnership with external providers in order to increase the number of appointments we can offer and reduce the wait. As a result, we have seen the number of appointments the service can offer significantly increase. However, referrals have also increased.
- **Quality Improvement and continuous improvement:** Current projects include improvements to the referral process, reducing DNAs, concluding assessments in as few appointments as possible, ongoing review of processes to identify and implement ways to further increase productivity (while providing good clinical quality and family experience, automating tasks to release more clinical and administrative capacity; ongoing review of skill mix required for tasks to reduce the impact of the national shortage of qualified professionals.
- **Early needs led support:** In terms of the support on offer to the family, we are fortunate that in Berkshire much of the same support and advice that is available after a diagnosis is also available before an assessment. (Please see appendix for further information) This includes services commissioned by the NHS and delivered in partnership with local charities, with an emphasis on support being needs-led rather than diagnosis dependent. In the west of Berkshire, the NHS commissioned autism and ADHD support service is delivered by Autism Berkshire and Parenting Special Children and provides a wide range of support including advice, workshops and courses which are all available to families at any point. Further information is available on their website: <https://www.autismberkshire.org.uk/berkshire-west-autism-adhd-support-service/> We also emphasise the need for system partners to provide support as early as possible as the young person's needs will be the same the day after an assessment as the day before. This includes free [PPEPcare](#) training to empower settings to understand and meet needs. [Neurodiversity newsletters](#) provide updates to families and other stakeholders.
- **Collaboration and shared learning:** The service has also been collaborating with other service providers across the region to share learning and innovation to respond to the

challenges that are being faced by all services. This includes the role of Artificial Intelligence in supporting assessments and a pilot of Spencer3D in schools (digital tool to profile and support identified needs in school settings).

Adult autism and ADHD service

- **Referral and triage process:** The Adult ADHD and Autism triage process ensures that clients referred to the service are provided with avenues for support (Autism Berkshire, and signposting for ADHD strategies/support) as well as links to support with mental health to all clients referred to the service.
- **Reducing wait for annual ADHD medication review:** additional short term funding has been provided to reduce the wait for an annual medication review.
- **Autism assessment process:** A pilot is underway to reduce the time required to reach diagnostic decision by enhanced information gathering prior to assessment.
- **ADHD post diagnostic Support Options:** The Adult ADHD service has increased patient choice in considering treatment options post diagnosis with enhanced guidance and support to clients to choose behavioural, psychological and environmental strategies. This includes a range of [online support guides](#) (including education, work, sleep, managing mood, relationships etc) and on demand webinar. All of these resources are available at any point (including prior to assessment or without a referral).
- **Quality improvement projects:** current projects include updating dashboards and improving the transition for CYP (to reduce waits to be seen after transfer to the adult service and improve support and experience)

Appendix

CYP: Support available at any point

Care of people waiting (needs-led support/early help)

There is a wide range of support available, and we work hard to make sure families know how to access this. There is a **strong focus on needs led (rather than diagnosis dependent) support** for families wherever they are on their journey and much of the same support available after an autism or ADHD diagnosis is also available before an assessment. We provide information on our website and at the point of referral so we can connect families to services that will help. At triage (and again if families/professional contact us with concerns while waiting), we look at what else might be needed as well as an autism/ADHD assessment. Children are often known to and supported by other services according to their presenting needs. Anyone can contact the service and share new/increasing concerns and we will respond to these. We let families know this at the point of referral. Should additional needs be identified at referral or while waiting there is a range of support available from Berkshire Healthcare and across the system.

Support available from the Neurodiversity Service:

- **SHaRON (Support, Hope and Resources Online) digital support network** - parents and carers have access from the point of referral to an online support network moderated by AAT/ADHD clinicians and autism and ADHD professionals across Berkshire. This connects individual to each other as well as to the service, offering peer to peer support as well as prompt access to professionals and a comprehensive library of self-help resources. Available 24/7 365 days a year

I would like to say that SHaRON Jupiter has been a life saver to me over the last couple of weeks. (Parent)

Everyone on here is so supportive. I don't know where I'd be if it wasn't for the amazing people on this site

- **A Qualified Children's Wellbeing Practitioner (CWP) and trainee CWPs** provide brief evidence-based interventions (for anxiety, low mood and emotional dysregulation) for children, young people and their parents (available according to need pre or post assessment).
- **Helpline/Care of People Waiting service:** Should there be new/increasing concerns after referral then families, referrers or other professional can contact the service. Helpline/COPW clinician will provide advice, support, signpost, make onward referrals and consider if the assessment now needs to be prioritised.
- **Referral packs give information** on all sources of family support to ensure families access this as soon as possible. This includes information on **ICB commissioned support service for autism/ADHD** (which is available at any stage pre and post assessment) [East](#) and [WEST](#)
They also provide access to our [Comprehensive online resource](#) with help and advice on a wide range of developmental, emotional/mental health etc concerns as well as our [autism and ADHD advice and guidance](#)
- Referral pack also contains **a letter for school to emphasise the need for needs-led support.**

Support within the wider children and young people's services

- Support is provided according to presenting need by: Children and Young People's Integrated Therapies (CYPIT), CAMHS (including Mental Health Support and Getting Help Teams), Health Visiting and School Nursing
- For more urgent mental health needs, families can access support as needed from Specialist CAMHS Duty Worker, CAMHS NHS 111 and the Rapid Response Team (who can usually provide a same day response to a mental health crisis).



What support is available now?

There is often a misunderstanding that a diagnosis is needed to access help for autism or ADHD. This is not the case.

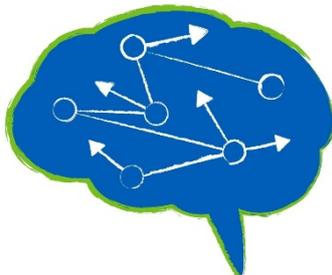
It is very important that support is provided based on the child or young person's needs and that everyone understands that it is not necessary to wait for an autism/ADHD assessment to take place first. A child's needs will be the same on the day after the assessment as they were the day before the assessment.

When a diagnosis is not made, it is also very likely there will still be needs which require support. Fortunately, much of the same support available after diagnosis is also available to families at any point.

Download the PDFs below to find out about all the support, which is available before, during and after an assessment:

- [ADHD](#) (opens PDF)
- [Autism](#) (opens PDF)

Local support



Before, during or after an assessment, families can access support from their locally commissioned NHS service which supports families who have a child with autism and/or ADHD or who are waiting for either/both assessments. The services provide a range of support including workshops to support with anger, emotional regulation and sleep difficulties.

No referral is needed.

- Visit [Autism Berkshire](#) if you live or have a GP in Berkshire west (Newbury, Reading or Wokingham)

Berkshire WEST System offer includes:



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Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

17 January 2024

Title	Annual Complaints and Compliments Report 2022/23 for Adult Social Care
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Nayana George
Lead Councillor	Councillor Gittings, Lead Councillor for Adult Social Care
Corporate priority	Healthy Environment
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the contents of the report be noted. 2. That the action taken in response to learning from complaints, as described in the summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23, attached at Appendix A to the report, be noted.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Adult Social Care recognises that there will be occasions when complaints are made. This report tells you how many complaints were received in 2022/23 and were dealt with using either the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure or the Statutory Complaints Procedure for Adult Social Care. It also summarises the main types of complaints we have received and provides some examples where we have improved as a result of learning from these complaints.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009 require that Local Authorities operate a complaints procedure. In September 2009, the [Department of Health](#) introduced a [complaint procedure](#) to cover both adult social care and health services. This meant a 3 stage complaints procedure became a 1 stage complaints procedure. Following investigation of the complaint by the Council, if the complainant is not satisfied with the outcome the complainant is advised to contact the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager, to share their concerns with a view to possibly reviewing them with a senior manager or proceed to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.
- 2.2. Complaints relating to Adult Social Care that fall outside of the scope of the statutory process are investigated in accordance with the Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure. Reading Borough Council's Corporate Complaints Procedure gives an opportunity for those who are not 'qualifying individuals' under the social services legislation, to still be able to complain about Adult Social Care.
- 2.3. Qualifying individuals are defined in national guidance as the Service User or their appointed representative which can be a family member, friend, or Advocate. The timescale for responding to complaints is between 15 working days and three months, depending on the seriousness and complexity of the complaint. The guidance provides a risk matrix to assist the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager, who is the designated Complaints Manager for the Council, to assess the complaint.

- 2.4. Compliments can be an indicator of when the Council has performed well and can highlight the positive outcomes for the public who are in contact with us or that we provide a service to.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of complaints and compliments activity and performance for Adult Social Care for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.
- 3.2. During this period the service received 89 statutory complaints, which is a 4.3% decrease over the 93 received in 2021/22, and 10 corporate complaints, which is a significant decrease of 50% over the 20 received in 2021/22. We also received one request for a corporate Stage 2 investigation during this period.
- 3.3. The main themes for the period 2022/23 for both corporate and statutory complaints are:
- Quality of Service Provided = 43 (43.4%)
 - Staff Conduct = 15 (15.2%)
 - Communication = 13 (13.1%)
- 3.4. A summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23 is at Appendix A. This will also be made publicly available through the Council's website from 23 October 2023.
- 3.5. The Appendix highlights some examples of learning from complaints in the past year along with key service improvements as a result of the complaints received, which the Committee is invited to note.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Complaints Service provided by the Customer Relations Team contributes to the Service's aims to enhance emotional wellbeing and deliver outstanding services for service users who may be dissatisfied with the Adult Social Care service and those needing protection through Adult Safeguarding. It does this by providing an impartial and supportive service to service users and their families who wish to complain or raise a concern and ensuring that there is learning from complaints.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There are no environmental and/or climate implications arising from this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Information about the complaints or compliments process is provided verbally to service users via the Social Care Teams as well as the Customer Relations Team. Leaflets on the procedures are also widely distributed by the Social Care Teams and available in a variety of formats and languages on request.
- 6.2. Service Users and their carers are reminded of their right to complain or make a compliment and a leaflet is given out when the social care worker first meets with them. Service users and/or their representative can also register a complaint via the web, email direct to the Customer Relations Team, in person, by phone, in writing or via an advocate.
- 6.3. Translation services are provided for complainants whose first language is not English and advocacy support is available for service users who wish to make a complaint.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager will ensure that the statutory complaints/compliments process is accessible to all customers regardless of their race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

- 7.2. The statutory complaints process is designed to ensure that any concern or issue faced by the service user, or their representative is addressed in a timely and impartial manner.
- 7.3. Due to the safeguards in process outlined above, there is no requirement to complete an Equality Impact Assessment in relation to this report.

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. There are none.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. The Statutory foundations for the Adult Social Care Services Complaints Procedures are The Local Authority Social Services Act (1970), The Human Rights Act (1998), Statutory Instruments 2009 No.309 National Health Service, England Social Care, England, the Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaints (England) Regulations 2009.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. There are no Capital or Revenue implications arising from this report. The Council's Customer Relations Team provides value for money in effectively discharging the complaints process for the Council by attempting informal resolution of complaints. There are no specific financial risks arising from this report

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. Not applicable.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendix A

1. A summary of Adult Social Care Complaints and Compliments 2022/23

ADULT SOCIAL CARE COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS 2022/23 SUMMARY REPORT

Introduction

This is a summary report of the data for complaints/compliments received by Adult Social Care for the financial year 2022/23.

The Council welcomes feedback through the complaints/compliments process which, as well as providing the opportunity to identify where services have not been provided as they should be, it also provides customer insight and helps identify any deficiency in practice, policies, and procedures. It is from these that the Service and those who work in it can continue to learn and improve practice and service delivery.

Statutory Complaints Procedure

General complaints about Adult Social Care received from service users or their approved representatives (Family Member, Advocate or Power of Attorney) are dealt with through the statutory procedure. This will be one investigation by a senior officer in the relevant service area (Team Manager) and then signed off by either a Service Manager or Assistant Director.

At the Complainant's, or their representative's, request, an external, independent investigator can be appointed to investigate if the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager deems the complaints to be at medium or high risk. The following Risk Matrix is used to assess the complaint.

Risk Matrix

The matrix below is used by the Customer Relations & Information Governance Manager in confirming the level of risk once an expression of concern has been considered within the formal complaints procedure.

		LIKELIHOOD OF RECURRENCE				
		Rare	Unlikely	Possible	Likely	Almost certain
SERIOUSNESS	Low	Low	Low	Low	Moderate	Moderate
		Low	Moderate	Moderate	High	High
	Moderate	Low	Moderate	High	High	Extreme
		Moderate	Moderate	High	High	Extreme
	High	Moderate	High	High	Extreme	Extreme
		Moderate	High	Extreme	Extreme	Extreme

Time Limits

Level of Risk	Maximum Time Limit for Completion
Immediate resolution	1 working day – confirm outcome
All accepted as formal complaints	Acknowledge within 3 working days
Low	15 working days
Moderate	25 working days
High	65 working days
Extreme	Up to 6 months

If the complainant feels that the issues they have raised remain unresolved, they have the right to request a meeting with the Service Manager/Assistant Director and the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager or refer their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

The Statutory Complaints process encourages the complainant and the Local Authority to consider resolving a complaint or concern informally through a face to face meeting or telephone discussion. It is the complainant's right to request the presence of the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager at any face-to-face meeting.

Some complaints may require immediate action including whether the matter should be considered as a safeguarding issue. If it is a safeguarding issue, the relevant procedures would take precedence over the complaints procedure.

Corporate Complaints Procedure

The Corporate Complaints Procedure deals with complaints which do not meet the criteria for investigation through the Statutory Procedure (for example the complaint is made by a Provider or a family member who does not have consent from the service user to make the complaint) and is a 2-stage process. The first stage provides an opportunity for a local resolution of any problems which may arise, and it is expected that the majority of complaints will be resolved at this level, usually within 20 working days or less. Where the problems cannot be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction at a local level, Stage 2 of the process involves the investigation of the complaint by a more senior member of staff, usually within 30 working days or less and with a formal sign off by an Assistant Director.

Where the complainant feels that the issues they have raised remain unresolved, they have the right to refer their complaint to the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman.

Summary of Compliments and Complaints Activity, Quality Assurance & Learning

This report details information for the past year together with analysis of the data, quality assurance and information on service developments as a result of learning from complaints. Under the current monitoring system, information about complaints received directly by teams is reported to the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager upon receipt. This is to ensure that the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager is aware of all current complaints in order to monitor their progress and highlight cases that can be resolved through Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) to Team Managers and senior staff.

Part 1 - Corporate Complaints

Please Note: The following tables include information for those complaints received and investigated at Stages 0 and 1 only, as complaints which go on to Stage 2 would count as being a duplicate complaint received for reporting purposes.

For information, the service received one request for a complaint to be investigated further at Stage 2 during this reporting period.

Corporate Complaints Received

Total Number of Corporate Complaints Received	Total No. Received	Stage 0	Stage 1
2017/18	7	3	4
2018/19	9	1	8
2019/20	13	3	10
2020/21	17 (+30.8%)	2	15
2021/22	20 (+17.6%)	6	14
2022/23	10 (-50%)	2	8

Spread of Complaints Received across Teams

Team	2022/23	% of Total No. Received	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
CMHT	1	10%	2	10%
Commissioning	3	30%	2	10%
Deputy's Office	1	10%	0	0
FAB Team	0	0	1	5%
Finance	0	0	1	5%
Localities Team	3	30%	3	15%
PBST	0	0	3	15%
Public Health	1	10%	0	0
Safeguarding	0	0	5	25%
Short-Term Team	0	0	3	15%
Wellbeing	1	10%	0	0
Total	10	100%	20	100%

Themes of Complaints Received

Theme	2022/23	% of Total No. Received	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
Communication	1	10%	1	5%
Financial Issue	0	0	7	35%
Lack of Support	0	0	2	10%
Policy Issue/Procedure	3	30%	4	20%
Quality of Service Provided	3	30%	3	15%
Staff Conduct	3	30%	3	15%

Total	10	100%	20	100%
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How Complaint was Received

Method	2022/23	% of Total No. Received	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
E-mail	3	30%	8	40%
Letter	2	20%	2	10%
Telephone	2	20%	8	40%
Webform	3	30%	2	10%
Total	10	100%	20	100%

Corporate Complaints Responded To

Outcomes for Complaints Investigated Formally to an Outcome

Outcome	2022/23	% of Total Responded To	2021/22	% of Total Responded To
Upheld	1	10%	5	27.8%
Partially Upheld	0	0	5	27.8%
Not Upheld	6	60%	8	44.4%
No Outcome	2	20%	0	0
Multiple Outcomes	1	10%	0	0
Total No. Sent Out	10	100%	18	100%

Timescales for Complaints Investigated Formally to an Outcome

	2022/23	% of Total No. Responded To	2021/22	% of Total No. Responded To
Total No. Sent Out In Timescale	7	70%	12	66.7%
Total No. Sent Out Over Timescale	3	30%	6	33.3%

Part 2 - Statutory Complaints

Statutory Complaints Received

Total Number of Statutory Complaints Received

	Total No. Received	% Change over previous year	Stage 0	% Of total received	Stage 1	% Of total received
2017/18	79	+27.4%	22	27.8%	57	72.2%
2018/19	72	-8.9%	21	29.2%	51	70.8%
2019/20	84	+16.7%	30	35.7%	54	64.3%
2020/21	71	-15.5%	33	46.5%	38	53.5%

2021/22	93	+31%	50	53.8%	43	46.2%
2022/23	89	- 4.3%	58	65.2%	31	34.8%

Total Number of Statutory Complaints Received, Split by Teams

Team	2022/23	% of Total No. Received	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
Advice & Wellbeing Hub	2	2.2%	4	4.3%
Community Mental Health	1	1.1%	7	7.5%
*Commissioning	13	14.7%	7	7.5%
Community Reablement	1	1.1%	0	0
Deputy's Office	0	0	2	2.2%
Discharge to Assess Team	3	3.4%	0	0
DoLS	1	1.1%	0	0
Finance	1	1.1%	1	1.1%
Financial Assessments & Benefits	0	0	1	1.1%
Independent Living	1	1.1%	0	0
Localities	27	30.4%	44	47.2%
Long-Term Team	2	2.2%	1	1.1%
Mental Health Team	12	13.6%	0	0
Occupational Therapists	0	0	1	1.1%
Personal Budget Support	8	9.0%	6	6.4%
Preparation for Adulthood Team	8	9.0%	0	0
Primary Care Network	1	1.1%	0	0
Public Health	0	0	1	1.1%
Review Team	3	3.4%	0	0
Safeguarding Adults	2	2.2%	2	2.2%
Shared Lives Team	1	1.1%	0	0
Short-Term Team	2	2.2%	16	17.2%
Total	89	100%	93	100%

Note: The Commissioning Team investigate complaints and concerns about Providers. The 13 complaints referenced above are complaints raised and investigated about service Providers.

Total Number of Statutory Complaints Received, Split by Theme

Theme	2022/23	% of Total No. Received	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
Communication	12	13.5%	19	20.4%
Data Breach	1	1.1%	0	0

Financial Issue	10	11.2%	7	7.5%
Lack of Support	7	7.9%	5	5.4%
Policy Issue/Procedure	7	7.9%	6	6.5%
Quality of Service Provided	40	44.9%	49	52.7%
Staff Conduct	12	13.5%	7	7.5%
Total	89	100%	93	100%

How the Complaints were Received

Method	2022/23	% of Total No. Received.	2021/22	% of Total No. Received
E-mail	48	53.9%	48	51.6%
Letter	9	10.1%	9	9.7%
Telephone	20	22.5%	24	25.8%
Webform	12	13.5%	12	12.9%
Total	89	100%	93	100%

Statutory Complaints Responded To

Outcomes of Statutory Complaints Investigated Formally to an Outcome

Outcome	2022/23	% of Total No. Responded To	2021/22	% of Total No. Responded To
Upheld	28	31.8%	12	27.9%
Partially Upheld	9	10.2%	9	20.9%
Not Upheld	31	35.2%	10	23.3%
No Outcome	4	4.5%	1	2.3%
Multiple Outcomes	16	18.3%	11	25.6%
Total	88	100%	43	100%

Note: One of the 89 complaints received was withdrawn by the complainant, 88 were investigated.

Timescales for Responding to Statutory Complaints

	2022/23	% of Total No. Responded To	2021/22	% of Total No. Responded To
Total No. Responded to in Timescale	62	70.5%	24	55.8%
Total No. Responded to Over Timescale	26	29.5%	19	44.2%

Note: The statutory complaints above, we worked to an initial 15 working day response date extending to no more than 25 working days.

Learning & Service Improvements following Complaints received

Complaints and concerns provide essential and valuable feedback from our service users and customers. Listening to customers and reflecting on examples of where we have not got it right can reveal or highlight opportunities for improvement (for example, a deficiency in practice, communication or service delivery). Even if a complaint is not upheld, lessons can be learnt from that complaint with service developments and improvements as a result. The complaints process and the feedback gained is an integral part of the quality assurance process, which feeds into the development and monitoring of services. Learning from complaints are reviewed by the Adult Social Care Care & Quality Board to ensure lessons have been understood and are embedded into practice. Below are some examples of learning from complaints in the past year along with key service improvements as a result of the complaints received.

Examples of complaints and learning:

Complaint 1:

Unhappy with the support provided by the Locum Social Worker in the Discharge to Assess Hospital Team, who contacted you to advise the Care Centre could not meet her father's care needs due to his behaviour. She was not offered any help to find another care home placement for her father or kept up to date with his situation at Care Centre – Complaint upheld

Learning 1:

All workers will be reminded to inform family members of the decision-making process and legislation we have to adhere to when working with individuals who appear to lack mental capacity.

Workers to be reminded to complete a formal mental capacity assessment when there are any changes to an individual's day to day life when they lack mental capacity. In this case when the father was moved to the Care Centre and at the four-week placement review.

All workers to be reminded to record all discussions with line managers on the social care electronic record so there is a clear audit of decision making.

All workers to be reminded to keep in contact/communicate with family members until a placement has been made permanent and/or is stable.

Complaint 2:

Have received the financial assessment outcome letters from the Financial Assessment & Benefits Team, which have confirmed her mother's maximum weekly charge for her non-residential care & support package that she is receiving.

The Social Worker allocated to the case in March 2021 informed the complainant that there would be no charges until the Financial Assessment & Benefits Team had contacted her to obtain the necessary information for the assessment, however this was not the case and the complainant had to query this with the Financial Assessment & Benefits Team. – Complaint Upheld.

Learning 2:

The Council will now be seeking to urgently introduce an Errors and Omissions report so we can compare data across the two systems used in this process. This will avoid the possibility of a similar occurrence in the future.

Complaint 3:

Attitudes of both staff members involved within the formal complaint about an external provider; The timings of visits and staff logging off at differing times when both have left at the same time; Tasks stipulated in the care plan not being completed by both members of staff involved in the complaint; and the general lack of respect towards the Service User and family during the visits causing upset and distress – Complaint Upheld.

Learning 3:

Members of staff are to engage in further training to increase their knowledge and skills regarding dispute resolution and how approaches can have an impact on others. Medication and manual handling techniques to be reviewed and staff to be observed. Service to conduct an audit of calls made across the service to ensure compliance. Ongoing process to be established by the service. Earlier intervention by the management team to prevent escalation and focus on resolution where conflict arises.

Service Improvements – in 2022/23:

- ASC have implemented the Quality Improvement Team which works with Providers in Reading to improve the quality of care provided by them
- ASC have undertaken 1553 reviews between April 2022 and March 2023 which is an increase on the previous year
- ASC have invested in the Carers Partnership delivered by Voluntary Sector Providers to ensure Carers have easy access Carers assessment and increase the number of assessments and Carers Personal Budgets offered.
- ASC have developed a customer survey to measure satisfaction and are gathering monthly data to identify areas for improvement
- All managers continue to be trained in investigating and responding to complaints. In addition, the service is looking to commission training for all staff on customer care and what good customer care looks like.
- The ASC Care and Quality Board continue to review all elements of care quality in the service, review lessons learnt from complaints, and implement any agreed service improvements.
- ASC have improved workflows on the Mosaic system to ensure providers are paid in a timely manner

Quality Assurance

The Customer Relations Team carries out checks of all complaint responses to ensure the quality of the response and that the language and terminology used is made easy for the complainant to understand, particularly if the complainant has a disability. We have on occasion asked the investigating officer to translate reports and responses into Easyread.

Statistics indicate 100% of responses were checked by the Customer Relations Team before being sent out. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager and the Team are also available to the complainant and the investigator for advice on best practice during the complaint investigation but remain impartial.

The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager will deliver training on investigating and responding to complaints on request. The Corporate Complaints Procedure is available on-line. The Adult Social Care statutory procedure is available on-

line also. The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager attends Team Meetings to provide training and advice to Teams and Senior Managers when required. The Customer Relations Team has also improved processes to ensure upcoming responses are discussed and monitored at weekly meetings. The Social Care staff are in more regular contact with the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager and her team and are aware of their processes which has led to improved joint working for the benefit of the complainant.

Support Network

The Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager is the Vice Chair and participates in the Southern Region Complaints Managers' Group and the National Complaints Managers' Group, which continues to support Customer Relations and Complaints Managers in sharing good practice, both nationally and locally. Where cases are complex the Customer Relations & Information Governance Service Manager often seeks advice and guidance from Legal Services and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's advice line.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's role is to investigate complaints about maladministration or administrative fault that lead to injustice for the complainant. In some complaints the LGSCO may find evidence of administrative fault but no resultant injustice. The LGSCO should not investigate complaints about policy changes where the decision has been properly made.

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman received 5 representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to Adult Care & Health Services, which is 2 less than the previous year. Of these 5 cases, 4 cases were investigated and fault found and 1 case was assessed and not further investigated.

The LGSCO did not issue any formal reports finding maladministration by the Council.

Compliments

The Customer Relations Team owns the logging of compliments for the Council as a whole. Staff are reminded and encouraged to pass on all compliments to the Customer Relations Team's generic mailbox.

In the year 2022/23, 42 compliments were received by the following Adult Social Care Teams: In the previous year only 10 were recorded.

Teams that were complimented by service users include - AMHP and Forensic Team, Adult Safeguarding team, Occupational therapists (OT), D2A team, Review team, Mental Health Team

Examples:

- For the D2A and Review team - I have just spoken to VJ's daughter J who had nothing but praise for the support they had from RBC when VJ was placed in a Nursing Home in Wiltshire. Both J and P were excellent in their roles. The family are very grateful that their mother is getting exceptional care. J said she has no need to attend the review meeting because she trusts RBC and the home to do the best for her mother. She is very well looked after and thank you for the time and support J and P have given them to make the right decision.

- For an OT - I'm pleased to share that MLD's son R could not have spoken more highly of you today on the phone, described you as "brilliant" and that your assessment of need when MLD was in hospital was exactly right.
- For the AMHP and Forensic team - Hope all well. Just would like to say it's been a pleasure working with you. Many thanks for all your input which have contributed a lot in the improvement of the quality of life of our residents. On behalf of HH, I wish you all the best in your future plan and may God answer all your prayers.
- For an OT - Many thanks for visiting E last week and supporting us with this bathing requirements. To be honest, We have struggled from last one year to find a suitable bathing support. Although many solutions were offered, but either they were too 'high-tech', didn't fit our bathtub or not suitable for his age. In our first meeting, you got involved, listened to our requirements and proposed a solution swiftly. The solution & products you have provided nicely fits in our bath tub nicely and very easy to use for us and E. You were very quick to order the equipment which arrived the next day. Just wanted to say 'Many thanks' for continued help and devising a practical solution which will make our and E's live comfortable and safe. You have been thoroughly professional, supportive, empathetic and patient during the whole discussion.
- Another OT - Visiting family had commented on the difference input had made to P mobilising safely on stairs and in garden and he thanked me, I explained there is also team behind the various work so he wanted to extend his thanks to everyone in this team as he thought the work we did "was brilliant and he knows people knock the council but you have all been great and made such a difference to me. I don't want to embarrass you but you are all great". Wife also thanked as the TEC had made much easier for her to manage falls risk with overnight toileting and on stairs, and she felt his quality of life improved eg being able to access garden again which is up some steps outside.
- For AMHP staff - We have always had a good working relationship with the Reading AHMP service. Recently it has been highlighted to me on a number of occasions how proactively the two services have worked together particularly in relation to preventing hospital admissions. This is due in no small part to the efforts that V and her team put in. Please could you pass my thanks on to the team for the excellent work they do.
- For Adult Social Care - I just wanted to let you know that I spoke to BG's mother today and she offered a lovely compliment about L, she said that she found L to be very passionate and that she had a really good understanding of children with complex learning disabilities. She said that moving her child towards adulthood services was very daunting however she felt much more positive after meeting with L.

Contact Information: How to make a complaint

Some complaints can be sorted out by discussing your problem with your Social Worker or a manager. If you want to make a complaint, you can contact the Council by telephone, letter, in person or by e-mail. Telephone the Customer Relations Team on 0118 937 2905 or e-mail: Socialcare.Complaints@reading.gov.uk. If you wish to make your complaint to

us in writing, our address is: The Customer Relations Team, Reading Borough Council, Floor 2 South Rear, Civic Offices, Bridge Street, Reading, RG1 2LU. Your complaint will be recorded and if we cannot sort out the problem immediately it will be passed for further investigation and action. The Customer Relations Team can take your complaint over the telephone and explain the complaints procedure in more detail or send you a leaflet explaining how to complain. The leaflet is also available in Council buildings or via the Council's website. You can also use these contact details to tell us if you have a concern (but do not want to make a complaint) or if you want to make a compliment about a service.

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Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2022-23

SUMMARY

An overview of complaints, compliments, SARs activity and performance for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

AUTHORS

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Information Rights Services
Manager and Fiona Tarrant
BFfC Head of Communications
& Compliance

VERSION

1.0

DATE

July 2023

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Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
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Company number 11293709

Contents

Purpose of report	4
Executive summary.....	4
Recommendations.....	5
Context	5
Activity.....	6
Contribution to strategic aims.....	6
Community engagement and information	6
Equality impact assessment.....	6
Legal implications	7
Financial implications	7
Value for money	7
Risk assessment	7
Background papers.....	7
Appendix A	8
Children’s Social Care complaints for Brighter Futures for Children 2022/23.....	8
Summary report.....	8
Introduction	8
Statutory complaints procedure	8
Summary of compliments and complaints activity, quality assurance & learning	9
Quality assurance.....	9
Support network.....	10
Complaints activity statistics.....	10
Total number of Stage 1 complaints (including those resolved by alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and eventually withdrawn) received in the last five years.....	11
Outcomes for those investigated to a completion (excluding those resolved via ADR and those eventually withdrawn) ..	11
Timescales.....	11
Main theme of all complaints received during 2021/23.....	12
Who the complaint was received from.....	12
Statutory complaints received by team.....	13
Methods used to make a complaint	13
Demographic Information.....	13
Complaints from young people involving advocates	14
Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman	14
Learning from complaints	15
Further learning	17
Subject Access Requests (SARs).....	17
Compliments.....	18
Appendix B.....	18
Contact information: How to make a complaint	18

TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDREN'S SERVICES & EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	18 October 2023	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	BFFC ANNUAL COMPLAINTS & COMPLIMENTS REPORT 2021-22		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	COUNCILLOR HOSKIN	PORTFOLIO:	CHILDREN'S SERVICES
SERVICE:	BRIGHTER FUTURES FOR CHILDREN (CHILDREN'S SERVICES)	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD RBC MANAGER (as per the SLA with BFFC):	NAYANA GEORGE	TEL:	0118 937 3748
JOB TITLE:	Information Rights Services Manager	E-MAIL:	Nayana.george@reading.gov.uk
LEAD BFFC SENIOR MANAGER (BFFC Lead for the SLA)	FIONA TARRANT	TEL:	0118 937 4356
JOB TITLE	Head of Communications & Compliance	E-MAIL	Fiona.tarrant@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

Purpose of report

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of complaints, compliments, SARs activity and performance for the period from 1 April 2022 to 31 March 2023.

Executive summary

This report outlines the work that Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) and Reading Borough Council (RBC) have carried out to improve customer relations. The report's main focus is on complaints and compliments, also covered are Subject Access Requests (SARs).

Children's Social Care, Early Help, Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in Reading are delivered by Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC), a not-for-profit company wholly owned by, but independent of, Reading Borough Council. Through a Service Level Agreement, Reading Borough Council's Customer Relations Team handles the administration of complaints, compliments and SARs.

This report details information for the year 2022/23, analysis of the data, quality assurance and information on service developments as a result of learning from complaints.

Under the current monitoring system, information about complaints received directly by teams is reported to the Customer Relations Team upon receipt. This is to ensure that the Information Rights Services Manager, who acts as the statutory Complaints Manager, is aware of all current complaints in order to monitor their progress and highlight cases that can be resolved through alternate dispute resolution (ADR) to team managers and senior staff.

This SLA is led by the Information Rights Services Manager for the Council and is overseen by BFFC's Head of Communications & Compliance.

Complaints, particularly in the emotive arena of children's services, are inevitable. The way that they are handled, however, can help reduce the number of escalating complaints and can improve parental and family understanding of the need for intervention by children's services and the positive outcomes for children and young people.

BFFC recognises complaints are an important source of information to help the company understand where and why changes need to be made to improve the service provided.

During the financial year 2022/23 BfFC received 77 statutory complaints, which is an increase of 12 (18.46%) against the 65 received in 2021/22.

To give this some context, in 2022/23, 2,883 children in total were referred to children's social care, so the number of statutory complaints represents 2.7%. These referrals were regarding a mix of both new and existing children and young people. This compares to 2,479 referrals and 2.6% for 2021/22.

Of the 77 complaints received:

- 10 (13.0%) were resolved through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) by the social care teams.
- The remaining 67 (87.0%) progressed to a formal investigation, although one of these was subsequently withdrawn by the complainant once the investigation had commenced.

During this reporting period, 14 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Some of these related to Stage 1 complaints received in this reporting year, and some to Stage 1 complaints received in the previous reporting year (2021/22). Of these 11, one then progressed to a Stage 3 investigation. We also received one further request for a Stage 3 investigation, although this was a progression of a Stage 2 complaint received in the previous reporting year (2021/22).

Both the Customer Relations Team, on BfFC's behalf, and BfFC's Communications & Compliance and HR/Training teams have continued to raise awareness of the complaints process with both staff and the public.

The 'Children's Social Care Complaints 2022/23 – Summary Report' attached at **Appendix A** provides an analysis of the data for statutory complaints; it explains how complaints are managed and how the learning is used to improve services. This will be made public through both Reading Borough Council's and Brighter Futures for Children's websites.

The Council and BfFC have worked closely to drive improvements in the services offered to children and young people and to signpost to information on advocacy, early resolution and the complaints procedures.

Nevertheless, we recognise there is always room for improvement and we are continuously working to better the services offered to children and families.

Recommendations

Both BfFC's Board and the Adult Social Care, Children & Education Committee is asked to:

- Note the contents of the report and intended actions to further improve service delivery and the management of representations, particularly complaints, in children's services in Reading.
- Note the continuing work to raise awareness of all conflict resolution processes, including the statutory complaints process and encourage appropriate use by children, young people and their families.

Context

The NHS & Community Care Act 1990, Children Act 1989, Children Act 2004, Department of Health and Department for Education Guidance & Regulations require that the children's social care service sets up and maintains a complaints procedure. They also require that local authorities operate the procedure within specified timescales and that methods of investigation, a summary of statistical information on complaints and a review of the complaints process are included in an annual report.

Activity

Brighter Futures for Children operates a 3-stage procedure in respect of statutory complaints about children's social care made by 'qualifying individuals', as specified in the legislation. Qualifying individuals are defined in national guidance as a child or young person, their parent, carer or foster carer or 'anyone who could be seen to be acting in the best interests of the child'.

The timescale for responding to complaints at Stage 1 is 10 working days, which can be extended to 20 working days in certain circumstances. The RBC Information Rights Services Manager, who is the designated complaints manager for BFFC, also has to be aware of all complaints as they are being dealt with.

The corporate complaints procedure gives an opportunity for those who are not 'qualifying individuals' under the social services legislation, to still be able to complain about other aspects of children's services and this route is used for all corporate and education (incl. SEND) complaints.

Contribution to strategic aims

Customer relations contribute to both BFFC and RBC's aims to enhance emotional wellbeing and deliver outstanding services for children in need and those needing protection in Reading. It does this by providing an impartial and supportive service to children and families who wish to complain or raise a concern and ensuring that there is learning from complaints.

RBC's Customer Relations Team and the Information Rights Services Manager administer this service on behalf of Brighter Futures for Children, under a Service Level Agreement. The BFFC Board, via its committees, has oversight of service delivery and on actions relating to lessons learned, as part of the company's strategic aim to improve children's services in Reading.

Community engagement and information

Information about the complaints process is provided verbally to service users via BFFC's Children's Social Care teams and Independent Reviewing Officers, as well as by the Customer Relations Team. Full information is also on the website www.brighterfuturesforchildren.org.

Leaflets on the procedures are widely distributed and available in a variety of formats and languages on request to the Customer Relations Team or through the use of ReachDeck on BFFC's website.

In all children looked after reviews and all child protection conferences, the chair always mentions the complaints process so that our most vulnerable children are reminded of their right to complain and a leaflet is provided. Children and families are also able to register a complaint via the web, text, email directly to the Customer Relations Team, in person, by phone, in writing or via an advocate.

The Brighter Futures for Children website has a direct link to the complaints service and the Customer Relations Team has published the details for the Information Rights Services Manager (as the Complaints Manager) and the BFFC advocacy provider, Reconstruct. The Customer Relations Team also works closely with Healthwatch Reading and other organisations that offer free help line support to children in care and carers who may wish to complain and require assistance.

Translation services are provided for complainants whose first language is not English and advocacy support is available for young people who wish to make a complaint.

Equality impact assessment

The Information Rights Services Manager will ensure that the statutory complaints process is accessible to all customers regardless of their race, gender, disabilities, sexual orientation, age or religious belief.

The statutory complaints process is designed to ensure that any concern or issue faced by vulnerable children and their carers is addressed in a timely and impartial manner.

Legal implications

The statutory foundation of the children's social care services complaints procedures are the Local Authority Social Services Act (1970), The Children Act (1989), The Children Act (2004), The Human Rights Act (1998), Children (Leaving Care) Act (2000), Adoption and Children Act (2002), the Health and Social Care (Community Health and Standards) Act (2003). and The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (2006).

This statutory guidance for local authority children's services on representations and complaints, [Getting the Best from Complaints](#), takes all of the above legislation into account.

It is a requirement of the Department of Health's standards and criteria for complaints management for children's social care that an annual report including complaints is presented to a public meeting.

Financial implications

There are no capital or revenue implications arising from this report. However, BfFC has an obligation to ensure the service provided by RBC's Customer Relations Team is value for money, that the SLA is regularly monitored and that all complaints are handled in a trauma informed, restorative and timely manner to minimise the likelihood of legal costs associated with escalation of complaints that could have been better resolved earlier.

Value for money

The overriding aim of both BfFC and RBC is to work towards informal resolution wherever possible. BfFC works to the principle of a restorative and trauma informed approach and is keen for complaints to be resolved to the complainant's satisfaction, at the earliest possible stage. The Customer Relations Team works to this aim and ensures that most statutory complaints are resolved within the Stage 1 process so that the need for Stage 2 investigations and Stage 3 panels are minimised.

Risk assessment

There are no specific financial risks arising from this report.

Background papers

['Getting the Best from Complaints'](#) Government Publication, August 2006

Appendix A

Children's Social Care complaints for Brighter Futures for Children 2022/23

Summary report

Introduction

This is a summary report of the data for statutory complaints received by Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC) for the financial year 2022/23. The report shows there were 77 complaints statutory complaints received, an increase of 12 (18.46%) compared to the 65 received in 2021-22.

This report will be made available to the public through the Reading Borough Council (RBC) and BFFC websites.

In addition to the quality of service provided, there are many factors that can affect the number of complaints received such as satisfaction, customer expectations, awareness of the complaints process, and the extent of promotional activity.

A high number of complaints should not be interpreted simply as meaning that Brighter Futures for Children is providing a poor service, while at the same time a low number of complaints should not be interpreted as meaning people are satisfied with the service.

When interpreting the statutory complaints statistics, it is important to take into account not just the number received but the number and proportion that are upheld.

Brighter Futures for Children welcomes feedback through the complaints process. As well as providing opportunity to identify where services have not been provided as they should be, feedback can also provide customer insight and help identify any deficiency in practice, policies and procedures. It is from these that the service and those who work within it can continue to learn and improve practice and service delivery.

Statutory complaints procedure

Complaints dealt with through the statutory procedure involve three stages.

At Stage 1 complaints are investigated and responded to by a manager in the relevant service area.

If the complainant feels that the issues they have raised remain unresolved, they have the right to progress their complaint to Stage 2. Consideration of complaints at Stage 2 is normally achieved through an investigation conducted by an investigating officer and an independent person. The independent person is involved in all aspects of consideration of the complaint including any discussions in the authority about the action to be taken in relation to the child. At the conclusion of their investigation, the independent person and the investigating officer prepare independent reports for adjudication by a senior manager (usually the Director of Children's Social Care).

When Stage 2 of the complaints procedure has been concluded and the complainant is still dissatisfied, they can request a review of the stage 2 investigation, by a review panel at Stage 3. The Panel must consist of three independent people.

The statutory children's social care complaints process encourages the complainant and BFFC to consider Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR) at every stage of the complaints process. This means resolving a complaint or concern informally through a face to face meeting or telephone discussion. Entering into ADR does not restrict the complainant's right to request a formal investigation at any

stage. It is the complainant's right to request the presence of a customer relations manager at any face-to-face meeting.

Summary of compliments and complaints activity, quality assurance & learning

There has been an increase of 12 (18.46%) in the number of complaints received compared to the previous year. Of the 77 complaints received, 10 were resolved informally through Alternate Dispute Resolution (ADR), and one was withdrawn by the complainant. Of the remaining 66 complaints which were investigated to an outcome, 28 (42.4%) were responded to within timescale and 38 (57.6%) outside the agreed timescales. This compares to 22 (44%) and 28 (56%) respectively for 2021/22.

The top three themes for 2022/23 for all statutory complaints received were as detailed below. The figures for 2021/22 have been left in brackets for comparison.

- Staff conduct – 23 (29.9%) (2021/22 - 14 (21.5%));
- Quality of Service provided or received – 17 (22.1%) (2021/22 - 23 (35.4%); and
- Procedure – 14 (18.2%) (2021/22 - 13 (20%))

Examples of complaints recorded as **Staff conduct** complaints are recorded as such when complaints are received about specific individual members of social work staff.

Quality of service provided or received include the parent or carer disagreeing with the content of an assessment or care plan proposed for a child or young person, concerns from parents or carers about contact arrangements with their child looked after and the child or young person being unhappy about the move to a different placement.

Procedure complaints are mainly about the actions, or lack of, taken by a team or individual relating to a specific case.

Quality assurance

The Customer Relations Team carries out checks of all complaint responses to ensure the quality of the response and that the language and terminology used is easy for the complainant to understand, particularly if the complaint is from a child or young person.

All responses made during the year (100%) were checked by the Customer Relations Team before being sent out. The findings and recommendations arising from complaints are shared regularly with BfFC's Board, Senior Leadership Team and operational managers. The Information Rights Services Manager and the Customer Relations Team are also available to the complainant and the investigator for advice on best practice during the complaint investigation but remain impartial.

The Information Rights Services Manager delivers training on investigating and responding to statutory Stage 1 complaints and also on the corporate complaints procedure for BfFC staff. The Information Rights Services Manager also attends team meetings to provide training and advice to front line staff.

Training is available online and can be accessed by all social care staff through BfFC's training department and via BfFC's training portal. Take up of this on-line training is low, however, two face-to-face training sessions for operational managers were delivered in 2022/23.

The complaints procedure is promoted to external groups and publicity material is available to staff, children and young people on both RBC and BfFC's websites. Parents or carers with learning difficulties or other needs can access the information using the ReachDeck accessibility tool on the

BfFC website, or they can be signposted to local, impartial organisations, such as Reading's Information Advice and Support Service (IASS). ReachDeck will also translate and 'speak' web documents.

Processes have been improved to ensure responses due are discussed and monitored regularly. BfFC's senior managers get regular updates on all complaints which are live and under investigation. BfFC staff are in more regular contact with the Customer Relations Team and are aware of the process, which has led to improved joint working for the benefit of complainants.

Monthly reports of the Service Level Agreement are provided to the BfFC Contract Manager. Quarterly reports are prepared for the BfFC Board and Senior Leadership Team (SLT) and for the Council's Corporate Management Team (CMT).

Support network

The Information Rights Services Manager participates in the Southern Region Complaints Managers' Group and is the current chair of the group and also attends the National Complaints Managers' Group. Both groups continue to support customer relations and complaints managers in sharing good practice, both nationally and locally. Where cases are complex the Information Rights Services Manager often seeks advice and guidance from the Council's Legal Services Team, and the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman's advice line.

Complaints activity statistics

In the year 2022/23, children's social care received 77 statutory complaints, which is an increase of 12 (18.46%) compared to the 65 received in 2021/22.

During this reporting period, 14 complaints progressed to a Stage 2 investigation. Some of these related to Stage 1 complaints received in this reporting year, and some to Stage 1 complaints received in the previous reporting year (2021/22). Of these 11, one progressed to a Stage 3 investigation. We also received one further request for a Stage 3 investigation, although this was a progression of a Stage 2 complaint received in the previous reporting year (2021/22).

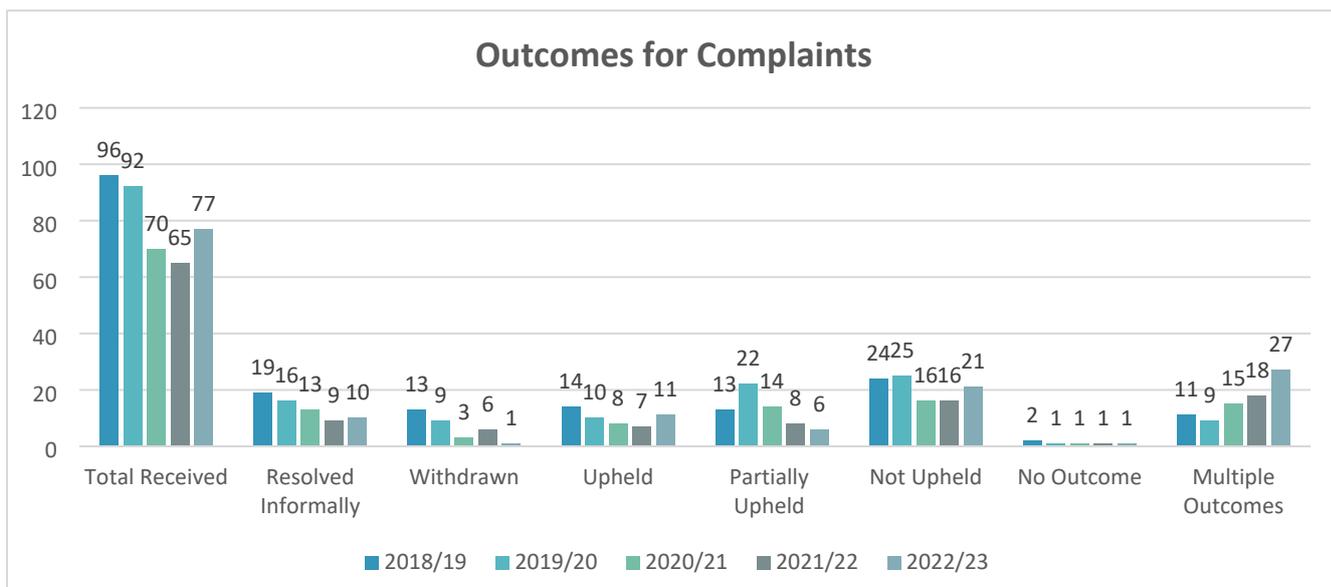
Of the 77 complaints received:

- 10 (13.0%) were resolved as representations informally through alternative dispute resolution (ADR) (Stage 0) by the social care teams.
- 1 (1.5%) of the remaining 67 complaints was withdrawn by the complainant following a resolution with the service after the investigation had commenced, leaving 66 (85.7%) which were investigated at Stage 1 to an outcome.

Of the 66, 28 (42.4%) were responded to within timescale, with the remaining 38 (57.6%) complaints responded to over timescale.

Of the 66 complaints investigated to an outcome, 11 (16.7%) (2021/22 = 7 (14%) were recorded as fully upheld, 6 (9.1%) (2021/22 = 8 (16%) as partially upheld, 21 (31.8%) (2021/22 = 16 (32%) as not upheld, and 1 (1.5%) (2021/22 = 1 (2%) as having no recordable outcome.

The remaining 27 (40.9%) (2021/22 = 18 (36%) were complaints with multiple strands to the complaint, where several outcomes were recorded. A complaint is recorded as partially upheld when the issues the complainant is raising are accepted, but where it is either out of BfFC's hands or remit to resolve the matter to the complainant's satisfaction.



Total number of Stage 1 complaints (including those resolved by alternative dispute resolution (ADR) and eventually withdrawn) received in the last five years.

Year	Number of complaints received	% Increase against previous year	Number of cases referred to Children's Services	% of complaints against referrals
*2018/19	96	-29.4%	2,765	3.47%
2019/20	92	-4.17%	2,564	3.6%
2020/21	70	-23.9%	2,384	2.9%
2021/22	65	-7.14%	2,479	2.6%
2022/23	77	+ 18.46%	2,883	2.7%

*Mostly pre-Brighter Futures for Children, which became operational on 3 December 2018.

Outcomes for those investigated to a completion (excluding those resolved via ADR and those eventually withdrawn)

Outcome	2022/23 Number	% of Total	2021/22 Number	% of Total
Upheld	11	16.7%	7	14%
Partially upheld	6	9.1%	8	16%
Not upheld	21	31.8%	16	32%
No outcome	1	1.5%	1	2%
Multiple outcomes	27	40.9%	18	36%
Total	66	100%	50	100%

Timescales

Reporting Year	Total Investigated	In Timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
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	to an Outcome				
2021/22	50	22	44%	28	56%
2022/23	66	28	42.4%	38	57.6%

	Total Resolved Informally	In timescale	% of Total	Over Timescale	% of Total
2021/22	9	6	66.7%	3	33.3%
2022/23	10	5	50%	5	50%

Main theme of all complaints received during 2021/23

(NOTE: This includes all complaints received and resolved informally, withdrawn, and investigated to an outcome at Stage 1, but does not include complaints investigated at Stages 2 & 3, as these themes are duplicates of Stage 1)

Theme of complaint	2022/23 Number	% of Total	2021/22 Number	% of Total
Communication	11	14.2%	7	10.8%
Failure to Resolve Issue	1	1.3%	0	0
Financial Issue	1	1.3%	0	0
Lack of Support	10	13.0%	8	12.3%
Procedure	14	18.2%	13	20.0%
Quality of service provided	17	22.1%	23	35.4%
Staff conduct	23	29.9%	14	21.5%
Total	77	100%	65	100%

Who the complaint was received from

Who made the complaint	2022/23 Number	% of Total	2021/22 Number	% of Total
Advocate*	6	7.8%	5	7.7%
Child *	0	0	1	1.5%
Extended Family (Siblings, Aunts & Uncles, and Grandparents)	8	10.4%	0	0
Friend	0	0	1	1.5%
Landlord	0	0	1	1.5%
Parent (Incl. Adopted or Foster Parents & Guardians)	54	70.1%	42	64.6%
Professional (Care Worker,	1	1.3%	3	4.6%

Social Worker, etc)				
Self **	8	10.4%	12	18.6%
Total	77	100%	65	100%

* These are complaints received directly from a child, usually under the age of 12, sometimes via an advocate.

** These are complaints received from young people who are open to the service in their own right and are aged over 12.

The majority of complaints are from the birth parents who disagree with social care involvement and outcomes from assessments, care plans and wish to challenge a professional decision. Of the 54 complaints received from parents, 22 of them were from fathers who felt excluded from the processes. Complaints of this nature are inevitable, however high-quality record keeping, clear communication with a clear distinction between fact and opinion reduces the opportunity for dispute.

Statutory complaints received by team

Team	2022/23 No. of Complaints	%
Children Looked After Team	16	20.8%
Children & Young People's Disability Team	3	3.9%
Early Help Team	0	0
Family & Friends	1	1.3%
Fostering Service	1	1.3%
Leaving Care Team	5	6.5%
Together for Families Teams	51	66.2%
Total	77	100%

The three areas which received the highest number of complaints were the Together for Families Teams with 51 (66.2%), the Children Looked After Team with 16 (20.8%), and the Leaving Care Team with 5 (6.5%). This can mainly be attributed to the challenging circumstances in which these particular services work in and the volume of their direct contact with children and families.

Methods used to make a complaint

Method	2022/23 Number	% of Total	2021/22 Number	% of Total
Email	51	66.2%	45	69.2%
Letter	3	3.9%	3	4.6%
Telephone	17	22.1%	10	15.4%
Webform	6	7.8%	7	10.8%
Total	77	100%	65	100%

The above demonstrates that the complainants have a number of methods they can use to contact the Customer Relations Team with their complaints.

Demographic Information

Ethnicity	2022/23 Number of	% of Total	2021/22	% of Total
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	Complaints Received		Number of complaints received	
Asian/Asian British	3	3.9%	2	3.1%
Black or Black British	1	1.3%	1	1.5%
Black or Black British / Black Caribbean	3	3.9%	0	0
Black or Black British / Black African	2	2.6%	1	1.5%
Mixed Black & White	1	1.3%	1	1.5%
Mixed White & Asian	3	3.9%		
Mixed White & Black Caribbean	6	7.8%		
Mixed Other	3	3.9%		
Not Stated	22	28.5%	43	66.2%
Other White European	1	1.3%		
White British	31	40.3%	16	24.7%
White Other	1	1.3%	1	1.5%
Total	77	100%	65	100%

For equality monitoring purposes, staff have been encouraged to seek personal demographic information from people who make a complaint to help assess if there are groups of people who are proportionally complaining more or less and to explore the possible reasons.

The offer of the translation service and easy read versions of complaint responses are made available by the Information Rights Services Manager to those complainants who need these.

Complaints from young people involving advocates

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023 six complaints were recorded as coming from young people via an advocate.

The Information Rights Services Manager also meets BfC teams and managers to reinforce the importance of capturing verbal complaints. Staff are encouraged to record and analyse comments or concerns, as many children's and young people's issues are resolved this way rather than using the complaints process. If the young person is unhappy but does not wish to make a formal complaint, the Customer Relations Team also offers to try to resolve matters informally.

Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

Between 1 April 2022 and 31 March 2023, the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LG&SCO) received 23 representations from dissatisfied service users for issues relating to BfC. This is an increase of 7 from the previous year.

Of the 23 cases, the LGSCO assessed nine cases for investigation. Of these, five cases were upheld and two cases were not upheld. One is awaiting an outcome and one is yet to be investigated.

In respect of the five upheld complaints, the LGSCO asked the Council/BfC to apologise and provided financial redress. They also recommend some service improvements.

Of the remaining 14 cases, 11 were assessed but not investigated as they were either out of time, not within the LGSCO's jurisdiction to investigate or was closed after initial enquiry/assessment. Three cases were deemed premature and passed back to BfC to investigate as they had not progressed through the complaints' procedures.

The LGSCO will issue one formal report finding maladministration by BfC, however this will not be published in order to safeguard the complainant. This matter has been scrutinised by the BfC Board, CMT and Lead Councillors. All comments and learning are being addressed and reassurance has been sent to the LGSCO.

Learning from complaints

BfC welcomes feedback from service users to inform the improvement of services. All compliments and complaints are logged and disseminated to managers.

Issues arising from complaints, how the specific service has addressed them, and emerging themes are reported to both the Senior Leadership Team, the Company's Audit and Risk committee and the Company's Quality Improvement committee.

Where appropriate, learning events are held with key practitioners to draw out issues and learning, with findings disseminated to relevant services and teams.

In 2022/23 these were the learning improvements BfC focused on:

- Addressing the improvements needed in compliance by appointing a full time Compliance, Policy and Process Officer and incorporating compliance into the Head of Communication's role and key responsibilities
- Introducing new and revised communications about the complaints process, reviewing the wording on the website and improving accessibility to the complaints' procedure
- Introducing a new digital leaflet on the complaints' procedure for children and young people in care or with past experience of being in care and publicising this internally and externally.

The DfE guidance asks for the Council or its representative - in this case BfC - to ensure that we report the learning and service improvements implemented as a result of complaints. Some learning was pertinent to individual workers and led to bespoke advice and training. Some learning was shared in reminder to all staff regarding good practice and some learning led to review of services and processes.

Some individual and staff learning included:

1. Complaint (this part upheld)

Part of a parent's complaint was that an assessment, completed in October 2021, has not been provided to the parent, despite a request to the social worker.

Outcome

The Complaints Manager investigated and could not find evidence of the assessment having been shared. A sincere apology was issued to the parent, the assessment was provided and this part of their complaint was upheld.

Learning

BFFC has now implemented a system where social work practitioners must record the date when a copy of the single assessment is shared with a parent/carer/young person before it is completed.

2. Complaint (Partially upheld)

A parent raised concerns about a social worker's communication skills and preparedness for the visit which they made to the parent's home. The parent complained this made them feel very stressed and oppressed.

Outcome

A letter was sent to the parent expressing concern that the social worker's communication made them feel stressed and oppressed. The letter said that the Complaints Manager's investigation found that the social worker reflected a different version of events and was clear that they did not intend to communicate in a way to make the parent feel like this, but accepted this was how the parent had felt.

Learning

The social worker took on the feedback in order to further improve their communication skills and practice with families. Please note: Managers at BFFC routinely observe social workers' practice and through this process do identify and address any cause for concern.

3. Complaint (upheld)

BFFC delayed its decision making regarding a family's request for a Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG) following an occupational therapy assessment on their child's needs.

Outcome

The relevant officers were reminded that the DFG process does not have a predilection for those with a physical disability.

Learning

As the DFG process can be a stressful and a complicated process to explain and to ensure families have time to process information in their own time, written information (in the form of a leaflet) explaining key terms, trigger points of the process, when a stage starts, ends and another stage starts and expected timescales was produced.

4. Complaint (upheld)

The family complained that the allocated occupational therapist contacted their daughter's school and discussed their daughter's personal information without parental consent.

Outcome

The complaint was investigated and found to be proven. A letter of apology was written to the parent, with details of measures now in place to prevent this from happening in future.

Learning

BFFC put in place appropriate checks and balances to ensure that appropriate parental consent form is filled in, signed and visible on file. Checks are made before any third party is approached to ensure parental consent has been obtained.

Further learning

Complaints and concerns provide essential and valuable feedback from our service users. Listening and reflecting on examples of where we have not got it right can reveal or highlight opportunities for improvement (for example, a deficiency in practice, communication or service delivery).

Even if a complaint is not upheld, lessons can be learnt from that complaint with service developments and improvements as a result. The complaints process and the feedback gained is an integral part of the quality assurance process, which feeds into the development and monitoring of services.

To build on learning in previous years, we gave a commitment during the presentation of last year's annual report to contact complainants for their views on how to improve the complaints process.

We have sent a survey out to complainants asking for feedback on ways to improve the complaints process and will be looking at and actioning improvements over the next 12 months. We will provide an update on the survey findings in the next annual report.

Subject Access Requests (SARs)

The Customer Relations Team processes all SARs requests for BFFC. These are open and closed children's social care cases (historical cases where paper and microfiche files are held at the records centre) and Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) cases.

In 2022/23, the Customer Relations Team received 59 requests for records, 21 more than the 38 requests received in 2021/22 relating to BFFC.

Of the 59 requests received 39 requests were completed. The remaining 20 cases are waiting to be processed as at the end of March 2023, this number would have altered by the time this report is presented at ACE.

A further 14 requests received between 2020 and March 2023 are outstanding and waiting to be processed at the time of writing this report.

The main reasons for the backlog are as follows:

- Restrictions posed by the pandemic meant records could not be retrieved from the archive for scanning between March-July 2020.
- The move of paper records from Darwin Close to Bennet Road in early 2021 restricted access to the storage area.
- The lack of resource to redact files which range from a few hundred pages to over 3500 pages per file.
- Paper files need to be copied from microfiche and scanned before redactions can be completed. In SEND cases, information is held on the EMS (Education) system as well as shared files and emails. These have to be searched, converted to PDF and redacted before the file can be shared with the requestor.
- In all cases the Customer Relations Team and the Information Governance Team has kept in regular contact with requestors to ensure they were kept up to date on the progress of their requests.

Extra BFFC resource was deployed to help the Customer Relations Team clear backlogs, which in the report to this Committee noted 35 cases in the backlog. The Council has purchased new software for the redaction work, at the time of writing this report we are waiting for the contract to be signed with a view to implementation taking place in July & August 2023.

Compliments

In the year 2022/23, 50 compliments were received and logged for BFFC.

Teams that were complimented included the Early Years SEND Team, the Children & Young People's Disability Service, the Independent Fostering Agency, Pinecroft and Cressingham children's homes, Children's Social Care and our children's centres.

Here are some examples of compliments received:

Examples:

- **For social workers** - I wanted to write to you to thank you for your support and for X over the last 9 months or so. X is excellent at her job and we have really benefitted from having her allocated to us. She has been dependable and reliable – doing things like making phone calls or referrals when she says she will – as well as punctual. She has been honest and open with us and kept us informed of everything along the way, even when it meant telling us things we didn't want to hear.
Her gentle, wise and non-combative approach made her a really good person to ask for advice or to explore issues with together and to discover a suitable way forward together. We will miss her support enormously. Thank you both again.
- **For foster carers** - To all community carers who took care of Y. Many thanks from all the our family. Your care was exceptional.
- **For Pinecroft children's home** - Thank you so much for all you do for my son and my whole family. It has been life changing to have more support so we as a family can get out of the house and even when at the home we can be together in the lounge as this just isn't possible when we are all home. Importantly I know my son is not sad and happy when with you. It's a very special place with caring and warm staff. Thank you everybody for all you do.

Appendix B

Contact information: How to make a complaint

Some complaints can be sorted out by discussing your problem with your social worker or a manager. If you want to make a complaint, you can contact the Customer Relations Team by telephone, letter, in person, or by e-mail. Telephone the Customer Relations Team on 0118 937 2905 or e-mail: socialcare.complaints@reading.gov.uk.

If you wish to make your complaint to us in writing, our address is:

Customer Relations Team
Reading Borough Council
Floor 2 South Rear
Civic Offices
Bridge Street

Reading
RG1 2LU

You can also text us with your complaint, type SPKUP & your message to 81722. Your complaint will be recorded and if we can't sort out the problem immediately it will be passed for further investigation and action.

The Customer Relations Team can take your complaint over the telephone and explain the complaints procedure in more detail or send you a leaflet explaining how to complain. Leaflets for adults and for children & young people are also available in council buildings or via the Brighter Futures for Children website on the following page:

<https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/about/compliments-and-complaints/>.

You can also use these contact details to tell us if you have a concern (but do not want to make a complaint) or if you want to make a compliment about a service.

See Addendum – Learning from Complaints – drafted by Fiona Betts, Lead for Quality Assurance.



Learning from Complaints

Addendum report for ACE

December 2023

SUMMARY

This brief report summarises the learning and improvements made within the children's social care service as a result of complaints in 2022/23.

OWNER

Fiona Betts
Lead for Quality Assurance

VERSION 1

DATE

1 December 2023

© Brighter Futures for Children

Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
Reading RG1 2LU

Company number 11293709

Introduction

This paper sets out examples of the learning for children's social care as a result of complaints received between April 2022 and March 2023. It also identifies issues for continuous improvement.

General learning

Together for Families Team

The majority of complaints received between April 2022 and March 2023 were not upheld at stage 1. Where practice elements were upheld or partially upheld, the resulting action/learning was most often a revision to case records on matters of accuracy, and/or a discussion with the relevant practitioners and managers about practice expectations. The theme of these discussions is most commonly around communication (or lack thereof); ensuring children's records include feedback and views from parents; and case notes that detail how parents are being updated about the progress of assessments and support.

A small number of complaints included reference to child protection conference papers not being received in the expected timeframe before the conference meeting, and it is noted that the Service Manager for Reviewing, Conferencing and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) has implemented changes to the service that is addressing this.

Following one complaint, BfC has now implemented a system whereby social work practitioners must record the date which a copy of the single assessment was shared with a parent/carer/young person before it is completed – this supports families to receive a timely copy of the assessment, to provide their views, and also to support families being aware of the assessment outcome at the earliest opportunity.

Adoption and Permanence Team

Only one significant complaint was received that led to as part of an induction to the adoption and permanence service, relevant staff are made aware how to set up letterbox contact arrangements for adopted children. This alongside a dedicated post to support the timely arrangement of letterbox contact provides reassurances of improved practice.

Children and Young People with Disabilities Service

Complaints received in this service relate mostly to disagreements between the service and parents, as to how best to meet their children's needs, for example to provide services without a Section 17 assessment, or disagreement in respect to direct payments or a delay in the making of adaptations to equipment/buildings. This is different in its nature, as does not wholly reflect the practitioners or managers' practice. Many of these complaints are not upheld at Stage 1, and those that proceed to Stage 2 or 3 remain not upheld.

One aspect that has been upheld is the need for advocacy for parents (which has been addressed in the newly tendered advocacy contract) as well as the need to engage with parents who may be neurodiverse in a manner that allows them to process and reflect on emails or reports in a timelier manner.

BfC Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)

One complaint was received and not upheld at stage 1, but most complaints to the service that progressed to Stage 2 were upheld. Learning was child-specific, and where there was transferable

learning, this was shared with the team (e.g. foster carer logs, children’s pocket money arrangements, supervision). Learning from one upheld complaint is currently being managed through our HR processes.

Specific learning across the whole service

It has been noted that a more consistent approach is needed to ensure that information is routinely triangulated by managers conducting a stage 1 complaint investigation, which includes always talking with the complainant as part of the response. Training is planned for February 2024 to address this, and guidance is being updated.

Whole Service Meeting: Learning from complaints and Ombudsman reports

In July 2023, the Head of Service, Tff, the Service Manager, Conference, Review, LADO and Participation, and the Lead for Quality Assurance presented a workshop to the Children’s Social Care service regarding learning from complaints and Ombudsman reports. The session considered what we have heard from recent complaints and Ombudsman reports in the past year; looked at one case in more detail; confirmed what good practice in this area looks like; and explored recent Child safeguarding practice reviews (CSPRs) with domestic abuse as a factor.

Attendees broke into small groups to explore a case scenario based on a recent Ombudsman case before sharing insights and learning. These included:

- The importance of being person-centred rather than process-focused in our response.
- How we might avoid escalation of complaints by ensuring we listen to issues and concerns from people complaining about our services.
- The potential relationship between complaints and controlling behaviours/allegations of domestic abuse – understanding that complaints may be driven from a loss of control for a parent/carer and how that can be supported without losing focus on the child/ren.
- Making time to reflect and seek support as a practitioner.
- Working with challenging behaviours – symptoms and causes, and using a trauma informed approach.

The session also included a presentation about what good practice looks like in terms of assessment, participation and management support as influenced by learning from complaints. It concluded with small-group reflections about what attendees might do differently in the future to avoid potential complaints; how they would respond to complaints, and what they need from each other and the organisation to support practice.

Next steps

Management of the Service Level Agreement (SLA) for complaints is held by Fiona Tarrant, Head of Communications & Compliance for BFFC, and review of the compliance elements of the SLA is well managed – this includes robust checking of timescales for responses etc. There have been recent improvements in our approach to Learning from complaints. It is important for continuous improvement that we understand the details of complaints at the earliest stage, whether or not they are ultimately upheld or not, to shape our learning and development of case practice and management.

Going forwards and since the appointment of the most recent Compliance, Policy and Process Officer, there is a SharePoint site for letters and documents, and a tracker that includes the learning points for each complaint. The Compliance, Policy and Process Officer and the Lead for QA meets at

least monthly to review the learning points, and feed this into quality assurance, improvement and learning and development work across the company.

This ensures that learning from complaints is shared with the service at the earliest opportunity (e.g. service-wide meetings) and mechanisms developed to measure the impact of this learning on case practice and management. This will also help identify what support can be provided to the responders to stage 0 and stage 1 complaints to prevent them escalating on to stage 2 complaints and beyond.

We note that an RBC Internal Audit into the complaints SLA is currently underway, and our continued learning will be informed by the findings of this review.

**Adult Social Care,
Children's Services and
Education Committee**



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

17 January 2024

Title	Leaving Care Action Plan update
Purpose of the report	To note the report for information
Report status	Public report
Report author	Hilary Loades – BFfC Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
Lead Councillor	Cllr Hoskin
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	The Committee to note the progress made on the leaving care action plan and current priorities.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. This report details the progress made on achieving the actions identified in the BFfC Leaving Care Action Plan 2023/2024, which was drawn up in April 2023 in response to a review of the service undertaken by the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, Mark Riddell MBE in March 2023. It details the actions already achieved, those that are being worked on and those that are proving more challenging to progress.
- 1.2. Overall, the actions identified in the Plan are being systematically addressed and progress is being achieved in most areas.
- 1.3. Moving forward, support is being sought from community partners in the hope of broadening some aspects of our care leavers' 'offer' and bi-monthly meetings bring together relevant BFfC managers and our Participation Officer to review the progress of the Plan, in order to ensure a co-ordinated approach and the involvement of our children and young people who are looked after in planning our services.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. BFfC's Corporate Parenting Strategy outlines the Council's corporate parenting responsibilities to Reading looked after children and care experienced young people.
- 2.2. This Strategy was reviewed in May 2023 and will be further updated in April 2024 as part of the company's rolling programme.

3. The Proposal

- 3.1. As of the 31st October 2023, the Council was responsible for 265 children in care and 180 care leavers aged between 18 and 25 years.
- 3.2. Statutory duties towards children looked after are clearly defined in the Children Act. Statutory duties also extend to care leavers. These are not all young

people who have been in care, but those who meet the criteria defined in the Care Leavers' Act 2002.

- 3.3. In March 2023 Mark Riddell MBE, the National Implementation Adviser for Care Leavers, undertook a two-day formal visit to Reading and reviewed services for care leavers, delivered by Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC), RBC and the partnership. The review focussed on:
 - 1..1. Corporate Parenting Panel.
 - 1..2. Education, employment, and training.
 - 1..3. Housing.
 - 1..4. Health.
 - 1..5. Transition to adulthood.
 - 1..6. Local offer to care leavers.
- 3.4. The formal feedback received following Mark Riddell's visit identified strengths and areas for improvement and a partnership action plan was implemented to ensure that, collectively, BFfC, RBC and the wider partnership are championing and meeting the needs of children in care and care leavers. On the 13th July 2023 the action plan was endorsed by Corporate Parenting Panel, chaired by Cllr Hoskin, and it is supported by senior leaders across BFfC and RBC.
- 3.5. Work is ongoing around all areas of the action plan, although some have inevitably proved easier to make progress with than others.
- 3.6. Three key areas of activity have been that:
 - The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Corporate Parenting Panel have been updated in partnership with panel members and children in care and the department's revised 'Promise' to our children looked after now states BFfC and RBC's joint commitments to our children in care and care leavers and forms appendix 2 of the ToR.
 - The recommendation of the Care Leavers' Review that RBC's sliding scale of council tax exemptions that was previously in place for care leavers up to the age of 21 should be extended to 25 years (to reflect the corporate parenting duties of the local authority continuing to this age) has been costed with a proposal that the financial impact of this proposal be included in the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) and 2024/2025 budget.
 - The Independent Review of Children's Social Care in England (May 2022) recognised the negative outcomes for care experienced young people¹ and adults and recommended that the Government should make 'care experienced' a protective characteristic. A protected characteristic means that it is against the law to discriminate against someone because of this characteristic. All protected characteristics have equal importance. Treating care experience in this way means that the Council can monitor and measure the impact that it is having to support our care experienced young people and adults in their life journey and make appropriate arrangements or adjustments to provide this support. Adopting this approach enables the Council to help tackle the inequalities that care experienced young people

¹ Care experienced applies to anyone who has been in care for any period of their childhood. They do not need to have formal care leaver status to be care experienced. Care experience is a lifelong characteristic.

face, and in doing so support them to improve their outcomes, including accessing work readiness and employability skills; building their future careers and gaining experience; and championing access to apprenticeships and support through recruitment processes.

On the 17th of October 2023 the meeting of the Full Council considered and approved:

- The revised terms of reference for the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- The proposal to include the revised sliding scale of council tax dispensation for children looked after and care leavers in the Council's 2024/25 MTFS planning.
- The proposal for 'care experience' to be recognised as a protected characteristic by RBC.

3.7. Separately to these actions:

- Our young people who are looked after by BFfC or are recent care leavers, are being increasingly consulted around the development of BFfC's services that impact on them, and a group of young people now regularly attend the Corporate Parenting Panel.
- An increased housing offer for care leavers has been agreed for this year (2023/2024) with an additional 7 units being made available. It is also agreed that this will be reviewed prior to the future allocation for 2024/2025 being set.
- Progress has been made on developing our RBC apprenticeship 'offer' to care leavers, with five apprenticeship roles now identified in different departments which will be recruited to over the coming months.
- A clearer 'pathway' for care leavers transitioning to adult social care services is now established. The current capacity within the service means that young people are allocated personal advisers from the age of 17 or 18, dependent on needs, with an ambition that this will be brought forward to 16yrs.

3.8. Other areas of the action plan that are currently being prioritised include:

- Updating our BFfC/RBC care leavers' 'offer'. This includes:
 - o Revising our sliding scale of council tax dispensation and extending it to young people aged up to 25 years (see 3.6 above).
 - o Increasing our housing offer for care leavers (see 3.7 above).
 - o Increasing our personal allowance rate for care leavers to bring it in-line with the DfE recommended rate.
 - o Increasing the level of our settling in allowance for care leavers to bring it in-line with the DfE recommended rate.
- The first two of these commitments are to be funded by RBC and the second two by BFfC, subject to approval of the 2024/5 MTFS by Policy Committee. Work will be undertaken with Communications & Compliance and care leavers, to co-produce a new pictorial version of our care leavers' 'offer' which co-ordinates with our 'promise' to our children looked after. To allow time for a co-produced offer, this will be available for sign off by the corporate parenting panel by April 2024.

- Seeking support from the RBC directors and officers to develop specific aspects of our care leavers 'offer', e.g., provision of 'setting up home' grants, or covering the first two months' rent for care leavers taking on their first tenancies (until benefit payments are in place).
 - Establishing a physical care leavers' hub, possibly co-located with other services in a one stop type approach.
 - Exploring options to host a key partnership event in March 2024. This is in the early stages of planning; however, the intention is to seek practical, material and/or financial support from partner agencies and businesses across the Reading area, in order to enable RBC/BFfC to broaden the support offer available to Reading care leavers.
- 3.9. A key area of the action plan that has yet to be addressed is:
- Developing a set of themed sub-groups as part of the Corporate Parenting Panel based on the priority areas for care leavers and chaired by panel members who are then 'champions' for the themed area, i.e., housing, health, mental health, education, employment & training (EET) etc.
 - Champions will be identified at the next Corporate Parenting Panel in January 2024. Themed sub-groups will be developed when a specific need is identified and would be led by the relevant panel Champion who would engage with the relevant operational officers.
- 3.10. The areas of the action plan that are currently proving more challenging to make progress on include:
- Employing a participation apprentice /champions on a full-time basis in the participation unit or leaving care team, to drive the local offer from each key partner agency and to engage with care leavers aged up to 25 years and represent their views.
- This has funding implications which are proving hard to prioritise given the financial constraints that BFfC is operating under at the current time.
- Obtaining free prescriptions, and dental and eye care for care leavers aged up to 25 years.
- This will need to be achieved through our health partners, however, whilst discussions are ongoing, they are clear that they are not currently able to fund this initiative and this offer is not currently available across the ICB BOB footprint. This will be explored further at the next Corporate Parenting Panel in January 2024.
- 3.11. In conclusion, the actions identified in the BFfC Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023/24 are being systematically addressed; reasonable progress is being achieved in most areas, accepting the current financial pressures place restrictions on what can realistically be achieved in some areas at the current time. Support is being sought from community partners in the hope of broadening some aspects of our care leavers' 'offer'.
- 3.12. Bi-monthly meetings bring together relevant managers within BFfC and our Participation Officer to review the Plan. This supports a co-ordinated approach and the involvement of our children and young people who are looked after in planning our services.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. Reading Borough Council supports the view set out by the Department for Education regarding Corporate Parenting principles, which states: *‘The role that councils play in looking after children is one of the most important things they do. Local authorities have a unique responsibility to the children they look after and their care experienced young people (relevant and former relevant children) ... and the critical question that local authorities should ask in adopting such an approach is: ‘would this be good enough for my child?’*
- 4.2. Children looked after, care leavers and care experienced young people face unique challenges. As corporate parents it is the role of the Council and BFfC to advocate on behalf of our children looked after, care leavers and care experienced young people, and to empower them to make their own decisions in preparation for adulthood. Such that our children and young people achieve their full potential and the best possible outcomes.
- 4.3. Leaving care, like leaving home, is a critical transition for our young people and supporting them through this transition into adulthood is critical. This is not simply a matter of helping young people acquire a checklist of life and independent living skills – although this is important – but also helping young people to develop resilience, achieve a positive sense of self and have positive options for their futures.
- 4.4. The proposals within the BFfC Leaving Care Action Plan and detailed within this report align with the Council’s Corporate Plan and Corporate Parenting Strategy and BFfC’s Business Plan.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. There are no material environmental or climate implications resulting from the recommendation of this report.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Representatives of children looked after and our care leavers have rewritten our ‘promise’ to children in care and have been involved in the review of our care leavers’ ‘offer’. This includes our financial offer to care leavers.
- 6.2. Members of the Corporate Parenting Panel, including a representative group of children and young people who are or were previously looked after by BFfC have been involved in the review of the Panel’s Terms of Reference.
- 6.3. Working with managers across Children’s Social Care, our BFfC Participation Officer ensures that BFfC children looked after and care leavers are increasingly engaged in consultations around the services provided to our children looked after, our care leavers, and their families.
- 6.4. BFfC is seeking to engage with partners in the Reading community to gain their support around expanding different aspects of our ‘offer’ to our Reading children looked after and care leavers.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. The recommendations of this report are intended to promote equality of experience and opportunity for Reading’s children looked after, care leavers and those who are care experienced.
- 7.2. Some children looked after, care leavers and care experienced persons will also have other protected characteristics recognised under The Equality Act 2010.

- 7.3. In the last quarter, RBC / BFfC have committed to recognising care experience as a protected characteristic alongside other protected characteristics set out in The Equality Act 2010. It is intended that this will have a positive impact for children looked after, care leavers and young people with care experience.

8. Legal Implications

- 8.1. Corporate Parenting is the term used to refer to the collective responsibility of the Council and our partner agencies to provide the best possible care and protection for children and young people who are looked after; that is, children and young people for whom the Council either has, or shares, parental responsibility, or provides care and accommodation on behalf of their parents.
- 8.2. Section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017 - The Children and Social Work Act 2017 outlines the seven key corporate parenting principles which local authorities should have regard to when exercising their functions in relation to looked after children and young people.
- 8.3. Part 3 of the Children Act 1989 (the Act) provides Government guidance for Councillors and emphasises their role in ensuring that all children looked after receive a good standard of care and are able to achieve the high-quality outcomes that every parent would want for their own children or children within their family. As well as local authority responsibilities towards children looked after, the Children Act 1989 placed a duty on partners including Health, Education and Housing services to assist Children's Services to fulfil their functions under the Act – providing help, support, and services in order to meet Corporate Parenting responsibilities.
- 8.4. The Council also has a duty and responsibility towards care leavers aged 16 to 25 years. These are not all young people who have been in care, but those who meet the criteria defined in the Care Leavers' Act 2002.

9. Financial Implications

- 9.1. There are no new proposals within this report that have not been considered elsewhere in terms of any potential financial implications.

10. Timetable for Implementation

- 10.1. Separate target dates are set for different parts of the action plan; these are kept under review on a two-monthly basis.

11. Background Papers

There are none.

Appendices -

- 1. BFfC Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023-2024 (updated November 2023) (Appendix 1)**



Leaving Care Service Action Plan

(Response to Mark Riddell Review)

2023-2024

For decision For discussion For information

OWNER

Hilary Loades – Head of Service
– Corporate Parenting

VERSION

V 6

DATE

April 2023
(Updated December 2023)

BFfC Leaving Care Service Action Plan 2023/2024 (response to Mark Riddell Review)

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG	
1. Corporate Parenting Panel – To adopt the Champion Model Approach						
1a	To develop the Membership of the Corporate Parenting Panel (CPP) with internal partners and external partners i.e., mental health, adult transitions, housing, etc.	<p>Panel's ToR to be reviewed with consideration of how to support the more meaningful involvement of C&YP in care, and which partner agencies should be represented:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Health ○ Education ○ Mental health ○ Adult transitions ○ Housing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The revised SoP for CP Panel have been agreed at Panel and approved by Council on 17/10/2023. 	Hilary L / Roselind M	Achieved	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Panel representatives from partner agencies are to be confirmed. 	Hilary L / Roselind M	31.01.24	
1b	To consider the need for themed sub-groups based on the priority areas for care leavers i.e., housing, health, mental health, EET, etc.	Will be dependent on 1a being actioned first.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lara P and Maria Y met with RBC SLG on 12.06.23 to train and raise awareness in respect to the Council's Corporate Parenting role and Care Leavers' offer. • Contact has since been made by Leads in respect of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Cultural & Leisure (DP) - Economic Growth & Neighbourhood Services (EG) 	Hilary L / Roselind M	31.01.24	

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
			<p>Arrangements are being made to meet with them to discuss how we take their interest forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meetings have taken place with Housing who have increased their 'offer' for this year by an additional 7 places for care Leavers (now offering 23 places). This will be reviewed at the end of the year. 			
1c	To identify elected members and officers who are 'Champions' for themed areas and could chair themed sub-groups when needed.	Will be dependent on 1a being actioned first	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lara P and Maria Y have provided briefing to our RBC councillors around Corporate Parenting, and their potential to champion specific issues appropriate to the needs of our Care Experienced Young People. Agenda item for January Corporate Parenting Panel to identify champions who can take a lead in key areas 	Hilary L / Roselind M	31.01.24	
1d	To employ a Participation Apprentice / Champions on a full-time basis to inform and drive the Panel, the local offer from each key partner agency and to engage with care leavers	Participation Apprentice role to be appointed to work with Emma C (Participation Officer)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> JD created Funding subject to outcome of MTFS approval 	Otilia B	31.03.24	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG	
	up to 25 years and to represent their views.					
2. Adopting a Whole Service Approach						
2a	To review with HR colleagues a Workforce Strategy that 'favours' care leavers (i.e., is this vacancy appropriate for a care leaver (CL), is the entry point a barrier and is a guaranteed interview given?)	Roselind M /Kayon M-J to start discussions with HR.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • HR Strategy on apprenticeships for Care Leavers to be reviewed. • Already have <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Guaranteed interview. ○ Preparation for interview by VS or Elevate. ○ Funding provided for clothing. • Transport to interview facilitated. 	RM / JF-B	31.03.24	
2b	Care Leavers as a protected characteristic	Approval by RBC to consider Care Experience as a protected characteristic to be sought	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A proposal was drawn up in respect of considering Care Experience as a protected characteristic – this proposal was considered by Council on 17/10/2023 and was agreed. 	Hilary L / Roselind M	Achieved	
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since 17/10 PAs are speaking with Care Leavers on what this means for them. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Emma P	31.03.24	

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
2c	To formally ask each department and or commissioned/procured services to make an opportunity/offer to CLs (e.g. shadowing, work experience or full time work, etc, or 'softer' things such as the use of direct work vans to move CLs or an offer of repairs).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identify all RBC departments and relevant managers and arrange meetings. Consider process for matching YP to any opportunities offered and how YP can be identified and supported to express interest. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement is being sought / established with different departments and different 'offers' including the possibility of apprenticeships is being explored. Apprenticeships have currently been offered by: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bennett Road (Carpentry) Highways Day Care Services (Care Worker) HR (HR Support) DCASC (Business Admin) Kennett Nursery (Nursery Support Worker) <p>(see 2d below)</p>	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	31.03.24	
2d	To develop our apprenticeship scheme for RBC Care Leavers.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop the apprenticeship 'offer' across different RBC services. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An apprenticeship scheme is in place with 5 guaranteed apprenticeships within RBC this year for Care Leavers: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Carpentry (allocated) Business support (being interviewed for) Parks & Services Data & Performance Housing. Elevate Adviser is supporting appropriate YP to consider applying for apprenticeships. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Saj C (Elevate)	Achieved (now BAU)	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentors are being allocated to care leavers to support them in applying for apprenticeships, preparing for interviews, and remaining motivated if appointed. • Kayon has met 2x with Alex H – RBC Apprenticeship Officer – helpful in moving this forward. Considering whether mentors can be attracted from across the council. • HR Rep/Kayon/Elevate meet bi-monthly to review how the apprenticeship programme is being rolled out and consider emerging issues/needs. • While more apprenticeships will be sought moving forward (2024/25), at the current time the number available is considered to be adequate given the work required with the YP who pursue them and the work required in the longer-term to support the YP who are successful. Will need to be a phased process. • Once more YP are in apprenticeships across the council or with other local employers, 			

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
			consideration will be given to setting up a support group.			
2e	To consider holding a key partnership event where each partner agency makes explicit their offer to care leavers based on what operational staff and care leavers have said is important to them when services are being delivered.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Initial discussion held 10/11 – Fiona B and Carol F agreed to move this action forward (see also 3b below). 	Roselind M /Fiona B /Carol F	31.03.24	
2f	To review the current Council Tax Offer for YP up to 25 years	<p>To consider the review of the current policy considering a more generous offer</p> <p>Currently scaled at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 year olds – 100% 19 year olds – 75% 20 year olds – 50% 21 year olds – 25% 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A proposal for RBC’s sliding scale of council tax exemptions that were in place for CLs aged up to 21 to be extended to CLs aged up to 25 living in the Borough and included in the Council’s MTFS planning was considered at Council on 17/10/2023 and the motion was carried. Subject to 2024/25 MTFS approval 	RBC via Lara P / Maria Y / Lead Member for Children	31.03.24	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG	
3. Education, Employment & Training To expand the 'whole council approach' by:						
3a	Virtual School Head to undertake an aspirational audit of all CLA & CLs through the PEP process.	Clare H to be asked to undertake review.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PEP process works well for Reading C&YP looked after. VS already make an aspirational offer. 	Clare H		
3b	To hold a Business Event to match the aspiration audit to local businesses and the community.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A Business Event is being planned for Q3 – see 2e above. 	Clare H/ Emma C/ Roselind M/ Fiona B/ Carol F	31.03.24	
3c	To get each department in the 'family business' (RBC/BfFC) to make an offer or an opportunity/ work shadowing/ apprenticeship to a CLA or CL.	See 2c above.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See 2c above. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Otilia B	31.03.24	
3d	To review BfFC's / RBC's HR Workforce Strategy to include CLs and to develop	See 2a – include Elevate and apprenticeship co-ordinator.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work being progressed. Interviews already guaranteed for apprenticeship roles within the council. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Jamie F-B	31.03.24	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
	an offer of guaranteed interviews with a contextual offer for entry points.				
3e	The LA to agree ringfenced apprenticeships for CLs linked to vacancies so they can move from an apprenticeship to a permanent post when appropriate.	<p>Guarantees of ringfenced apprenticeships linked to vacancies will need Director / councillor support – Lara P and/or Councillor GH.</p> <p>To identify who in RBC has the authority to ring fence specific posts for care leavers and how these posts should be identified.</p> <p>(Approximately 10-15 per year, dependent on the aspirations of young people).</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See 2d above. 	Lara P / Maria Y / Roselind M / Kayon M-J	31.03.24
3f	For care leavers who are in the ringfenced jobs to be given time out of work to meet as a group to support each other / be involved in the care leaver forum.	To be negotiated once potential posts are identified / agreed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will be progressed following 3e (above) being achieved. 	Hilary L / Roselind M	T.b.c. (dependent on 3e above)

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
3g	To consider an incentive scheme for care leavers who are seeking work.	To be included in review of local offer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being considered as part of the ongoing review of Care Leavers' Offer and the associated financial package: funding for bus pass, and if successful an electronic device (e.g., tablet or laptop) if the role requires it. Interview clothes are provided by the 'Smart Works' charity – accessed via PAs and the Career Adviser (Elevate). Most YP already have a laptop as provided to support their secondary education. Post-16 bursaries for vulnerable students (£1,200) are accessed via Virtual School. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	Achieved	
4. Housing To consider strengthening the existing offer in the following ways:						
4a	To develop a housing offer to CLs aged 21 - 25yrs and CLs entering and leaving custody	Consider developing a 'half-way house' – possibly joint commissioned by different services, including probation, housing, adult services, and social care to prepare YP to manage tenancies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase in housing offer for CLs from 12-15 x 1 bed + 2 x 2 bed accommodation per year (with an additional 7 units for 23/24) – also agreed that further increases will be considered moving forward. <p>Note: the majority of BFFC's CLs are currently UASC and will not qualify for</p>	Lead person for housing subgroup (Zelda Wolfe /Sarah H – RBC QA and	To be confirmed with lead	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG	
		<p>housing as they have not been in the UK for 3 years.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Roselind and Kayon to calculate the expected number of BFFC CLs who will be eligible for accommodation in 2023/24 and 2024/25 to inform future planning. 	Strat Op Mgr)	28.02.24		
4b	Housing Partners develop a standard offer to CLs when they move into their housing i.e., carpets, a cooker, fridge freezer and a microwave – the use of VOID monies?	To be explored through housing subgroup – will need financial sign off – could potentially be met through additional financial offer for YP moving into allocated housing with money ringfenced for specific items	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being considered as part of the ongoing review of Care Leavers' Offer. Cllr Terry has introduced us to a local charity that can provide white goods for CLs moving into social housing. 	Lead person for housing subgroup	To be confirmed with lead	
4c	To consider option of BFFC / RBC covering rent for an agreed period when CLs move into their housing option (as often there are delays with HB and UC which put CLs into debt before they even move in),	Consider including this in RBC's local offer – maximum 2 months' rent – joint funded by CSC and housing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Being considered as part of the ongoing review of Care Leavers' Offer and the associated financial package. Roselind has met with DEGNS colleagues to discuss how they might support BFFC CLs around rent and storage of CLs goods. A further meeting is planned for 29/11. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Housing	31.03.24	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG	
5. Health – To work with Health Partners to support them in developing a health offer for care leavers To potentially include:						
5a	An offer from health around emotional wellbeing and support.	Development of health subgroup to take 5a – 5d forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Revised / upgraded mental health support 'offer' for 18+ via: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 'Reframe' 'TellMi' (App) Reframe (service specific for CLs) works well with no waiting list for YP aged 16+. YP access directly – initial feed-back positive. CIC CAMHS now offer consultations within one month – offer network/placement support mtgs. Will work directly with YP if placed in west Berkshire but not out of area. Consideration ongoing as to whether service can also offer direct therapy for CLA to avoid need for referrals to external providers. 	Lead person for health subgroup	To be confirmed with lead	
5b	Free prescriptions to care leavers up to 25yrs.	Development of health subgroup to take 5a – 5d forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting held with Designated Nurse for Safeguarding & CLA (Jane B) – to discuss feasibility. Exploring provision of annual pre-payment certificates, free dental care and ophthalmology for Care Leavers, 18- 25 not entitled to free prescriptions, however it has not 	Lead person for health subgroup	To be confirmed with lead	

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
			<p>yet proved possible to move this forward.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> As this is a health need it cannot be included in the LA 'offer' but needs to be provided by Health. To be discussed on the agenda at January corporate Parenting Panel 			
5c	Free dental care and eye care for care leavers.	Development of health subgroup to take 5a – 5d forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting held with Designated Nurse for Safeguarding & CLA (Jane B) – to discuss feasibility. Will explore provision of annual pre-payment certificates, free dental care and ophthalmology for Care Leavers, 18- 25 not entitled to free prescriptions. As this is a health need it cannot be included in the LA 'offer' but needs to be provided by Health. To be discussed on the agenda at January corporate Parenting Panel 	Lead person for health subgroup	To be confirmed with lead	
5d	Planned transitions / hand overs at 18 (or older) from the LAC nurse to complex needs / psychological services etc.	Development of health subgroup to take 5a – 5d forward.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Meeting held with Designated Nurse for Safeguarding & CLA (Jane B) If YP have an identified emotional or mental health need CAMHS will support transition to adult social 	Lead person for health subgroup	Achieved	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
		<p>care and adult mental health services.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bi-monthly meetings in place between relevant services to plan transitions to adult services (where YP eligible for ongoing psychological support or continuing health care as adults). • Mosaic pathways now streamlined to support transitions. 			
6. Adult Transitions To develop a clear pathway to Adult Social Care					
6a	To routinely start discussions around complexity when YP are in care planning and are approaching 14yrs with Care Act Assessments being actioned for complex care leavers at 17yrs.	Roselind M and Kayon M-J to move forward current discussions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Meetings in place with Adult Services which focus on planning transitions (see 5d above) • BfFC Leaving Care Service brings YP to the attention of Adult Services from the age of 16. • Current staff numbers do not enable PAs to start assessments when YP are aged 14. Assessments currently completed when YP are approaching 18. • Similarly, while YP could be brought to the attention of Adult Services at age 14, Adult Services currently lack the capacity to be able to respond. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J / Otilia B /Sumbal W	31.03.24

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CLA reviews routinely identify and plan for transfer. • IT processes updated to support smooth timely transitions. 			
6b	To consider having an expert based in the leaving care team.	Roselind M and Kayon M-J to work with health colleagues to make a business case.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reframe (service specific for CLs) and CIC CAMHS working well (see 5a above). • A number of CLA access talking therapies through health services. • Reframe and CIC CAMHS do not work with severely traumatised YP aged 18+. Currently accepted at this is a gap in services. Roselind will ascertain whether any other Berkshire LAs have such support in place for their CLs and if so, who the provider is. 	Roselind M /Cathy Burgess/ Kayon M-J	To be pursued for 01.04.25	
7. DWP						
7a	The LA and DWP to develop or review their JWP to include having a SPOC in the LC team, to address verification of ID issues and the advance payments	Kayon M-J to explore if a JWP already in place and to draft a review as appropriate.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Named worker for CLs in Reading within DWP helps with verification documents, setting up appointments and early applications for UC (Jointly located with Elevate and considered to work well). 	Kayon M-J	Achieved	

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
	system (as they don't always favour care leavers).					
7b	The JWP to then be presented to the Corporate Parenting Panel for sign off.	To be actioned once 7a completed.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint working protocol (Reading / Wokingham / DWP) has been updated and signed off and will be presented to CP Panel for oversight in January 2024. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	31/01/24	
8. The Operational Model and Local Offer						
8a	To work to developing a model of practice in which the PA is allocated at the point of the first pathway plan (around the YP's 16 th birthday).	<p>Policy in place – a capacity issue.</p> <p>To review policy and make recommendations to DCSC re maintaining the status-quo or creating an additional specialist PA post.</p> <p>To review allocation of PA in line with capacity of the service, consider allocation at age 17 depending on the needs of the YP.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> PA job description says responsible for 25-26 YP. 28th April – 234 YP in LC service Capacity issue - unable to allocate YP in short breaks or shared care. arrangements (currently 12) PAs look to close down YP aged 21 who are well functioning and do not require on-going support, so as to be able to increase allocation of 16 – 18 year olds. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J /Sumbal W	To be pursued for 01.04.25	

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
8b	To develop a multi-agency team approach with different specialisms working alongside PA's	Recommendation: Not considered necessary – Reading a small geographical area and relationships between key agencies already in place – need to instead focus on improved communication between different agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not required 			
8c	To develop a more ambitious Local Offer which includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> specific offers to CLs over 21 years, with a focus on UASC, CLs entering and leaving custody and CLs as parents an explicit offer to CLs going into university which goes beyond the statutory bursary offer. consideration of providing leisure passes with a Plus 1. 	Local offer to be reviewed and presented to CPB for consideration / approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focussed Group held with Care Experienced YP on 19.07.23. New proposed 'offer' has been drafted and costed (August 2023) for management consideration. Given the LA's current financial situation any increase in costs will need to be met by BFFC. Financial offer and Care Leavers offer to be fully costed and built into MTFS 2024/25 approval process. Still a need to specifically consider whether extra provision is required for CLs entering and leaving custody (other groups all considered in the proposed revised local offer). 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	31.03.24	

Task	Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
	BFFC / RBC should pull together a set of guarantees and make them explicit as part of the local offer.				
8d	To set up a HUB for CLs, possibly co-located with other services in a one stop type approach.	Initial exploration/scoping of options with report to CPB.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Possible venues for a future 'Hub' are being explored. Likely that an existing RBC venue will need to be identified / repurposed due to cost implications of securing external accommodation. Consideration of seeking sponsorship from external companies to supply/support costs of furniture/ furnishings/ electronic and/or sports equipment etc. 	Emma C/ Otilia B/ Zelda Wolfe	31.03.24
8e	To review our setting up home grant and the current restrictions placed on it.	To be reviewed as part of local offer.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has been costed and is currently being considered as part of the 2024/25 MTFS approval process. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	01.04.24
8f	To review our CLs financial policy to promote more incentives when CLs are seeking EET, etc.	To review financial offer and current incentives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> See section 8c above. 	Roselind M /Kayon M-J	31.03.24

Task		Proposed Way forward	Progress	Lead	Target date	RAG
8g	To consider our CLs' feedback.	To consult with CLs regarding local offer. Once received, feedback to then be considered and to inform proposed offer to be put forward to CPB for consideration / approval.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focus group held 19.07.23 to explore YP's views. Participation Officer and PAs regularly receive YP's informal feedback. Reviewed as part of work on proposed 'offer' – has been costed (August 2023) for management consideration. 	Emma C /Otilia B/ Roselind M or Kayon M-J	Ongoing	

Hilary Loades

Updated 12.12.2023

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Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee Report: Reading Borough Council School Admission arrangements 2025-2026

For decision For discussion For information

SUMMARY

This report sets out for the Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education (ACE Committee) proposed Local Authority community school admission arrangements for 2025-2026

OWNER

Victoria Hannington, School Admissions Manager

VERSION 1

DATE

17 November, 2023

REVIEW DATE

November 2024

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Brighter Futures for Children
Civic Offices, Bridge Street,
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Company number 11293709

Contents

1	PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT	3
2.	RECOMMENDED ACTION.....	3
3.	POLICY CONTEXT.....	4
4.	THE PROPOSAL	5
4.1	Primary and Secondary School Co-ordinated schemes 2025-26	5
4.2	Admission Policy for Community Primary, Infant and Junior Schools 2025-2026	5
4.3	Relevant Area	5
5.	CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS	5
6	ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS	5
7.	COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION	5
8.	EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT	5
9.	LEGAL IMPLICATIONS.....	6
10.	FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS	6
11.	HR IMPLICATIONS	6
12.	COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS.....	6
13.	BACKGROUND PAPERS	6



TO:	ADULT SOCIAL CARE, CHILDRENS SERVICES AND EDUCATION COMMITTEE		
DATE:	17 January 2024	AGENDA ITEM:	
TITLE:	READING BOROUGH COUNCIL SCHOOL ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS 2025/26		
LEAD COUNCILLOR:	RUTH McEWAN	PORTFOLIO:	EDUCATION
SERVICE:	BFfC	WARDS:	BOROUGHWIDE
LEAD OFFICER:	BRIAN GRADY	TEL:	
JOB TITLE:	DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION	E-MAIL:	Brian.Grady@BrighterFuturesforChildren.org

1 PURPOSE AND SUMMARY OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report invites the Committee to determine;
- The admission arrangements for Community Primary Schools in Reading for the school year 2025/26.
 - The coordinated scheme for primary schools for the 2025/26 school year.
 - The coordinated scheme for secondary schools for the 2025/26 school year.
- 1.2 These arrangements for 2025/26 comply with the School Admissions Code 2021.

2. RECOMMENDED ACTION

- 2.1 That the scheme attached at Annexes A, B and C as the admission arrangements for 2025/26 for community schools in Reading and the local arrangements for complying with the national coordinated primary school admission procedures for the allocation of primary school places for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.
- 2.2 That the scheme attached at Annex D as the local arrangements for complying with the national coordinated secondary admissions procedure for the allocation of secondary school places for 2025/26 for residents of Reading Borough be agreed.
- 2.3 That the relevant area as attached in Annex E which sets out the organisations that must be consulted for any admission arrangements for schools in Reading be agreed.

3. POLICY CONTEXT

- 3.1 School admissions are subject to detailed requirements, set out in law and particularly the School Admissions Code 2021, published by the Government and approved by Parliament. As part of those requirements, local authorities must draw up schemes for coordinating admissions to all maintained schools in their area. The purpose of coordinated schemes is to ensure that every parent/carer of a child living in Reading who has completed and submitted an on time application receives one offer of a school place at the conclusion of the normal admissions round. The schemes set out a process and timescale to enable the offer of a single school place. They do not affect the right of individual admission authorities to set and operate their own admission arrangements but they do include arrangements for resolving multiple offers, where a place can be offered at more than one school. Reading Borough Council is the admitting authority for community, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools within the borough.
- 3.2 The Council is also required to determine the admission policy for community schools which includes the number of places to be made available at each school and the oversubscription criteria to be applied where there are more applicants than places available. Where the over-subscription criteria include catchment areas these must also be approved. The governing bodies of academies, free schools, voluntary aided and foundation schools are required to determine their own admission number and oversubscription criteria. Those schools also operate their own arrangements as part of the coordinated scheme – and where they are oversubscribed, continue to decide which applicants best meet their oversubscription criteria.
- 3.3 Reading Borough Council last consulted on the policy in 2018 and therefore there is no duty to consult this year.
- 3.4 Reading Borough Council deliver its school admissions service through Brighter Futures for Children (BFfC). BFfC is an independent, not-for-profit company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, set up in December 2018 to deliver children’s services, early help, education and SEND services in Reading
- 3.5 The documents must be determined by the 28 February 2024 to ensure Reading is compliant with the school admissions code and published on the BFfC website by 15 March 2024.

4. THE PROPOSAL

4.1 Primary and Secondary School Co-ordinated schemes 2025-26

These schemes have been amended to reflect appropriate dates. Policies were approved on the previous consultation for 2018 entry and there are no changes.

4.2 Admission Policy for Community Primary, Infant and Junior Schools 2025-2026

The policy has no changes from the proposals for 2024/25.

4.3 Relevant Area

The Relevant area outlines the organisations that must be consulted by all schools in Reading when consulting on admissions policies. No amendments have been made to this.

5. CONTRIBUTION TO STRATEGIC AIMS

5.1 The admission arrangements contribute to the aims of ensuring that there are good education, leisure and cultural opportunities for people in Reading.

6 ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

6.1 The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).

6.2 Where possible children are placed with a local school. Parental preference and the need to divert children to other schools that are not their preference, means that some children are placed in schools outside their local community. This can have an impact on travel by public transport and in cars.

7. COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND INFORMATION

7.1 Section 138 of the Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities to involve local representatives when carrying out "any of its functions" by providing information, consulting or "involving in another way".

7.2 This duty is met with these proposed arrangements. We have a statutory duty to consult every 7 years on the coordinated scheme for school admissions. We last consulted between 17 October 2018 and 10 December 2018 as per the school admission code. The outcome from that was reported to ACE on the 14 February 2019.

8. EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

8.1 Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;



- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is not relevant to this decision

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 None arising directly from this report

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

10.1 None arising directly from this report

11. HR IMPLICATIONS

11.1 None arising directly from this report

12. COMMUNICATION IMPLICATIONS

12.1 The new policies will be shared with all local Schools and neighbouring local Authorities by the School Admission Team. The new 2025 admissions guides will be updated as will the relevant pages on the BfFC website.

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

13.1 None



**Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council
Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the 2025/2026 academic
year.**

For September 2025 entry

Determined on

Contents

Introduction.....	2
Applications	4
Late Applications	5
Changes of preference	5
Change of Address	6
Processing Applications	6
Exchange of information	6
Resolving multiple offers	6
Informing schools	7
Informing Parents	7
Waiting Lists	7
Withdrawing a place.....	8
Requests for admission outside the normal age group.....	8
Disputes between Parents.....	9
In-Year Admissions	10
Timetable for the Primary & Junior School Admissions Round 2025-26.....	10

Introduction

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Reading Borough Council delivers its school admissions service through Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC). BFFC is an independent, not-for-profit company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, set up in December 2018 to deliver children's services, early help, education and SEND services in Reading.

The Reading coordinated scheme was last consulted on between 17 October 2018 and 10 December 2018. There have been no significant changes since that consultation took place, therefore no requirement for a public consultation.

This Scheme is made under section 84 of the Standards and Framework Act 1998 and in accordance with the school Admissions (Admissions Arrangements and Coordination of admissions arrangements (England) Regulations 2014.

The purpose of this coordinated scheme for primary/infant/junior school admissions is to ensure that every parent/carer of a child **resident in Reading Borough**, who has applied, receives **one offer** of a school place at the conclusion of the normal admissions round. At its heart is clear communication between Reading school admissions, other Local Authorities, community, and all state schools in Reading.

Parents/carers who live in the Borough of Reading **must** apply to Reading school admissions if they require a place for their child in any state school as part of a routine admissions round, including schools in other local authorities, academies and free schools. Applications cannot be submitted to a school or to the local authority in which the school is situated. Parents/carers living within any other local authority areas must apply through their own local authority admissions service.

Coordination with Reading school admissions does not affect the right of individual admission authorities to set and operate their own admission arrangements. Admission authorities for Reading schools will need to comply with the timetable set out below.

These arrangements deal mainly with a child's first admission to school during the school year from September 2025 to August 2026. The children concerned are those born between 1 September 2020 and 31 August 2021. The place offered is a full-time place from September 2025.

Admission to Junior School in September is for children born between 1 September 2017 and 31 August 2018.

National Offer Day for Primary and Junior Admissions is 16 April 2025

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Applications

Reading Borough Council will put in place procedures that, where possible, ensure all parents/carers living in the Borough of Reading (with a child eligible to start school in September 2025) will be aware of the application process. Children on roll at a Reading nursery school/early years setting in September 2024 will receive information about how to apply in November 2024.

Children living in Reading and attending an infant school will be sent information about the application process for admission to a junior school.

Parents/carers are encouraged to apply online via the Reading Parent Portal. The site will be open from **1 November 2024 until 15 January 2025**.

Parents/carers will be invited to list four schools and rank them in order of preference. Parents/carers may also give reasons for their preferences. Parents/carers may list any state schools, including those outside the local authority; this includes academies, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled Schools.

The Reading common application form (and the online terms and conditions) will include a statement requiring parents to confirm they have read the *Guide for Parents and Carers* and accept the policies and procedures in that document.

Parents/carers should return their completed forms directly to the school admissions team at BfFC.

Parents/carers will complete the common application form online by the agreed deadline. The school admissions team will validate the application address. Validation, where possible, will be by reference to Council Tax data held by the local authority. Where this is not possible, proof of residence will be required in the form of ownership documents or tenancy agreement.

Where, as part of its admission arrangements, a school requires additional information, parents/carers may also choose to complete a supplementary form to support their application. This should be submitted separately to the school. The *Guide for Parents and Carers* will identify those Reading schools for which a supplementary form may be necessary. These forms will be available from the BfFC website. Supplementary forms are not applications and parent/carers must apply to Reading school admissions either on the common application form or online.

The National Closing Date is **15 January 2025**.

Late Applications

Applications received after the closing date will be treated as 'late' applications. However, if the late submission of the application is caused by extenuating circumstances, (e.g. sudden illness or death of a close family member or the family having very recently moved to the area) the application may be accepted as "on time". The reason for late submission must be supported with documentary evidence received before **1 February 2025**.

Where no evidence is provided, it will be assumed that the application could reasonably have been submitted by the closing date. In such cases, the application will be treated as late and considered after all on time applications have been allocated.

All applications received from the **2 February** are considered late and will be passed to the appropriate admission authority in Reading (or to the appropriate local authority) approximately two weeks after National Offer Day.

In these cases, parents/carers will be informed about the outcome of their application as per the timetable below, after National Offer Day. Unsuccessful applications for oversubscribed schools will be added to the waiting lists of those schools and ranked according to their oversubscription criteria.

Late applications will be processed approximately two weeks after national offer day. The first round of post-National Offer Day allocations will be at the end of May **2025**. After this date late application will be processed regularly. In each case, the cut-off date for consideration in each round of allocations will be 1 week prior to the allocation date.

Changes of preference

Changes of preference must be submitted using a new application form (paper or online). If received by the school admissions team before **15 January 2025** it will be accepted as on time and will replace any previous application. Any preferences to be retained from a previous application should be listed on subsequent applications.

Changes of preference received after **15 January 2025** will be treated as late applications in the way described above. However, applications for late change of preference where there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. sudden illness or death of a close family member or the family having very recently moved to the area) may be treated as on time, provided written evidence is supplied to support the late submission. This should be received by the school admissions team before **1 February 2025**. If no evidence is provided, the application will be treated as late. Any application for change of preference(s) received after **1 February 2025** will replace any previous application and be marked as late.

Please think very carefully about submitting an application after this date, particularly if you have already submitted an on time application.

Approximately two weeks after National Offer Day, late changes of preferences will be passed to the appropriate admission authority in Reading or to the appropriate local authority to be considered.

Change of Address

As required by the School Admissions Code 2021, changes of address made after **15 January and before 1 February 2025** may be considered as on time. If an applicant changes address after **1 February 2025** they will need to submit a new application, based on the new address. The new application will be marked as late, and their previous application may be withdrawn. Documentary evidence of the change of address will be required.

Processing Applications

Exchange of information

As per the timetable below, the Reading school admissions team will forward applications to other local authorities and admission authorities in Reading. At the same time other local authorities will forward applications to Reading for their residents to be considered for Reading schools.

Depending on the arrangements agreed with the governing body of each school, the school admissions team will provide the school with relevant information to enable them to rank against their oversubscription criteria, as per the timetable. Reading school admissions will not pass on the details of the parent/carer's preference ranking to the school, and no school will be told about other schools a parent has listed.

As per the timetable, each admission authority in Reading will rank the applications according to their published oversubscription criteria and return ranked lists to the school admissions team.

Resolving multiple offers

As per the timetable, Reading school admissions will inform other local authorities of places offered in Reading schools to their residents. During the exchange of information, Reading school admissions will consider all cases where a child can be offered more than one of their preferences. In such cases, a place offered will be at the school a parent/carer listed highest in preference.

If a place cannot be offered at one of the preferred schools listed by the parent/carer, a place will normally be offered at the catchment school (if that school has spaces remaining) or, the nearest Reading school with a place available. If the offered school is one where Reading Borough Council is not the admission authority, this will be in consultation with the governing body of the school in question. If the nearest school with places is a faith school, parents/carers will be offered this as an option. Should the parent/carer be unhappy with a faith school being offered, they will be informed of other schools with available spaces

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the **2025/2026** academic year.

(which may be further from their home). Where no places are available at any Reading schools, parents/carers will be informed, and alternative schools (outside Reading Borough) may be offered. Such an offer will depend on availability and the agreement of the appropriate admission authority. This will not preclude parents/carers from requesting an alternative school, nor from lodging an appeal for their preferred school with the admission authority.

Informing schools

As per the timetable, the school admissions team will send each Reading primary and infant school a list of pupils to be offered a place at their school. This will be confidential to the school and must not be passed on to parents/carers.

Informing Parents

On **National Offer Day**, parents/carers who submitted an 'on time' online application will receive an email with a formal offer and may view their offer online.

Parents/carers who submitted a paper application will receive details of their offer by letter (posted 2nd Class). The formal offer will identify whether the offer is made on behalf of the governing body of a school or another local authority. The letter will:

- Inform parents/carers of their child's offered school.
- Inform parents/carers how to accept the offer and the deadline for accepting.
- Provide information about the right to defer admission to a later term and any option for part-time provision.
- Provide information on school transport.

If the school offered is not their first preference, parents/carers will also be supplied with the following information:

- Where they can find information showing how places were allocated at oversubscribed schools in Reading.
- How to submit an appeal.
- If the place offered is not their highest preference school(s), the child's name will be added to the waiting list(s) of any school(s) they listed higher in preference. Parents/carers are required to advise Reading school admissions if they do not wish their child's name to remain on a waiting list.
- Contact information for other local authorities.

Waiting Lists

Two weeks after National Offer Day, 'waiting lists' will be administered for schools with more applicants than places available. A child's position on a waiting list is determined by the oversubscription criteria of the school. When a place becomes available, it will be offered to the child who is top of the waiting list. A child's position on a waiting list may go up or down for a number of reasons (e.g. pupil withdrawals or new and revised applications). When a place is allocated from the waiting list, the child's current allocation

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

(for a lower preference school) will be removed and allocated to another student, if appropriate. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the school admissions team if they no longer wish for their child to remain on the waiting list of a school. It will be assumed that a child is to remain on the waiting list of all schools listed higher in preference to one offered (unless the parent/carers indicates otherwise).

Waiting lists for all schools in the Reading Borough, will be kept until **31 August 2026**. After this date, the policy of the individual school(s) will be followed. When the coordinated admissions round ends, on **31 August 2025**, waiting lists will continue to be managed as part of the In-Year admissions process and follow the individual policy of the school.

Withdrawing a place

If the offered place is not accepted within four weeks of national offer day, Reading school admissions will send a reminder and allow a further seven days for a reply. If there is still no response, the offer may be withdrawn. If it arises that a school offer was based on fraudulent, or intentionally misleading information (which denied the place to another child), the place will be withdrawn.

Requests for admission outside the normal age group

Parents/carers may request their child be admitted outside the year group suggested by the child's date of birth (i.e. admission to Reception, rather than Year 1, in **September 2026**). In such cases, applicants should apply using the common application form by **15 January 2025**. They should **also** complete the offset request form (having read the separate guide). The offset request form should be submitted to the school admissions team before **1 February 2025** to be considered prior to National Offer Day. The application will be forwarded to the relevant admissions authority of the listed schools for consideration and the school admissions team will seek the views of the child's early years setting. Each case will be carefully considered by the admissions authority. Parents/carers will be informed of the decision in writing before the National Offer Day, setting out clearly the reasons for the decision. Any request received after **1 February 2025** will be processed after National Offer Day.

If the offset request is agreed, parents/carers must formally accept it. Following this, their application submitted for September **2025** is withdrawn. Parents/carers are not told which school their child was allocated before accepting/declining the offset. A new application must then be submitted in the following year for entry from September **2026**.

Requests for schools outside Reading will be referred to the relevant local authority for consideration under that Council's scheme.

One admission authority cannot be required to honour a decision made by another admission authority on admission outside the normal age group. Therefore, if an application for **2026** entry lists different schools to the application withdrawn in **2025**, it will (if

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the **2025/2026** academic year.

required) be forwarded to different admissions authorities for their consideration. Where this is the case, the offset request form must be resubmitted.

Disputes between Parents

Anyone with parental responsibility may apply for their child's school place and list up to four preferred schools. However, the child's address on the application should be recorded as the place they spend most of the week as set out in our definition of 'Home Address'.

When completing application forms, parents/carers must tick to confirm they have parental responsibility for the child and that their application is made with the agreement of all parties having parental responsibility.

Where parents disagree over which school preferences should be named, we recommend starting the following process as early as possible as national closing dates are fixed and cannot be extended under any circumstances:

- We urge parents to work together in the best interests of their child, and it is advised that the applicant should inform all other parties who have parental responsibility before submitting the application.
- All parties should agree with the school preferences to be listed. Any disagreements should be resolved before an application is submitted.
- If parents are unable to reach an amicable agreement, they should seek legal advice or recourse through the Family Court.

The local authority will only process one application per child and will only make one offer of a school place.

Where more than one application is received, the local authority (or local authorities if parents submit applications to more than one) will contact both applicants to advise that more than one application has been received, and request they complete one application with one set of preferences for their child.

All evidence must be received by published closing dates, at which point a decision will be made as to which application is processed. The local authorities concerned may contact early years or education settings noted in the application, or other professionals working with the child where applicable, to assist in their decision making. Any evidence provided after the closing date which affects the content or processing of the application, may render the application late, and delay an offer of a school place.

We will not mediate between parents where there is a dispute. Only one application will be accepted, and the final decision will rest with the local authority after all submitted evidence has been considered.

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the **2025/2026** academic year.

In-Year Admissions

The In-Year admissions arrangements for the school year, September 2025 - July 2026 will use the determined policies of 2025/2026.

Parents/carers seeking admission for their child into Year 1 – Year 6 of a primary/infant or junior school in Reading Borough must apply to Reading school admissions. Parents/carers may apply direct to some voluntary-aided, academy or free schools in the Borough, however, most of these schools have opted to be part of the coordinated admission arrangements and applications are normally submitted to the Reading school admissions team. A list of schools to which a direct application is necessary is available from the BFFC website. Where a school listed is in another local authority, the parent/carer will be advised to apply directly to that local authority, and the application for that school will follow the relevant local authority's scheme.

Timetable for the Primary & Junior School Admissions Round 2025-26

Action	Date
<i>Guide for Parents and Carers</i> to be placed on BFFC Website.	By 1 September 2024
Information sent to Early Years Providers to share with parent	By 1 November 2024
Online Reading Parent Portal for admissions open.	1 November 2024 – 15 January 2025
National Closing date for receipt of applications.	15 January 2025
Late/change of preference applications accepted in extenuating circumstances, written support must be submitted at time of application.	1 February 2025
Application details sent to voluntary-aided/Academes schools in Reading and other local authorities. Own Admissions Authority schools to provide Reading school admissions team with a list of children ranked according to the school's oversubscription criteria.	During February 2025
Coordination between other local authorities of offers that can be made to their residents in Reading schools.	By 2 April 2025
National Offer Day - Offer notifications sent to Reading Residents	16 April 2025
Deadline for parents to accept.	1 May 2025
Late applications for over-subscribed schools added to the waiting lists/change of preferences processed.	From 2 May 2025
Coordination with other LA's ends.	31 August 2025
Waiting lists held for Reading schools.	Until at least 31 July 2026

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Primary, Infant and Junior Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.



ADMISSION POLICY FOR COMMUNITY INFANT, JUNIOR
AND
PRIMARY SCHOOLS 2025-2026

For September 2025 entry
Determined on

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Other admitting authorities within Reading Borough Council	3
Cohort.....	3
Admission of children outside the normal age to Reading Borough Council Community Primary Schools.....	3
Oversubscription Criteria for Community Primary and Infant Schools	4
Priority within the Oversubscription Criteria.....	5
Oversubscription Criteria for Community Junior Schools – Geoffrey Field Junior School.....	6
Priority within the oversubscription criteria.....	7
Notes relating to the above oversubscription criteria.....	7
Note 1 – Category 1 – Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children.....	7
Children who were previously in state care outside England.....	7
Note 2 – Category 2 Medical/Social Reasons	8
Note 3 – Category 3 – Siblings	8
Note 4 – Category 3 – Siblings	8
Catchment area	9
Tiebreaker.....	9
Multiple births (twins, triplets etc.).....	9
Parent/Carers	10
Home address.....	10
Split living arrangements	11
Siblings.....	12
Deferring a Place	12
Part Time Admissions	13
Waiting Lists	13
Returning Crown Servants and Armed Forces Personnel.....	13
In-Year Admission Arrangements for the School Year 2025-2026	14
Appeals	14
Admissions Numbers – Reading Community Infant, Junior and Primary Schools.....	15

Introduction

Reading Borough Council is the admission authority for community and voluntary controlled schools within the borough.

Reading Borough Council delivers its school admissions service through Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC). BFFC is an independent, not-for-profit company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, set up in December 2018 to deliver children's services, early help, education and SEND services in Reading.

This document sets out the local authority's admission arrangements for entry to schools in September 2025.

The Reading School Admissions policy was last consulted on between 17 October 2018 and 10 December 2018. There have been no significant changes since that consultation took place, therefore no requirement for a public consultation.

These arrangements comply with the School Admissions (Admission Arrangements and Coordination of Admission Arrangements) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2014, the School Admissions Code 2021 and the School Admissions Appeals Code 2021.

Other admitting authorities within Reading Borough Council

Voluntary aided schools, free schools and academies are their own admission authorities and are required to publish their own proposals for consultation (if required) and determine their own admissions arrangements. Details of their proposals and/or determined arrangements should be obtained from each individual school.

National Offer Day for Primary and Junior Admissions is 16 April 2025

Cohort

Applications for children born between 1-9-2020 and 31-8-2021 will be considered for admission to a reception class in 2025 as part of the 2025/2026 routine admission round.

Applications for admission to junior schools in September 2025 will be considered for those born between 1-9-2017 and 31-8-2018.

Admission of children outside the normal age to Reading Borough Council Community Primary Schools

Children are normally allocated school places according to their chronological age. However, parents may request their child be placed outside of their normal age group, for example, if the child is identified as 'gifted and talented' or has experienced problems such as ill health. In addition, the parents of a summer born child may choose not to send that child to school until the September following their fifth birthday and may request that they are admitted out of their normal age group; to Reception rather than Year 1, in September 2026.

Reading Borough Council, as the Admission Authority for community primary schools, will consider each case individually and determine what is in the best interest of the child, taking into account:

- The parent's/carer's views.
- Information about the child's academic, social, and emotional development from their current setting.
- The child's medical history and the views of a medical professional (where relevant).
- Whether the child has previously been educated out of their normal age group.
- Whether the child may have fallen into a lower age group had they not been born prematurely.
- DfE document 'Advice on the admission of summer born children'.
- DfE document 'School Admissions Code'
- LGO document 'Summer born admissions'.
- The views of the head teacher at the school(s) concerned
- The views of the child's early years setting (if attending one)

To request a child's admission be delayed to September 2026, parents/carers need to read the offset guide and complete the required form. It is recommended they make an application for a reception place in the normal way for September 2025 by 15 January 2025 so that the application can be considered. Each case will be reviewed, and parents/carers will be informed of the decision in writing before the National Offer Day, setting out clearly the reasons for the decision. If the request to delay admission is agreed, the parents/carers must issue a formal acceptance, declaring their intention to proceed on this basis. In this case, the application submitted for September 2025 entry will be withdrawn (before a reception place is offered) and a new application must then be submitted (for entry in September 2026) when the next primary admissions round opens in November 2025.

Parents/carers will not be made aware of the school they would have been allocated before the decision is accepted or declined. The decision made by Reading school admissions panel is not binding on any other Admission Authority and therefore schools may come to different decisions based on the evidence. If the request is refused, parents must decide whether to accept the offered place for Reception 2025 or refuse it and make an in-year application for a Year 1 place in September 2026.

Oversubscription Criteria for Community Primary and Infant Schools

Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) naming a community primary or infant school will be allocated a place above all other children.

The oversubscription criteria take no account of the parent's/carers order of preference. Applications for each school named by the parents/carers will be ranked according to the criteria set out below if there are more applications than places available.

Category		Notes
1	A 'looked after child' or a child who was previously looked after but immediately after being looked after became subject to an adoption, child arrangements, or special guardianship order including those who appear [to the admission authority] to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A looked after child is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989).	Provided appropriate evidence is submitted – See Note 1.
2	Families who have strong medical or social grounds for their child's admission to a particular school.	See Note 2.
3	Children whose permanent home address is in the catchment area of the school and have a sibling at the school at the time of application, who is expected to be attending the school when the child is due to start school.	This category may apply in other circumstances - See Notes 3 and 4.
4	Children whose permanent home address is in the catchment area of the school.	
5	Children whose permanent home address is not in the catchment area of the school but have a sibling at the school at the time of application, who is expected to be attending the school when the child is due to start school.	See Note 4.
6	Children in receipt of Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) at the time application who attends the nursery unit at the school.	
7	Other Children	

Priority within the Oversubscription Criteria

Within each of the above categories 1-5 and 7, priority will be given to children who are in receipt of the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Service Premium or Pupil Premium (PP) at the time of application. To be considered for these priorities, parents/carers will be required to complete a Supplementary Information Form which **must be endorsed by the child's current school or nursery** confirming that they receive Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Service Premium or Pupil Premium (PP) for the child. This form must be completed and returned to the school admissions team prior to **1 February 2025** in order that this priority may be awarded on time for the routine admissions round. Any applications received later than this date will be awarded the priority after national offer day.

Oversubscription Criteria for Community Junior Schools – Geoffrey Field Junior School

Children with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) naming the school will be allocated a place above all other children.

The oversubscription criteria take no account of the parents/carers order of preference and applications for each school named by the parents/carers will be ranked according to the criteria set out below if there are more applications than places available.

Older siblings still attending the linked junior school will be considered as siblings for admission to the infant school.

Category		Notes
1	A 'looked after child' or a child who was previously looked after but immediately after being looked after became subject to an adoption, child arrangements, or special guardianship order ⁹¹ including those who appear [to the admission authority] to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted. A looked after child is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989).	Provided appropriate evidence is submitted – See Note 1.
2	Families who have strong medical or social grounds for their child's admission to a particular school.	See Note 2.
3	Children whose permanent home address is in the catchment area of the school and have a sibling at the school, or Geoffrey Field Infant School at the time of application who is expected to be attending the school when the child is due to start school.	This category may apply in other circumstances - See Notes 3 and 4.
4	Children whose permanent home address is in the catchment area of the school.	
5	Children whose permanent home address is not in the catchment area of the school but have a sibling at the school or Geoffrey Field Infant School at the time of application, who is expected to be attending the school when the is due to start school.	See Note 4.
6	Children who are attending Geoffrey Field Infant School at the time of application.	
7	Other Children.	

Priority within the oversubscription criteria

Within each of the above categories 1-5 and 7, priority will be given to children who are in receipt of the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Service Premium or Pupil Premium (PP) at the time of application. To be considered for these priorities, parents/carers will be required to complete a Supplementary Information Form which **must be endorsed by the child's current school** confirming that they receive Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Service Premium or Pupil Premium (PP) for the child. This form must be completed and returned to the school admissions team prior to **1 February 2025** in order that this priority may be awarded on time for the routine admissions round. Any applications received later than this date will be awarded the priority after national offer day.

Notes relating to the above oversubscription criteria.

Note 1 – Category 1 – Looked After Children and Previously Looked After Children

A 'Looked After' child is a) in the care of a local authority, or b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions as defined in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989 at the time of making an application for a school place.

A previously 'Looked After' child is a child who was looked after but has been adopted or became subject to a child arrangement order or special guardianship order immediately following having been 'Looked After'. Confirmation will be required from the local authority that last looked after the child that the child was looked after immediately prior to the issuing of one of the following orders:

An adoption order is an order under the Adoption Act 1976 (see Section 12 adoption orders) and children who were adopted under the Adoption and Children Act 2002 (see Section 46 adoption orders).

A 'child arrangements order' is an order settling the arrangements to be made as to the person with whom the child is to live under Section 8 of the Children Act 1989 as amended by Section 14 of the Children and Families Act 2014.

Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians).

Children who were previously in state care outside England

A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of, or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.

The care may have been provided in an orphanage or other setting, but the child may have been adopted and is no longer in state care. Evidence of the previously looked after status and/or the adoption will be requested. Where such evidence is not available, the admissions authority will work closely with BFFC Virtual School for Children Looked After to make a pragmatic decision based on the information available to ensure a consistent local approach.

Note 2 – Category 2 Medical/Social Reasons

When applying under criterion 2, families who have strong medical or social grounds for their child's admission to a particular school must provide written evidence. This should come from an independent professional aware of the case relating to the child, parent/carer or other children living at the same address (e.g. doctor, hospital consultant or psychologist for medical grounds or registered social or care worker, housing officer, the police or probation officer for social needs). This evidence must: be specific to the school in question, show why that school is the most suitable, what facilities will benefit the child, and why no other school can offer the same support. It is not enough for the professional to report what the parent/carer has told them.

If failure in awarding this priority would result in no appropriate school being allocated, the panel, after taking considering the evidence submitted, the parental preference and the catchment school, will allow categorization of medical/social grounds to the most appropriate school. This applies to those children whose social/medical needs can be met by more than one school but not many schools. For example, when reasons are due to mobility issues and a number of schools are equal distance and failure to award this would result in no appropriate school being allocated.

In addition, this category includes children who are subject to a child arrangement order or special guardianship order awarded to a family member in order to prevent the child being taken into care by a local authority. A copy of the order must be provided.

No individual officer will take responsibility for determining whether a case is ranked in the category. A panel of officers in the form of the School Admissions Panel will make the final decision. Evidence must be provided by **1 February 2025** to be considered as on time for National Offer Day. If evidence is received by the team after this date, then it is at the discretion of the panel whether to accept these documents for 'on time' allocations. The admissions team will not prompt parents to send evidence to support admission under this category, but they may ask for further evidence if this is required to make a decision. If evidence is received before the **1 February 2025** parents will be informed in writing, before National Offer Day as to whether this has been granted. This is not a guarantee of a place at a particular school.

Note 3 – Category 3 – Siblings

Children whose home address is in the former catchment area of a school and have a sibling at the school and that sibling was admitted to the school from the same address will be treated as category 4 of the oversubscription criteria.

Note 4 – Category 3 – Siblings

If parents/carers applied for a place at their catchment area school for their child and it was not possible to offer a place at that school because the school was oversubscribed, a sibling protection applies. Where the child was admitted to a lower preference Reading community primary school or allocated a place by the authority at an alternative Reading community primary school, the application for any younger siblings for that school will be treated as 'catchment area' and considered under category 4. Where a parent does not list all schools

in the catchment area for the home address at the time of application and a place would have been offered at a catchment area school had it been listed, they forfeit the right to sibling protection. Parents/carers must inform the admissions team at the time of application if they consider this exemption applies.

Where a space is allocated as part of an in-year admission at a school listed second preference or lower, or if a school closer to the child's home address was available to parents and was refused, parents forfeit the right to this sibling protection for future admissions. Parents will be informed at the time of allocation if this right has been forfeited.

Catchment area

The catchment area of the schools can be seen from attached maps. These are a guide only. Exact catchment area information for individual addresses can be found on Reading Borough Council's website <https://my.reading.gov.uk/>

Tiebreaker

If a school does not have enough places for all children in a particular category, places will be allocated to those living nearest the school. The distance is measured in miles as a straight line between the Ordnance Survey data point for the child's home address and the school using Reading Borough Council digital mapping software. This distance is measured to three decimal places. In the rare event that it is not possible to decide between the applications of those pupils who have the same distance measurement, the place will be offered using random allocation. A member of Committee Services staff for Reading Borough Council will supervise the selection process.

Multiple births (twins, triplets etc.)

Places are offered according to the oversubscription criteria. However, where this would result in splitting children of multiple births, the other sibling(s) will be offered a place in most cases. In very exceptional circumstances, where the admission of more than one additional child to the year group causes prejudice to the provision of efficient education and efficient use of resources, it may not be possible to offer a place to all multiple birth children.

In cases where siblings attending the same year group, but with different birth dates are split by the oversubscription criteria, only one child will be offered a place. This applies to children during Key stage 1 (up to and including Year 2) if admission would take a class over 30 pupils. Selection will be made randomly by a representative of Reading Borough Council's Committee Services. The parents may decline the offer and seek places for all siblings at another school or accept the place for one of the siblings. In the latter case, the other sibling's name(s) will be added to the waiting list. If admission is in Key Stage 2, or the admission of the other siblings will not contravene infant class size regulations, then each case will be considered. Often, the other child/children will be offered a place (on the condition that the admission will not prejudice the provision of efficient education and efficient use of resources).

Parent/Carers

A parent/carer is any person who has parental responsibility or care of the child. Parental responsibility for a child is set out in the Children Act 1989. Normally this parent/carer would reside with the child at the permanent home address stated on the application.

Home address

Applications are processed based on the child's single permanent home address where the child lives, with parent(s) or a carer/legal guardian, on the closing date for applications. By applying, the parent/carer/legal guardian is confirming the child will be living at that address on National Offer Day. An address will not be accepted where the child is resident, other than with a parent or carer, unless it is part of a private fostering or formal care arrangement.

Checks will be made to determine whether an address declared on the application form is that of a second home, with the main home being elsewhere. Some residential arrangements will be considered temporary. In such cases, the School Admissions Team will examine available evidence to determine whether, on balance, the declared home address may be considered the child's permanent home for the purpose of admission. Any circumstance where the declared address is to be accepted as the permanent home, despite another home being owned or otherwise available for occupation, should be declared at the point of application. Without being exhaustive these this might include:

- an owned property being a considerable distance from the preferred school, indicating that the family had permanently relocated to the new home; or
- an owned property that is uninhabitable and cannot reasonably be made habitable in the period leading up to admission to the school; or
- an owned property that is in the process of being sold and the family live permanently in the declared property; or
- a situation, following divorce or separation, where the family home cannot be occupied by the applicant or otherwise treated as the child's permanent home.

Where the declared address is rented and the applicant has no claim on any other property, the declared address may be considered temporary if there is evidence to suggest the applicant has chosen to rent the property solely for the period necessary for their child to be admitted to a particular school.

Reference to Reading Borough Council tax records will be made to determine a single address for consideration of a place under criteria 4 or 5. It is for the applicant to satisfy the admissions authority that they live at the address stated.

Applicants will be asked to declare that the address used is expected to be their place of residence beyond the date of the pupil starting school. Applicants are required to advise of any change of circumstance at any time prior to the child starting school. If the applicant does not declare such arrangements (or a different address is used on the application where the child does not usually live), it will be considered that a false declaration has been made.

This may result in a decision being taken to decline to offer a place at a particular school, or to withdraw the offer of a place. In deciding whether an allocation was based on a misleading or fraudulent application, an admissions panel will consider any supporting evidence giving reasons why the move was necessary prior to the child starting school.

It is important to declare if there is to be a change of address prior to the child starting school. If the applicant already owns a property which is in the process of being sold, the admissions team are able to accept the address of the new property only on submission of the appropriate evidence in support (e.g. completion of contracts letter on both the new property and, where possible, disposal of their current property). The deadline for submission of evidence to support a move is **1 February 2025**.

If the applicant is renting the property, the tenancy agreement must be dated **1 February 2025** or prior, to be accepted as on time. If the tenancy agreement expires prior to National Offer Day, the applicant must provide evidence showing that they still reside at the property past that date. If the applicant moves to a new rented property after the **1 February 2025**, the application will be marked late and considered after National Offer Day.

A temporary address cannot be used to obtain a school place. Temporary addresses will only be considered where evidence is provided of a genuine reason for the move e.g. flooding or subsidence.

Reading school admissions reserves its right to carry out further investigation, request additional evidence and to reject applications (or withdraw offers of places) if it believes it has the grounds to do so. In such cases, the applicant will have recourse to the independent appeals process. Where it is believed an address provided is not the only address, the Corporate Audit & Investigation Team may be called upon to investigate further.

Split living arrangements

Where a family claims to be resident at more than one address, justification and evidence of the family's circumstances will be required (e.g. formal residence order, child arrangements order or legal separation documentation). The application must be completed by the parent using the address which is owned, leased or rented and where the child lives for the majority of the school week. This is based on the number of school nights a child spends at the address (from Sunday at 6pm to Friday at 9am).

Where children live across two addresses, families cannot use whichever address would advantage their child's admission into a certain school.

Where there is an equal split or there is any doubt about residence, the School Admissions Team will assess and make a judgment about which address to use for the purpose of allocating a school place. Where necessary, further information may be requested, for example:

- any legal documentation confirming residence
- the pattern of residence

- the duration of the current arrangement
- confirmation from the current school or early years setting of the primary contact details and home address supplied to it by the parents
- the address where child benefit or other benefit (if applicable) is paid
- where the child is registered with their GP
- any other evidence the parents may supply to verify the position.

It is recommended that consensus is reached by both parties (and the child) regarding the school preferences listed. It should be noted that only one offer letter will be sent to the main applicant, unless otherwise requested and agreed by both parties.

The information provided to determine the home address will be considered by an admissions panel of at least two officers and their decision is final.

Siblings

For the purposes of admissions criteria during the main primary admission round, ‘siblings’ are older siblings already attending the preferred school. However, Geoffrey Field Junior School will consider a younger sibling attending Geoffrey Field Infant School. In-year applications will consider younger siblings, but not a sibling attending the nursery class of a school.

Siblings are children who have either the same mother or father, or they are children who live together in a family unit and with their parent(s)/carer(s). Siblings must live at the same permanent home address as each other. If they do not live at the same address, then they are not treated as siblings for the purpose of admission.

A child who is part of a multiple birth (e.g., twins) is not classed a sibling for the purpose of ranking by oversubscription criteria. However, where application of the oversubscription criteria would result in splitting children from a multiple birth, the other child/children will usually be admitted to the school.

Deferring a Place

Upon receipt of an application, the local authority is legally required to offer every child a full-time Reception place to start in the September following their fourth birthday. In Reading schools, places are offered on a full-time basis from September 2025 as a “rising 5” admission. Children do not reach statutory (compulsory) school age until the September, January or April following their fifth birthday. When children are offered “rising 5” places, parents/carers may decide to defer their child’s start until January 2026 or April 2026 (depending on their child’s birth date). In such cases, the offered school must hold the child’s place. However, schools are not obliged to hold a place where a parent/carer wishes to defer beyond April 2026 (i.e., September 2026) as this pushes the child’s start into the following academic year. Any parent/carer wishing to defer entry to September 2026

(i.e. to miss out Reception entirely and start their child in Year 1) must forfeit their child's September 2025 school offer and re-apply for a Year 1 place in July 2026. They should also consider that places may not be available if their preferred school has become oversubscribed by this time.

Part Time Admissions

Parents/carers may request their child be admitted on a part time basis for an initial period (but not beyond the point at which their child reaches compulsory school age). Where a parent/carer chooses this option, they cannot insist on part-time provision that is individually tailored to their needs. Parents/carers must consult with the Headteacher of the allocated school to agree the best arrangement for both child and school.

Waiting Lists

Approximately two weeks after National Offer Day 'waiting lists' will be created for Reading schools. Children will be added to the waiting list of any school their parents/carers listed higher in preference to the school they were offered. A child's position on the waiting list is determined by the oversubscription criteria. The list will be re-ranked whenever new children are added following late applications or changes of preference. When a place becomes available, it is offered to the child ranked highest on the waiting list. After 1 September 2025, children identified for placement as part of the Fair Access Protocol can be placed above those on the waiting list. Positions on the waiting lists may go up or down due to pupil withdrawals, new or revised applications. Reading school admissions will keep waiting lists until end of July 2026 (end of Term 6 for Reception classes). After this date, the waiting lists will be abandoned. Parents/carers must then re-apply for a place in Year 1 as an in-year admissions applicant if they are still interested in obtaining a place for their child.

Returning Crown Servants and Armed Forces Personnel

Families of Crown servants returning from overseas to live in the Reading Borough or applicants relocating in the armed forces may apply for a place in advance of their move provided the application is accompanied by an official letter confirming the posting to the UK and the expected relocation date. A school will be offered in advance of a move and held until the appropriate time. If the schools listed on an application form are oversubscribed, the family will need to provide an address to be ranked accordingly.

Where a parent is unable to provide confirmation of a relocation address, an indication of the area may be provided, narrowed down as far as possible, to which the family intend to return. Preferences will be processed but applications will be considered under criterion 7 (other children) until the parent is able to provide confirmation of the new address (e.g. proof of exchange of contracts or a signed rental agreement). If a place cannot be offered at a preferred school, an alternative school will be offered, and parents will be advised of the right of appeal for a place at the preferred school. It is the responsibility of parents to keep the school admissions team informed of any changes to their planned address during the application process.

In-Year Admission Arrangements for the School Year 2025-2026.

The In- Year admissions arrangements for the school year, September 2025- July 2026 will use the determined policies of 2025/2026.

Parents/carers seeking admission for their child into Year 1 – Year 6 in a community primary school in Reading Borough, must apply to Reading school admissions using the In-Year Application form. Parents/carers may apply direct to some voluntary-aided or academy schools in the Borough, but most of these schools have opted to be part of the coordinated admission arrangements and applications are normally submitted to the Reading school admissions team. A list of those schools to which a direct application is necessary is available from the Brighter Futures for Children website.

If there is a place in the parent's/carer's preferred school, the place will be allocated, however, if there are more applications than places available the oversubscription criteria (as outlined above) will apply with places allocated to the child(ren) ranked highest. Remaining applicants will be added to the waiting list which will also be ranked according to the oversubscription criteria. Children allocated according to the Fair Access Protocol will take precedent over children on the waiting list.

Those children new to the area, or who have moved within the borough, will be able to start at the school as soon as possible after their move. If the request is to move schools within the borough without a move of home, these children will normally be expected to start at the beginning of the following term.

Waiting lists for admission in Years 1 to 6 will be held until 31 December 2025 after which parents/carers must reapply for their child to remain on the waiting list until July 2026. The waiting list will be abandoned after 31 July 2026 and parents/carers must reapply if they are still seeking a place for September 2026.

Appeals

If it is not possible to offer a place at the preferred school(s), parents/carers will be advised of their right of appeal.

Admissions Numbers – Reading Community Infant, Junior and Primary Schools.

The following are the proposed admission numbers for 2025

School	September 2025 - Admission Number
Alfred Sutton Primary	90
Caversham Park Primary	30
Caversham Primary	60
Coley Primary	30
Emmer Green Primary	60
EP Collier Primary	60
Geoffrey Field Infant	90
Geoffrey Field Junior	90
Katesgrove Primary	90
Manor Primary	45
Micklands Primary	60
Moorlands Primary	60
Oxford Road Community	30
Park Lane Primary	60
Redlands Primary	30
Southcote Primary	90
St Michael's Primary	60
Thameside Primary	60
The Hill Primary	60
The Ridgeway Primary	60
Whitley Park Primary School	90
Wilson Primary	60

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**Primary Schools Designated Areas (Catchments) for
Primary, Infant and Junior Schools in Reading for the
2025/2026 academic year.**

For September 2025 entry

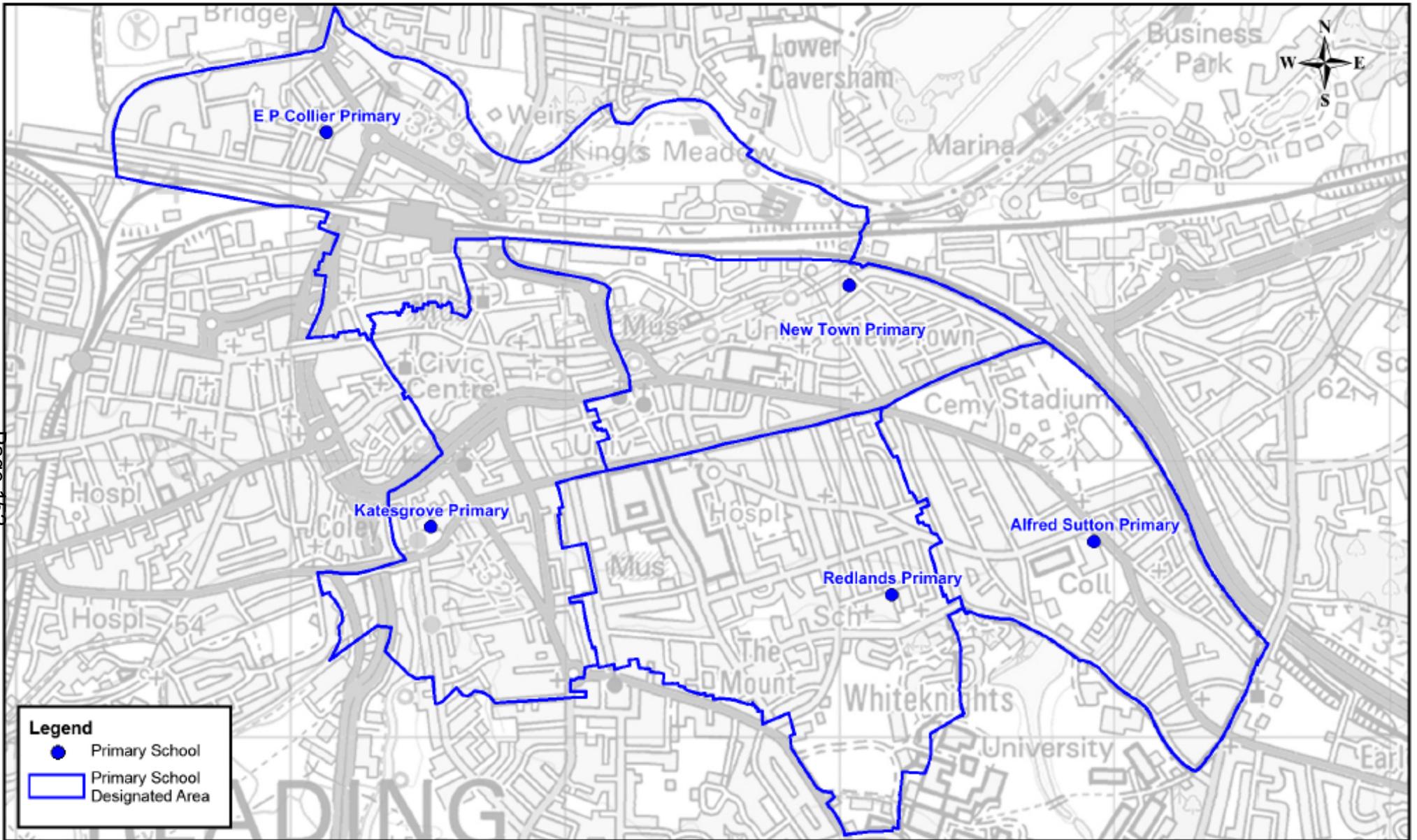
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The maps on the following pages show Primary, Infant and Junior school catchment areas in Reading. It includes catchments for Reading Borough Council maintained and other state maintained schools.

Please note, not all schools have a catchment area.

Some areas do not have a catchment school due to schools removing the catchment criteria from their policy.

The maps do not include parish catchments for schools. A parish catchment is an address which falls in the area of an ecclesiastical parish church.



Title: Primary Schools Designated Areas
 Central and East Reading

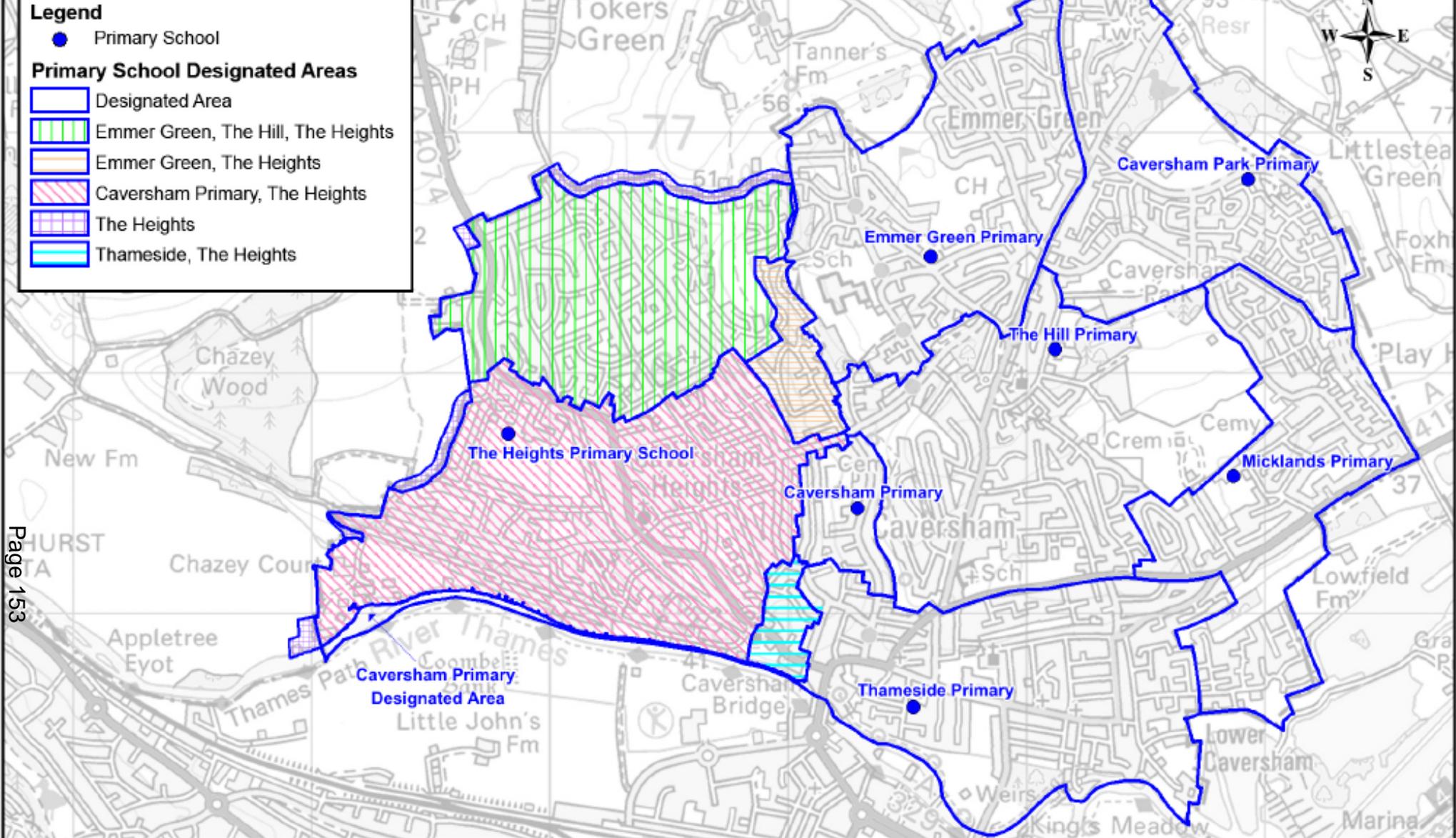
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Date: 09/08/2018 Scale at A4: 1:18500

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Title: Primary Schools Designated Areas
North Reading

Drg.No.: GIS00012

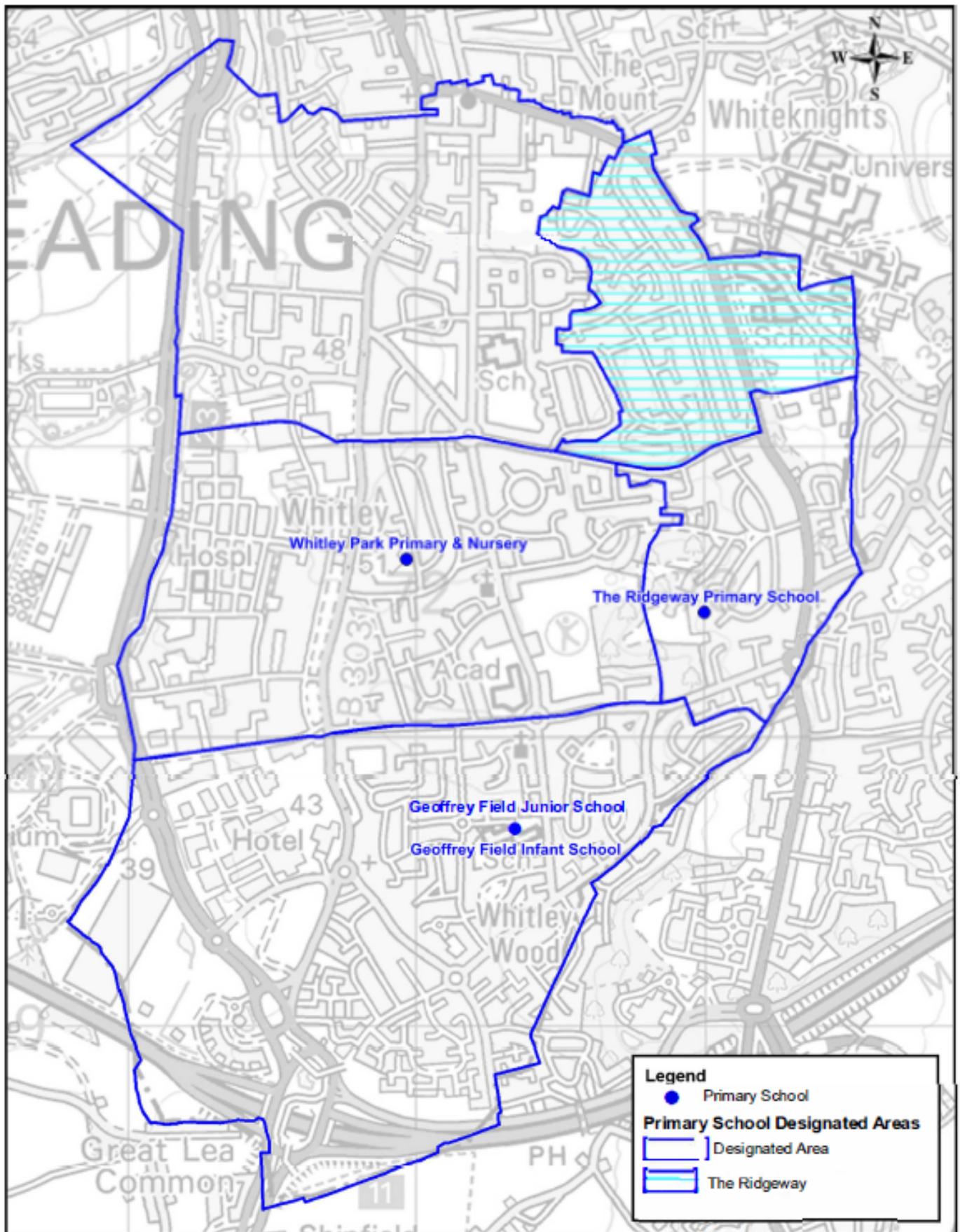
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Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

Ref: G:\M\I\CD\Ed&Comm\School Admissions\updated primary schools\designated areas maps

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Title: **Primary Schools Designated Areas**
South Reading

Drg.No.: GIS00013

Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

Date: 09/08/2018

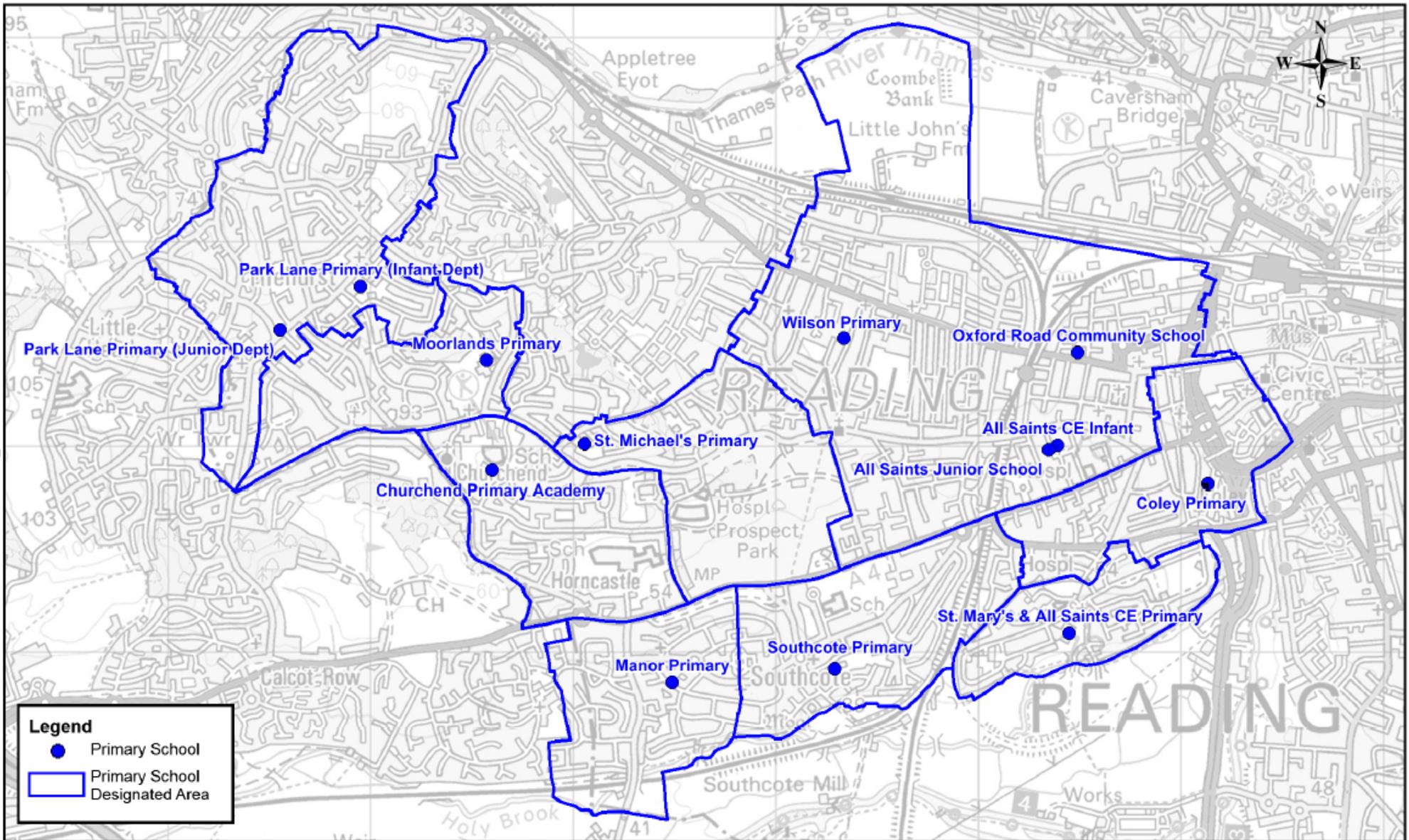
Scale at A4: 1:18000

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Title: **Primary Schools Designated Areas**
West Reading

Drg.No.: GIS00014

Date: 09/08/2018 Scale at A4: 1:25000

Produced by GIS & Mapping Services

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**Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council
Secondary Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.**

For September 2025 entry

Determined on

Contents

Introduction.....	3
Applications	4
Late Applications	5
Changes of preference	5
Change of Address	6
Processing Applications	6
Exchange of information	6
Resolving multiple offers	6
Informing schools	7
Informing Parents	7
Waiting Lists	7
Withdrawing a place.....	8
Requests for admission outside the normal age group.....	8
Disputes between Parents.....	9
In-Year Admissions	10
Timetable for the Secondary School Admissions Round 2024-25	10

Introduction

Reading Borough Council delivers its school admissions service through Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC). BFFC is an independent, not-for-profit company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, set up in December 2018 to deliver children's services, early help, education and SEND services in Reading.

The Reading coordinated scheme was last consulted on between 17 October 2018 and 10 December 2018. There have been no significant changes since that consultation took place, therefore no requirement for a public consultation.

This Scheme is made under section 84 of the Standards and Framework Act 1998 and in accordance with the School Admissions (Admissions Arrangements and Coordination of admissions arrangements (England) Regulations 2014.

The purpose of this coordinated scheme for secondary school admissions is to ensure that every parent/carer of a child **resident in Reading Borough**, who has applied, receives **one offer** of a school place at the conclusion of the normal admissions round. At its heart is clear communication between Reading school admissions, other local authorities, community, and all state schools in Reading.

Parents/carers who live in the Borough of Reading **must** apply to Reading school admissions if they require a place for their child in any state school as part of a routine admissions round, including schools in other local authorities, academies and free schools. Applications cannot be submitted to a school or to the local authority in which the school is situated. Parents/carers living within any other local authority areas must apply through their own local authority admissions service.

Coordination with Reading school admissions does not affect the right of individual admission authorities to set and operate their own admission arrangements. Admission authorities for Reading schools will need to comply with the timetable set out below. As all schools in Reading are foundation, voluntary aided or academies, the governing body of each school will consult (if necessary) and determine their own admission arrangements for September 2025.

These arrangements deal mainly with a child's admission to secondary school during the school year from September 2025 to August 2026. The children concerned are typically those born between 1 September 2013 and 31 August 2014. The place offered is a full-time place from September 2025.

National Offer Day for Secondary Admissions is 3 March 2025

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Secondary Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Applications

Reading Borough Council will put in place procedures to, where possible, ensure all parents/carers living in the Borough of Reading (with a child eligible to start secondary school in September 2025) will be aware of the application process. Eligible children living in Reading will receive information about the process in early September 2024. Children who attend Reading schools, but who are not resident in Reading, will be advised to apply to their home local authority.

Parents/carers are encouraged to apply online via the Reading Parent Portal. The site will be open from **2 September 2024 until 31 October 2024**.

Parents/carers will be invited to list four preferred schools and rank them in priority order. Parents/carers may also give reasons for their preferences. Parents/carers may list any state schools, including those outside the local authority; this includes academies, voluntary aided and voluntary controlled schools.

The Reading common application form (and the online terms and conditions) will include a statement requiring parents to confirm they have read the *Guide for Parents and Carers* and accept the policies and procedures in that document.

Parents/carers should return their completed forms directly to the school admissions team at BFFC.

Parents/carers will complete the common application form online by the agreed deadline. The school admissions team will validate the application address. Validation, where possible, will be by reference to Council Tax data held by the local authority. Where this is not possible, proof of residence will be required in the form of ownership documents or tenancy agreement.

Where, as part of its admission arrangements, a school requires additional information, parents/carers may also choose to complete a supplementary form to support their application. This should be submitted separately to the school. The *Guide for Parents and Carers* will identify those Reading schools for which a supplementary form may be necessary. These forms will be available from the BFFC website. Supplementary forms are not applications and parent/carers must apply to Reading school admissions either on the common application form or online.

National Closing Date is **31 October 2024**.

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Secondary Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Late Applications

Applications received after the closing date will be treated as 'late' applications. However, if the late submission of the application is caused by extenuating circumstances (e.g. sudden illness or death of a close family member or the family having very recently moved to the area) the application may be accepted as "on time". The reason for late submission must be supported with documentary evidence received before **1 January 2025**.

Where no evidence is provided, it will be assumed that the application could reasonably have been submitted by the closing date. In such cases, the application will be treated as late and considered after all on time applications have been allocated.

All applications received from the **1 January 2025** are considered late and will be passed to the appropriate admission authority in Reading (or to the appropriate local authority) approximately two weeks after national offer day.

In these cases, parents/carers will be informed about the outcome of their application as per the timetable below, after National Offer Day. Unsuccessful applications for oversubscribed schools will be added to the waiting lists of those schools and ranked according to their oversubscription criteria.

Late applications will be processed approximately two weeks after national offer day. The first round of post-National Offer Day allocations will be **May 2025**. After this date, late application will be processed regularly. In each case, the cut-off date for consideration in each round of allocations will be 1 week prior to the allocation date.

Changes of preference

Where the parent/carer wishes to change their preferences, they must submit a new application form (paper or online). If this is received by the school admissions team before **31 October 2024** it will be accepted as on time and will replace any previous application. Any preferences to be retained from a previous application must be listed on any subsequent application.

Changes of preference received after **31 October 2024** will be treated as late applications in the way described above. However, applications for late change of preference where there are extenuating circumstances (e.g. sudden illness or death of a close family member or the family having very recently moved to the area) may be treated as on time, provided written evidence is supplied to support the late submission. This should be received by the school admissions team before **1 January 2025**. If no evidence is provided, the application will be treated as late. Any application for change of preference(s) received after **1 January 2025** will replace any previous application and be marked as late.

Please think very carefully about applying after this date, particularly if you have already submitted an on-time application.

Approximately two weeks after national offer day, late changes of preferences will be passed to the appropriate admission authority in Reading or to the appropriate local authority to be considered.

Change of Address

As required by the School Admissions Code 2021, changes of address made after **31 October 2024 and before 1 January 2025**, may be considered as on time. If an applicant changes address after the **1 January 2025**, they will need to submit a new application based on the new address. The new application will be marked as 'late' and their previous application may be withdrawn. Documentary evidence of the change of address will be required.

Processing Applications

Exchange of information

As per the timetable below, the Reading school admissions team will forward applications to other local authorities and admission authorities in Reading. At the same time, other local authorities will forward applications to Reading for their residents to be considered for Reading schools.

Depending on the arrangements agreed with the governing body of each school, the school admissions team will provide the school with relevant information to enable them to rank applicants using their oversubscription criteria, as per the timetable. Reading school admissions will not pass on the details of the parent/carer preference ranking to the school, and no school will be told about other schools a parent has listed.

As per the timetable, each admission authority in Reading will rank applications according to their published oversubscription criteria and return ranked lists to the school admissions team.

Resolving multiple offers

As per the timetable, Reading school admissions will inform other local authorities of places offered in Reading schools to their residents. During the exchange of information, Reading school admissions will consider all cases where a child can be offered more than one of their preferences. In such cases, a place offered will be at the school a parent/carer listed highest in preference.

If a place cannot be offered at one of the preferred schools listed by the parent/carer, a place will normally be offered at the catchment school (if that school has spaces remaining) or the nearest Reading school with a place available. If the offered school is one where Reading Borough Council is not the admission authority, this will be in consultation with the governing

body of the school in question. If the nearest school with places is a faith school, parents/carers will be offered this as an option. Should the parent/carer be unhappy with a faith school being offered, they will be informed of other schools with available spaces (which may be further from their home).

Where no places are available at any Reading schools, alternative schools (outside Reading Borough) may be offered. Such an offer will depend on availability and the agreement of the appropriate admission authority. This will not preclude parents/carers from requesting an alternative school, nor from lodging an appeal for their preferred school with the admission authority.

Informing schools

As per the timetable, the school admissions team will send each Reading Secondary school a list of pupils to be offered a place at their school. This will be confidential to the school and must not be passed on to parents/carers.

Informing Parents

On **National Offer Day**, parents/carers who submitted an online application will receive an email with a formal offer and may view their offer online.

Parents/carers who submitted a paper application will receive a letter (posted 2nd Class) containing their child's offer of a secondary school place. The formal offer will identify whether the offer is made on behalf of the governing body of a school or another local authority. The letter will:

- Inform parents/carers of their child's offered school.
- Inform parents/carers how to accept a school place and the deadline for accepting.
- Provide information on school transport.

If the offered school is not their first preference, parents/carers will also be supplied with the following information:

- Where they can find information showing how places were allocated at oversubscribed schools in Reading.
- How to submit an appeal.
- If the place offered is not their highest preference school(s), the child's name will be added to the waiting list(s) of any school(s) they listed higher in preference. Parents/carers are required to advise Reading school admissions if they do not wish their child's name to remain on a waiting list.
- Contact information for other local authorities.

Waiting Lists

Two weeks after National Offer Day, 'waiting lists' will be administered for schools with more applicants than places available. A child's position on a waiting list is determined by the oversubscription criteria of the school. When a place becomes available, it will be offered to the child who is top of the waiting list. A child's position on a waiting list may go

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Secondary Schools for the **2025/2026** academic year.

up or down for a number of reasons (e.g. pupil withdrawals or new and revised applications). When a place is allocated from the waiting list, the child's current allocation (for a lower preference school) will be removed and allocated to another student, if appropriate. It is the responsibility of the parent to inform the school admissions team if they no longer wish for their child to remain on the waiting list of a school. It will be assumed that a child is to remain on the waiting list of all schools listed higher in preference to one offered (unless the parent/carer indicates otherwise).

Waiting lists for all schools in Reading Borough will be kept until the end of **31 December 2025**. After this date, the policy of the individual school(s) will be followed. When the coordinated admissions round ends, on **31 August 2025**, waiting lists will continue to be managed as part of the In-Year admissions process and follow t.

Withdrawing a place

If the offered place is not accepted within four weeks of national offer day, Reading school admissions will send a reminder and allow a further seven days for a reply. If there is still no response, the offer may be withdrawn. If it arises that a school offer was based on fraudulent, or intentionally misleading, information (which denied the place to another child), the place will be withdrawn.

Requests for admission outside the normal age group

In exceptional circumstances, applications may be received for children who are not currently studying in the school year appropriate to their age. Where this arises, the schools requested will consider the circumstances of each case. Applications for these children will normally be processed with all other children, and these children will be permitted to enter their allocated secondary school.

Applicants should apply using the common application form by **31 October 2024**. Parents must outline their reasons for the request and supply supporting documents (e.g. information from their child's education setting or medical evidence). They should also provide confirmation from their current school that their child is studying outside their normal year group, in Year 6. The school admissions team will forward this information to the listed schools for consideration. Each case will be carefully considered by the admissions authority and parents/carers will be informed of the decision in writing, before National Offer Day, setting out clearly the reasons for the decision. One admission authority cannot be required to honour a decision made by another admission authority on admission out of the normal age group.

Requests for schools outside Reading will be referred to the council in whose area the school is located for consideration under that council's scheme.

Transgender Students

Where a transgender pupil wishes to apply for a single-sex school, they must do so in the normal way (outlined in this policy) by completing the Common Application Form. Reading school admissions will coordinate these admissions; however, it is for the admissions authority of the school(s) listed on the application to decide on the case. Where a place is refused, parents will be notified of their right to appeal.

Disputes between Parents

Anyone with parental responsibility may apply for their child's school place and list up to four preferred schools. However, the child's address on the application should be recorded as the place they spend most of the week as set out in our definition of 'Home Address'

When completing application forms, parents/carers must tick to confirm they have parental responsibility for the child and that their application is made with the agreement of all parties having parental responsibility.

Where parents disagree over which school preferences should be named, we recommend starting the following process as early as possible as national closing dates are fixed and cannot be extended under any circumstances:

- We urge parents to work together in the best interests of their child; it is advised that the applicant should inform all other parties who have parental responsibility before submitting the application.
- All parties should agree with the school preferences to be listed. Any disagreements should be resolved before an application is submitted.
- If parents are unable to reach an amicable agreement, they should seek legal advice or recourse through the Family Court.

The local authority will only process one application per child and will only make one offer of a school place.

Where more than one application is received, the local authority (or local authorities if parents submit applications to more than one) will contact both applicants to advise that more than one application has been received and request they complete one application with one set of preferences for their child.

All evidence must be received by published closing dates, at which point a decision will be made as to which application is processed. The local authorities concerned may contact early years or education settings noted in the application, or other professionals working with the child where applicable, to assist in their decision making. Any evidence provided after the closing date which affects the content or processing of the application, may render the application late, and delay an offer of a school place.

We will not mediate between parents where there is a dispute. Only one application will be accepted, and the final decision will rest with the local authority after all submitted evidence has been considered.

In-Year Admissions

The In- Year admissions arrangements for the school year, September 2025- July 2026 will use the determined policies of 2025/2026.

Parents/carers seeking admission for their child in Year 7- Year 11 of a secondary school in the Reading Borough should in most cases apply to Reading school admissions. Most secondary schools in the borough have opted to be part of the coordinated admission arrangements. A list of the schools to which a direct application is necessary may be obtained from the BFFC website. Where a school listed is in another local authority, the parent/carer will be advised to apply directly to that local authority and the application for that school will follow the relevant local authority's scheme

Timetable for the Secondary School Admissions Round 2024-25

Action	Date
<i>Guide for Parents and Carers</i> to be placed on BFFC Website.	By 2 September 2024
Information sent to Primary Schools to share with parent	By 6 September 2024
Online Reading Parent Portal for admissions site open.	2 September 2024 – 31 October 2024
National Closing date for receipt of applications.	31 October 2024
Late/change of preference applications accepted in extenuating circumstances; written support must be submitted at time of application.	By 31 December 2024
Application details sent to secondary schools in Reading and other local authorities. Own Admissions Authority schools to provide Reading school admissions team with a list of children ranked according to the school's oversubscription criteria.	During December 2024- January 2025
Coordination between other local authorities of offers that can be made to their residents in Reading schools.	By 12 February 2025
National Offer Day - Offer notifications sent to Reading Residents	3 March 2025
Deadline for parents to accept.	15 March 2025
Late applications for over-subscribed schools added to the waiting lists/change of preferences processed.	From 18 March 2025

Coordinated Admissions scheme for Reading Borough Council Secondary Schools for the 2025/2026 academic year.

Action	Date
Coordination with other LA's ends.	31 August 2025
Waiting lists held for Reading schools.	Until at least 31 December 2025

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Reading
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Relevant Area

Reading Borough Council delivers its school admissions service through Brighter Futures for Children (BFFC). BFFC is an independent, not-for-profit company, wholly owned by Reading Borough Council, set up in December 2018 to deliver children's services, early help, education and SEND services in Reading.

The School Standards & Framework Act 1998 requires Local Authorities to establish Relevant Area(s) for admission policy consultations. The Relevant Area is the area in which admission authorities must consult with schools regarding their proposed admission arrangements before finalising them.

Once the relevant area has been determined, any school or academy proposing to change arrangements will need to consult with all other interested parties within this area in line with the Schools Admission Code.

Reading's last consultation ran from 17 October until 9 December 2018 and was determined on the 14 February 2019 to ensure that schools and academies use the defined relevant area to inform their statutory consultation process on admission arrangements.

Reading has reviewed the current relevant area and as there is no change, this will be retained for school year **2025/26**. The relevant area was determined as follows:

1. Admissions Authorities must consult on admission arrangements for primary/infant and junior schools with

- Headteachers and Governing Bodies of all schools in Reading Borough
- Neighbouring Local Authorities – Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council
- Diocesan Authorities - Oxford Church of England Diocese, Portsmouth and Birmingham Catholic Diocese
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation Secondary Schools within 8 kilometres (5 miles) of the Reading Borough border
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation primary/junior/infant schools within 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) of the Reading Borough border

2. Having first consulted with the appropriate Diocese, **primary** Voluntary Aided schools must consult with:

- Reading Borough Council/ Brighter Futures for Children
- All primary/infant and junior and maintained nursery schools in Reading Borough
- Neighbouring Local Authorities – Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation primary/junior and infants' schools outside Reading Borough within 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) of the school

3. Primary Academies and Foundation and Trust schools must consult with

- Reading Borough Council / Brighter Futures for Children
- All primary/infant/junior and maintained nursery schools in Reading Borough
- Neighbouring Local Authorities – Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation primary/junior and infants' schools outside Reading Borough within 3.2 (2 miles) kilometres of the school

4. Secondary Academies and Foundation schools must consult with:

- Reading Borough Council / Brighter Futures for Children
- All primary/junior and secondary schools within Reading Borough
- Neighbouring Local Authorities – Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation Secondary Schools within 8 kilometres (five miles) of the Reading Borough border
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation primary/junior schools within 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) of the Reading Borough border

5. Having first consulted with the appropriate Diocese, **Secondary** Voluntary Aided schools must consult with:

- Reading Borough Council / Brighter Futures for Children
- All primary/junior and secondary schools within Reading Borough
- Neighbouring Local Authorities – Oxfordshire County Council, West Berkshire Council and Wokingham Borough Council
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation Secondary Schools within 8 kilometres (5 miles) of the Reading Borough border
- All Academies, Voluntary Aided or Foundation primary/junior schools within 3.2 kilometres (2 miles) of the Reading Borough border

**Adult Social Care,
Children's Services and
Education Committee**



Reading
Borough Council
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17 January 2024

Title	School Transport Policy 2024-2025
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Brian Grady, Director of Education
Lead Councillor	Cllr Ruth McEwan
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That ACE Committee agree to consult on School Transport policy clarification, as follows: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Travel assistance entitlement means an offer of a bus pass or school bus at a pickup point, with an expectation for active travel as part of a child's healthy development; • Clarification of the exceptional circumstances and appropriate evidence required to access any exceptional additional support in addition to travel assistance; • That parents are liable for costs incurred by Brighter Futures for Children on behalf of Reading Borough Council if children do not access travel assistance provided; • That students are not entitled to travel assistance post-16 except in appropriately evidenced exceptional circumstances. 2. That ACE Committee delegate the format and process of consultation to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 1.2. Brighter Futures for Children, on behalf of Reading Borough Council, are wanting to support more children to engage in active travel, as part of a fulfilling childhood helping young people develop and move towards independence, and to reduce journeys to school by car, by working with families, schools, local communities and transport planners to encourage students to walk or cycle to school or, where this is not feasible, to encourage greater use of public transport.
- 1.3. School Transport has been a significant budget and growth pressure in Reading for the past two years. Local Authorities across England are experiencing continued demand and cost pressures regarding school transport and local pressures are in line with these national increases in demand and cost increases. These include continued increases in

numbers of children with SEND, leading to an increase in the number of children needing transport assistance to school, including children needing to go further afield to be provided with an appropriate education placement. These demand and growth pressures mean action needs to be taken to make savings across the School Transport budget.

- 1.4. To help deliver savings and to promote the most active and independent forms of travel, increasing and promoting independence for young people on their journey to adulthood and independent living, in line with the Council's policies and strategic aims to promote independence, it is proposed to consult on the School Transport Policy for 2024, with changes aiming to clarify language and promoting the most active travel for Reading pupils.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. As set out in HM Government's Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance: *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age* (updated June 2023), parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 2.2. A child is deemed eligible if they are of compulsory school age, attend their nearest suitable school and: live more than the statutory walking distance from that school; or could not reasonably be expected to walk to that school because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, or would not be able to walk to that school in reasonable safety, even if they were accompanied by their parent.
- 2.3. As well as these legal obligations, the Statutory Guidance confirms that Local Authorities are able to make discretionary arrangements to fund wider school transport. Such arrangements were agreed by Reading Borough Council and last ratified at Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in October 2020, including the following arrangements:
 - 2.3.1. Provision for children beyond statutory school age (post 16)
 - 2.3.2. Supporting the most vulnerable children access schools through taxi transportation rather than a personal budget or bus routes.
 - 2.3.3. Chiltern Edge School transport.
- 2.4. Policy clarifications and changes have been informed by national benchmarking and practice, including through the joint work of the Association of Directors of Environment, Planning and Transport and the Association of Directors of Children's Services.

3. Travel assistance entitlement

- 3.1. Policy language has been clarified to focus on how BffC on behalf of Reading Borough Council will provide travel assistance to school where there is clear statutory eligibility, and the criteria applied to determine eligibility.
- 3.2. The policy language confirms that travel assistance for almost all children will be enabled through the provision of bus passes and/ or access to school buses with local pick up points.
- 3.3. A number of operational changes are being tested this academic year to enable this policy clarification to be successful, including the reintroduction of bus transport routes with drop off points to promote independent travel.
- 3.4. A clearer focus on assisting more active travel and personal transport budgets are proposed to combine to both meet children's current needs whilst also encouraging greater independence.

- 3.5. As reported to ACE Committee in the School Place Planning Strategy 2023-2028, the development of more local provision for children with SEND, including through Additionally Resourced Provisions designed to create more inclusive mainstream options for children with SEND, will ensure that more children with SEND are able to walk and cycle to an appropriate local school place.

4. Post 16 transport

- 4.1. Statutory school age begins with the start of term following a pupil's 5th birthday and ends on the last Friday in June in the academic year in which they turn 16.
- 4.2. Under national legislation, students are required to be in education, employment or training until their 18th birthday. This could involve mixing full-time work with study, following an apprenticeship, continuing full-time in school or college, or combining part time training with volunteering. There has not, however, been any change to statutory school age which ends at the end of the academic year in which the student turns 16
- 4.3. Under the current law, there is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance or to another educational setting once a student is 16 and over. However, the Company is required to facilitate the attendance of all those of sixth form age i.e. those students in school years 12- 14 who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday. This may involve travel assistance, but the Company does not need to provide this assistance free of charge. Responsibility for attendance lies with the student and their parents/carers.
- 4.4. Post 16 travel is currently being provided for approximately 100 young people at an annual cost of £320,470. Travel is provided to students attending Reading College, Newbury College, Henley College, New Meaning/Bucks College, UTC and Berkshire College of Agriculture. The updated Policy clarifies that BfFC on behalf of Reading Borough Council will confirm arrangements for post 16 assistance in an annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement by 31 May each year. The consultation will propose confirming that the arrangements for assistance from academic year 2024/2025 will remove a presumption of funding for travel, to providing support to access travel funded by the family or the student. The process of decision making (if the policy is adopted) will be needs-led, through the statutory annual review for each individual young person – with personalised plans developed on an individual basis.

5. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 5.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:
- Healthy Environment
 - Thriving Communities
 - Inclusive Economy
- 5.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:
- People first
 - Digital transformation
 - Building self-reliance
 - Getting the best value
 - Collaborating with others
- 5.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.
- 5.4. More active travel for young people will support the Corporate Plan theme of Thriving Communities. In addition, any reduction in road traffic will support the Council's actions

in response to the Climate Emergency and the ambitions set out in our Corporate Plan under Healthy Environment.

6. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 6.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 6.2. The model of prioritising active travel and school transport through buses will encourage reduced emissions. The proposed policy changes will promote Reading children to attend local schools within walking distance, which will have a further positive impact on the Climate Emergency, reducing transport emissions in and around Reading.

7. Community Engagement

- 7.1. Statutory Guidance sets out what Local Authorities should do when consulting on school transport arrangements. This guidance is quoted below.
- 7.2. *“Local Authorities should consult locally with: schools whose pupils will be affected by the proposed changes, parents whose children will (or may) be affected by the proposed changes, and those whose children may be affected in the future – for example, because they live in the catchment area of, or attend the feeder school of, a school affected by the proposed changes; and the local Parent Carer Forum.*
- 7.3. *Consultation should last for at least 28 working days during term time.*
- 7.4. *Local Authorities should give careful consideration to the impact proposed changes to their policy will have on parents’ choice of school, the financial impact the changes will have on affected families, paying particular attention to the potential impact of any changes on children from low-income families and the impact the changes will have on people with protected characteristics.*
- 7.5. *Wherever possible, local authorities should phase in changes so that children who begin attending a school under one set of travel arrangements continue to benefit from those arrangements until they leave that school”.*
- 7.6. Engagement with Reading Buses has been undertaken ahead of the formal consultation, to establish whether a publicly available bus service could be provided to mitigate the risk of the removal of dedicated school buses to Chiltern Edge. The proposed consultation on policy changes is being planned with Reading Buses advising on potential routes, to inform Councillor decisions.
- 7.7. Statutory Guidance requires a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline would therefore be undertaken across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024. If agreed by Committee, the proposed timeline for consultation and implementation of the revised policy is as follows:

Milestone	Timescale
Decision by ACE Committee to proceed with statutory consultation	16 January 2024
Commencement of statutory consultation period	17 January 2024
Closing date of statutory consultation period	16 February 2024 (to account for half term and comply with the requirement for a 28 day consultation)
Review of feedback from consultation period	19 February-1March 2024

Confirmation of final proposals published for Committee decision	13 March 2024
ACE Committee consideration of final proposals	20 March 2024

7.8. Dedicated engagement sessions on the consultation will be held with Reading Families Forum and Special United, Reading’s forum for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability.

7.9. The consultation will include impact monitoring proposals, so that Councillors could be assured that at any point any newly adopted Policy could be amended if there was deemed to be an adverse impact on disadvantaged families, pupils with protected characteristics or any other at risk group.

8. Equality Implications

8.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
- advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

8.2. It is anticipated that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is relevant to the decision, and will be completed, so that we can evidence any differential impact in particular for children with a disability, but also parents with any of the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) or sexual orientation.

8.3. The consultation will identify families where a pupil is eligible for Free School Meals and pay particular attention to the need to mitigate pressure on families currently exacerbated by the cost of living crisis – through mitigations such as a means tested approach for some families to received support, and negotiate ongoing public transport access through Reading Buses and other public transport providers.

9. Other Relevant Considerations

9.1. Impact on Public Health outcomes will be modelled as a result of more children being supported to travel actively and more children with SEND being able to walk and cycle to an appropriate local school place.

10. Legal Implications

10.1. Statutory guidance refers to the legislation governing travel to school for children of compulsory school age, in particular:

- Section 508A of the Education Act 1996: sustainable travel to school;
- Section 508B of and Schedule 35B to the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for eligible children;
- Section 508C of the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for other children;
- The School Information (England) Regulations 2008: publication of information about travel arrangements.

11. Financial Implications

11.1. The proposals being considered are anticipated to make budget savings. The savings analysis undertaken so far will be further informed by the consultation process. In

addition to Policy changes supporting current resource management plans, the following areas of Policy are anticipated to make savings.

- 11.2. Post 16 travel is currently being provided for approximately 100 young people at an annual cost of £320,470. Travel is provided to students attending Reading College, Newbury College, Henley College, New Meaning/Bucks College, UTC and Berkshire College of Agriculture. The updated Policy would expect to see this funding reduce over a phased period. An initial review of young people's needs and EHCPs has identified 50 young people whose arrangement would be reviewed in the next academic year under this proposed policy change. It is not anticipated that the full current budget cost would be saved as individual needs-led budgets are still expected to be required for a number of young people. Further work is being done on potential budget savings.

12. Timetable for Implementation

- 12.1. Statutory Guidance requires a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline would therefore be undertaken across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024.
- 12.2. Implementation is proposed from September 2024. A more detailed implementation timetable will be informed by dialogue with Reading Buses. The contract terms for the current bus contract, which is in place until 2025, include a three-month termination clause.

13. Background Papers

- 13.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. School Transport Policy 2024-25 DRAFT: subject to consultation.



School Transport Policy

2024-25

DRAFT: subject to consultation

SUMMARY

This document summarises arrangements for the statutory duties required of BFFC on behalf of Reading Borough Council.

OWNER

**Anne Tarrant,
School Transport
Manager**

VERSION

v.4

DATE

January 2024

REVIEW DATE

January 2025

Contents

1. Introduction	3
2. Responsibilities and Duties.....	3
3. Non-statutory school age (0 to 4) Eligibility for Travel Assistance	3
4. Statutory school age (5 to 16 - Mainstream and pupils with an EHCP).....	4
5. Non-statutory school age (16 to 19 - Mainstream and pupils with an EHCP)	8
6. Support for students with an EHCP 19-25 years	8
7. Children Looked After (under the care of the Company - all ages).....	8
8. General Guidance	9
9. Application and Review Process	14
10. How to Appeal a Decision	15
11. How to Make a Complaint or seek remedy to an issue with transport.....	17

1. Introduction

This document describes the policy for providing travel assistance to school and the criteria applied to determine eligibility.

The Policy has been developed in accordance with the legislative framework set out under the Education Act 1996 and current Government guidance. It will be reviewed and updated regularly to ensure that arrangements adopted within Reading reflect any new legislation and guidance.

The awarding of travel assistance will be based on the criteria set out in this policy and the needs of the pupil for whom the transport assistance is being requested.

Travel assistance will not be awarded based on:

- the financial circumstances of the family (unless paragraph 4.5 applies);
- the needs of siblings; or
- parents work commitments.

If a pupil qualifies for travel assistance, they will be awarded a bus pass.

If the pupil qualifies for transport assistance under paragraph 4.8 or 4.9, other options may be considered such as:

- a bus pass with travel training;
- a personal budget; or
- a place on a school bus.

All applicants for travel assistance under paragraph 4.8 and 4.9 will be assessed to determine whether pupils are able to benefit from travel training. If assessment indicates that the pupil will benefit, any augmented travel assistance will be time limited. These assessments take up to 10 days to complete.

2. Responsibilities and Duties

It is the responsibility of the parent/carer to ensure that their child(ren) attend school.

However, in certain circumstances, Brighter Futures for Children (the Company) will provide travel assistance, if certain criteria are met.

The Education Act 1996 provides the following duties and powers on local authorities:

- duty to promote sustainable modes of travel to meet school travel needs - s.508A
- duty to make necessary travel arrangements free of charge to secure suitable school travel arrangements for eligible pupils. Eligibility includes age, distance to school, disability and safe walking routes - S.508B
- power to make necessary school travel arrangements for other pupils on payment of a charge as appropriate - s.508C
- power to provide travel assistance or travel expenses for pupils attending early years education, subject to eligibility criteria - s.509A
- duty to prepare a Post-16 transport policy statement setting out transport provision and financial assistance (where applicable) to facilitate attendance of sixth form students at educational institutions - s.509AA and s.509AB

This policy covers the local authority's duty to provide eligible pupils, who meet the minimum criteria, school travel assistance at the start and end of the school day, not including pre or after school activities such as wrap around childcare or school clubs.

If a pupil is referred to alternative provision by the school where they are on roll, it is the school's responsibility to assess the need for transport and provide that transport if required.

3. Non-statutory school age (0 to 4) Eligibility for Travel Assistance

Children under statutory school age are not automatically entitled to transport to an early years setting or school. Statutory school age begins on the first day of the term following the child's 5th birthday.

The Company will consider providing travel assistance for any child who will turn 5 within the term that the application is made, subject to them meeting the eligibility criteria and a safety assessment. Parents should not assume automatic entitlement.

The eligibility criteria are outlined in Section 4.

4. Statutory school age (5 to 16 - Mainstream and pupils with an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP))

Statutory school age begins with the start of term following a pupil's 5th birthday and ends on the last Friday in June in the academic year in which they turn 16.

Pupils of statutory school age need to attend a school or educational setting on a full-time basis; this is defined as 190 days (or 380 sessions) each academic year.

The Company will consider providing travel assistance if the:

- pupil lives in the Reading Borough Council area;
- pupil lives beyond the statutory walking distance to their nearest suitable school;
- pupil is from a low-income family (where extended rights apply – see section 4.5);
- pupil's walking route to school is unsafe;
- pupil has an EHCP, a disability or a mobility difficulty.

The nearest suitable school is defined as 'the nearest qualifying school with places available that provides education appropriate to the child's age, ability, aptitude, gender and any special educational needs they may have'.

A 'qualifying' school is:

- a maintained school or nursery, or a special school approved under s.342 of the Education Act 1996
- a pupil referral unit or alternative provision academy
- an academy

When determining the nearest suitable school for transport purposes, the Company does not consider whether a pupil is qualified for a selective school or the parent's preference for a single gender or faith school. Therefore, the geographically nearest suitable school may be an all-ability mixed gender non-denominational school. In these instances, if a pupil chooses to attend

selective or single gender school, the Company will not support travel costs to that school, unless it is the nearest suitable school.

Parents/carers should always express a preference for their nearest suitable school on their application. The Admissions team will determine places available and therefore families do not need to be concerned about whether their child is likely to secure a place at the nearest suitable school.

Parents are not required to name the nearest suitable school as their first preference when they make their school application, but it must be listed as one of their preferences to ensure that if they cannot be offered a place at the nearest suitable school, then transport could be provided to the next nearest school.

If parents do not express their nearest suitable school as one of their preferences, and instead choose a place at a school which is not the nearest suitable school, the pupil will not be eligible for Company funded travel assistance unless the extended rights apply (please see section 4.5).

The previous information on “places available” does not apply to admissions to Special Schools or Additionally Resourced Provision.

Applications for transport to UTC Reading will be assessed under the mainstream secondary school transport policy. As it is unlikely that UTC Reading will be the nearest available secondary school, pupils will only qualify for transport assistance under the Low-Income policy (See Section 4.5)

Escorts, where awarded, are only provided for pupils at the beginning and end of the school day. It will not be provided for additional activities, e.g. Induction/Open Days, Interview visits, Work Experience, Homework Clubs, Dental/Medical appointments, Respite Care, Breakfast Clubs or Parental/Carer attendance at school.

Where a pupil becomes ill during the day, it is the responsibility of the parent to collect their child or to agree with the school that they will provide adequate care until the end of the school day.

4.1. Types of travel assistance

In order to determine the most appropriate travel option for pupils and the most cost-effective means of travel assistance, the Company will use a range of criteria. These are described in the following sections.

4.2. Statutory Walking Distances

The statutory walking distances are as follows:

- up to 2 miles (if below the age of 8)
- up to 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16)

4.3. Calculation of distances and available routes

For eligibility purposes, the statutory walking distances will be calculated with reference to the shortest walking route a pupil can walk safely (accompanied as necessary). A route might include footpaths, bridleways and other tracks which are not passable by motorised transport.

For pupils who fall within the 'Extended Rights' eligibility criteria the 6-mile and 15-mile upper limits are not walking routes. These routes are those which are passable using a suitable motorised vehicle. In short, the two upper limits will be measured along road routes.

4.4. Pupils who live beyond the statutory walking distance

Travel assistance will be provided free of charge for those pupils of statutory school age who are travelling over the statutory walking distance to/from the nearest open entrance gate of their nearest suitable school. Pupils will normally be required to use public transport and, in these cases, they will be provided with a free bus pass in order for them to use the service. The provision of any form of transport other than bus would only be made in exceptional circumstances.

4.5. Extended rights for pupils from low-income families

A pupil may be eligible for extended rights under the 'low income' provisions. The Company defines low-income families as those where a pupil receives free school meals because their parents or carers receive at least one of the benefits listed below:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit – provided you are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190
- Universal Credit - with an annual earned income of £7,400 or less (after tax and not including any benefits you get)
- The guaranteed element of Pension Credit
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999

If the pupil is not entitled to free school meals, another benefit that is accepted is entitlement to the maximum level of Working Tax Credits.

Where extended rights apply, pupils aged 8 to 10 from low-income families who live more than 2 miles (rather than 3) from their nearest suitable school become eligible for travel assistance from the Company.

Secondary school age pupils from low income families who attend schools between 2 and 6 miles from their home will be eligible for travel assistance even if the school they attend is not their nearest suitable school, providing it is one of the three nearest schools which the pupil is qualified to attend (for example a mainstream pupil is not qualified to attend a special school even if it is one of the 3 nearest schools and therefore it would be discounted).

Secondary school age pupils from low-income families who attend a school between 2 miles and 15 miles away from home will be entitled to travel assistance if their parents/carers have expressed a wish for them to be educated at that particular school based on the parents/carer's religion or belief and, having regard to that wish, there is no nearer suitable school. This applies to parents/carers with a particular religious or philosophical belief, including those with a lack of religion or lack of belief.

4.6. Pupils whose route to school is unsafe

If the route to school is unsafe to walk, and if the pupil lives within the statutory walking distance of and is registered at the nearest suitable school, the Company will fund suitable travel arrangements.

All walking routes are assessed in accordance with the Road Safety GB and RoSPA (Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents) guidelines. The Company will assess the route at the times the pupil would be using it and will take into account:

- the age of the pupil
- whether risks might be less if the pupil were accompanied by an adult and whether that is practicable
- the width of the road and the existence of pavements
- the volume and speed of traffic
- the conditions at different times of the year
- availability of suitable crossing points

4.7. Travel assistance to schools that are not the pupil's nearest school

If a place cannot be offered at the nearest suitable school when this has been expressed as one of the preferences, then travel assistance to the next nearest suitable school will be offered. Where the Company allocates a school place which is not a preference, the Company will only consider providing transport support if the nearest suitable school was expressed as one of the preferences.

4.8. Criteria for travel assistance for pupils with an EHCP

Pupils who have an EHCP may require assistance with getting to school or to another educational setting. This may be over and above the provision made for other pupils. Having an EHCP does not automatically mean that a pupil will be eligible for travel assistance, they must still be attending the nearest school that can meet their needs. The Company considers the individual needs of pupils, including professional advice, and will consult with parents/carers and teachers about transport needs and assistance. Where appropriate the pupil will also be consulted.

The Company will take the following into account when determining eligibility for travel assistance for pupils with an EHCP:

- mobility
- medical needs
- behaviour
- vulnerability (including age, young parents and those at risk of disengaging from employment, education or training)
- practicality
- travel training
- nearest suitable school

This list is for guidance only, and satisfaction of one or more of these factors does not automatically support entitlement to travel assistance.

When determining the most appropriate type of travel assistance for pupils with an EHCP, we will consider the following:

- age of the pupil;
- nature and severity of the pupil's needs;
- availability of public transport;
- length and nature of the journey;
- most cost-effective mode of transport.

An application form can be obtained from the Special Education Team (Tel 0118 937 2674). The eligibility of these applications will be assessed by the SEND Team via the SEND Panel, using the criteria above.

4.9. Other exceptional circumstances

Parents/carers of pupils who do not meet the eligibility criteria above, who feel that their circumstances merit provision of travel assistance may apply outlining the exceptional circumstances. Each application will be considered, and travel assistance may be provided at the discretion of the Company.

An example of exceptional circumstances is a medical condition or disability.

Discretionary assistance will be:

- dealt with on a case-by-case basis;
- granted for a set period of time;
- is subject to review more frequently than other circumstances;
- may cover the whole cost of transport provision or be a contribution to the cost of the travel assistance.

5. Non-statutory school age (16 to 19 - Mainstream and pupils with an EHCP)

Local authorities have a duty to prepare and publish an annual Post-16 Transport Policy Statement by 31 May each year. The Company prepares this on behalf of Reading Borough Council and publishes this on the Company's website.

This statement specifies the arrangements for transport that the Company considers is necessary to make to facilitate the attendance of sixth form students receiving education or training.

Under national legislation, students are required to be in education, employment or training until their 18th birthday. This could involve mixing full-time work with study, following an apprenticeship, continuing full-time in school or college, or combining part time training with volunteering. There has not, however, been any change to statutory school age which ends at the end of the academic year in which the student turns 16.

Under the current law, there is no automatic entitlement to travel assistance or to another educational setting once a student is 16 and over. However, the Company is required to facilitate the attendance of all those of sixth form age i.e. those students in school years 12- 14 who started their programme of learning before their 19th birthday. This may involve travel assistance, but the Company does not need to provide this assistance free of charge. Responsibility for attendance lies with the student and their parents/carers.

6. Support for students with an EHCP 19-25 years

The Company outlines the support available to students aged 19 to 25 with an EHCP in the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement described above.

7. Children Looked After (under the care of the Company - all ages)

The Company is committed to supporting those most in need, ensuring that travel assistance is available to those who require it. It is recognised that Children Looked After face specific challenges and barriers to achieving their full potential, and as corporate parents we are committed to reducing those barriers.

For Children Looked After under our care, travel assistance will be provided as follows:

- if a child looked after is educated at a school that is not the nearest suitable school for less than one term, travel assistance will be provided by the Company for this period
- if a child looked after is educated at school that is not the nearest suitable school for more than one term, travel assistance will be provided by the Company for one term. During this term it is expected that an application will be made to the nearest suitable school, unless there are exceptional circumstances as to why the pupil should not move to this school. The view of the Head Teacher of the Virtual School will be taken into account when considering exceptional circumstances.

8. General Guidance

8.1. Travel assistance

If a pupil qualifies for travel assistance, they will be awarded a bus pass.

If the pupil qualifies for transport assistance under paragraph 4.8 or 4.9, other options may be considered such as:

- a bus pass with travel training;
- a personal budget; or
- a place on a school bus.

All applicants for travel assistance under paragraph 4.8 and 4.9 will be assessed to determine whether pupils are able to benefit from travel training. If assessment indicates that the pupil will benefit, any augmented travel assistance will be time limited. These assessments take up to 10 days to complete.

8.2. Home address

Transport assistance is based upon the distance from the home address to school and will be verified using the information supplied by the parent/carer. Home address is defined as being the address at which the parent/carer ordinarily reside and with whom the pupil normally lives.

In situations of joint parental custody, the home address would normally be that at which the parent/carer, in receipt of the child benefit for that pupil, resides. If child benefit is not received, then the address at which the pupil is registered with a GP will be used. If

this is not conclusive then we will use the address the pupil spends the greater proportion of the school week.

8.3. Educational placement for students with an EHCP

Transport assistance is based on travel from the home address to the educational placement or placements named in section I of the EHCP.

Placements attended will need to meet the criteria for transport eligibility to receive transport assistance. There is no automatic entitlement to transport assistance.

8.4. Change of address and emergency contact details

Parents have an obligation to notify the Company when they move house.

If a pupil or student moves to an address further away from the school such that their current school is no longer the nearest suitable school, the Company will normally expect the parents/carers to apply for a place at the nearest suitable school and to consider a moving date which takes account of a planned transition to the new school. If parents/carers choose not to apply for a place at the nearest suitable school, the Company will not continue to provide travel assistance unless there are exceptional circumstances

Parents/carers must provide the Company with up-to-date emergency contact numbers and email addresses. It is the parent/carer's responsibility to provide updated information where there are changes to avoid incurring costs.

If a pupil or student remains eligible for travel assistance, it can take up to 15 working days to organise the transport arrangements.

8.5. Inaccurate Applications

The Company reserves the right to reclaim the cost of any transport provided, if it is found that any incorrect information has been submitted in order to gain travel assistance.

8.6. Students living outside of Reading

Students who live outside of Reading attending a school in Reading should apply to their own Local Authority for assistance with transport.

8.7. Grounds of religion or belief

There is no eligibility for transport assistance for pupils on the grounds of religion or belief, except in relation to low-income families (see section 4.5).

8.8. Transport during the school / college day

Transport will not be provided for journeys made during the school day. Where pupils attend medical or dental appointments or off-site provision arranged by the school, then the school or parent/carer, as appropriate, must make arrangements and pay for transport.

8.9. Transport timing

Appropriate transport arrangements will be made based on the age and needs of the pupil. Pick-up and drop-off times cannot be rescheduled to take into account other family

commitments. Parents/carers who are unable to be home at the specified pick-up and drop-off times and location will have to make alternative arrangements.

Students receiving mainstream transport assistance are expected to walk up to 1 mile to their pickup point, with or without a parent/carer as appropriate. The pickup point for students with an EHCP may be a short distance from the home address, up to 1 mile.

Parents/carers will be responsible for ensuring their child is at the pickup/setting down point near their home and for accompanying their child to/from this point where required. Parents/carers will be responsible for ensuring they are waiting to meet their child at the setting down point on the return (homeward) journey. If parents are late to either drop off their child by two minutes or more, the transport will leave without the child. If the child is on the vehicle and parents are late by two minutes or more, parents are liable for the costs resulting from their delay.

8.10. Transport for students with an EHCP transferring to a different school

Transport is arranged from home or the closest available pick-up point to the designated school only. Where a pupil is transferring to a new school during the academic year, we accommodate requests for changes in transport where possible. Any request for transport to other schools or settings during transitions need to be submitted online application form.

8.11. Transport following the closure of a school

If a school decides it needs to close early or not open because of severe weather, every attempt will be made to inform the parents/carers. This may not always be possible especially in the case of larger schools. The school will advise parents/carers of their procedures in the event of an emergency closure.

In bad weather conditions, the transport operator is the sole judge of whether to begin or complete a bus journey, giving priority to the safety of the pupils on the vehicle.

Parents/carers must ensure that their child is warmly dressed in case the journey to or from school is very slow or even halted in bad weather.

In the event that transport is not able to operate in the morning because of adverse weather conditions, but a parent/carer nevertheless decides to take the pupil to school, then they will be expected to make their own arrangements to collect the pupil either at the end of the day or at the time of early closure.

Drivers are required to seek the safest route and may therefore avoid normal routes in order to stay on major roads or to avoid specific hazards. They are instructed that they must only set-down pupils at specific set-down points. Where transport is not able to access the predetermined set-down point due to poor weather, passengers may be asked to leave the vehicle at an alternative safe location.

Where a road is too hazardous for school transport in the morning, the transport operator is under no obligation to attempt the afternoon run if the hazard remains. Parents/carers would be informed if this is the case so they can make alternative arrangements to collect the pupil from school.

8.12. Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) Checks

Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service checks are carried out on all drivers and escorts prior to them being employed on transport contracts. Following a satisfactory check and appropriate safeguarding training, an identity badge will be issued to drivers and passenger assistants by the Company which will be worn at all times as proof of approval to undertake the work. If a driver or passenger assistant cannot produce their badge, you should notify the School Transport Manager immediately and do not let your child travel in the vehicle.

If you have any concerns regarding the behaviour of drivers or passenger assistants, please report this by emailing school.transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org.

8.13. Safety of Routes

The Company will monitor the routes and vehicles used to ensure that they are fit for purpose and do not pose a risk to anyone travelling on the vehicle or using the route to travel to school. Any vehicle or route found to be unsafe will be withdrawn and alternative arrangements made until normal service can be resumed. The Company reserves the right to make changes to routes and types of travel as necessary.

If you are concerned regarding the safety of a route, you can report this by emailing school.transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

8.14. Identification of new routes

The Company reserves the right to review all routes in light of any changes to the Admission Policy or areas of new housing. If such changes mean that a pupil will no longer be entitled to transport, then the notice of withdrawal will be two months from the date of notification to the parent/carer.

8.15. Journey Times

The Company will make every effort to ensure that travelling times to and from school are a maximum of:

- 45 minutes each way at primary school age
- 75 minutes each way at secondary school age

Where pupils with special needs attend out of borough placements or boarding placements, the distances involved may mean that some pupils will have longer journeys.

8.16. Data Protection

The Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) regulates the way we use your personal information.

You provide this information when you seek services from or come into contact with us. The Act provides a legal framework to the way we handle this data. Data Protection compliance is not an activity that is done once and requires ongoing compliance measures and reviews.

To ensure this compliance is managed in a structured way, the Company and Reading Borough Council employs Data Protection Officers. Our data protection policy can be found here on the Company website.

8.17. Parents/Carers of students with additional needs who are not at home

In the event that parents/carers of pupils with additional needs are not at home when the pupil is returning from school, the driver or escort will notify the Company's School Transport Manager to seek advice. Where possible, they will make a return visit to the family home to check if the parent or carer has returned.

If the parent/carer has not returned by the end of the route, the driver or passenger assistant will contact the School Transport Manager to inform them of the situation. The School Transport Manager will then inform the Head. Drivers and passenger assistants will receive further instructions following the advice given by the Head Teacher and may be required to travel back to school to leave the pupil with an appropriate adult. In all cases, a note will be left for the parent/carer containing details of who they should contact and the whereabouts of the pupil.

If an incident happens after 5pm Monday to Thursday, and after 4.30pm on a Friday, contact will be made with the Social Care Emergency Duty Team. All incidents will be recorded and considered by the Company.

Parents will be liable for costs incurred by the Company resulting from their failure to be present on time to meet their child.

8.18. Escorts for students with additional needs

Escorts are responsible for the supervision of pupils to and from school. They will oversee the pupil's conduct and safety in such a way that the driver is able to drive the vehicle safely in their duties. The role of the escort is to help the driver to ensure the pupil can access their transport provision in a safe and appropriate way.

The needs of each individual pupil will be assessed (typically via a risk assessment contributed to by key stakeholders) to determine whether they will require supervision by an escort. There is no minimum and maximum age that determines whether an escort is required.

Escorts receive training in order to understand the needs of pupils placed in their care. All escorts are subject to an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring check (DBS).

Every effort will be made to ensure that the same passenger assistant and driver continue to transport a pupil. We understand disruption can be unsettling and will do our best to minimise changes. This may not always be possible, and changes may need to be made, for example as a result of staff unavailability/staff turnover/contract renewals.

The escort is not responsible for administration of medical aid. If a pupil has a medical condition which could require the administration of medical aid during the journey, the Company will make suitable transport arrangements.

Should an eligible child have medical needs that require a Health Care Plan or a life-saving medical plan to be implemented in the event of an emergency, all viable options to provide transport will be explored in conjunction with relevant Health Services. These steps may pose a delay in the implementation of transport, or temporary withdrawal of transport in exceptional cases if it is not deemed by the contractor, commissioner, or family that it is safe for the child to continue travelling without further consideration, or amendments to the transport arrangements.

In some instances, a continuing healthcare assessment may be necessary to understand fully the care needs of children, and what support is needed to ensure they travel safely. NHS continuing healthcare - NHS (www.nhs.uk)

8.19. Residential Schools

The frequency of transport for pupils in 52-week placements will be determined individually.

The frequency of transport for pupils in a standard 40 week placement will depend on the number of weeks in the school calendar. The following numbers are for guidance only:

- termly boarders: 2 journeys each term, 6 journeys per academic year
- half termly boarders: 2 journeys each half term, 12 journeys per academic year
- weekly boarders: 2 journeys each week, 76 journeys per academic year

Where a student is unable to make their journey to school due to sickness or family matters and the Company has been informed at least 24 hours before, the journey will be provided at a date agreed between the School Transport Manager and the parent/carer. A parent/carer will be expected to make their own transport arrangements if the Company is notified less than 24 hours before.

8.20. Expected level of behaviour for all pupils

We aim to ensure the safety and well-being of all pupils whilst travelling to school. To ensure this, all pupils using Company organised transport are expected to meet standards of behaviour that will ensure their own safety and that of other passengers. The Company will work in partnership with schools and other educational settings to promote appropriate standards of behaviour and pupils being transported will be expected to follow the same behaviour codes as they do when in school or other educational settings. Behaviour that does not meet our standards will be monitored and appropriate action taken.

Should a risk assessment be deemed necessary to enable informed, appropriate, safe transport; the service will endeavour to seek the views of key stakeholders e.g schools/ parents/ transport contractor.

Where behaviour falls below the required standards transport may be suspended for a set period or withdrawn completely. This would be a matter of last resort. The length of the suspension or withdrawal of travel assistance will be dependent upon the seriousness of the incident.

When behaviour first becomes an issue dialogue with the parents/carers and the school/educational setting will begin, with a view to resolving issues prior to any further action being taken. Parents/carers will be notified when transport is suspended or withdrawn, giving 5 days' notice of the suspension/exclusion. This will take the form of a written warning letter, suspension or withdrawal letter. If an incident is of a serious nature the Company reserves the right to withdraw the pupil from transport immediately to ensure the safety of the pupil and others. In these instances, the parent/carer will be notified.

The decision to suspend or withdraw transport will take into account any special educational needs and disabilities the pupil may have that impact on their presenting behaviour. Where this is the case, the Company will work with parents/carers and the pupil with additional needs (where they have capacity) to identify alternative solutions to safely transport them to their school/ educational setting.

Parents/carers are responsible for transporting their own children during any period of exclusion from transport due to inappropriate behaviour that is unrelated to any special educational needs and disabilities. There would be no refunds for transport during this period.

Behaviour that falls below the required standard includes that which is likely to significantly offend or endanger others, including, but not limited to:

- serious damage to the vehicle by the pupil
- actions which may constitute a health and safety risk
- assaults on others
- verbal abuse of other people including but not limited to swearing, taunting, racist, sexist, transphobic or homophobic comments, threatening behaviour
- incitement of others to engage in misbehaviour
- making repeated malicious false allegations of mistreatment requiring investigation
- serious misuse of a travel pass
- failure to comply with the reasonable instructions of the driver, escort, Company officer, or authorised member of school / establishment staff

During the period of suspension or withdrawal, it is expected that parents/carers take steps to address the behaviour. The parent/carer, pupil (where reasonable) and school/educational setting will be consulted on arrangements for the return to transport.

Parents/carers who wish to appeal a decision taken to suspend or withdraw transport should follow the process outlined in the suspension or withdrawal notification letter. This will enable a review of the case.

9. Application and Review Process

9.1. Application process

Mainstream

Application forms for travel assistance are available online and can be found using this link:

<https://brighterfuturesforchildren.org/for-parents-carers/schools/transport/>.

Applications cannot be made retrospectively. Assistance will only be provided from the date of application.

Pupils with an EHCP

Applications are made to the SEND Team and assessed by the SEN Panel.

9.2. Review process

Provision of travel assistance at any one time does not guarantee that this will be an ongoing arrangement and the requirement will be reviewed by the Company on a regular basis.

All pupils who receive travel assistance will be subject to review:

- at the end of Year 3 in which the pupil attains the age of 8 years;
- at the end of Year 6;
- following the successful completion of Independent Travel Training;
- at the annual review meeting if the pupil has an EHCP;
- following a change in circumstances.

If during the course of any school year the Company determines that the provision of travel assistance is no longer appropriate, it will stop at the end of the term in which the decision was made.

10. How to Appeal a Decision

If you applied for travel assistance and your child is not offered assistance or the transport being provided is unsuitable, you do have a right to challenge the decision through the appeals process. This guide will take you through the appeals process.

10.1. Grounds for Challenge

There are only two grounds for appeal, and these are:

- That you believe the policy has NOT been applied correctly;
- That you believe the policy HAS been properly applied correctly but the exceptional circumstances outlined in the application have not been fully considered.

10.2. How to make an appeal.

If you believe that one of the two grounds for appeal apply you can challenge the decision. There are two stages to the appeals process.

10.2.1. Stage One

This appeal will be reviewed by a senior officer in the School Transport Service, the Reviewing Officer.

An appeal should be submitted, via the online form (https://reading-self.achieveservice.com/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-1a6aff7c-82df-41a6-8277-b0c6c2d83a1c/AF-Stage-d3dccd92-82c4-4d15-bae8-b1e8ea60ed93/definition.json&redirectlink=/&cancelRedirectLink=/&category=AF-Category-0c39d40f-83aa-4cef-9790-1719ad0c268a&noLoginPrompt=1).

This should be completed and submitted within 20 working days from the receipt of the Authority's written decision not to award assistance. The form will ask you to state which of the two grounds you are appealing on and why you are appealing.

If you are appealing on exceptional circumstances or low income you will be able to upload further evidence not included in your original application. Do not include the evidence submitted with your original application.

Reviewing Officer will review your original application within 20 working days of receipt and parents/carers will be notified in writing.

If you would like a hard copy of the appeals form, please email:

School.transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

OR write to:

School Transport Service

Brighter Futures for Children

Civic Offices

Bridge Street

Reading RG1 2LU

Or call:

0118 937 2542

10.2.2. Stage Two

If your appeal is not upheld, and the original decision remains you have a second chance to challenge the decision.

Again, this should be completed and submitted, via the online form (https://reading-self.achieveservice.com/en/AchieveForms/?form_uri=sandbox-publish://AF-Process-1a6aff7c-82df-41a6-8277-b0c6c2d83a1c/AF-Stage-d3dccd92-82c4-4d15-bae8-b1e8ea60ed93/definition.json&redirectlink=/&cancelRedirectLink=/&category=AF-Category-0c39d40f-83aa-4cef-9790-1719ad0c268a&noLoginPrompt=1).

This should be completed and submitted within 20 working days from the receipt of the Reviewing Officers written decision not to award assistance. The form will ask you to state which of the two grounds you are appealing on and why you are appealing.

The parent should request that their appeal be progressed to Stage Two where it will be reviewed by an Independent Officer Panel headed by a senior officer from Brighter Futures for Children.

Parents can submit additional information and will be invited to attend. Officers on this panel will have had no involvement in the original decision making. The appeal date will be within 40 working days of receipt of your request and any additional supporting information. Prior to the case being heard, a full copy of all correspondence will be sent to the parent.

Parent will be informed of the outcome within 5 days of the hearing. Full details of the decision will be provided.

10.3. Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman

If you believe there has been an administrative fault, at any time during your appeal, with the way Brighter Futures for Children has handled your appeal, you may contact the Local

Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSO) who investigates complaints about Councils:

PO Box 4771, Coventry CV4 0EH (Tel: 0300 061 0641) www.lgo.org.uk

11. How to Make a Complaint or seek remedy to an issue with transport

11.1. If things go wrong, the School Transport Service will endeavour to rectify the situation swiftly, to the satisfaction of all parties, as long as the solution is not outside the boundaries of this policy

11.2. For issues identified by schools or families that require a remedy relating to the delivery of service from the provider e.g:

- lateness of transport
- changing schedule (within policy reasons; e.g sickness, INSET days etc.)

11.3. Please refer to your travel schedule and contact the operator directly in the first instance. This will likely remedy you concern quicker than reporting to a third party first. If you have an issue that persists, please contact the School Transport service on school.transport@brighterfuturesforchildren.org

11.4. Any pupil, parent or carer wishing to make a formal complaint relating to Home to School Transport arrangements, should contact the Customer Relations Team:

Call: 0118 937 3787

Write:

Freepost RTLS-CKGX-RKLL
Brighter Futures for Children
Customer Relations Team
Bridge Street
Reading RG1 2LU

Email us at: complaints@reading.gov.uk

**Adult Social Care,
Children's Services and
Education Committee**



Reading
Borough Council
Working better with you

17 January 2024

Title	Proposals to change Chiltern Edge School Transport arrangements
Purpose of the report	To make a decision
Report status	Public report
Report author	Brian Grady, Director of Education
Lead Councillor	Cllr Ruth McEwan
Corporate priority	Thriving Communities
Recommendations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That ACE Committee agree to consult on School Transport policy changes to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge School and to change current transport arrangements. 2. That ACE Committee delegate the format and process of consultation to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Lead Councillor for Children's Services and the Lead Councillor for Education and Public Health.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. Parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 1.2. School Transport has been a significant budget and growth pressure in Reading for the past two years. Local Authorities across England are experiencing continued demand and cost pressures regarding school transport and local pressures are in line with these national increases in demand and cost increases. These include continued increases in numbers of children with SEND, leading to an increase in the number of children needing transport assistance to school, including children needing to go further afield to be provided with an appropriate education placement. These demand and growth pressures mean action needs to be taken to make savings across the School Transport budget.
- 1.3. Chiltern Edge secondary school is a 6 form of entry school in Sonning Common, Oxfordshire, which has been providing school places for Reading pupils aged 11-16 unable to secure a local Reading school place for many years. In recognition of the need to support Reading pupils access a school place, school transport arrangements have been provided for Chiltern Edge pupils since before Local Government reorganisation, with Oxfordshire establishing arrangements before 1998.
- 1.4. With the opening of the new River Academy secondary school in Reading from September 2024 securing sufficient local secondary places for all Reading children, it is appropriate for us to review the free transport provision for Maiden Erlegh Chiltern

Edge. This paper recommends that we consult on revising the School Transport Policy to remove free transport entitlement for pupils attending Chiltern Edge school.

2. Policy Context

- 2.1. As set out in HM Government's Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance: *Travel to school for children of compulsory school age* (updated June 2023), parents are responsible for ensuring their child attends school. This means they must take all the action necessary to enable their child to attend school. For most parents, this includes making arrangements for their child to travel to and from school. The Statutory Guidance makes clear that Local Authorities must make arrangements, free-of-charge, for eligible children to travel to school.
- 2.2. A child is deemed eligible if they are of compulsory school age, attend their nearest suitable school and: live more than the statutory walking distance from that school; or could not reasonably be expected to walk to that school because of their special educational needs, disability or mobility problem, or would not be able to walk to that school in reasonable safety, even if they were accompanied by their parent.
- 2.3. As well as these legal obligations, the Statutory Guidance confirms that Local Authorities are able to make discretionary arrangements to fund wider school transport. Such arrangements were agreed by Reading Borough Council and last ratified at Reading Borough Council Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Education Committee in October 2020, including the following arrangements:
 - 2.3.1. Provision for children beyond statutory school age (post 16)
 - 2.3.2. Supporting the most vulnerable children access schools through taxi transportation rather than a personal budget or bus routes.
 - 2.3.3. Chiltern Edge School transport.

3. Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge

- 3.1. There has been a long-standing historical need for Reading families to access Chiltern Edge School, due to the lack of local secondary school places in the north of the borough and oversubscription of Highdown School in Caversham. Following school admissions boundary changes, Oxfordshire agreed to pay transport costs for Reading pupils attending Chiltern Edge School from two areas of Caversham – Caversham Park Village on the east side of Caversham and a number of roads on the far west side of Caversham.
- 3.2. Reading Borough Council altered the designated catchment areas for the Caversham area, and made all of the Borough north of the river (RG4 postcodes) into one dual catchment area shared between Highdown School and Chiltern Edge. It was agreed at the time of this boundary change that Reading would assume responsibility for the pupils Oxfordshire had been paying for and that this would be phased in over 5 years as each new Year 7 started. This historical context is important, as when Chiltern Edge and Highdown schools academised, they will have taken ownership of their own catchment areas and admissions arrangements and Reading Borough Council ceased to be the admission authority at this time.
- 3.3. Originally, the routes were covered by buses procured by Oxfordshire. Reading took over the transport provision for the Reading pupils and Reading Buses were able to provide double decker buses out of their network provision. The buses became part of the Reading Buses timetabled services and pupils were issued with Reading bus passes and could use not only any of the three public bus services but also the public bus service to Sonning Common, giving them the option of travelling out of normal school hours e.g. to attend after school clubs.
- 3.4. In 2022, the most recent contract was awarded to Reading Buses to operate three double decker buses from the RG4 Caversham area to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge. The original specification was to convey 245 pupils but the total number of passes

issued was 290. Further to the contract award, the admissions round for September 2023 saw 100 places offered for Reading pupils, which required additional bus capacity. For 2023-24 a contract variation has been put in place for Reading Buses to provide a 4th bus.

- 3.5. As Highdown has been oversubscribed for several years, the school transport policy has allowed free transport to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge for any pupil living within the RG4 postcode area. However, with the opening of the River Academy in September 2024, there is an opportunity to revise this policy and reduce or remove the cost of transporting pupils to an out of borough school.
- 3.6. The Statutory Guidance requirements regarding consultation are set out in the Community Engagement section of this paper below. The key test in the Statutory Guidance regarding any proposed change is a test of reasonableness. To ensure that all options for change of policy can be considered for implementation from September 2024, our published Secondary Admissions Guide, made available from the beginning of September 2023, has highlighted there may be a potential change to our Transport policy regarding what is now Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge.
- 3.7. Statutory Guidance requires a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline would therefore be undertaken across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024:
 - ACE Committee agreement to consult on proposed changes January 2024
 - Consultation undertaken mid-January to Mid-February
 - ACE Committee consideration of preferred proposal early March
 - March-September implementation period.
- 3.8. It is proposed that the policy change would remove eligibility for children not yet currently in receipt or eligible for transport. It is then proposed to consult on the following options:
 - Fully removing eligibility from September 2024. This would achieve a full saving of £264,000 per year. This is currently the recommended option, due to the current savings required on School Transport budgets.
 - A planned reduction of between one and two buses a year, to cancel all four buses within a three-year period. A three year reduction would lead to projected savings of £90,000 per year from September 2024. The planned reduction proposals could be based on year group eligibility or on reducing geographical area eligibility.
- 3.9. The consultation will include impact monitoring proposals, so that Councillors could be assured that at any point the policy could be amended if there was deemed to be an adverse impact on disadvantaged families.
- 3.10. Year group – led reductions would be based on the impact of the River Academy opening year group by year group from September 2024 (new secondary schools open on a phased basis, initially opening usually Years 7 and 10 before growing to have all year groups open across a number of years). As River Academy opens more year groups, we would align eligibility changes to year groups opening, which would support the options for parents if they wished to move their child from Chiltern Edge. For the 24-25 academic year, eligibility being removed for Year 7 is expected to have a low detrimental impact for families, as parents are expected to prefer River Academy. River Academy opening is projected to reduce demand by at least one bus. A reduction of a further bus would be proposed for September 2024 for the older year groups in this option, but this would have more impact.
- 3.11. Geography-focused changes could reduce the eligible area based on nearest schools for pupils with an aim that pupils under the three-mile walking limit for school transport

would have eligibility removed, with protection remaining for children living over 2 miles who might qualify for a bus pass under the current Low Income criteria of our policy .

- 3.12. Reading Buses have been engaged in discussions regarding proposed options for change and advise that tranches of 80 pupils per bus would be the planning approach taken by Reading Buses to test viability of any parent-funded route. Options being considered include season tickets versus direct pay, and open public buses versus coach travel, with volumes and phase options to be informed by feedback.

4. Contribution to Strategic Aims

- 4.1. The Council's new Corporate Plan has established three themes for the years 2022/25. These themes are:

- Healthy Environment
- Thriving Communities
- Inclusive Economy

- 4.2. These themes are underpinned by "Our Foundations" explaining the ways we work at the Council:

- People first
- Digital transformation
- Building self-reliance
- Getting the best value
- Collaborating with others

- 4.3. Full details of the Council's Corporate Plan and the projects which will deliver these priorities are published on the [Council's website](#). These priorities and the Corporate Plan demonstrate how the Council meets its legal obligation to be efficient, effective and economical.

- 4.4. The opening of River Academy supports the Council's ambitions for local, high quality school places for Reading children, and actively supports the Corporate Plan theme of Thriving Communities. In addition, any reduction in road traffic will support the Council's actions in response to the Climate Emergency and the ambitions set out in our Corporate Plan under Healthy Environment.

5. Environmental and Climate Implications

- 5.1. The Council declared a Climate Emergency at its meeting on 26 February 2019 (Minute 48 refers).
- 5.2. The model of prioritising active travel and school transport through buses will encourage reduced emissions. The proposed policy changes will promote Reading children to attend local schools within walking distance, which will have a further positive impact on the Climate Emergency, reducing transport emissions in and around Reading.

6. Community Engagement

- 6.1. Statutory Guidance sets out what Local Authorities should do when consulting on school transport arrangements. This guidance is quoted below.
- 6.2. *"Local Authorities should consult locally with: schools whose pupils will be affected by the proposed changes, parents whose children will (or may) be affected by the proposed changes, and those whose children may be affected in the future – for example, because they live in the catchment area of, or attend the feeder school of, a school affected by the proposed changes; and the local Parent Carer Forum.*
- 6.3. *Consultation should last for at least 28 working days during term time.*
- 6.4. *Local Authorities should give careful consideration to the impact proposed changes to their policy will have on parents' choice of school, the financial impact the changes will have on affected families, paying particular attention to the potential impact of any*

changes on children from low-income families and the impact the changes will have on people with protected characteristics.

- 6.5. *Wherever possible, local authorities should phase in changes so that children who begin attending a school under one set of travel arrangements continue to benefit from those arrangements until they leave that school”.*
- 6.6. Engagement with Reading Buses has been undertaken ahead of the formal consultation, to establish whether a publicly available bus service could be provided to mitigate the risk of the removal of dedicated school buses to Chiltern Edge. The proposed consultation on policy changes is being planned with Reading Buses advising on potential routes, to inform Councillor decisions.
- 6.7. Statutory Guidance requires a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline would therefore be undertaken across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024. If agreed by Committee, the proposed timeline for consultation and implementation of the revised policy is as follows:

Milestone	Timescale
Decision by ACE Committee to proceed with statutory consultation	16 January 2024
Commencement of statutory consultation period	17 January 2024
Closing date of statutory consultation period	16 February 2024 (to account for half term and comply with the requirement for a 28 day consultation)
Review of feedback from consultation period	19 February-1 March 2024
Confirmation of final proposals published for Committee decision	13 March 2024
ACE Committee consideration of final proposals	20 March 2024

- 6.8. Dedicated engagement sessions on the consultation will be held with parents of children attending Chiltern Edge secondary school.
- 6.9. The consultation will include impact monitoring proposals, so that Councillors could be assured that at any point any newly adopted Policy could be amended if there was deemed to be an adverse impact on disadvantaged families, pupils with protected characteristics or any other at risk group.

7. Equality Implications

- 7.1. Under the Equality Act 2010, Section 149, a public authority must, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to—
- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;
 - advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
- 7.2. It is anticipated that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is relevant to the decision, and will be completed, so that we can evidence any differential impact in particular for

children with a disability, but also parents with any of the protected characteristics: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex (gender) or sexual orientation.

- 7.3. The consultation will identify families where a pupil is eligible for Free School Meals and pay particular attention to the need to mitigate pressure on families currently exacerbated by the cost of living crisis – through mitigations such as a means tested approach for some families to received support, and negotiate ongoing public transport access through Reading Buses and other public transport providers in Oxfordshire. In terms of the Reading Borough Council reducing inequality priority, Chiltern Edge is the only school where families benefit from this extended entitlement, and analysis of catchment areas suggest that it is predominantly not disadvantaged families who currently benefit from this entitlement. The percentage of children eligible for free school meals in local schools compared to the national average of 22/5% is: Highdown 9.4% JMA 37.8% Wren 24.5%; Chiltern Edge Reading pupils 13% (estimated – updated data held by the Trust requested).

8. Other Relevant Considerations

- 8.1. Impact on Public Health outcomes will be modelled as a result of more children being supported to travel actively and more children being able to walk and cycle to an appropriate local school place.

9. Legal Implications

- 9.1. Statutory guidance refers to the legislation governing travel to school for children of compulsory school age, in particular:
- Section 508A of the Education Act 1996: sustainable travel to school;
 - Section 508B of and Schedule 35B to the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for eligible children;
 - Section 508C of the Education Act 1996: travel arrangements for other children;
 - The School Information (England) Regulations 2008: publication of information about travel arrangements.

10. Financial Implications

- 10.1. The proposals being considered are anticipated to make budget savings. The savings analysis undertaken so far will be further informed by the consultation process. In addition to Policy changes supporting current resource management plans, the following areas of Policy are anticipated to make savings.
- 10.2. The agreed 2022/2023 contracts costs for 3 buses to Maiden Erlegh Chiltern Edge was £925 per day (£308 each per day). The 2023/2024 costs for 4 buses is £1,356 per day (£339 each per day). The difference in prices equates to around 10%, which is currently around the standard inflation pressures being seen across transport contracts.
- 10.3. The current annual contract cost therefore equates to a total of £257,640 a year (based on 190 school days).

11. Timetable for Implementation

- 11.1. Statutory Guidance requires a 28-day consultation period in term time. The proposed timeline would therefore be undertaken across January – March 2024, with any implementation of policy changes from September 2024.
- 11.2. Implementation is proposed from September 2024. A more detailed implementation timetable will informed by dialogue with Reading Buses. The contract terms for the current bus contract, which is in place until 2025, include a three-month termination clause.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1. There are none.

Appendices

1. School Transport Policy 2024-25 DRAFT: subject to consultation.
(See Appendix 1 to Item 11 in the Agenda Pack)

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