Achieving
for Children

IMPACT REPORT 2020/21

achieving
for children

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ABOUT ACHIEVING FOR CHILDREN

OUR VISION

Our vision is to provide children and their families with the support and services they need to live safe, happy, healthy and successful lives.

WHO WE ARE

At Achieving for Children we champion children and families, putting their wellbeing and education first. As a social enterprise, we take the values of public service and combine them with a business approach to deliver our social aims. We have the independence and flexibility to tailor innovative solutions to the needs of children and their families, whilst maintaining our focus on delivering priorities for each of the councils that own the company.

OUR VALUES

Trust:

We are reliable, others can count on us to undertake tasks and deliver on what was agreed – we will do what we said we would do. We will encourage open and honest communication, and model clear and fair professional boundaries.

Respect:

We will listen to and value other people's perspectives and differences. We will show empathy and humility in the way we communicate.

Empower:

We help others to realise their ability and potential, and show emotional intelligence in our approach. We show appropriate and respectful use of the power given to us in our jobs or positions and we use this to encourage and enable others.



HOW WE WORK

We put children and young people first

We are passionate about ensuring the best possible outcomes for children and young people - this drives everything that we do.

We embrace diversity and champion inclusion

We are committed to valuing difference and diversity in our workforce and in the children and families we work with, so that their identities are promoted and their individual needs are met.

We nurture strong, responsive and caring relationships

We build strong and productive partnerships with children, young people, parents, carers and communities so that we can listen and learn from one another.

We lead and support partnerships to meet the needs of children and families

We build strong and effective partnerships with our owning councils, other statutory services, schools, education providers, local businesses, as well as organisations in the voluntary and community sector.

We are resourceful, adaptable and dependable

We find and create solutions that work well for children and their families. We build our reputation based on our professionalism, our dedication, our flexibility, and by always delivering what we promise.

We value and invest in our staff to deliver innovative and quality services

We know that our employees are our most important asset – they make our ambitions a reality. We recruit and retain the best people, value their experience and expertise, and support their professional development and personal growth.

We will work with our own councils to deliver the most effective solutions for them

We understand the requirements of each council that commissions us to deliver their children's services, and work closely with elected members and corporate leaders to help deliver their plans and priorities.

KEY FACTS

- We are the biggest UK spin out of children's services into a community interest company which is owned by, and operates across, the Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames, the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames and the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead.
- We have a well-established and effective Board of Directors including non-executive independent directors and executive directors appointed from within Achieving for Children or from the owning councils.
- We have a highly qualified and highly talented workforce of around 1,300 staff.
- Ofsted rated our children's services in Kingston as 'outstanding' and as 'good' in Richmond and in Windsor and Maidenhead.
- We deliver early help services, children's social care, education services, special educational need and disability (SEND) services, and business services.
- We have developed our own local residential provision, including supported accommodation for care leavers, short break care for children and young people with disabilities, and a new residential children's home.
- We secured over £7 million from the Department for Education as part of the Partners in Practice initiative to develop innovative ways of supporting children and young people on the edge of care.
- We have embedded the Signs of Safety model across all our services which has enabled practitioners to better work in partnership with children and families, building on their family strengths to promote their safety and wellbeing.
- We have established an independent fostering agency (IFA) across all boroughs which has now been operating effectively for almost two years and has led to an increase in the number of approved fostering households.

WELCOME



We are pleased to present Achieving for Children's impact report for 2020/21. Our response to the global pandemic has inevitably shaped much of our work over the past 12 months and we could not be more proud of our workforce which has gone above and beyond to ensure our children, young people and families have continued to remain safe and supported.

The organisation has quickly and efficiently adapted to new working arrangements which is testament to the commitment and effort of our staff who have continued to deliver our services, albeit in different and innovative ways.

We have embraced technology and digital solutions to enable us to maintain our critical service offer.

This has included over **75%** of our employees working from home, hosting children's centre and youth centre sessions on Facebook, communicating with our young people via podcasts, delivering training virtually and via webinars, and communicating with our care leavers via regular video calls.



We have worked closely and collaboratively across operational areas to support colleagues where necessary.

For example, bringing together staff from a number of teams in Business Services to create a COVID task force so there was capacity to respond to issues immediately as they emerged in both operational areas.

We have worked in partnership with our owning councils to develop detailed and effective business continuity plans, including mitigating activity, and to provide practical support when required, such as redeploying staff to support efforts to make phone contact with all vulnerable residents.

Although it has been an unexpected and challenging 12 months, our impact report clearly demonstrates the significant achievements we have made and we know we will continue to provide children, young people and families with the support and services they need in the next year and beyond.

During the year, our effective early help and children's social care services have continued to operate either face-to-face in a COVID safe environment, or virtually.

For example, our contact centre in Twickenham safely provided over **3,000** hours of contact between children, young people and families taking into account COVID restrictions.

We have supported schools, across all three of our boroughs, to respond to ever-changing COVID regulations and to put in place systems to enable pupils to receive a strong educational offer either in the classroom or at home.

In Windsor and Maidenhead, we delivered 'Wellbeing for education return' training to **95%** of schools.





Our health visitors maintained face-to-face contact with families where possible to ensure the health and development of young children and rolled out the 'safe baby' toolkit in response to national concerns about the added risk to babies during lockdown.

Our nationally recognised family and adolescent resilience services have continued to work with families with complex needs to keep them together and to avoid children unnecessarily coming into care.

This is demonstrated by us providing support to **395** families facing multiple issues including mental health needs, domestic abuse, drug and alcohol abuse, and unemployment via our Strengthening Families service.

There are so many examples this year of staff going the extra mile to support our communities - for example, our youth centres in Kingston supporting the delivery of **8,000** meals to vulnerable families' and our children and young people from Anstee Bridge making **300** cupcakes with ingredients provided by the Coop and then delivering these to key workers.

We have introduced schemes to support vulnerable families who have needed additional support with food and heating bills this year and established holiday activity and food programmes for vulnerable children across all three of our boroughs.

A number of health staff have also been seconded to the NHS to help with the local rollout of the vaccination programme. This year has shown yet again that we employ so many talented staff who are truly committed to improving the lives of children and young people.



The coming years will undoubtedly bring us further challenges, but also present an opportunity to reflect on what we have learned over the last year and how we can use that learning to improve how we work.

Our education, health and social care services will be evermore critical to support children, young people and families through the recovery process. We will also reflect on feedback from young people and our staff about what they have preferred over the last year.

For example, we know that many young people would like to continue engaging with our services via a mixture of virtual and in person communication and that many families and young people have found our virtual early help offers more accessible and engaging.

We also want to use this learning to provide more opportunities to listen and hear the voices of our children, young people and families.

We want to establish more innovative and creative ways of listening - for example, in Windsor and Maidenhead, we worked with health colleagues to establish young health champions, like Aida, who has undertaken mental health first aid training and who sits on interview panels to recruit new health care professionals in Berkshire.

Similarly, in Kingston and Richmond, our Children in Care Council members, such as Selina and Tom, have developed and now deliver Voices, Rights and Choices training for our staff to explore practical methods of how to meaningfully and effectively involve children and young people in care and those leaving care.

We want to do more of this so we can be confident that the decisions we make about our services are based on the views of those we support.

Our workforce has told us that they found that a mixture of home and office based working has supported their work life balance and wellbeing.

We plan to transform the way we work over the coming years to make sure we continue to meet the needs of young people and that we have an employment offer that attracts and retains talented staff.

Supporting financial sustainability remains a focus and it is important that we continue to deliver value for money services and reflect on how funding is best aligned to local priorities. Continuing to reflect the views of children and families is key to getting this right.

Our business plan outlines an ambitious medium term strategy that supports the local development of increased quality and affordable education, health and social care provision across all three boroughs.

We will be working closely with all three of our commissioning councils to see this ambition come to fruition.

Moving into the new financial year, it is clear that we will need to continue to develop and adapt to the challenging environment in which we are operating. We also have ambitious plans and opportunities to further shape our services to support children and young people to meet their potential.



Lucy Kourpas
Chief Operating and Finance Officer



Ian Dodds
Director of Children's Services in Kingston and Richmond



Kevin McDaniel
Director of Children's Services in Windsor and Maidenhead

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES to 2024

We have identified six strategic priorities for the next four years.

STRONGER FAMILIES

We will have a relentless focus on safeguarding children and young people across all our services. The services we deliver will be high quality and will protect and promote the wellbeing of children and young people by promoting family resilience. We will work collaboratively with our key partners to ensure we are able to realise the benefits of joint working to support our children, young people and families.

“Ensuring children and young people are safe from harm is our core business. We want to build resilience in our families and communities so that they are better able to help, support and protect children without the need for statutory intervention. As part of this we want to ensure our relationships with key partners are strong and that our families really benefit from collaboration and joined-up working.”

POSITIVE FUTURES

We will invest and work collaboratively to improve our local education, health and care offer to children and young people so that they have access to high quality services, are able to stay close to their families and friends, achieve well, and develop their skills for independence.

“It is crucial that we provide the right support at the right time. This will enable us to help children and young people to develop their independence and prepare for adulthood. Putting in place local provision means children and young people can stay close to their families and essential support networks and they can benefit from our integrated services giving them the best chance for a positive future.”

EXCELLENT WORKFORCE

Our workforce will be experienced, talented, empowered and motivated to deliver the best possible services and outcomes for children and young people. We will invest in the recruitment, retention and development of our workforce and reward their achievements.

“Feedback from children, young people and families always emphasises the importance of a consistent, skilled and motivated workforce. We want to make Achieving for Children a place where people want to come and work and a company that they are proud to tell their family and friends that they work for.”

FINANCIAL STABILITY

The services we deliver will provide excellent value for money and we are trusted by our commissioning councils to deliver the best possible services within the agreed contract price, including the efficient delivery of our financial savings plans.

“Given the financial context, nationally and locally, it is essential that we are focused on delivering efficient, cost-effective and financially sustainable services so we are able to support those most in need.”

COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

We will secure the sustainability of the community interest company through contract renewal, business development, fundraising and good growth, so that we are able to reinvest in the services we deliver directly to children and their families.

“Greater commercial success will enable us to generate a profit to reinvest in our services thereby benefiting the children and young people that we support.”



SMARTER WORKING

Our business processes will be efficient, cost-effective and supportive to frontline practitioners so that they are able to spend as much time as possible working directly with children, young people and their families to improve outcomes for them.

“Better business processes, and effective use of new digital technologies, will allow our workforce to reduce the amount of time they spend on unnecessary paperwork and bureaucracy, freeing them up to spend more time with the children, young people and families we support.”

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



ACHIEVING STRONGER FAMILIES

Our early help services provide crucial support to vulnerable families to prevent issues escalating to the point at which statutory intervention is necessary. Across all our early help services we have been focused on ensuring our provision remains effective but also sustainable given the financial climate.

FUEL: Feed Ur Everyday Lives has been established in response to the Department for Education funding to provide a range of fun and enjoyable activities and food to children and young people aged 5 to 16 years who are eligible for free school meals (FSM). We are expecting over **1,000** children and young people to engage with the programme over the year.

As part of Project X, as a means of reducing serious youth violence and knife crime, we supported **161** young people to engage in structured positive activities such as X-ercise, with a focus on fitness through one-on-one and group sessions, Gourmet X: a virtual online cooking project, X-press yourself: a creative music course and X-cast: a podcast project.

We supported over **20,000** families through the COVID Winter Support Grant across all three boroughs. The aim of the grant is to help vulnerable households and families with children who were particularly affected by the pandemic throughout winter.

We achieved **'good'** inspection ratings of our Youth Offending Services in Kingston and Richmond, and Windsor and Maidenhead which demonstrates our high quality support to those young people who are involved in criminal activity.

Following an extensive **20** week public consultation exercise which received almost **700** responses, we have transformed our early help services in Windsor and Maidenhead into a Family Hub service model, which provides targeted and specialist support to those most in need.

> "I have benefited immensely and the support couldn't have come in at any better time. With the lockdown on and families struggling to cope with everyday challenges of life, the programme showed how we can make some very small changes to the way we live and the profound impact that it could make and help us cope with the situation a bit better. So for that, I sincerely thank the team."

A parent who accessed a programme of support from the Family Resilience Service in Windsor and Maidenhead.

We launched our new Early Help Strategy and Early Help Resilience Networks in Kingston and Richmond with the aim of encouraging a greater focus on partnership working and coordination of universal early help, and seeking to empower communities and families and reduce the need for referral to targeted or specialist services.

We secured funding in Richmond from a local charity to create and deliver **130** 'kit bags' for children aged 2 to 13 years who are supported by our social care services. The kit bags support virtual visiting and direct work with younger children and sibling groups by providing creative material and activities which help practitioners to engage with the children and capture their voices.

> "I delivered my kit bags yesterday and all the children were over the moon. Parents have told me how invaluable this has been to them. This is a wonderful initiative!"
>
> Feedback from a social worker who has used kit bags with the family they support.

Over **30,000** children and young people have been supported by our early help, social care and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) services throughout the pandemic.

SNAPSHOT: Wellbeing Service

Achieving with Andrea

Andrea is a 16 year old girl who was referred to the Wellbeing Team in Windsor and Maidenhead for support with low mood and anxiety. She also has a diagnosis of autism and had been trying to seek additional support at school to access education. At that time she was not attending school and barely leaving the home. Her sleep routine had become very out of sync to the point where she was sleeping for most of the day and then awake during the night, which further limited her ability to participate in meaningful activities during the day. Our Wellbeing Service assessed her needs and supported her to undertake eight sessions of cognitive behavioural therapy which focused on Andrea's goals to improve her mood and be able to re-engage with her learning and the social activities that she had been avoiding. Teachers from her school and a family coach from our Family Resilience Service attended early help review meetings with her family to ensure the support she was receiving was effective and joined up.

The Wellbeing Service worked together with her school to support Andrea with an education, health and care plan application, which was agreed, and an alternative educational provision was confirmed. By the end of the sessions, Andrea said she was feeling a lot happier in herself and she was now attending an alternative educational setting and was really enjoying re-engaging with learning and making new friendships. She told us she was feeling more positive, as she was now getting more out of life by engaging in meaningful activities which she hadn't felt able to do previously. Overall, her sleep pattern had improved and she was getting out of the house more in general, including going shopping with her mum or sister and going for a coffee with a friend.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS



ACHIEVING POSITIVE FUTURES

We are working hard to improve the inclusive services we provide to children and young people with special education needs and disabilities (SEND) as well as continuing to support our young people in our care and that access our youth services.

We launched the new SEND Register in Kingston and Richmond to capture the details of more children and young people with SEND to encourage greater engagement with families. Since the launch of the new register in mid-March 2021, there have been over **1,000** families sign up, with new registrations coming in every day. All those that sign up receive a Disability Awareness Card, which was designed in collaboration with children and parents, and that provides proof of a child's disability.

We have supported **85** apprentices via virtual learning platforms and remote teaching mechanisms during the pandemic. Of these, **11** have education, health and care plans or self-declared learning difficulties or disabilities, and two are care leavers.

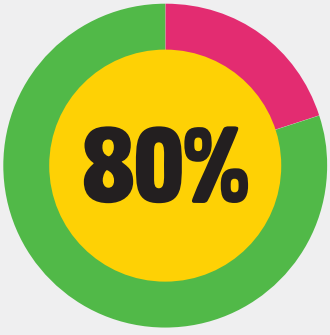
> "I always felt the youth worker understood what my son was going through and what I was going through as a parent because she had walked a similar journey. Every time I asked the worker to give me a call she would do that in a heartbeat more so when my son called her even at night she would help if she could. Thank you."

A parent's feedback on the support provided by youth services.

In response to the pandemic, we created a dedicated Youth Services Instagram page, which now has **1,300** followers, and launched our TikTok account on international women's day with staff and young people sharing the women who inspire them - this resulted in **17** videos uploaded with over **3,500** views.

Our independent fostering agency which operates across all three boroughs, had its most successful year yet in terms of recruiting mainstream carers with **18** households recruited across our operational areas.

Our Way2Work team provides excellent support to our apprentices, and as a result, their progression rates are extremely good with over **80%** of employers offering advanced apprenticeships or permanent employment opportunities.



Our new purpose-built short break centre for children and young people with disabilities, **Rainbow House**, is due to open in June 2021 and Enhanceable has been appointed as the commissioned provider to deliver the service. The seven-bed centre will provide overnight short break care for children and young people aged from 8 to 18 years who may have multiple disabilities, complex medical needs or challenging behaviours. The design, planning and even naming of the centre, has been heavily informed by the views and experiences of children, young people and families.

We launched the Virtual College to improve the experience of our older young people who are looked after, by creating clearer pathways and opportunities for students aged 16 to 25 years old. The college is part of our wider Virtual School offer, which has been rated as '**outstanding**' by Ofsted and which seeks to support the education of all of our looked after children.

> "Talking to someone who could give me ideas about how to support my child using theory and their knowledge and experience was the best thing about the support, all of the sessions were valuable."
>
> **A parent's feedback on the attachment focused family psychology sessions.**

We are an official partner in the Government's KickStart scheme and have been approved to recruit up to **121** 16 to 24 year olds across **31** organisations in Kingston and Richmond. The young people will be supported to complete six months of paid work to gain valuable work skills, knowledge and experience. **Nine** of our **16** internal Kickstart roles have been offered so far, with **five** offered to care leavers or young people with EHCPs, and **11** young people have already started jobs with partner employers with a further **37** are currently in the recruitment stage.

> "I didn't have any experience, but the Kickstart scheme has allowed me to experience many things, which can mean in the future I will be employable and will have the necessary skills and experience to go further in the sector."
>
> **Feedback from a young person employed as an apprentice through the KickStart scheme.**

The Emotional Health Service (EHS) launched a new online resource hub for professionals, families and young people to 'help families help themselves' to improve the mental health and wellbeing of our families. The resource hub contains links to online therapy providers such as Kooth, advice pages, information leaflets for young people, an online video library for parents with presentations on a range of topics from helping with sleep, supporting your child's anxiety

Our Educational Psychology Service worked with **44** schools to deliver the Attachment Aware Schools Award, which provides a framework of support and understanding for schools within which children and young people who have experienced adversity, can heal, thrive, play, and learn.

Through a range of initiatives, including the VALU project and the Esteem project, we supported over **400** young people who are currently receiving support from our early help and social care services and who are engaged in risky behaviour, on the edge of care, or who are at risk of social isolation.

By strengthening our online engagement, **5,000** young people have been supported by our Youth Services to take part in positive activities.



Despite COVID restrictions, **eight** young people with SEND were supported to commence independent travel training, with **five** successfully completing the training in 2020/21. The training supports children and young people to become more independent by learning the skills and building the confidence to use public transport safely.

We made good progress on school place projects including:

- the expansion of Burlington Junior School
- a proposed six-form entry 11 to 16 Church of England secondary school
- a proposed 90-place special school for children and young people with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD)
- another satellite provision of Dysart Special School
- a 20-place specialist resource provision which will open at Hampton High in September 2021
- two new specialist bases in mainstream schools for 20 pupils ASD in Windsor and Maidenhead which are due to open in September 2021
- an ambitious proposal to create a 16 to 25 SEND campus with Orchard Hill College and Academy Trust



We supported the establishment of two parent carer forums (PCFs) in Kingston and Richmond, which are independently run by parents and carers who have children and young people with any form of SEND. We work closely with the parent carer forums and welcome their support and challenge to enable us to improve our SEND services. As part of our SEND transformation activity, we have parents co-leading our workstreams relating to participation, engagement and co-production.

SNAPSHOT: Hope House

Our new residential children's home in Teddington, Hope House, opened in October 2020 following a successful registration process, and is now accommodating three young people. Ofsted described the home as 'beautiful' during their registration visit and under our experienced registered manager we have assembled a highly qualified and capable staff team. The home works with our Emotional Health Service to encourage a restorative approach, and as a result, our social workers who support the young people who are living there, have rated the care as outstanding. During 2021/22, we are aiming to establish a sister children's home in Kingston.

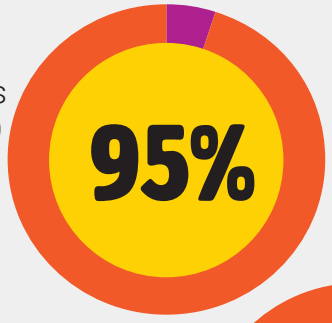
OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

ACHIEVING AN EXCELLENT WORKFORCE

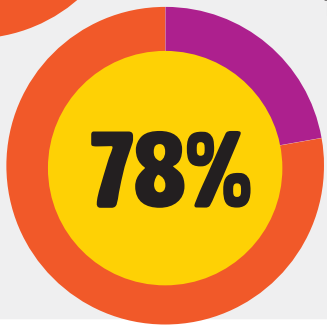
Much of the focus on our workforce has been in relation to the pandemic to ensure our staff have felt supported to adapt to new working arrangements, and that as a result, our children, young people and families have still received high quality services, whether online or face-to-face in a COVID safe environment.

Our senior leaders have sent over **40** COVID-19 related communications to our staff to ensure our workforce have been kept up to date with national and local information.

Our 2020 staff survey, which engaged 500 of our staff, demonstrated that our workforce feel supported in their roles, particularly given the challenging circumstances due to the pandemic. Overall, the survey demonstrated a high level of satisfaction amongst our workforce with more positive responses than 2019 in **95%** of the questions asked.



Most pleasingly, **78%** of our workforce would recommend Achieving for Children as a place to work.



All of our buildings were made COVID secure so that services could be delivered safely on site when required. This involved establishing risk assessments and health and safety systems for over **70** buildings. Staff bubbles and rotas were put in place to enable staff to work safely and personal protective equipment was made available for all staff who go out on visits to children and young people.

Our youth centres have formed part of our response to the pandemic, with the Powerstation in Kingston being set up as a foodbank provision, and in partnership with local organisations, helping to deliver over **8,000** meals to over a **1,000** families in Kingston.

"I'm incredibly grateful to my managers at Achieving for Children for their support - particularly during the first lockdown when my wife and I were home-schooling my 5 year old son and trying to entertain my 3 year old daughter at the same time - while both working! The flexibility and understanding that I received made an incredibly difficult situation more manageable, and enabled me to continue to get my work within timescales and to a high standard. Thank you!"

Henry Kilpin, Head of Strategy, Policy and Programmes

We supported our owning councils to respond to the needs of the local community by providing staff to be part of the team undertaking wellbeing calls to vulnerable people in the community, and redeploying some of our school nursing team to support vaccination efforts.

Children and young people from Anstee Bridge made **300** cupcakes, with ingredients donated by the Coop, which they then delivered to key workers across Kingston. Anstee Bridge is an alternative learning programme for young people aged 14 to 16 facing emotional challenges that cause them to struggle and disengage from education.

Considerable effort has been paid to supporting our workforce to adapt to home working, with over **1,000** staff members working outside the office during lockdowns, and all staff now equipped to work remotely when needed.

> “Thank you for the help of the Education Psychology Service, as it immensely supported our students to deal with their emotional health and mental state of mind following the return to school after lockdown.”

Feedback from a school who were provided with additional support for the return to school.

In November 2020, we celebrated ‘Wellness at work week’ across the organisation, which was extremely well received by our staff who were invited to attend a range of wellbeing workshops as part of our wellbeing offer.

> “I have thoroughly enjoyed my time working for Achieving for Children. I would recommend it to others. I have really noticed a sense of community and connection amongst both my smaller team and the wider team.
>
> There is no sense of hierarchy but of management working alongside ground level staff. This provides staff satisfaction and also encourages us to be creative when developing our services to provide the best services possible for the families we work with.
>
> I also really appreciate the amount of focus that is given to our own wellbeing and how this is actively encouraged and modelled by managers higher up. This reinforces the message that staff wellbeing is important and will reduce risk of burnout or high staff turnover.”

Response to our 2020 staff survey from a member of staff who has been part of Achieving for Children for the past 12 months.

Vaccinations have been rolled out to our health and social care staff and efforts, such as a live session with GPs, are being taken to encourage those with vaccine hesitancy.



SNAPSHOT: Equality and Diversity Board

The death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement has given us the opportunity to review our own equality and diversity practice. We recognise that discrimination has a destructive impact on many people's lives. The recent events have highlighted the continued racial disparity, structural inequalities and systemic injustices experienced by many Black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) communities across the world, and given us all the opportunity to reflect on ourselves, our society and our organisation.

In light of the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter movement, we have taken the opportunity to reflect on our own equality and diversity practice. To help us make sure we are inclusive and have a representative and diverse workforce we have introduced a new Equality and Diversity Board, chaired by Melody Chiramba and vice-chaired by Elise Kitson, two Achieving for Children members of staff who nominated themselves and were then elected by over 200 of their colleagues, following online hustings.

The new board has already had an impact, with regular drop in sessions being held for staff to discuss issues or concerns which are then fed back to senior leaders, as well as recently holding a question and answer session with a panel of experts, including Dr Zoe Williams (from BBC TV's 'Trust Me I'm a Doctor') and local GP, Dr Naz Jivani, for any staff members who have concerns about the COVID vaccine. The session, which was attended by over 40 people, allowed staff the opportunity to ask questions and be given the facts to enable them to make an informed decision about the vaccine.

Training has also been commissioned around racism and sexuality and gender in the workplace which will take place in the summer, and analysis is currently being undertaken for an equality and diversity staff survey which will form action planning going forward.

> "We wanted to be chair and vice chair because we are passionate about social justice. We want to make and be a part of the positive change for people who have been marginalised and unheard. We want to see equality and diversity being prioritised and consistently on the agenda for our organisation to promote inclusivity."
>
> Melody Chiramba and Elise Kitson, Elected Chair and Vice-Chair of our new Equality and Diversity Board.



OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

ACHIEVING FINANCIAL STABILITY

As an organisation, we aim to deliver services that provide excellent value for money and we are trusted by our commissioning councils to deliver the best possible services within an agreed funding envelope. This year has been an exceptional year and we have worked closely with the councils to discuss and explain financial pressures and agree the correct balance between affordability and impact on services.



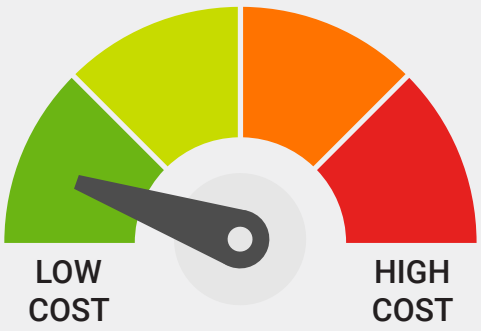
During the last 12 months, we have delivered **£3m** in savings and cost mitigations and as part of the owning councils' budget setting processes we have planned **£6.4m** of future efficiencies and cost mitigations in 2021/22.

We have agreed a new joint commissioning approach with the Clinical Commissioning Group in Kingston and RIchmond which will enable us to work together to make best use of our joint resources.

We have invested in the organisations' commissioning and procurement capacity and expertise to support the achievement of competitive prices when we commission support and placements.

Over the medium term, we aim to improve our value for money and control costs by developing our procurement approach as well as by moving to a more mixed model of commissioned and directly delivered provision.

Our services continue to benchmark as average or low cost when compared to comparative boroughs and we continue to explore new ways of improving value for money.



SNAPSHOT: Funding for SEND

Funding of SEND services has been a significant challenge in recent years across all three of our boroughs and in particular, in Kingston and Richmond. We have worked closely with our councils and the Department for Education this year to agree additional safety valve funding for the coming five years. The funding will be aligned to successful delivery of the SEND Futures Plans and will lead to a more sustainable financial footing for the delivery of SEND services. The agreement is a result of a concerted effort over recent years to get a fairer funding settlement from the government. This effort has been led by our staff, councillors, and council staff along with support from current and previous local MPs and the leaders of Kingston and Richmond councils.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

ACHIEVING COMMERCIAL SUCCESS

We are focused on securing our sustainability through contract renewal, business development, fundraising and good growth, so that we are able to reinvest in the services we deliver directly to children and their families.

In partnership with St Mary's University in Twickenham and Barnet Council, we successfully secured an extension to our Transition Hub project, which so far, has supported **40** future students in care aged 11 to 14 years old, including unaccompanied asylum seeking children, to improve their long-term outcomes using an evidence-informed and tailored programme of support.

We created a new Business Development Strategy to ensure we take full advantage of any commercial opportunities that emerge. The strategy outlines our aim to further develop as a specialist children's services provider and commissioner over the next five years.

Our youth centres have successfully bid for over **£100,000** in grants to deliver more provision for our young people and renovate and improve our existing facilities.

We were awarded additional funding as part of the **Partners in Practice** programme to continue our innovative work supporting children experiencing domestic violence, substance misuse and parental mental health issues through our Strengthening Families Plus service in Kingston and Richmond and our Troubled Families service in Windsor and Maidenhead. Our evaluation activity has shown that families and staff are positive about the impact that we have had, and we will be sharing our experiences with other local authorities so they can learn from us.

SNAPSHOT: Digital consultancy

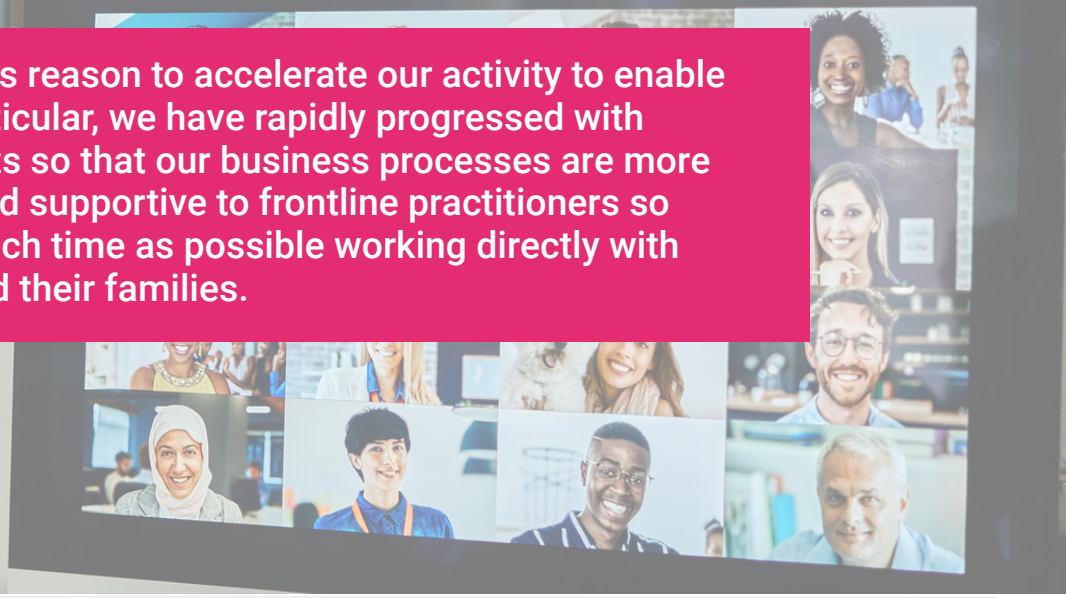
The main focus of our commercial activity during the year has been in relation to digital technology. Within Achieving for Children we have implemented audio recording which we regularly use to record in meetings instead of relying on a minute taker. It is estimated that this has saved around £70,000 in cost avoidance during the year. Based on our expertise in this area, over the past 12 months we provided audio recording consultancy to four local authorities to support them to implement audio recording assistive technology in meetings such as child protection conferences and looked after reviews.

As a result of our success with this consultancy, from November 2020 to March 2021 we were funded by the Department for Education to provide digital support to 22 other local authorities. Support ranged from helping with remote working practices to implementing digital culture change and bringing colleagues along with the digital journey.

OUR ACHIEVEMENTS

ACHIEVING SMARTER WORKING

The pandemic has given us reason to accelerate our activity to enable us to work smarter. In particular, we have rapidly progressed with some of our digital projects so that our business processes are more efficient, cost-effective and supportive to frontline practitioners so that they can spend as much time as possible working directly with children, young people and their families.



Our new Digital, Data and IT Strategy for 2021/23 has been finalised which sets out our digital approach and outlines future projects, such as the digitisation of subject access request processes and making better use of bulk email processes to save time and effort.

“Using the Notify system, we were able to directly contact over 5,000 children’s centre users which ensured we got a good level of participation in our Family Hub Service public consultation and were successfully able to shape the final proposals based on that feedback.”

Rachael Park-Davies, Associate Director for Early Help and Family Support

We have transferred much of our communications and strategies to video format which means shorter, more succinct messaging that has been well-received by our staff, partners and children, young people and families.

Twelve of our services have been supported by the Digital Team to undertake a digital diagnostic to identify how they can use digital solutions.

“Achieving for Children faces the challenge of providing improved services, whilst coping with reduced funding and changes in expectations and demands. The introduction of a digital approach at Achieving for Children, known as the ‘BeDigital Programme’, can enable us to meet our strategic priorities and provide better services for children, young people and their families.”

Jabed Hussain, Head of Business Support and Digital

Using the Notify system we have sent **35,346** emails and **27,282** text messages to enable us to inform families about our services in a more accessible and direct way.

> “The Google Suite training has been extremely useful in helping me to make sure I’m using the available applications effectively. I’ve discovered a number of shortcuts that have saved me time and have been able to present information in a more accessible way thanks to what I’ve learnt.”
>
> Edwina Gregory-Johnson, Senior Policy and Project Officer

We have saved around **£12,000** in staff time by transferring most of our paper forms to online forms which saves postage costs and resources. Forms are now easier to fill in for families and professionals resulting in quicker referrals and quicker support.

To improve business support processes and to save time and effort, we have introduced an online signatory system and invoicing process to reduce administration for our Business Support staff and we have mobilised a digital petty cash system for payments for children and young people.

COVID has given us the opportunity to be more digitally innovative, for example, implementing QR codes within our buildings for staff that had to go in the office that also allows us to get statistics on office usage which will be used for estates planning in the future.

We have delivered savings of **£90,000** through a reduction in printing by using digital initiatives. This has also saved us hundreds of thousands of sheets of paper.

In recognition of their work, our Digital Team has been awarded a Certificate of Excellence from the iESE Public Sector Transformation Awards.

Google Suite support has been provided to over **240** staff via three drop in sessions to increase their confidence using the software.

SNAPSHOT: Our new environmental strategy

We are committed to work smarter by reducing our environmental impact. We have worked with our owning councils to develop our own environmental strategy, which aligns with environmental approaches in all operational areas. The strategy sets out our commitment to reducing our carbon footprint and to working with children and young people, particularly through our youth councils, to identify more ways that we can be environmentally aware. The strategy has now been finalised and a task force, including representatives from the Youth Council, has been established to develop an action plan to take forward.

PRIORITY PROJECTS 2021/22

In the next year, we will:

- Ensure we are able to effectively respond to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic by continuing to keep our children and young people safe, ensuring our families feel supported, and helping our staff to adapt to new working arrangements.
- Implement the Sufficiency Strategy recommendations across all three boroughs with a focus on increasing and improving local provision across social care, health, education.
- Review and put in place strengthened arrangements for corporate support services so that the company has the services it needs to be efficient, effective and deliver excellent value for money.
- Deliver the SEND Futures Plan in Kingston and Richmond to transform the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families, so that local, high-quality education, health and social care provision meets needs and promotes independence for all children and young people with SEND, whilst also delivering good value for money.
- Improve the provision of occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, and physiotherapy through the implementation of recommendations identified in the review of therapies across Achieving for Children, the CCG and key partners.
- Develop and implement a mental health strategy that outlines responsibilities for Achieving for Children, CCG and partner organisations, with clear pathways and thresholds that are easily understood by families and that effectively meet the mental health needs of children and young people in universal and more targeted provision.
- Work with adult care and housing providers to improve pathway and transition planning for young people with SEND so that services and support are in place to meet their needs, promote independence and enable a positive experience of early adulthood.
- Specify, procure and implement a new case management system to replace the existing PARIS system that is used across children's services with the aim of improving consistency of practice, reducing the administrative burden on staff, automating much of the standard reporting needs, and enabling more effective collaboration with partners, families and children.