

Our Way Forward Strategic Priorities 2024 - 2025

Ambition and Wellbeing: Creating a “County of Opportunity for All”



Children’s Services provides a wide range of support for children and families. This document publicly sets out the strategic priorities for 2024-25 and shows how they contribute to the Council’s overall [Corporate Plan](#) to create a cleaner, greener, healthier Hertfordshire; and the Children’s Services [‘Outcome Bees’ Framework](#).

Whilst not exhaustive, the priorities outlined in this document highlight some of the key areas of activity that will be undertaken this year. Please read this document alongside: [‘Our Way Forward-Plan for Children and Young People 2021- 2026’](#) which sets out more information about our ambitions and what they mean for children and young people. This year, Children’s Services is also working across the Hertfordshire Local Area Partnership to deliver its [Priority Action Plan for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\)](#), which is reflected in these priorities and described in more detail on page 2.

Young People’s Priorities for 2024-25:

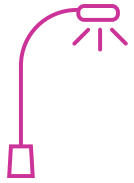
- Support and activities for Care Leavers aged 18 - 25.
- Helping Children Looked After and Care Leavers to stay in education if they need to move home.
- Communication with Children Looked After and Care Leavers about the support they can receive and transitions when this changes.
- Changing the language used to talk about young people who have a social worker.
- Education, careers advice and support with future options.

Feedback from surveys with young people and Hertfordshire’s Children in Care Council, January 2024



Children’s Services
Our Way Forward





Spotlight on the Hertfordshire Local Area Partnership Improvement Programme

Children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

SEND is a key priority for Hertfordshire in 2024 – 25, and improvement work in this area is owned strategically and politically across the system by senior leaders who are collectively ambitious for children and young people with special needs and disabilities and their families. In July 2023, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a joint inspection of Hertfordshire’s Local Area Partnership. The inspection outcome was that there are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently. A [priority action plan](#) has been produced and agreed by Ofsted and the CQC that aims to take forward the learning from the inspection process and will set out how the Partnership will address the priority actions for improvement identified through the inspection.

Our plan focuses on ensuring that:

- Leaders act with urgency to accelerate their data dashboard work so that they have a shared, accurate understanding of the exact provision for SEND in Hertfordshire, and of its quality, so that they can target coherent activity where it is needed most.
- Leaders work more collaboratively and in partnership across all of SEND provision, with secure governance and quality assurance arrangements in place, and with a particular urgent focus on addressing the areas leaders have identified in their strategy for SEND.
- Leaders across the partnership address the variability in CYP’s access to health services that exists in the local area.
- Leaders across the partnership act to improve the quality of EHC plans, ensuring they capture the voices of CYPF in a meaningful way.
- Leaders take action to ensure that CYP with EHCPs are attending provision stated on their plans, that it meets need, and the use of part-time timetables is appropriate.
- Leaders address the gaps and delays in service provision. This includes services for ASD, ADHD, mental health, audiology and speech and language.
- The local area partnership act to address parents’ and carers’ concerns at an early stage to reduce dissatisfaction and eliminate the need for them to follow formal routes.

Key elements of this plan are integrated into Children’s Services overall priorities, as set out in this document.

To meet the needs of Hertfordshire's children within their local community.

What we want to achieve	How this will be measured	This will contribute towards Hertfordshire's corporate priorities of...
<p>Sufficient local school places Ensure sufficient, appropriate and environmentally sustainable local school places for all children, including those with special educational needs, both in the short term and over the next 20 years. This will include 90 additional special school places by September 2025.</p>	<p>Decrease in the number of children requiring single occupancy transport to school.</p> <p>Increase in new schools designed as Net Zero Carbon in operation and existing schools supported in NZC transition.</p>	<p>Cleaner greener Hertfordshire Sustainable responsible growth</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Ambitious</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
<p>Awareness and use of community resources Increase awareness and use of local resources that can support children, young people and their families in their local area, particularly for those with special educational needs and those in need of support with their mental health and emotional wellbeing.</p>	<p>Increase in number of visits to the Local Offer website</p>	<p>Healthy and fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Resilient</p>
<p>Keep children safe in the community through our Family Safeguarding model</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trial new ways of working to enable more children and young people to stay safe both in and out of their home, by unlocking the resources of their family network and local communities. • Continue working with the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership to maintain the stability and effectiveness of our multi-agency safeguarding arrangements. 	<p>Rate of children on Child Protection Plans lower than national average</p>	<p>Healthy and fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Safe</p>
<p>Innovation to support children in care and care experienced children Implement innovative ways to ensure healthy fulfilling lives and improved outcomes for Hertfordshire's children in care and children on the edge of care:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide edge of care support that enables children to stay within their family network and families to stay together, including through 	<p>Increase in percentage of Children Looked After (CLA) living in Hertfordshire</p> <p>Decrease in Children Looked After living in three or more homes during the year</p>	<p>Healthy and fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Safe</p>

<p>increased use of Family Group Conferencing and Family and Friends care, Special Guardianship Orders.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to innovate and grow Hertfordshire’s local residential homes and in-house foster care. • Enable children to leave care as soon as possible where safe to do so, through ongoing delivery of the Family Safeguarding for Children in Care programme. • Ensure all children in care continue to feel supported and not stigmatised, and understand the support they can receive. • Ensure we plan at the earliest opportunity to help all children to find a long term home. • Sign up to the National Care Leaver Covenant, offer Council Tax Exemption to Care Leavers aged 18-21 years, and consider making Care Experience a protected characteristic. • Increase the number of Care Leavers who are in employment, education, and training by removing barriers and increasing opportunities 	<p>Increase in numbers of children supported to return home</p> <p>Increase in number of children in care who move on to live in long term homes</p>	
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To plan, commission and deliver trauma focused services that meet the individual needs of children and young people.

What we want to achieve	How we will measure this	Contribution to Hertfordshire's corporate priorities
<p>Excellent services for the most vulnerable young people</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work together with partners in health, police, care and education to support young people to transition out of care and into adulthood effectively. • Plan a coordinated approach to supporting the increased numbers of Separated Migrant Children, to dynamically meet their education, health and social care needs. 	<p>Increase in percentage of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation</p> <p>Increase in number of Separated Migrant Children who are Looked After and are in Education Employment and Training</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Healthy</p>
<p>Improve commissioning for young people</p> <p>Strengthen joint commissioning across education, health and social care with focus on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure young people know where and how to access support for their mental health and that services are accessible, flexible and trauma informed. • Education, prevention and support for children and young people related to county lines, gangs, knife crime, domestic abuse, and violence against women and girls. • Agree and implement a multiagency quality assurance framework to ensure the services and arrangements commissioned deliver high quality services to children and young people with SEND and their families 	<p>Increase in % of young people who know how to access services if they are worried about mental health (Young People's survey)</p> <p>Increase in number of services with a good rating (3 or 4) on their trauma informed self-evaluation</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Happy</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
<p>Listening and learning</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data to track the emerging needs of children and young people; and aim to co-produce services alongside children, young people and families, ensuring the voice of those with lived experience is central to service planning and their own care planning. • Working with partners, further develop the SEND System Dashboard to inform reporting, service development and improvement activities; and evaluate coverage of existing mechanisms to capture Children, Young People and family feedback across education, health and social care and identify and implement ways to receive feedback and act on it 	<p>Increase in proportion of service development projects that show engagement and co-production with children and young people</p>	<p>Excellent services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Included</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>

<p>Improved and earlier support for children with SEND, through services that are joined up, inclusive and easy to access, where SEND is everybody's business.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Allocate EHCP cases across a broader range of teams and strengthen our workforce, in order to improve the timeliness and quality of statutory assessment and review. • Embed VSEND as the preferred tool for identification of need across the SEND partnership so that children's needs are identified earlier, and this is done in the same way no matter what school a child goes to. 	<p>Increase in % of Education Health and Care Needs Assessments completed within 20 weeks</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives</p> <p>Excellent services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Resilient</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
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To support all children and young people to thrive and achieve.

What we want to achieve	How we will measure this	This will contribute towards Hertfordshire's corporate priorities of...
<p>Improving attainment for everyone</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the attainment gap between underachieving groups and all children and young people in Hertfordshire. • Enabling every child in Hertfordshire to attend a great school where they are safe and happy and enabled to reach their full potential. • Ensure that children in Alternative Provision are supported to access the right provision at the right time to meet their needs, with next steps set out. 	<p>Increase in attainment data for early years, and key stages 2, 4 and 5</p> <p>Increase in proportion of schools assessed by Ofsted as Good or Outstanding</p> <p>Decrease in numbers of children waiting for special school placements</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives Excellent services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Ambitious</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
<p>Support for children not in school</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor and support children who are not currently attending school, including those who are finding it difficult to attend regularly due to emotional based school avoidance, and those who are electively home educated. • Ensure all children are able to thrive and achieve and receive the highest quality of education that enables them to achieve and helps them to catch up if needed. • Address severe absence and the use of part-time timetables for children with Education, Health and Care Plans. 	<p>Increase in number of children successfully reintegrated into education (data from pilot programme)</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Bee Ambitious</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
<p>Support for young people with their skills and employment</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver an offer to young people across the county, including careers education, information, advice, guidance and information for young people on their future options both in and out of educational settings (including on the green economy) • Create a new Recruitment Hub with a key focus on supporting vulnerable young people to gain in-demand skills and enable access to employment and training. 	<p>Increase in percentage of care leavers (including those with SEND) who are in education, employment and training</p>	<p>Sustainable responsible growth Cleaner greener Hertfordshire</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be independent</p>

<p>Working with health services to ensure all children have the opportunity of the best start in life through access to integrated services from ante-natal through to 5 years</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure the Family Centre Service continues to meet the needs of families and works effectively together with the Public Health Nursing, by recommissioning the Family Support Service element in line with recent consultation feedback. • Develop the support offered to families with young children through the delivery of the early years element of Hertfordshire’s Family Hub approach. • Ensure all eligible families can access the childcare support entitlement. 	<p>Family Centre mobilisation completed by December 2024</p> <p>Increase in take-up of Childcare Support entitlements for eligible children from 2-years (9 months from Sept 24)</p>	<p>Healthy and Fulfilling Lives</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Healthy</p> <p>Links to the Integrated Care Board’s priority 1 ‘best start in life’</p>
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To have a skilled and flexible workforce who are proud to work for Hertfordshire

What we want to achieve	How we will measure this	This will contribute towards Hertfordshire's corporate priorities of...
<p>Deliver excellent professional development for all roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to deliver professional development in models of social work practice including Family Safeguarding. • Enhance training for staff working directly with young people in how to support them with their mental health. • Support our workforce and our colleagues in partner agencies and schools to make SEND everyone's business and embed the Professional's Promise. • Provide high quality supervision, management and a learning and development offer for all staff in Children's Services, including all professionals and foster carers. 	<p>Staff survey data</p> <p>L&D training data – increase in number of people attending mental health training courses and SEND training courses</p> <p>Exit interviews data</p>	<p>Excellent Services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Safe</p> <p>Part of our SEND Priority Action Plan</p>
<p>Improved recruitment and retention for key roles</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Train a new generation of Hertfordshire social workers in partnership with Frontline and the universities of Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire/ Step-up to Social Work programme. • Promote Hertfordshire as an excellent place for a range of multi-agency professionals to work with children and families. • Ensure all staff receive support for their wellbeing and to manage their work. • Identify and implement process improvements and opportunities for increased collaboration with partner agencies, in order to support improved efficiency of working, as well as better outcomes for families. 	<p>Increase in numbers of new social workers on Frontline and apprenticeship programmes</p> <p>Reduction in use of agency staff, and decrease in voluntary turnover and average days lost to sickness</p>	<p>Excellent Services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Resilient</p>
<p>All staff feel included</p> <p>Actively promote Diversity, Equality, Equity & Inclusion within the Children's Services' workforce and the communities it serves:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deliver actions through identified work streams that link to the Council's overall Diversity & Inclusion Strategy • Embed Diversity, Equality, Equity & Inclusion actions in everyday best practice so that they are everyone's responsibility. • Listen and respond to the voices of children, young people and families as well as employees. • Deliver the Social Care Workforce Race Equality Standards action plan 	<p>Staff survey data</p>	<p>Excellent Services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Included</p>

To work in partnership to deliver early help and support to children, young people and families and build life chances

What we want to achieve	How we will measure this	This will contribute towards Hertfordshire's corporate priorities of...
<p>Excellent early support for children and families, fit for the future Plan for the future, making bold decisions to transform services where it will improve support to children and their families who are at risk of poor outcomes, in order to prevent problems occurring:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure children and families, including those with SEND, get the high-quality support at the right time from the right agency, and that children are kept informed of what is happening. • Strengthen father and non-resident parent inclusive practice • Explore new multi-agency Hertfordshire approaches to supporting children and families who need help, through the new government models such as 'Family Help'. 	<p>Hertfordshire quartile performance on the rate of children on Child in Need Plans and Children Looked After</p> <p>Increase in percentage of family outcomes achieved (Supporting Families claims)</p> <p>Increase in numbers of Family First Assessments</p>	<p>Excellent services</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Ambitious</p>
<p>Building Life Chances</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure that families and partners are kept informed about the changes to direct financial support through programmes such as Covid Recovery Funding, Household Support Fund, Holiday Activities Fund, and that families can access online and other support. • Support providers to seek other funding sources to sustain programmes previously supported by the cost of living support programmes. • Continue to develop the Building Life Chances programme by embedding it into the Family Hubs model. 	<p>Increase in number of calls/compliments</p> <p>High number of programmes that continue beyond the funding period</p>	<p>Healthy fulfilling lives</p> <p>Sustainable responsible growth</p> <p>Outcome Bee: Be Resilient</p>