



**Voluntary Organisations for Children  
young people & families**

# **STRATEGY**

**2018 - 2021**

**September 2018**

# Introduction

From **Len Simkins** - Independent Chair of VOCypf

I am very happy to introduce this new Strategy for VOCypf which updates our previous Strategy (2014-2017), and outlines our overall plans for the next three years.

VOCypf provides a wide range of well received services for the children's sector but there is a danger, for a small organisation like VOCypf, that our services could become simply demand or funding led and become thinly spread and disjointed. To use our limited resources in the best way it is therefore important to have a longer-term, strategic approach in planning our services.

Voluntary and community sector organisations play an essential role in supporting children and young people and families in the local area. The voluntary children's sector therefore needs to have a voice when strategic plans and policy decisions, affecting children, young people and families, are being made by statutory bodies. VOCypf aims to continue to inform the voluntary sector about children's sector issues as well as helping to build the sector's capacity to have a stronger voice. This Strategy plans how we are going to approach this work over the next few years. Action Plans will then be produced each year to provide more detail on VOCypf's annual plans.

As Chair of VOCypf I would like to thank our very committed staff, **Gemma Williamson** (VOCypf Officer) and **Helen Hall** (VOCypf Communications Officer), and also the **VOCypf Executive Group** for their support and input in helping us move forward with developing this new Strategy.

I would also like to take this opportunity to thank **Central Bedfordshire Council**, **Bedford Borough Council** and the **Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board** for their funding for VOCypf, and to thank the **CVS** for acting as our host agency.



Bedford  
Borough  
Council



## VOCypf's Team

### **VOCypf Executive Group:**

Len Simkins – Independent Chair  
Paul Chandler – YMCA Bedfordshire  
Michele Flynn – Bedford Open Door  
Wendie Harvey – FACES  
Diana Headley – Groundwork  
Michael Howe – Families First Bedfordshire  
Martin Trinder – CVS (Host agency for VOCypf)

**VOCypf Officer:** Gemma Williamson (3 days a week)

**VOCypf Communications Officer:** Helen Hall (1 day a week)

# VOCyfp - Background

**Voluntary Organisations for Children, Young People and Families (VOCyfp)** was launched in 2009. Previously it had been the **Voluntary Organisations Consortium (VOC)**, which had brought together two earlier networks – the Family Network and Voluntary Organisations Consultative Group.

The change to VOCyfp took place at the same time as the two new unitary authorities of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire were created. VOCyfp works in both local authority areas and has close working relationships with both councils, which both help to fund VOCyfp.

VOCyfp brings together organisations in the children’s sector to promote greater involvement in, and understanding of, local and national agendas. Having a network of organisations gives the sector a stronger influence on decision making both locally and nationally. Having a coordinated approach can also facilitate greater engagement with the voluntary sector and allow for capacity building.

The voluntary sector in the UK (through large national organisations and local grassroots organisations) has a big impact and a valuable role to play in the lives of children, young people and families. VOCyfp helps to promote this essential work in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

## VOCyfp – Role

VOCyfp’s role was formalised in its new Constitution in 2013.

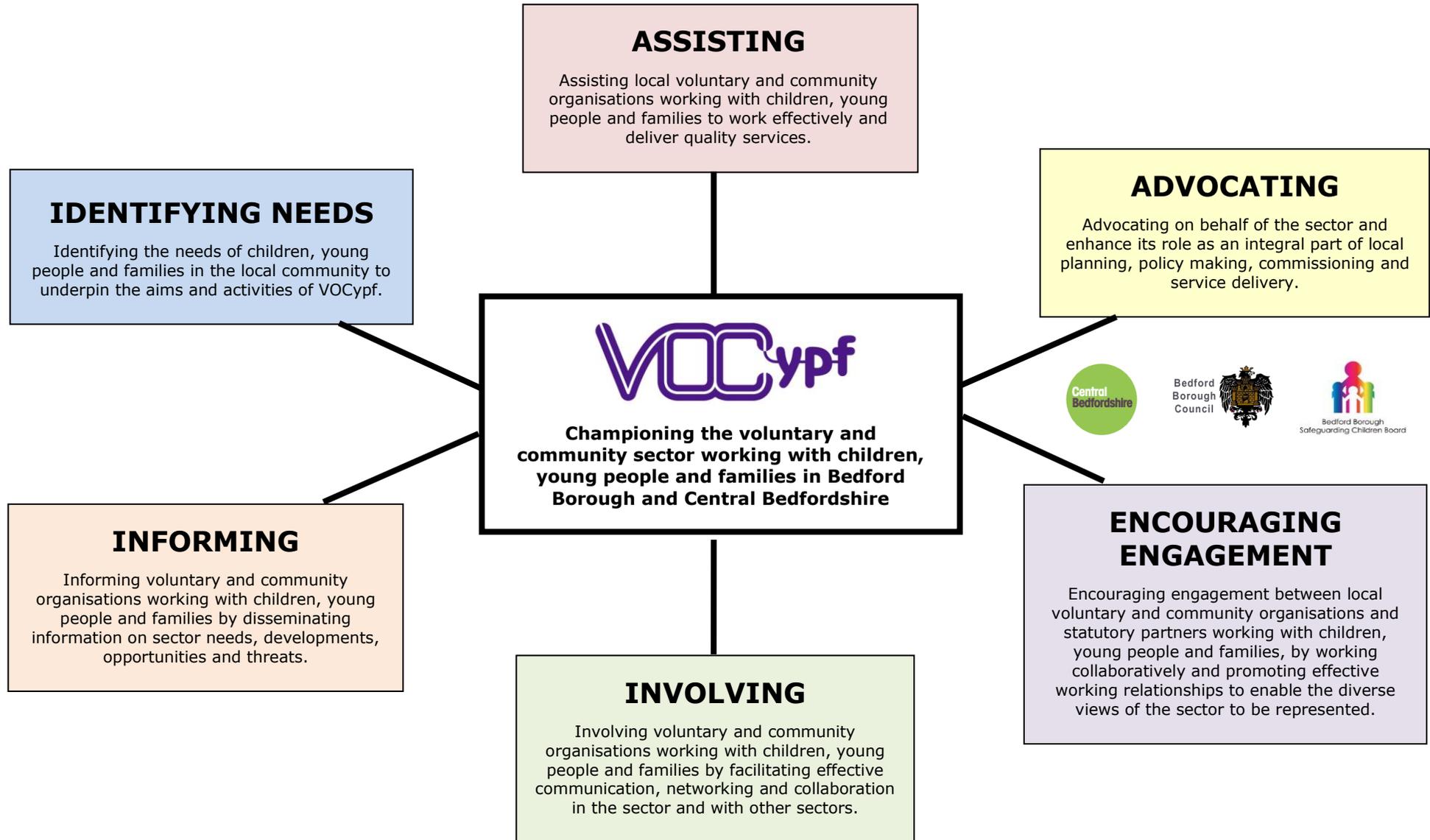
### Mission

**To champion the voluntary and community sector working with children, young people and families in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire**

### General aims

1. To **identify the needs** of children, young people and families in the local community to underpin the aims and activities of VOCyfp.
2. To **assist** local voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families to work effectively and deliver quality services.
3. To **involve** voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families by facilitating effective communication, networking and collaboration in the sector and with other sectors.
4. To **inform** voluntary and community organisations working with children, young people and families by disseminating information on sector needs, developments, opportunities and threats.
5. To **advocate** on behalf of the sector and enhance its role as an integral part of local planning, policy making, commissioning and service delivery.
6. To **encourage engagement** between local voluntary and community organisations and statutory partners working with children, young people and families, by working collaboratively and promoting effective working relationships to enable the diverse views of the sector to be represented.

# VOCypf – Role



## VOCypf – Key achievements

Since 2009 VOCypf has played an important role in supporting voluntary sector organisation in working with children, young people and families, and over the last 9 years VOCypf's work has developed considerably.

VOCypf's Annual Report of 2017/18 highlighted the key achievements last year. These included:

- Attending 33 local authority meetings to help influence the statutory decision making processes in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
- Directly engaging with 16 local children's sector agencies during the year
- Distributing a fortnightly online newsletter providing information on children's sector issues to over 350 individual contacts (covering 173 VSC organisations)
- Organising a full day forum, attended by 47 delegates including representatives from the local authorities, which provided a positive networking opportunity for children's sector organisations in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.

Other VOCypf activities in 2017/18 included:

- Establishment of a Bursary Fund to help staff from VCS organisations attend essential training
- Facilitation of the Counselling Collective which focuses on mental health issues for children and young people
- Helped set up the new Independent Poverty Action Group in Bedford
- Organised a Safeguarding Project in Bedford Borough providing advice and support on safeguarding issues to smaller VCS organisations

## VOCypf – Challenges

VOCypf has many strengths - especially in terms of: its reputation; its expertise and knowledge; its extensive communications work; and its value for money. However, there are some weaknesses and challenges that need to be addressed.

These challenges include:

- Uncertainty of future funding – based on annual rather than longer-term contracts
- Lack of engagement from some VCS organisations
- Changes in national government policy – with support for the voluntary sector being lower on the agenda
- Changing relationships with local authorities with less commissioning opportunities
- Small staff team and a general lack of capacity

# National agenda for children, young people and families

Children, young people and families are always a high priority for any national government and law, policies and decisions made nationally has a major affect on local work in the children's sector.

VOCyph seeks to keep the sector up to date with these changes through its regular newsletter and other communications. The national changes also affects the work of local authorities which will also has an impact of VOCyph's work especially in its input into local strategic meetings and initiatives. National changes can also have a big impact on staff training requirements, policy development for local organisations, and funding opportunities for the sector.

The **main current issues**, affecting children, young people and families, on the national agenda are:

- **Children's Mental Health:** Approximately 1 in 10 children and young people are affected by mental health problems including depression and anxiety. This is often a direct response to what is happening in their lives. Unfortunately many children and young people are not receiving the help they need early enough.
- **Child Sexual Exploitation:** There is increasing concern about the growth of child sexual exploitation in the UK. Child sexual exploitation is a hidden crime where young people often trust their abuser and don't understand that they're being abused. Some children and young people are trafficked into or within the UK for the purpose of sexual exploitation. Sexual exploitation can also happen to young people in gangs.
- **E-Safety:** Children and young people are using technology, including the internet, more and more as they get older and it is important that they are protected from the risks they may encounter

The main **emerging themes** on the national agenda are:

- **Childhood obesity:** According to estimates from Public Health England, a quarter of children between 2 and 10 years old are overweight or obese. Obese children are more likely to become overweight adults and to suffer premature ill health and mortality.
- **County Lines and Gangs:** Groups are established providing networks between urban hubs and county locations into which drugs (primarily heroin and crack cocaine) are supplied. The groups exploit young or vulnerable people, to achieve the storage and/or supply of drugs. The groups often use intimidation, violence and weapons.
- **Refugees and Asylum Seekers:** In 2017 just over 8% of asylum applications were by unaccompanied children compared with over 16% in 2008, so the number is decreasing. In 2017 there were significant increases in the number of applications from Sudan and Vietnam. In 2017 89% of applicants were male, which is similar to earlier years.

# Local picture for children, young people and families

In our local area, since 2009, we have had the two unitary authorities of Bedford Borough Council and Central Bedfordshire Council.

The areas of Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire are also served by the NHS Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group and the Bedfordshire Police Authority (which also covers Luton Borough).

Most services and initiatives are organised separately by each local authority but some things continue to be organised with a pan Bedfordshire approach eg training and development.

Each of the unitary authorities has its own Safeguarding Children Board that is accountable to the Councils Chief Executive.

Services vary across the two authorities and are dependent on the priorities set by each individual Council, the NHS and the Police, which are often strongly influenced by the national agenda for children, young people and families.

Some organisations in the VOCypf network hold a number of local authority contracts and actively contribute to the identification of service gaps through performance and monitoring and open stakeholder events.

**Key current issues** in the local area are:

- **Child Sexual Exploitation:** CSE is not a significantly reported problem in Bedford Borough or Central Bedfordshire. However, a great deal of work is being done by both local authorities and statutory partners to raise awareness of CSE amongst children and young people, the children's workforce and the wider community.
- **Domestic Abuse:** In Bedfordshire Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conferences takes place each month - one for Central Bedfordshire and one for Bedford Borough.
- The conferences are attended by partner agencies such as Bedfordshire Police, Children and Young People's Services, Voluntary Sector Services, Health Services and Housing Providers. Individuals who are at high risk of serious harm due to domestic abuse are identified, their cases are discussed and a safety plan is agreed.
- **Neglect:** Neglect is the ongoing failure to meet a child's basic needs and is the most common form of child abuse in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire.
- **Poverty:** In Bedford Borough approximately 7,000 children live in poverty (18.1% of children), and in Central Bedfordshire the figure is almost 7,500 (12.8%). In 2017 VOCypf helped set up the Independent Poverty Action Group (IPAG), which is a group of VCS organisations in Bedford Borough that work with people living in poverty. IPAG aims to raise awareness, share expertise, and advise and support organisations working with those in poverty.
- **Voice of the Child:** The child's voice is a phrase used to describe the real involvement of children and young people. It involves seeking their views, listening to what they have to say and involving them in key decision-making processes. There is a PAN Bedfordshire LSCB sub-group entitled "Voice of the Child" which aims to raise awareness amongst children's sector organisations of the importance of gaining the voice of the child in their work.

## Local partnership meetings attended by VOCyfp

VOCyfp is invited to be part of various strategic and operational partner boards and groups. This participation may be through attendance of the VOCyfp Officer or by attendance of individual representatives from VOCyfp network organisations.

Details of the meetings currently attended by VOCyfp are given below.

### Bedford Borough

- Bedford Borough Safeguarding Children Board (BBSCB)
- Child Health and Well-being Partnership Group
- Domestic Abuse Delivery Group
- Virtual SEND team meeting

### Central Bedfordshire

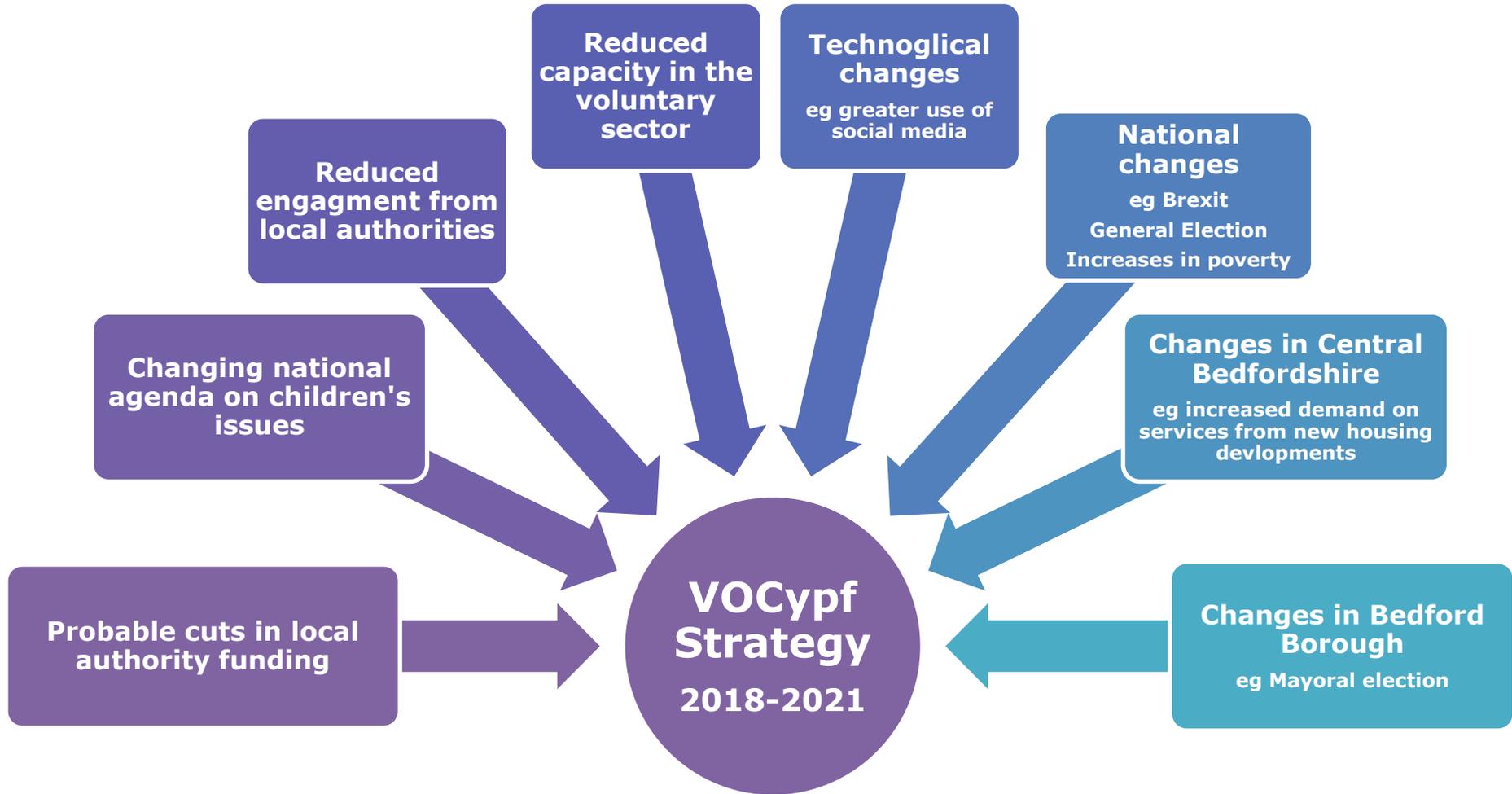
- Central Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (CBSCB)
- JSNA Review Group
- Learning and Improvement - LSCB sub-group
- Partnership Vision for Education Board
- Support and Aspiration Board

### Pan Bedfordshire

- Child Sexual Exploitation – LSCB sub-group
- Training and Development – LSCB sub-group

# Drivers of change for VOCypf

There are a number of factors and changes which could have an impact on VOCypf over the next few years.



# VOCypf Strategy - Summary

## Background

The VOCypf Executive Group has agreed a Strategy for 2018-2021 taking into account:

- VOCypf's role
- VOCyps key achievements and strengths – and its challenges and weaknesses
- The national agenda for children, young people and families
- The local agenda for children, young people and families
- The drivers of change likely to affect VOCypf over the next 3 years
- VOCypf's current, and likely future, resources

A special planning meeting was held on 5/6/18 to discuss the Strategy, and further discussions took place at the Executive Group meetings on 21/6/18 and 13/9/18.

The Strategy will be launched at the VOCypf Forum event on 9/10/18.

## Priority aims for the next 3 years

1. To continue to deliver and sustain our local authority funded work in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
2. To strengthen our relationship with all stakeholders and build stronger partnership links between the VCS and the statutory sector
3. To secure the longer-term financial future of VOCypf

## Key objectives

A set of **key objectives** have been agreed under each of the 3 priority aims for 2018/19

These key objectives are listed on the following page.

The objectives will be reviewed and revised for 2019/20 and 2020/21 at the beginning of each year.

## Annual Action Plans

To take forward the agreed key objectives, VOCypf's Executive Group will produce a more detailed **Action Plan** to outline the required action for 2018/19.

The 2018/19 action plan will be reviewed in early 2019 and a subsequent action plan will then be developed for 2019/20.

A similar process will then be used the following year to develop an action plan for 2020/21.

## Review of the Strategy

The intention is to review the VOCypf Strategy in early 2021 so that a new Strategy can be developed for 2021 – 2024.

However, the current Strategy could be refreshed before 2021, if the need arises.

## VOCypf's Key Objectives

### **Aim 1 - Continue to deliver and sustain our local authority funded work in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire**

VOCypf's funded work is commissioned by a joint SLA for 2018/19 with CBC, BBC and BBSCB.

The **objectives for 2018/19** are:

1. Attend a list of specified strategic meetings in Bedford Borough and Central Bedfordshire
2. Arrange 2 Forum events – to bring together the local authorities and VOCypf agencies
3. Produce a regular VOCypf newsletter
4. Manage Year 2 of the Safeguarding Project for BBSCB
5. Manage a new Safeguarding Support Project for CBC

The objectives for 2019/20 and 2020/21 will be developed when funding and the SLA for 2019/20 and 2020/21 is agreed.

### **Aim 2 - Strengthen our relationship with all stakeholders and build stronger partnership links between the VCS and the statutory sector**

The **objectives for 2018/19** are:

1. Strengthen the VOCypf Executive Group by increasing the representation of agencies working in Central Bedfordshire
2. Organise 2 Forum events - to strengthen links with, and between, VOCypf agencies
3. Identify 3 issues from the local children's agenda that VOCypf can specifically work on to develop stronger partnerships between VCS agencies and statutory agencies. (A VOCypf Executive Group member will take the lead on each issue).

The objectives for 2019/20 and 2020/21 will be developed later, and will depend on the success in meeting the 2018/19 objectives.

### **Aim 3 - Secure the longer-term financial future of VOCypf**

The **objectives for 2018/19** are:

1. Develop a Funding Plan for VOCypf
2. Take forward the initial necessary action identified in the Funding Plan

The objectives for 2019/20 and 2020/21 will be developed later, and will depend on the success in meeting the initial action from the Funding Plan, and on VOCypf's future financial situation.