



Bracknell Forest Council

Children's Social Care

**Bracknell Forest's vision  
and ambition for Children  
and Young People**

# Safeguarding and Supporting Children, Young People and Families

## Foreword

We are ambitious for all children and young people in Bracknell Forest. We want to help to keep them safe from harm and enable them to develop into responsible citizens; able and willing to play an active role in society. We want them all to go on to lead successful lives as adults.

Overall we want Bracknell Forest to be one of the best places in the country in which to grow up. We want all children to thrive and develop to their full potential. In order to achieve our ambition we need to work in partnership with children and young people, our staff, parents, carers, schools, key partners and other agencies. We recognise that a small minority of children and young people face a range of difficulties and challenges which could have a significant impact on them being able to achieve good outcomes.

We have a duty to protect and safeguard the wellbeing of children, and will uphold this duty by providing a range of high quality support appropriate to the child or young person and their family to address these difficulties and challenges.

In order to provide the protection and support for our children and young people, we believe that our workforce is crucial in achieving our aims. We want Bracknell Forest to be a place where good social work practice is recognised and supported, where staff feel able to do the job required, and where practice may not be as strong as we expect this will be promptly identified and addressed.

We have high expectations for our children and young people, and high expectations of our workforce.

Finally, we want Bracknell Forest Council to continue to be an employer of choice where staff work hard, feel appreciated and can progress in their career.

### **Councillor Dr Gareth Barnard**

Lead Member, Children, Young People & Learning

### **Dr Janette Karklins**

Director, Children, Young People & Learning

September 2014



# Introduction

All children in Bracknell Forest deserve the best start in life. For most this will be in a caring and supportive family, with parents or carers who strive to do all they can to ensure their children feel safe, secure and loved. For some, however, this sadly is not the case and it is here that the Council focusses its efforts. This statement sets out our vision and our plans to achieve it.

## Our Vision

**Children's Social Care at Bracknell Forest puts children and young people at the centre of everything we do. With a highly skilled and committed workforce, we work with families and partners to support our children to maximise their potential.**

### Key aims:-

The primary aim of Children's Social Care is to protect and support the most vulnerable children and young people in Bracknell Forest.

The voice of the child will remain at the centre of our work and we will ensure that their views are taken into account in all that we do.

We can only achieve good outcomes by working in partnership with others. Highly effective leadership is provided for Children's Social Care with a commitment to ensure best practice and the capacity to ensure continued improvement.

## Our Driver

Children and young people are at the heart of the services we provide. We listen to their views and those of their families. These are important to us in helping to plan what we do and to find out how well we are doing.

We believe that children are best brought up in their own family. But for some young people this is not possible and for them we will act as good corporate parents. This means that where necessary we will provide alternative care arrangements and for most children and young people, this will be with a local family. Where young people have very specialised needs, we will seek to find the most appropriate placement.

The number of families whose children come into the care system is relatively small. However, there are many other families who experience difficulties and parents who need help and support to enable them to care well for their children.

We will always take prompt action if needed. The future life chances of the child take precedence over those of the adults in a family and if a situation is not improving for a child or young person we will act as delays are not acceptable.

# Realising our vision

To meet this ambition, we will make a difference by working together with our partners to:

- consider what life is like for the child;
- spend time working in partnership with families and other agencies to affect positive change;
- take difficult decisions when they are in the child/young person's best long term interests;
- manage risk, understanding that uncertainty and risk is a feature of child protection work;
- streamline processes and systems so that social work professionals are released from unnecessary bureaucracy;
- intervene early in families to prevent a situation escalating;
- provide strong professional development and professional support for all staff.

We will keep colleagues informed of our involvement with families, where possible collaborate on and share assessments, feedback on outcomes and notify all involved when we intend to end our involvement with a child, young person and their parents/carers. Our social workers will manage key transition points so that we can successfully 'step down' support when appropriate.

Whilst Children's Social Care is responsible for assessing the help and support needed for children and their families with specialist needs, including Child Protection, we will work to support the work of early intervention and prevention, helping to address issues, wherever possible, before they reach crisis point.

The way in which we work with children, young people and families has changed significantly in recent years and this has been influenced by national policy development. These include:

- A focus on prevention and early intervention which looks at the support that a child, young person or family receive before they reach the threshold for statutory intervention, based on the belief that early intervention improves life chances, and reduces the need for more expensive services and support in the future.
- Revised guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2013, which clarifies roles and responsibilities of all professionals working with children and young people and seeks to place the child more centrally to the processes.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 which includes the Family Justice Review which has a focus on the public law processes, and places a greater emphasis on the voice of the child and the timeliness of decision making.
- There have been changes to the regulation of Social Work; all Social Workers are required to register with the Health Care and Professional Council. There has been a focus on social work training and on-going professional development.
- The new Ofsted framework for inspection provides a much greater spotlight on the way in which a child experiences the system, and looks very much at outcomes and impact of services and support of the child or young person.



# Why do we get involved with a child or young person?

The reasons are varied and include neglect and physical, emotional or sexual abuse. Parental concerns include drug/alcohol misuse, mental health issues and domestic violence which prevent adults in a family paying attention to a child's needs over their own. There are clear thresholds for intervention which have been agreed by the department and by our partners through the Local Safeguarding Children Board.

## What do we want to achieve?

We want children to have a stable, happy childhood and we only provide support and intervention where needed, in a timely manner and to make a positive difference for the child. We will ensure that there is no unnecessary delay in planning for the future care of children and young people who can no longer remain with their birth families. This is a key priority for the family justice system as well as the Council.

Foster carers do a rewarding job in caring for vulnerable young people whose birth families cannot care for them and we will provide intensive support to help them with this task.

We will know we have succeeded with our early intervention work when we have safely reduced the number of children who are in the care of Bracknell Forest Council and the number who have a protection plan.

## Working with those most vulnerable

In Bracknell Forest there are approximately 28,500 children and young people.

The vast majority will be happy, healthy and achieving well.

A small minority will be affected by events in their lives which will mean that they will need some support from professional agencies; the severity of the events will determine what level of help may be needed.

Our role in Children's Social Care is to work with children, young people and families where the level of need is high enough to have a significant impact on life chances and that without intervention the child or young person may be at risk of harm.

We will:

- **Intervene effectively** by undertaking proportionate assessments.
- Implement **evidence based** interventions.
- Help children and young people to **feel safe**.
- **Work together** with our partners, especially schools, the police and health services.
- Strive for the **highest standards** in our work.
- Work in **genuine collaboration** with children and families.
- Support and work with the **voluntary and community sector**.
- Remember that what we need to do is to **make a positive difference** to the lives of children, young people and their families.

**In order to ensure we are able to work with those most vulnerable we will:**

- Provide clear information about the **role of Children's Social Care**, to adults and to children and young people. This information will be available through leaflets and through information on the public website.
- Provide clear information about the **referral and assessment procedures**, this will be available on the public website and will be available in the Pan Berkshire Child Protection Procedures.
- Provide clear information about the **level of need** which will require statutory intervention from Children's Social Care. This information will be available on the public website and the Pan Berkshire Child Protection Procedures.
- Ask questions at **point of contact** with Children's Social Care to gain enough information to help us make a decision about the concerns being identified and next steps to take.
- Undertake an accurate and timely assessment of need if a **referral** meets the threshold for further action, to help us to consider the best approach to take in supporting a child or young person.
- **Signpost to other services** or support that may be suitable to help where appropriate if a referral does not meet the threshold for Children's Social Care.
- Make a **decision on next steps** when we have completed an assessment that reflects the information we have gathered and are in the best interests of the child or young person. We will **communicate the next steps** in the most appropriate way to the child, young person, family and to other professionals who have been involved.
- Work with the child, young person and their family in accordance with their plan, and undertake **regular reviews of progress**. We will aim to **close or step down cases** where the concerns and issues have been addressed and there is no longer a risk to the child or young person.
- Take **relevant steps to remove the child** from the family home and place them within a supportive foster care placement when there is insufficient progress made against a plan, or where a child is deemed to be at significant risk if they remain in the family home.
- Create **better outcomes** for the child/young person as a result of our intervention in their life.



# Our team

We will only achieve our vision and the good outcomes we want for children and young people with an effective team of staff. We value our employees and the work they do and we want our staff to feel appreciated and know that they can progress in their career with us.

The Professional Capabilities Framework, developed by the Social Work Reform Board, provides a framework for the way in which social workers think about and plan their careers and professional development. All workers receive a comprehensive induction programme that will help to orientate them within Bracknell Forest's local procedures and style of working.

The appointment of the Principal Social Work role, as recommended in the Munro review of child protection, has been made to a Head of Service who is responsible for ensuring that social workers have the opportunities to develop their skills and that service provision continues to reflect service need.

We will promote a culture that supports and develops good practice, where staff are proud of the work they do, are willing to take responsibility and own the impact they have on families futures. This will include having high expectations of staff and expecting them to have high expectations of themselves to support good social work practice.

We will continue to:

- **Recruit staff** with the requisite knowledge and skills needed for the role and who have the personal qualities required to learn and develop.
- Develop and retain skilled and experienced staff through **high quality supervisions, appraisal, training and support**.
- Continue to develop our **support offer**, which includes manageable caseloads.
- Strengthen inter-agency/multi-disciplinary **team working**.
- Promote **strong leadership**, management and supervision.
- **Safeguard children and young people** through multi-agency safeguarding training and safer workforce.
- Ensure all new staff have a **comprehensive induction programme** to help orientate them to Bracknell Forest.
- Ensure the **Principal Social Worker** role is effective in promoting the high standard of Social Work practice that is expected.
- Provide access to **ongoing research information** through membership to Research in Practice providing access to the latest research, webinars, training and publication of research resources.
- Support workers to access an **ongoing programme of management and leadership opportunities**.
- Ensure there is a **clear workforce planning** in place which includes specific training and development and progression opportunities.
- Provide an opportunity for social **workers to contribute their views** on their experiences of working in Children's Social Care through a regular Social Worker Health Check.

# Working together

Participation and engagement of children, young people and their families is central to the ethos of Children's Social Care.

We demonstrate this in many ways, including:

- **Listening** to the views and wishes of children and young people during assessments and, taking these into account when making plans.
- Providing an **advocacy service** for young people who require such support to express their views.
- A **clear procedure** for young people to make a complaint regarding any aspect of the service they receive.
- Supporting the **Children in Care Council (SILSIP)** for younger children looked after, teenagers and care leavers. This provides a forum with a range of activities for children and young people to have their say and meet with Senior Officers and Elected Members.
- **Seeking feedback** through questionnaires which inform ongoing discussions about service development.
- Seeking feedback from parents and professionals at the end of each Child Protection Conferences via a **short questionnaire**.
- Supporting the **Independent Reviewing Officer** role, acknowledged as being key to ensuring that children in care are able to express their views. This ranges from young people completing a **consultation** form before their review meeting, supporting young people to chair their own meeting, and meeting with them prior to review meetings to **discuss any issues**.



# Working in partnership with others

Working in partnership with others is an essential part of our work. We can only achieve our vision by working effectively with others to best meet the needs of children, young people and families.

We will:

- Ensure that we **communicate effectively our roles and responsibilities** when working with children, young people and families.
- Ensure that partners are able to **contribute effectively to assessment, planning and review processes** as appropriate.
- Ensure that we give **feedback to partners** who make a referral to Children's Social Care regarding the outcome of their referral.
- Ensure that we keep partners **informed of ongoing activity** where appropriate and through relevant channels.
- Attend other meetings as relevant to **establish effective links and liaison** where children, young people and families are being identified as being in need of support (Early Intervention Hub).
- Support and contribute to **key partnership meetings that provide strategic plans and priorities** such as the Local Safeguarding Children Board and the Children and Young People's Partnership.
- Provide regular **performance information to keep partners informed** of ongoing need, trends and issues. This information will help us to work with partners to support families together and achieve better outcomes.
- Facilitate **multi-agency meetings** to focus specifically on looked after children and care leavers (known locally as the Life Chances Team).

## Our learning culture

Our learning from case file audits, staff surveys, customer feedback, serious case and management review and inspection outcomes shapes our work in delivering our vision.

In order to ensure ongoing improvement we will:

- Have a strong **commitment to quality assurance systems** and processes.
- Undertake **regular audit activity** to look in depth at the way in which we work with children, young people and families.
- Ensure that **learning from audit activity** is fed back to practitioners and the learning informs ongoing practice improvements.
- Ensure that **learning from audit activity is used to inform wider plans and strategy** developments.
- Ensure that the **learning from any complaints** is incorporated into improving practice.
- Contribute to and learn from ongoing **peer review** and peer challenge activity.
- Contribute to and learn from ongoing **Inspection** activity.
- Contribute to **Serious Case Reviews** and **Partnership Reviews** led by the Local Safeguarding Children Board and ensure that any learning from these processes continue to inform our improvement activity.

# What is planned for the future?

Children's Social Care has experienced increasing numbers of children becoming looked after, and increasing numbers of children who are subject to a Child Protection Plan and who are children in need. The volume of referrals has remained high, and there have been many developments to ensure that the ongoing needs continue to be met, as well as addressing needs earlier through the Early Intervention Hub.

So far we have:

- Developed a **multi agency Life Chances Team**, to track and support children who are looked after. A **Leaving Care Life Chances Team** has also been developed to support the education, health and housing needs of our care leavers. This includes dedicated support from specialist services. These teams are delivering better outcomes for LAC.
- Developed a **stand alone fostering panel** to meet the local needs of our carers and delivery more timely assessments and ultimately more foster carers.
- Procured the service of the **Berkshire Autistic Society** to meet the early needs of families where there is a diagnosis of ASD which leads to better management of behaviour enabling families to cope.
- **Increased social work staffing** including front line social workers and focussed on developing their practice.
- **Increased permanency for** children, for example through more adoptions.
- Developed a **Domestic Abuse Perpetrator service** to prevent child protection cases escalating.
- **Revised systems/processes** following the Children and Families Act 2014 and the new statutory guidance.
- Developed a Pan Berkshire Service of **Experienced Practitioners** to give additional support for Social Workers by developing their legal knowledge and skills, particularly in the more complex Social Work casework.

Work continues to reshape service delivery in a way that meets increasing demands, and there will be a particular focus on implementing the recommendations of the Eileen Munro Review of Child Protection, supporting the development of prevention and early intervention, developing further our Fostering, Adoption and Family Group conferencing services and the introduction of Personalisation for families of children with disabilities.

# What are our key targets?

Our service plan includes these outcomes:

- 4.1 Provide accessible, safe and practical early intervention and support services for vulnerable children and young people in the Borough.
- 4.2 Increase the number and continue to support foster carers.
- 4.6 Support a wide range of flexible respite services for the carers of children and young people in need.
- 4.8 Ensure children and young people feel safe, are protected from harm and abuse, have their views respected and gain confidence as a member of the local community. The development of a Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub will enable us to make decisions in a more timely manner.
- 4.9 Continue to improve outcomes for looked after children in education and employment.

# Strategic planning

It is important to note that this activity takes place within a framework of strategic planning which incorporates a golden thread throughout the Children, Young People and Learning Department and the rest of the Council. These links are important to ensure that where relevant there is a clear and agreed set of priorities for improvement, and that all those working with children, young people and families, or those responsible for planning and delivering services are working together to a clear purpose and common goals.

## Our planning framework

<b>Council Medium Term Objectives</b>	These are the objectives set by the Council.
<b>Department Service Plans</b>	These are linked to the Council's Medium Term Objectives and identify key actions and performance indicators for each branch of the Department.
<b>Children and Young People's Plan 2014 – 2017</b>	This is a partnership plan that identifies a set of key priorities for improvement agreed by partners on the Children and Young People's Partnership.
<b>Individual Service / Business Plans</b>	These will be completed within each Branch of the Department and will be linked to the council objectives and the partnership priorities.
<b>Annual Appraisal</b>	The annual appraisals for staff ensure that the council objectives and partnership priorities are incorporated into individual personal development plans to ensure the golden thread links through directly to delivery.

### In summary ....

We are committed to providing quality and cost effective services to the children and young people and their families of Bracknell-Forest. We can do this if we value and support our staff in this challenging work and work well with our partners. By working together, it is our skill, commitment and professionalism which will make a positive lasting difference to improving children's life chances.

For further information about the work undertaken by the Department for Children, Young People and Learning please visit our website at:  
[www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/home](http://www.bracknell-forest.gov.uk/home)

Copies of this booklet may be obtained in large print, Braille, on audio cassette or in other languages. To obtain a copy in an alternative format please telephone 01344 352000.

## Nepali

यस प्रचारको सक्षेपं वा सार निचोड चाहिं दिइने छ ठूलो अक्षरमा, ब्रेल वा क्यासेट सून्नको लागी । अरु भाषाको नक्कल पनि हासिल गर्न सकिने छ । कृपया सम्पर्क गनुहोला ०१३४४ ३५२००० ।

## Tagalog

Mga buod/ mga hango ng dokumentong ito ay makukuha sa malaking letra, limbag ng mga bulag o audio kasette. Mga kopya sa ibat-ibang wika ay inyo ring makakamtan. Makipag-alam sa 01344 352000

## Urdu

اس دستاویز کے خلاصے یا مختصر متن جلی حروف، بریل لکھائی یا پھر آڈیو کیسٹ پر ریکارڈ شدہ صورت میں فراہم کئے جا سکتے ہیں۔ دیگر زبانوں میں اس کی کاپی بھی حاصل کی جا سکتی ہے۔ اس کے لیے براہ مہربانی ٹیلیفون نمبر 01344 352000 پر رابطہ کریں۔

## Polish

Streszczenia lub fragmenty tego dokumentu mogą być dostępne w wersji napisanej dużym drukiem, pismem Brajla lub na kasecie audio. Można również otrzymać kopie w innych językach. Proszę skontaktować się z numerem 01344 352000.

## Portuguese

Podemos disponibilizar resumos ou extractos deste documento em impressão grande, em Braille ou em audiocassete. Podem também ser obtidas cópias em outros idiomas. Por favor ligue para o 01344 352000.