



Meeting: **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 7 September 2021 at 2.00 pm**

Location: **Sparkenhoe Committee Room, County Hall, Glenfield**

Contact: **Gemma Duckworth (0116 3052583)**

Email: **gemma.duckworth@leics.gov.uk**

Membership

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC (Chairman)

Mr. M. Frisby CC Mr. N. Lockyer
Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. R. Hills CC Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Mrs. C. Lewis Mr. G. Welsh CC

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– Notices will be on display at the meeting explaining the arrangements.**

AGENDA

<u>Item</u>	<u>Report by</u>
1. Minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2021.	(Pages 5 - 12)
2. Question Time.	
3. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).	
4. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.	
5. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.	
6. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance	



with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule
16.

7. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order
36.

8. Children's Innovation Partnership.

Director of
Children and
Family Services

A presentation will be given for this item.

9. Quarter 1 2021/22 Performance Report.

Chief Executive
and Director of
Children and
Family Services

(Pages 13 - 20)

10. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing
Officer.

Director of
Children and
Family Services

(Pages 21 - 66)

11. Leicestershire Children and Families
Partnership Plan: Progress Update.

Director of
Children and
Family Services

(Pages 67 - 72)

12. Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding
Children Partnership Annual Report 2020/21.

Director of
Children and
Family Services

(Pages 73 - 92)

13. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 2
November 2021 at 2.00pm.

14. Any other items which the Chairman has
decided to take as urgent.

QUESTIONING BY MEMBERS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The ability to ask good, pertinent questions lies at the heart of successful and effective scrutiny. To support members with this, a range of resources, including guides to questioning, are available via the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny <https://www.cfgs.org.uk/>

The following questions have been agreed by Scrutiny members as a good starting point for developing questions:-

- Who was consulted and what were they consulted on? What is the process for and quality of the consultation?
- How have the voices of local people and frontline staff been heard?
- What does success look like?
- What is the history of the service and what will be different this time?
- What happens once the money is spent?
- If the service model is changing, has the previous service model been evaluated?
- What evaluation arrangements are in place – will there be an annual review?

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Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 1 June 2021.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frsiby CC	Mrs. C. Lewis
Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC	Mr. N. Lockyer
Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC	Ms. Betty Newton CC
Mr. R. Hills CC	Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In Attendance

Mrs. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Families
 Mrs. B. Seaton CC – Cabinet Support Member
 Mrs. A. Hack CC (Via Microsoft Teams) – For Agenda Item 5

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That the appointment of Mrs. H. Fryer CC as the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2022 be noted.

Mrs. H. Fryer CC – in the Chair

2. Election of Deputy Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. C. Smith CC be elected Deputy Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2022.

3. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 9 March 2021 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The following questions, received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5) were put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

(a) Mrs A Hack CC asked the following question of the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Pupil Premium is a top up provided for schools for each child who receives a Free School Meal (FSM) at a rate of £1,345 a year for Primary School Children and £955 pre secondary school children. This premium is calculated in October and January each year. However, in 2021, schools have been denied access to apply for Pupil premium for any child that became eligible from October 2020 to Jan 2021. In light of the reported figures, that almost 62% of schools have seen at least 5 pupils become eligible for FSM, how many children in Leicestershire became eligible for a Free School Meal from October 2020 to January 2021?

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

The DfE changed the way it allocates pupil premium from the January census to the October census to be in line with school funding in general. Between October 2020 and January 2021 an additional 596 FSM pupils in primary and 157 secondary pupils became eligible.

Supplementary Question

Mrs Hack CC asked a supplementary question in relation to over 750 children becoming eligible for free school meals from October 2020 to January 2021, which seemed like an unprecedented increase in the cohort. What representations have been made by Leicestershire County Council to the DfE to delay the change in the calculation?

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services replied to the effect that the Lead Member for Children and Families had recently written to the DfE and local MPs to raise the issue nationally. The issue had also been raised directly with the DfE department via the Association of Directors of Children's Services, where it was discussed on a regular basis.

(b) Mrs A Hack CC asked the following question of the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

In light of the change of timing for schools to apply for Pupil Premium, what is the current estimated loss per school in Leicestershire due to the change in calculation?

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

Schools don't apply for Pupil Premium, it is self-generated allocation from the census day. The total monies not allocated, due to the move to using the October census data is a total of £801,620 across all Leicestershire primary schools and £149,935 across all Leicestershire secondary schools.

Supplementary Question

Mrs Hack CC asked a supplementary question in relation to the fact that in the original question, it was requested that the funding loss, which is almost £1m in Leicestershire, was estimated per school and whether this was available. If not, it was asked whether Councillors could receive the total loss for the schools based in their divisions?

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded that a breakdown for each school was not currently available as it would be a relatively big piece of work to undertake. However, the Director stated that if members did want to understand the impact for their schools, they should contact her directly.

(c) Mrs A Hack CC asked the following question of the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

In light of Covid, there has been an earlier response than in 2020 to the management of all Exams. There is an expectation that schools will do most of the work on assessments, rather than the exam boards. Schools pay for Exam fees of approximately £60 per BTEC/Alevel and £30-£40 per GCSE and there is no current agreement on refunds (total refunds for 2020 was £42m). With schools currently being obliged to pay for exams and also being obliged to undertake teacher assessments, what support is being given to plug the financial/workload gap?

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

Almost all Leicestershire Secondary Schools are academies and therefore the local authority is not directly involved in their funding – this would be between the ESFA and the academies. The Leicestershire Education Effectiveness Partnership has developed a support offer to schools to assist in the moderation of centre assessed grades.

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

10. Wider Impact of Covid-19.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the wider impact of Covid-19 on children and young people in Leicestershire. This included in Early Years, Safeguarding, the Children and Family Wellbeing Service and Education Effectiveness. The report also detailed how the department had responded. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) The Director stated that the Coronavirus pandemic had posed unprecedented pressures and challenges and it was known that this specifically presented a higher level of risk for some children. It was pleasing to note that the service had adapted and changed the way it had delivered services to reflect the changing circumstances, guidance and restrictions and had dealt with the additional pressures presented by local lockdowns.
- ii) The Association for Young People's Health had produced a report which suggested that children and young people had been disproportionately impacted by the social, educational and economic impacts of the pandemic. There was evidence that many of the known risk factors for poorer outcomes for children and young people had been increased and those already facing challenges seemed to have been the hardest hit. The report also highlighted particular concern about the possible 'slow burn' impacts of educational and employment constraints and the role the pandemic was playing in widening health inequalities.
- iii) Barnardo's had commissioned a number of surveys with children and young people and at least a third of those surveyed said that they had experienced an increase of mental health and wellbeing issues and nearly 75% said that they had missed going to school or college. The findings had suggested that Covid-19 had had a disproportionate impact on children and young people's mental health and wellbeing.
- iv) The County Council's Policy Team had recently undertaken a project titled 'Conversations about Covid', which aimed to understand the full impact of the pandemic on local people. The project had spoken with a range of people and a wide range of experiences had been revealed. The Children and Family Service also actively sought feedback from children, young people and their families on an ongoing basis. The Barnardo's national consultation had been adapted and used to obtain timely localised data. As a result of the survey, the Leicester and Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships had continued to highlight young people's mental health as a key part of their business plan and had commissioned an audit of CAMHS waiting lists.
- v) A member raised the point that a general lack of engagement was an issue for schools and it was queried what more could be done to increase engagement. The Director responded that there had been an increase in children being electively home educated but there was confidence that schools were doing everything they could to support children on returning to school. Assurance was also provided that the department was supporting children in returning to school. It would be necessary to continue to monitor this over the coming years.
- vi) The Director confirmed that the same level of support was provided across all age groups. However, there had generally been greater attendance in Primary schools and more issues with those not attending in secondary schools.
- vii) The Director stated that the longer term impact of Covid-19 was not yet clear, but it could result in further increases in the number of children and families requiring

support with concerns over their short-term and long-term educational achievement and mental health. This would continue to be monitored.

The Director recorded her thanks to staff across the service and to those working in the education sector during the pandemic and this was reiterated by the Lead Member for Children and Families.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

11. Children and Family Services Department.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work of the Children and Family Services Department. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

The vision of the department was for Leicestershire to be the best place for all children, young people and their families. This was underpinned by the mission statement that children and young people in Leicestershire were safe and living in families where they could achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities. The Children and Family Services Department Plan 2020-2023 set out four key ambitions for the department – to help every child get the best possible start in life, help children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity, help children to live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments, and help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential.

In relation to Educational Excellence, it was asked that reference be made to also working with the Church of England and Roman Catholic diocese.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

12. Annual Report of the Virtual School Head.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Virtual School practice up to 31 March 2021 and a summary of data relevant to the academic year 2019-20. National benchmark data for 2019-20 had been published in March 2021 and was taken into account in the report. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) Across the 2019-20 academic year, the number of Leicestershire children entering care continued to rise and currently, there were 438 children of statutory school age in care. It was noted that there had been a significant increase over the last four years, although the number was lower than had been forecast and was also lower than neighbouring authorities. It was stated that the increase could be attributed to the offer and support given to homeless 16 and 17 year olds. The number of Leicestershire looked after children with a Special Educational Need was in line with other local authorities.

- ii) The Director stated that all children, for the previous term and a half, had had their education disrupted. Consequently, it was worth noting that examination results would not be comparable with those from previous years. The Virtual School had worked hard to remain in contact with all statutory school age children in care and assurance was given that the service had a complete picture of their progress.
- iii) The Virtual School's role to facilitate effective communication between the school and parents was highlighted and a query was raised around support was given to children in need. In response, it was stated that the DfE was currently looking at how this cohort might be better supported. In terms of the Virtual School, the support offered to schools directly was equally as appropriate in relation to how they supported children in need on roll. Support was also offered to parents of children who were previously looked after. There was the potential that Virtual Schools could be asked to provide this service for children and parents. It was noted that the response from the DfE had been delayed due to Covid-19, but once this had been received, information would be provided to the Committee.
- iv) A member questioned the safeguarding role of the Virtual School, and whether it dealt with traveller children. The Director reported that the Inclusion Service was responsible for children missing education, and that included traveller children. The Virtual School did not have the responsibility for this cohort as its responsibility lay with children in the care of the local authority. The Virtual School did not have a primary role in safeguarding, but had a wider role in ensuring children were protected. The Virtual School was essentially a skilled group of practitioners who acted as champions for children.

The Lead Member assured the Committee that further information on the role of the Virtual School would be provided in training on corporate parenting. Newsletters from the Corporate Parenting Team would be circulated to all members of the County Council.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

13. Quarter 4 2020/21 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update of the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2021 (Quarter 4). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

The Committee agreed that this was a very pleasing report, with no indicators being Red. Although there were areas that required further work to improve, there appeared to be a steady trajectory of improved performance.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

14. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 7 September 2021 at 2.00pm.

2.00 – 3.02pm
01 June 2021

CHAIRMAN

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

7 SEPTEMBER 2021

QUARTER 1 2021/22 PERFORMANCE REPORT

**JOINT REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND DIRECTOR OF
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2021 (Quarter 1).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children and Family Services Department's performance is reported to the Committee in accordance with the Council's corporate performance management arrangements.

Background

3. A Strategic Plan 2018-2022 has been agreed by the Council setting out its priority outcomes for delivery and supporting performance metrics, and this was refreshed last year. The Children and Family Services Department has also produced a Departmental Plan 2020-2023 which identifies a number of other ambitions and measures to monitor progress. The following report and accompanying dashboard aim to report on the priority areas identified by both plans and monitor performance of key indicators on a quarterly basis. The current performance dashboard is attached as Appendix A and has been refreshed to concentrate on indicators where new data is available for Quarter 1.
4. Due to the impact of Covid-19 on school operations and examination processes, no new school inspection data or education outcome data is currently available. Members will be updated once data is released for this area.
5. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.

Overview

6. From 24 measures that have been reported, three have improved, five show no significant change and five have declined. In addition to this, nine indicators provide information only with no polarity and two indicators have temporarily been suspended (see point 31).
7. From 14 measures that have a national benchmark, four are in the top quartile, six are in the second quartile, three are in the third quartile and one is in the fourth quartile.

Helping children in Leicestershire live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments

8. Local Authority comparisons used are figures published by the government for end of year benchmarking.
9. The number of 'Child Protection cases reviewed within timescales' was 91.7% at the end quarter 1. This is a decrease compared to quarter 4 (94.7%) and places Leicestershire in the third quartile of all local authorities by published benchmarks.
10. The percentage of 'Children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time' increased to 27.3% in quarter 4 (39 children). This is a rise of 5% (14 children) since quarter 4. Leicestershire remains in the third quartile of local authorities.
11. The percentage of re-referrals to Social Care within 12 months was 19.7% in quarter 4 (236), a rise of 1.3% compared to quarter 4 but the same number of children. Leicestershire remains in the second quartile of local authorities.
12. The percentage of 'single assessments completed within 45 days' was 91.5%. This represents 887 assessments and is 1.8% lower than quarter 4. This would place Leicestershire in the second quartile nationally by available comparisons.
13. Five Child Protection plans lasting two years or more were open at the end of quarter 1, representing 1% of cases. This is the same number and proportion as the end of quarter 4. The current figure places Leicestershire in the top quartile of local authorities and is lower than statistical neighbours using available comparators.
14. The 'percentage of children with three or more placements during the year' was 3.5% (24 children). This is very low by any standard and places Leicestershire in the top quartile nationally. The 'percentage of children in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption' was 63.9% (161 children). This is 6.1% (20 children) lower than quarter 4 and would place Leicestershire in the fourth quartile by published benchmarks.
15. The percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation was 97.9% at the end of quarter 1. This is higher than quarter 4 and places Leicestershire in the top quartile of local authorities using available comparisons.
16. The percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training was 64.6% at the end of quarter 1 (31 young people). This is higher than quarter 4

and places Leicestershire in the top quartile by comparison with other local authorities. The service provides careful oversight to the care leaver indicator and is driven by a corporate commitment for creating mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers.

17. The percentage of 'Children in Care who have had a dental check' was 35.1% (240 children). This is higher than quarter 4 (197 children). Routine dental treatment has been limited during the period of the Covid-19 lockdown and figures are now beginning to rise.
18. The percentage of 'Children in Care who have had an annual health assessment' within the last 12 months was 88.2% (603). This is 2.9% higher than quarter 4.
19. Completion of health assessments continues to be overseen by the Children in Care Head of Service and Service Manager, with specific actions identified to address delays and barriers including systems support, processes and staffing pressures. Both managers attend quarterly operational and strategic meetings with health partners to discuss and address the health needs of children in care and how best to meet these needs.

Helping children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity

20. During quarter 1, the Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS) worked with 4,162 individuals and 1,583 families across Leicestershire. This is higher than quarter 4 in both cases when the figures were 4,042 and 1,500 respectively.
21. The Children and Families Services Departmental plan states the intention to support more young people in mainstream Leicestershire schools by increasing the number of children effectively supported by Special Educational Needs Support (SEN Support) and decreasing the number of cases which subsequently require an Education and Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
22. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) was 2,244 in the Summer 2021 school census. This is 128 higher than the Spring 2021 census.
23. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire without an EHCP but in receipt of SEN Support was 11,371 in the Spring 2021 school census. This is 782 higher than the Spring 2021 census.

People are safe in their daily lives

24. Youth Offending statistics are usually reported one or two quarters in arrears. This is because data has to be produced and validated by legal bodies such as the Police and courts before being released to local authorities.
25. The Q4 2020/21 figure (latest available) for 'first time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10-17' was 18. This is 8 fewer than the previously reported quarterly figure. Of this group, 7 were previously known to the Children and

Families service. The figures for the first-time entrants remain low compared to regional and national data.

26. The rate of re-offending per young offender for quarter 3 2020/21 (latest available) was 0.67 offences per offender. This is higher than the quarter 2 figure of 0.46.
27. No young people were sentenced to custody during quarter 4 2020/21 (latest available), this is two fewer than quarter 3. This figure is usually low, for example one or two.

Help every child to get the best possible start in life

Early years

28. The percentage of eligible two-year and three-year olds taking up the Free Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) is reported termly and latest figures include the 2021 summer term.
29. During the spring term, the percentage of eligible 3 year olds taking up their FEEE place was 93.5% (6,825) an almost identical figure to the previous quarter (93.6%). The percentage of eligible 2 year olds was 68.5% (1,125), a rise of 4.9% following a fall in the previous quarter. Eligibility for 2 year olds is more targeted towards disadvantaged families, hence the smaller number of children.
30. The figures for the past year have been heavily affected by the Covid-19 disruption which has meant that newly eligible children were unable to begin their placement and some parents preferred to keep their children at home. However, recent figures are now approaching pre-pandemic levels.

Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential

31. No routine full school inspections took place during this period. Routine graded full school inspections are expected to resume in Autumn 2021 after being suspended since the beginning of the first COVID-19 lockdown, mid-March 2020.
32. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 839 at the end of quarter 1. The quarter 4 figure has been revised downwards since it was reported, and the new quarter 1 figure is higher than the refreshed figure (708) but lower than the originally reported quarter 4 figure of 867. This figure counts children whose parents have chosen to educate their child at home and has risen significantly in the past year with the number at the end of quarter 1 2019/20 standing at 465. The trend has been driven by two factors during this period: firstly, having experienced a period of enforced home schooling, some parents have opted for EHE as a lifestyle choice and have chosen to continue this even when schools reopened. The second factor has been ongoing health concerns which could be for the child, vulnerable parents or general safety concerns. The numbers will continue to be monitored closely.
33. Latest NEET data (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training), is for the end of May 2021 and shows a Leicestershire figure of 3% representing

420 young people. This is an increase of 73 young people compared to quarter 4. Although this is a significant rise, this reflects a wider rise in NEET figures. The statistical neighbour average has risen from 2.6% to 3.7% in the same period.

Conclusion

34. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of quarter 1 of 2021/22, covering the period April to June 2021.

35. Details of all metrics will continue to be monitored on a regular basis throughout the year and any subsequent changes will be notified in future reports.

Background Papers

None

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

36. None

Officer to Contact

Jane Moore, Director – Children and Families Service

Tel: 0116 305 2649

Email: Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director – Children’s Social Care

Tel: 0116 305 5479

Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Emma Jones, Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

Tel: 0116 305 7526

Email: Emma.j.Jones@leics.gov.uk

Alex Lea – Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

Tel: 0116 305 6803

Email: Alex.Lea@leics.gov.uk

List of Appendices

Appendix A - Children and Family Services Department Performance Dashboard for Quarter 1, 2021/22

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

37. Addressing equalities issues is supported by this report, with a focus on vulnerable groups within Leicestershire, including children in care. Education data relating to performance for different context groups including children with Special Educational Needs and Free School Meals is reported when data becomes available.

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Children and Families Performance 2021/22 Quarter 1

	Latest update	Current figure	Compared to previous data	Target*	Status RAG	National benchmark (quartile 1 = top)	Most recent Statistical Neighbour average
Help children in Leicestershire to live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments							
% child protection cases which were reviewed within timescales.	Q1	91.7%	Lower (high is good)	>97.2%	A	3	89.8%
% of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for second or subsequent time	Q1	27.3% (39)	Higher (low is good)	<20.8%	A	3	22.9%
% re-referrals to childrens Social Care within 12 months	Q1	19.7% (236)	Higher (low is good)	<18.7%	A	2	22.1%
% Single assessments completed within 45 days	Q1	91.5% (887)	Lower (high is good)	>90.3%	G	2	86.3%
% of Child Protection plans lasting 2 years or more open at the end of the quarter (low = good)	Q1	1% (5)	Similar (low is good)	<3.0%	G	1	1.4%
Placement stability - % children with 3 or more placements during a year (low = good)	Q1	3.5% (24)	Higher (low is good)	<9.0%	G	1	11.2%
Placement stability - % children in same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption	Q1	63.9% (161)	Lower (high is good)	>70.0%	R	4	65.0%
% of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation (end of quarter)	Q1	97.9% (47)	Higher (high is good)	>92.0%	G	1	85.4%
The % of Care leavers in education, employment and training (EET) (end of quarter)	Q1	64.6% (31)	Higher (high is good)	>54.0%	G	1	53.0%
The % of children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	Q1	35.1% (240)	Higher (high is good)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
The % of children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (at end of period)	Q1	88.2% (603)	Higher (high is good)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a

Help children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity							
No. of individuals worked with by Children and Families Wellbeing Service during quarter	Q1	4,162	Higher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
No. of families worked with by Children and Families Wellbeing Service during quarter	Q1	1,583	Higher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
No. of Children in mainstream schools with Education and Health Care Plans	Summer Census 2021	2,244	Higher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
No. of Children in mainstream schools in receipt of SEN Support (without EHCP)	Summer Census 2021	11,371	Higher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
People are safe in their daily lives							
Number of first time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10-17 (low = good) (year to date)	Q4 2020/21	18	Lower (no polarity)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Rate of re-offending by young offenders (low = good)	Q3 2020/21	0.67	Higher (Low is good)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Number of instances of the use of custody for young people (low = good)	Q4 2020/21	0	Lower	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
Help every child to get the best possible start in life							
The % of eligible 2 year olds taking up their FEEE	Spring 2021	68.5%	Lower	>76.3%	A	2	74.0%
The % of eligible 3 year olds taking up their FEEE	Spring 2021	93.5%	Similar	>98.0%	A	2	97.3%
Percentage of Primary schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding'	2019/20	88.0%	Better	90%	A	3	89.0%
Percentage of Secondary schools rated 'good' or 'outstanding'	2019/20	79.0%	Same	86%	A	2	76.0%
Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential							
No. of Children Electively Educated at Home	Q1	839	Higher	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NEET young people aged 16-17 (low = good)	Q1	3% (420)	Higher	<1.9%	A	2	3.7%

RAG rating key

	Top quartile of local authorities or high in second quartile with improving trend
	Second or third quartile with room for improvement
	Fourth quartile or low in the third quartile with a declining trend

* Targets are based on being in the top quartile of County Authorities where comparative data is available
A group of 33 county councils and county unitaries are used as the benchmark for the LCC Annual Report

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

7th September 2021

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with regard to children in care. The report evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021, including its corporate parenting function.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The IRO has a statutory role to ensure effective and improved care planning for children and young people, securing better outcomes, with their wishes and feelings being central and given full and due consideration. (IRO Handbook March 2010).
3. This Annual Report is a requirement of 'The IRO Handbook - Statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children' (March 2010). The content and format follows the prescription set out in the guidance. The report complies with the expectation that it will be available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as being accessible as a public document and most importantly, communicated to Leicestershire's children in care in a child and young person friendly version. A plan on a page will be designed for children to identify what has worked well within the provision of IRO services to children, areas of improvement and proposed developments.

Background

4. The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.
5. The IRO Service in Leicestershire is hosted within the Safeguarding and Performance Service, part of Children's Social Care (CSC), which sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS) department. Whilst part of CSC, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the

operational social work teams with managerial accountability sitting with the Head of Service: Safeguarding and Improvement.

6. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is essential to the quality assurance and effectiveness of the looked after experience of children and young people, not just on an individual basis but collectively, with IROs having a key part to play in monitoring the performance of the Local Authority as a Corporate Parent; drawing out themes for improvement and development, providing challenge to help drive forward change and improvement both in respect of individual plans but more thematically in respect of the improvement plan.
7. The effectiveness of the role has rightly been subject to scrutiny since its inception and the legal framework and statutory guidance was revised in 2010 to support a strengthened position. This is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.
8. The report is an opportunity to pinpoint areas of good practice and those in need of further development and improvement, providing information that can contribute to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. It highlights emerging themes and trends, and details areas of work which the service has prioritised during the year.

Key themes within this report

The response to COVID19

9. The Coronavirus pandemic during 2020-2021 has presented a time of severe pressure across all of society, and it is known that this specifically presents a higher level of risk for some children. The department recognised it is especially important that children and young people across Leicestershire continued to receive the services and support that they need and are effectively safeguarded during this pandemic.
10. The Safeguarding and Performance Service rapidly adapted and changed the way it has delivered services to reflect the COVID19 circumstances. Within 24 hours the Service adapted from facilitation and delivery of face to face meetings, to all meetings being held virtually from March 2020.
11. Review of Arrangements (ROA) meetings have aligned to this approach, with the IRO ensuring prior contact with the child to gain their views and wishes regarding the facilitation of the meeting, including how they wish to be involved or have their views advocated on their behalf. Feedback from young people has been mixed, with some young people feeling more comfortable with the virtual format and others missing the direct face to face contact. All workers have shown inventive ways of engaging children such as using What's App and video calls. Moving forward, with COVID19 restrictions being lifted, IROs will begin completing the ROA to the preferred method of the child or young person. It is expected that IROs will contact the child prior to the ROA meeting taking place to gain their views on how they wish for their meeting to be facilitated. IROs are also resuming visits to children to gain their views face to face,

whereas during the pandemic this process was completed virtually or via What's App and video calling.

12. Staff have been supported to maintain service delivery to children with support to implement home and remote working models. Staff have made good use of mobile technology to manage day-to-day communications with children and families and used virtual meetings through Skype/Microsoft Teams for key planning and decision-making meetings. This approach has also enabled staff to remain in close contact with their immediate teams and peers to prevent social isolation.
13. Corporate support for staff and managers has been strong throughout the pandemic with strong communication and support for staff wellbeing, funds for provision of working from home equipment and implementing safe working arrangements in key buildings where staff have continued to respond to service need.
14. Staff and leaders in Leicestershire have worked tirelessly during this period to support the most vulnerable children and have put arrangements in place to ensure scrutiny of the safety and well-being of children and young people the service supports and cares for.
15. The Corporate Parenting Team have been creative in ensuring children and young people's participation with many groups and activities taking place virtually, including the continuation of the Children In Care Council, Choir, Corporate Parenting Board as well as other fun activities.
16. Quality assurance and learning improvement activity has continued during the pandemic with all planned activity being delivered, to ensure senior management oversight of the quality of service being delivered. Audit activity has included writing to the child, IRO oversight and tracking, LAC health assessment and Placement Order audit. This is addition to the thematic audits completed by all CFS areas.

Timeliness

17. Performance in relation to timeliness of ROA meetings has been consistently strong over recent years, with improved performance over the past twelve months with the percentage of meetings taking place within timescales increasing by just over half a percent from 98.4% to 98.96%.
18. At the year ending 31 March 2021, the IRO Service had completed 1524 Review of Arrangement meetings for looked after children. Of these 1508 were within timescales, which equates to 98.96%.
19. A significant improvement during 2020/21 has been with getting records of Review of Arrangements written up and uploaded onto mosaic in a timely manner. In the previous year this was raised as a concern and a plan was developed to aim to have all records written and uploaded within twenty working days of the review with a minimum target of this being achieved in 95% of cases. This was seen as highly successful and has continued throughout 2020/21. At present, the service is awaiting tableau reporting against the timeliness, although the data collection used by the Business Support indicates this timescale is being met.

20. IROs now routinely upload all decisions and recommendations from ROAs within five working days. This is seen as an important part of the IRO role in ensuring the actions are progressed in a timely way to avoid any drift and delay in getting the right outcomes for a child or young person. Again, the Tableau report to monitor this has yet to be developed; however it has been monitored via management dip sampling cases which have had positive findings. In the most recent dip sample of cases from March 2021, eight out of ten cases sampled had the five-day decisions uploaded onto case notes within timescales, one was uploaded one day late. In one case there was a greater delay although it was still found that the full set of review of arrangement minutes were uploaded within the required timescale (20 working days).

Effective Care Planning

21. Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. In 2020/21 only 27% of children had an agreed permanence plan at second review which is slightly lower than in the previous year where 35% of second reviews included a permanence plan. Unfortunately, there are lots of reasons why permanence cannot be agreed at the second review, which may include further assessments needing to be carried out to identify if it is safe for a child to return to live with the parent or carer with whom they lived before coming into care and if this is not possible then what would be the best permanence option for their long-term care.
22. Permanence plans were evidenced in 72% of reviews subsequent to the second review, although this again is below the 80% figure of last year.
23. During the first part of the COVID19 pandemic, delays were seen in Court timetabling for care proceedings which would have also impacted on the IROs ability to ratify final care plans if assessments were still outstanding. As the country adapted to COVID19 restrictions and ways of working, these figures began to improve.

Participation

24. The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to the care planning. IROs continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. However, due to the COVID19 restrictions during 2020/21 this is in no doubt a significant area that has been affected by the lockdown measures and the fact that most looked after reviews during this year have taken place virtually.
25. In every year it is acknowledged that not all children will want to attend their meeting and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways. There has been a consistent pattern of children increasingly attending their ROAs up until this year. Although it is perfectly acceptable for children to participate in their reviews in any way they choose, such as via an advocate, sending their written views or asking their carers or social worker to speak on their behalf, nevertheless IROs always value seeing children and young people face to face and getting to know them and understanding the issues that are most important to them.

26. Despite an additional 57 children being in the care of the local authority, PN1 - Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves, shows that 98 fewer children and young people attended their reviews and spoke for themselves in comparison to 2019/20. It is positive to see that there was only a small increase in the number of children who chose not to participate in their reviews (PN7) with the vast majority of children choosing to participate in other ways – an increase of 186.
27. Prior to COVID19, when completing reviews, children or young people may have chosen not to attend the whole meeting, but may have joined for part of it, often once they felt more comfortable with those present in the room; this was particularly the case for younger children and would have previously been recorded as the child having participated, if only for a short period. It is key to note that whilst children and young people have been given the opportunity to join their virtual meetings, for some, this may not be something they feel comfortable with. Therefore, they may have asked to speak to the IRO before the meeting to share their views and for these to be advocated on their behalf; this aligns closely with the increase of 186 of young people participating in other methods.

Impact of Quality Assurance

28. The quality assurance role of IROs is critical to the development and improvement of the intervention that is provided to children and families and the impact on the outcomes achieved. IROs have key duties that scrutinise and support the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy, care planning and permanence. IROs are central to identifying and sharing good practice and checking the quality and consistency of provision across Looked After Children.
29. IROs have a statutory role to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are captured clearly, central to planning and given full consideration. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the IROs responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of its functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of its functions in relation to a child's case. Through these changes the IRO has an effective, independent and holistic oversight of the child's case and ensures that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.
30. This oversight provides opportunity for independent challenge in decisions identified as not being in the best interests of the child or where drift or delay has an impact on outcomes. An effective IRO service will drive forward improved outcomes for children and young people and will ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.
31. Significant work has been completed with the IRO service to develop a rigorous Quality Assurance process which identifies areas of concern as well as areas of good practice. This process is now fully incorporated into Mosaic and there is the additional benefit of Tableau reporting, which enables robust data analysis to identify themes across service areas where targeted work can be completed to address these.

32. This remains an area of further development to support wider services in understanding the significance of this part of the IRO, thus developing an acceptance of the process and how this aligns with the wider Leicestershire County Council's continuous improvement journey, to ensure the service is improving service delivery and outcomes for children and families.

Corporate Parenting Service

33. The Children in Care Council (CICC) recently participated in the development of a Contact Expectations Statement and a Review of Arrangements Expectation Statement to improve the experiences of children who have contact and participate in their Review of Arrangement Meetings. These documents clearly identify the views, wishes and perspective of children and young people and have been welcomed by the workers to ensure they are reflected in contact with family members and Review of Arrangement Meetings.
34. Members of the Children in Care Council have also participated in the production of a young people's version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. A video has been designed by members of the Children in Care Council. Young people were consulted on what the children's version of the strategy should look like and they were clear that they did not want it presented in a written form that looked like a leaflet or booklet so it was agreed to record it as an animated video. The young people were involved in every step of the design process. They were asked what they thought the most important elements of corporate parenting was and what did it mean to them. This generated a lot of ideas that were developed into statements and they were then asked via mentimeter to identify the most important ones which were then used for the basis of the script of the video.
35. This was launched at the Corporate Parenting Board in April 2021 and subsequently shown in several forums including the Child Care Managers Meeting. On every occasion the feedback has been positive and professionals have commented how powerful it is to hear the young people's comments.
36. The Children in Care Council has also been working with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust to develop a number of different projects with a view to all the CICC members becoming Green Champions. One of the issues they are looking at currently is stopping the use of single use plastic in their own environment. During the summer they were part of a tree planting campaign, setting up bug hotels and a wildlife garden at County Hall. They are also planning an environment cleaning campaign, such as going to Bradgate Park to do a litter pick. The young people are also really keen to have the opportunity to do a beach clean, this is likely to be planned when further COVID restrictions are lifted.
37. Beacon Voice's looked after children's choir has continued to meet throughout lockdown, despite it not being possible to meet face to face and sing together. More recently they have been working with a new choir master to write a song they are looking forward to performing as soon as the COVID restrictions are lifted.

38. As it has not been possible to arrange face to face activities in the usual way during this year the Participation Team has been very creative in looking at other ways to engage children and young people including virtual art workshops. These have been arranged with two separate companies.

Service Development

39. In Leicestershire, IROs have had responsibility for both child protection and children in care functions, through their role in child protection conferences and processes, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) work with children and young people and Looked After Reviews and care planning. All IROs have had a combination of Child Protection cases and Looked After Children.
40. Over the last few years the IRO service has significantly grown in capacity, this has been a result of the increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans and also Looked After Children.
41. In 2020, the average number of LAC children was 666, which was an increase from the average of 608 in 2019. A full time IRO held an average FTE case load of 78 cases totalling an average of 97.5 weighted cases. At present one LAC case is weighted as 1.5 given the extra requirements in relation to the IRO role for LAC, such as having to write the ROA record per child, whereas Child Protection conferences are supported with clerk capacity. This is considerably higher than the recommended caseload within the IRO handbook: "It is estimated that a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service, including the full range of functions set out in this handbook. This range should reflect the diversity and complexity of cases across different local authorities".
42. As the service has grown, the need to reconsider the service structure became increasingly necessary, as well as to provide the opportunity to focus on the identified improvement needs. Therefore, it was agreed from May 2021, the service would have two focus teams, one on Child Protection and one on Looked After Children. This would enable the teams to become experts in the area of work, focus on driving forward the improvement plans and achieving positive outcomes for children. The two teams would also lead on their individual development plans (see below), resulting in a robust, efficient Independent Reviewing Officer Service. With the focus teams and invested growth in the IRO service, this will enable caseloads to be aligned with the IRO handbook recommendations.
43. The benefits of having IRO and CP Chairs would enable the service areas to drive forward the areas of improvement required and provide a highly effective, specialist service to children and families.
44. The roles within the Corporate Parenting Team have evolved since the job descriptions were first produced. As a result of the developments within the service, including the growth of the service and the roles and responsibilities, it was agreed an evaluation of the team was required and this was completed in summer 2021.

Resource Implications

45. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

46. None.

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

47. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children and young people in care, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The IRO Service has a diverse compliment of staff with good representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.
48. The Safeguarding and Performance Service have an Equality and Diversity Action Plan in place which ensures that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported within the Safeguarding and Performance Service, in addition to working towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities - including relevant research, data, Quality Assurance activity and engagement with children, young people and families.

List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2020/21

Officer(s) to Contact

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care

Tel: 0116 305 479

Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Hayley Binley, Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding and Performance Service

Tel: 01163057566

Email: hayley.binley@leics.gov.uk

Safeguarding and Performance Independent Reviewing Officer Service LAC Annual Report 1st April 2020 - 31st March 2021



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1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) sets out the current performance for the service in 2020-2021 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The IRO Handbook (7.11) sets out the requirement for an annual report on the delivery of service and the impact of the IRO service on the outcomes for children in care.

For the purpose of this report, the term LAC (Looked After Child) will be used for statutory related references to children looked after by the local authority for example LAC Reviews, and all other references will refer to Children in Care (CiC).

Our response to COVID19

The Coronavirus pandemic during 2020-2021 has presented a time of severe pressure across all of society, and we know this specifically presents a higher level of risk for some children. We have recognised it is especially important that children and young people across Leicestershire continued to receive the services and support that they need and are effectively safeguarded during this pandemic.

The Safeguarding and Performance Service rapidly adapted and changed the way we have delivered services to reflect the COVID19 circumstances. Within 24 hours the Service adapted from facilitation and delivery of face to face meetings, to all meetings being held virtually from March 2020.

Review of arrangements (ROA) meetings have aligned to this approach with them being held virtually, with the IRO ensuring prior contact with the child to gain their views and wishes regarding the facilitation of the meeting, including how they wish to be involved or have their views advocated on their behalf. Feedback from young people has been mixed, some young people feeling more comfortable with the virtual format, others missing the direct face to face contact.

Our staff have been supported to maintain service delivery to our children with support to implement home and remote working models. Staff have made good use of mobile technology to manage day-to-day communications with children and families and used virtual meetings through Skype/Microsoft Teams for key planning and decision-making meetings. This approach has also enabled staff to remain in close contact with their immediate teams and peers to prevent social isolation.

Corporate support for staff and managers has been strong throughout the pandemic with strong communication and support for staff wellbeing, funds for provision of working from home equipment and implementing safe working arrangements in key buildings where staff have continued to respond to service need.

Staff and leaders in Leicestershire have worked tirelessly in the face of this unprecedented time to support the most vulnerable children during this period and have put arrangements in place to ensure scrutiny of the safety and well-being of children and young people we support and care for.

All workers have shown inventive ways of engaging children such as using what's app and video calls. The Corporate Parenting Team have been creative in ensuring children and young people's participation with many groups and activities taking place virtually, including the

continuation of the Children In Care Council, Choir, Corporate Parenting Board as well as other fun activities, quiz and craft events.

Quality assurance and learning improvement activity has continued during the pandemic with all planned activity being delivered, to ensure senior management oversight of the quality of service being delivered. Audit activity has included, but not exclusive to writing to the child, IRO oversight and tracking, LAC health assessment and Placement Order audit. This is addition to the thematic audits completed by all CFS areas.

Key themes within this report

- Timeliness

Performance in relation to timeliness of ROA meetings has been consistently strong over recent years, with improved performance over the past twelve months with the percentage of meetings taking place within timescales increasing by just over half a percent from 98.4% to 98.96%.

At the year ending 31st March 2021, the IRO Service had completed 1524 Review of Arrangement meetings for looked after children. Of these 1508 were within timescales which equates to 98.96%.

A significant improvement during 2020/21 has been with getting records of Review of Arrangements written up and uploaded onto mosaic in a timely manner. In the previous year this was raised as a concern, therefore a plan was developed to aim to have all records written and uploaded within twenty working days of the review with a minimum target of this being achieved in 95% of cases. This was seen as highly successful and this success has continued throughout 20/21. At present we are awaiting tableau reporting against the timeliness, however the data collection used at present by our Business Support indicates this timescale is being met.

Similarly, IRO's now routinely upload all decisions and recommendations from ROA's within 5 working days. This is seen as an important part of the IRO role in ensuring the actions are progressed in a timely way to avoid any drift and delay in getting the right outcomes for a child or young person. Again, the Tableau report to monitor this has yet to be developed however it has been monitored via management dip sampling cases which have had positive findings. In the most recent dip sample of cases from March 2021, out of ten cases sampled eight had the five-day decisions uploaded onto case notes within timescales, one was uploaded one day late. In one case there was a greater delay however it was still found that the full set of review of arrangement minutes were uploaded within the required timescale (20 working days).

- Effective Care Planning

Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. In 2020/21 only 27% of children had a permanence plan at second review this is slightly lower than in the previous year whereby 35% of second reviews included a permanence plan. Unfortunately, there are lots of reasons why permanence cannot be agreed at the second review, which may include further assessments needing to be carried out to identify if it is safe for a child to return to live with the parent or carer with whom they lived before coming into care and if this is not possible then what would be the best permanence option for their long-term care.

Permanence plans were evidenced in 72% of reviews subsequent to the 2nd review, although this again is below the 80% figure of last year.

During the first part of the COVID19 pandemic, delays were seen in Court timetabling for care proceedings which would have also impacted on the IRO's ability to ratify final care plans if assessments were still outstanding. As the country adapted to COVID19 restrictions and ways of working, we saw these figures begin to improve.

- **Impact of Quality Assurance**

The quality assurance role of IROs is critical to the development and improvement of the intervention that we provide to children and families and the impact that we have on the outcomes we achieve. IROs have key duties that scrutinise and support the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy, care planning and permanence. IROs are central to identifying and sharing good practice and checking the quality and consistency of provision across Looked After Children.

IROs have a statutory role to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are captured clearly, central to planning and given full consideration. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the IROs responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case. Through these changes the IRO has an effective, independent and holistic oversight of the child's case and ensures that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

This oversight provides opportunity for independent challenge in decisions identified as not being in the best interests of the child or where drift or delay has an impact on outcomes. An effective IRO service will drive forward improved outcomes for children and young people and will ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

Significant work has been completed with the IRO service to develop a rigorous Quality Assurance process which identifies areas of concern as well as areas of good practice. The QA process is now fully incorporated into Mosaic and we have the additional benefit of Tableau reporting, which enables robust data analysis which identifies themes across service areas where targeted work can be completed to address these.

This remains an area of further development to support wider services in understanding the significance of this part of the IRO, thus developing an acceptance of the process and how this aligns with the wider Leicestershire Council's continuous improvement journey, to ensure we are improving service delivery and outcomes for our children and families.

- **Service Development**

In Leicestershire, IRO's have had responsibility for both child protection and children in care functions, through their role in child protection conferences and processes, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) work with children and young people and Looked After Reviews and care planning. All IRO's have had a combination of Child Protection cases and Looked After Children.

Over the last few years the IRO service has significantly grown in capacity, this has been a result of the increase in children subject to Child Protection Plans and also Looked After Children. In 2018/2019 the IRO service consisted of 13.06 FTE IRO's In 2019/2020 the IRO

service consisted of 15.06 FTE IRO's. To date we currently have 16.1 FTE IRO's in post, who are working across both CP and LAC.

In 2020, the average number of LAC children was 666, this was an increase from the average of 608 in 2019, thus an increase of 58. A full time IRO's held an average FTE case load of 78 cases totally an average of 97.5 weighted cases. At present 1 LAC case is weighted as 1.5 given the extra requirements in relation to the IRO role for LAC, such as having to write the ROA record per child, whereas CP conferences are supported with clerk capacity. This is considerably higher than the recommended caseload within the IRO handbook "It is estimated that a caseload of 50 to 70 looked after children for a full time equivalent IRO, would represent good practice in the delivery of a quality service, including the full range of functions set out in this handbook. This range should reflect the diversity and complexity of cases across different local authorities".

As the service has grown, the need to reconsider the service structure became increasingly necessary, as well as to provide the opportunity to focus on the identified improvement needs. Therefore, it was agreed from May 2021, the service would have two focus teams, one on Child Protection and one on Looked After Children. Thus, two teams who have expertise in one area, CP or LAC and drive forward the development plan for that area. This would enable the teams to become experts in the area of work, focus on driving forward the improvement plans and achieving positive outcomes for children. The two teams would also lead on their individual development plans (see below), resulting in a robust, efficient Independent Reviewing Officer Service. With the focus teams, invested growth in the IRO service, this will also enable caseloads to be aligned with the IRO handbook recommendations.

The benefits of having IRO and CP Chairs, would enable the service areas to drive forward the areas of improvement required and provide a highly effective, specialist service to our children and families.

2. Introduction

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) sets out the current performance for the service in 2020-2021 for IRO services, identifying our priorities for the forthcoming year. The service provision of the Safeguarding and Performance Service is driven by our vision and mission statement and is underpinned by the shared values and behaviours of the Children and Family Services. The role of the IRO service is central to driving forward the Continuous Improvement Plan and promoting the key goals and behaviours set out in the Road to Excellence.

Continuous Improvement Plan 2021 - 2023
The Road to Excellence



Our Vision

For Leicestershire to be the best place for all children, young people and their families

Our Ambitions for 2021 - 2023

- Help every child to get the best possible start in life
- Help children and their families build strength, resilience, confidence and capacity
- Help children in Leicestershire to live in safe, stable environments and have secure attachments
- Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential.



Core Values and Behaviours that underpin everything we do

Aspirational
We value high aspirations for our Children and Families.

Being Curious
We value being curious and paying attention to detail.

Collaboration
We value collaboration based on building strong working relationships.

Behaviours

Listening
Understand trauma and it's effects on children and families we work with as well as on our workforce.

Building Relationships
Signs of Safety (SoS) supports our approach with children and families.

Outcome Focussed
Striving to improve the lives of the children and families we work with.

Being Accountable
Everyone is responsible for delivering high quality services.



Our pledge for children

Each member of staff pledges that:

- We will put you (children and young people) at the heart of everything we do and celebrate your uniqueness and diversity
- We will listen and value what you tell us and your voice will inform decision making and help us design services
- We will help you to feel safe and where possible this will be with your family
- We will visit you regularly and help you to understand why we are helping you and your family
- We will make sure you always have a timely and detailed plan and support your aspirations for your future
- If you are not able to be in the care of your family we will make decisions about your long-term plans without delay. (see our promise to children in care).

Our leaders and managers pledge to:

- Challenge and support plans at all levels to achieve the best outcomes for children and young people without delay
- Value and enable good relationships between front line practitioners and families by prioritising a stable workforce
- Create a culture where relationship-based practice can flourish using high quality regular supervision offering high-support and high-challenge
- Understand trauma and it's effects on children and families we work with as well as on our workforce
- Know what is happening in frontline practice through direct observation and conversation with our staff.

How we will do it

Embedding excellent practice

- Intervention informed by robust evidence based decision making
- A joined up approach built on consistent high quality targeted Early Help and Social Care advice within Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans
- Reflective supervision to support effective practice with challenge and robust management oversight
- Clear records to capture the child's journey in language they understand.

Taking the right action at the right time

- A strong whole family approach based on effective relationships between staff, children and families
- Strong multi-agency partnerships across all tiers of intervention
- Preventing delay at all stages especially permanence
- Creating sustainable exit plans and building on family networks keeping families together where this is safe
- Commitment to our preventative work in early support related services (Early Help).

Developing policy and performance

- Practice led recording systems to allow staff to focus on time with children
- Up to date policies, procedures and standards that underpin consistent practice
- Well commissioned services for children in care including alternative education provision
- Strategic approach to support recruitment and retention of staff
- Defining children's services for the future based on staff expertise and innovation.

Being a learning organisation

- Using data and audit to know ourselves well and inform our learning
- Establish a shared value base, owned by our workforce
- Sustain a stable and well supported workforce, celebrating diversity and delivering excellent training and development.
- Being risk sensitive, based on valuing family strengths and using effective safety planning.

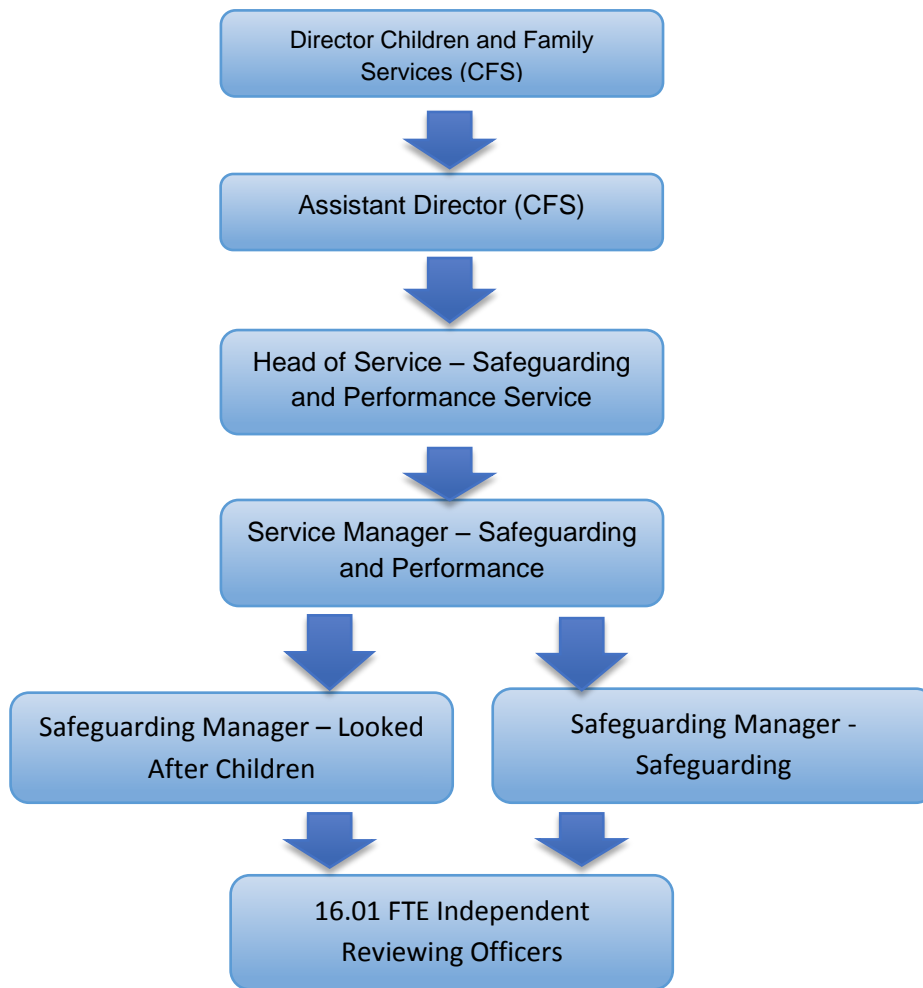
What success will look like

- Effective early help and support will reduce the number of children requiring social work intervention or support through an EHC Plan
- Children and families will tell us that we have made a positive difference to their lives
- Performance indicators evidence improving outcomes for children and young people
- Routine audit shows consistent application of thresholds, improved quality and timeliness of assessment and robust care planning driven by strong management oversight
- We will have examples of where children and families have helped us to develop our services
- Staff will tell us that streamlined systems and processes mean that they can spend effective time with children
- We will retain a highly skilled, committed workforce who have shared values
- Where children and young people cannot safely live at home decisions about legal and emotional permanency are robust and timely.



2706

The IRO Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service. Whilst the service sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS) and is part of the management structure of Children's Social Care (CSC); it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams. The independence of the IRO ensures that they are able to advocate and challenge for children and families to receive the right service at the right time to both protect and support them.



IRO's have a dual role and responsibility for both child protection and children in care functions, through their role in child protection conferences and processes, harmful sexual behaviours (HSB) work with children and young people and Looked After Reviews and care planning. All IROs have a combination of Child Protection cases and Looked After Children.

The quality assurance role of IRO's is critical to the development and improvement of the intervention that we provide to children and families and the impact that we have on the outcomes we achieve. IRO's have key duties that scrutinise and support the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy, care planning and permanence. IRO's are central to identifying and sharing good practice and checking the quality and consistency of provision across the areas of Looked After Children.

IRO's have a statutory role to quality assure the care planning and review process for each child in care and to ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are captured clearly, central to planning and given full consideration. The Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extended the IRO's responsibilities from monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's review to monitoring the performance by the local authority of their functions in relation to a child's case. Through these changes the IRO has an effective, independent and holistic oversight of the child's case and ensures that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

This oversight provides opportunity for independent challenge in decisions identified as not being in the best interests of the child or where drift or delay has an impact on outcomes. An effective IRO service will drive forward improved outcomes for children and young people and will ensure that his/her current wishes and feelings are given full consideration.

This report outlines the contribution made by the IRO Service in Leicestershire, to quality assurance and the improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2020 to March 2021. It is an evaluative report considering how effectively the Safeguarding and Performance Service has fulfilled the responsibilities of its role and the impact that this has had on children and families of Leicestershire. It is an opportunity to identify areas of good practice and those in need of development and improvement. It highlights emerging themes and trends, providing information that contributes to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. The performance measures used to measure success are both qualitative and quantitative data from all areas of quality assurance undertaken throughout children's services.

3. Context

The legal framework and statutory guidance for the IRO role for children in care is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.

The Handbook requires an Annual Report to be written and is prescriptive as to content and format (which this report follows) and the expectation that the report is made available for scrutiny by the Corporate Parenting Board, as well as accessible as a public document.

The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.

The National Children's Bureau (NCB) research 'The Role of the Independent Reviewing Officers in England' (March 2014) provides a wealth of information and findings regarding the efficacy of IRO services. The foreword written by Mr Justice Peter Jackson; makes the following comment:

'The Independent Reviewing Officer must be the visible embodiment of our commitment to meet our legal obligations to this special group of children. The health and effectiveness of the IRO service is a direct reflection of whether we are meeting that commitment, or whether we are failing'.

4. Profile of the IRO Service

Safeguarding and Improvement Unit

1x FTE Service Manager

2x FTE Safeguarding Managers

16.01 x FTE IRO

There are significant benefits of the IRO service being located within Children's Social Care whilst maintaining their independence. The position allows IRO's to have a good understanding of the key performance indicators and the context in which the Local Authority operates. Enabling understanding of the changing demands and pressures in the Department, including the impact of recruitment and retention.

To be successful, the role of the IRO must be valued by senior managers and operate within a supportive service culture and environment. It is not the responsibility of the IRO to manage the case, supervise the social worker or devise the care plan, but to have oversight to ensure that the child's plan is achieving change and creating positive outcomes for children and families.

IRO's have established professional relationships with social work teams and senior managers which are vital to their quality assurance role, enabling them to provide constructive feedback and challenge where needed, as well as promoting their need to have comprehensive oversight of the strengths and needs of the department. In addition, the role is essential to championing good practice. This in turn enables contributions to improvement activity which have a direct impact on improved outcomes for children and families.

The Safeguarding and Performance Service continues to be very well supported by senior leaders and this is evidenced by the support for the service to continue to grow, with 16.01 FTE IRO's now in post, an increase from 15.06 in 2019-2020. This highlights the recognition of the pivotal role the IRO's have in undertaking statutory duties such as chairing meetings and the broader quality assurance role which supports driving and improving practice.

The quality assurance role of the IRO is central to strengthening the implementation of Signs of Safety. IRO's are Practice Leads role modelling and apply the Signs of Safety approach, our identified values and behaviours and being experts in planning and using networks to strength support and protection to our vulnerable children and enhance how we build the wellbeing for out LAC children. This is underpinned by our Signs of Safety practice framework which underpins our work to improve the lives of children and families living in Leicestershire. Therefore, it is critical that their Signs of Safety knowledge and skills remain comprehensive. During 2020-2021 the IRO service has continued to utilise the bespoke training in Signs of Safety. This training supports the quality assurance role of the IRO's and the progress of embedding Signs of Safety throughout all areas of the work within CFS. These additional training opportunities are continuing into 2021-22 as the department continues to embed the Signs of Safety methodology into its culture and practice.

IRO's play a significant role in the development and delivery of high-quality interventions to children in care and in need of protection. The IRO Service in Leicestershire remains committed to this responsibility. This commitment is supported by the implementation of a service specific Learning Audit Framework (2020-21) which highlights areas of need and provides a framework of observation, peer audit and audit analysis to inform learning and drive forward best practice.

Challenge Meetings – IROs, Assistant Director (AD) & Agency Decision Maker (ADM)

The management group for the Safeguarding Unit meet each month for a Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting, to discuss cases and themes of concern. It is then considered whether these cases / matters need to be taken to the Challenge Meeting with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, or if further actions can be taken in the first instance. A tracking

spreadsheet is kept with a log of these discussions and the cases / themes are followed up with the allocated IRO during supervision or during Team Meetings if necessary.

Following the Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting, the managers from the Safeguarding Unit meet with the ADM and Assistant Director monthly to discuss identified areas of concern. Cases discussed in this forum are cases which have followed the full escalation process. Given the quality assurance role of the ADM, particularly in respect of permanence, this working together forum is key to identify themes and areas of practice which need further development.

The increasing number of QA Alerts supports with greater oversight and scrutiny earlier in the process. IRO's discuss all QA's and cases of concern with their manager each month in supervision with a view to escalating to the Pre-Challenge process if necessary, however as the QA process has been further embedded during this period there are far more examples of issues being resolved promptly without the need for senior management oversight and intervention.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)

The IRO service continues to maintain a good working relationship with CAFCASS Children's Guardians, at both IRO and management level. IRO's routinely liaise with Children's Guardians during Care Proceedings and ensure their views on the care plans are represented. Guardians routinely write to the Safeguarding Unit to confirm when they have been allocated a case under an Interim Care Order and are then invited to children's reviews. In addition to the liaison with the Guardian, the IRO also completes an IRO legal view on the proposed final Care Plan. It is positive that CAFCASS management has expressed a strong commitment to continuing to build productive working relationships between IRO's and Guardians.

Family Justice Board

The Safeguarding and Performance Service Manager attends the Family Justice Board meetings. This enables the IRO Service to have a direct connection into Family Justice Board and the Performance Subgroup of the Board. This assists with the IRO service being kept up to date with any issues arising from the Public Law work that in turn influences IRO practice. It also enables IRO's to continue to be up to date with changes to legislation, policies and procedures, enhancing their oversight of the practice and performance of the local authority in respect to children who are subject to care proceedings. This in turns helps ensure timely care planning and better outcomes for the children. The Service Manager ensures the IRO service is updated of key information via Team Meetings, emails and supervision.

Regional IRO Forums

The IRO Service has continued to engage in the East Midlands Regional IRO forums and has had the benefit of quarterly tailored training and networking days over 2020/21. Each IRO Regional Day has a key theme running through the day with a variety of speakers delivering presentations as well as there being opportunities to work in small groups with colleagues from other areas, to share good practice and reflect on ways to improve services for children and their families.

5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children

Being a Corporate Parent

The IRO Service within Leicestershire operates within the context of the council acting as 'Corporate Parents' for all of the children and young people that are placed in the care of the Local Authority. Looking after and protecting children and young people is one of the most important jobs that councils do and it is the council's responsibility to ensure that our children are given the care, support and stability that they deserve.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy states:

We know that we will be successful corporate parents if we really listen to our children and ensure that their views and opinions have meaning in all areas of our decision making, "You said. We did". The impact of this is seen in the enthusiasm, leadership and effectiveness of our children and their participation in our Children in Care Council, Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC), our Corporate Parenting Board and many more participation events.

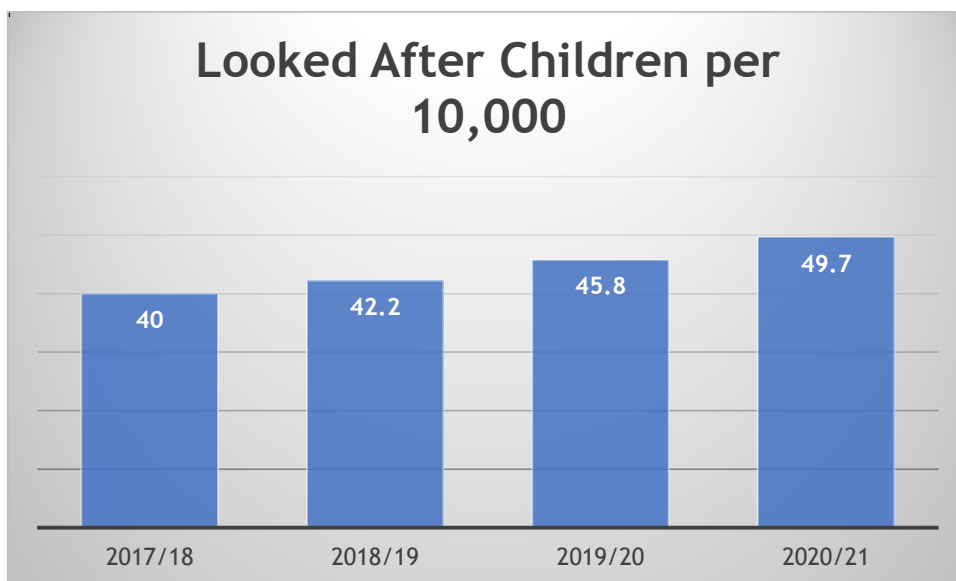
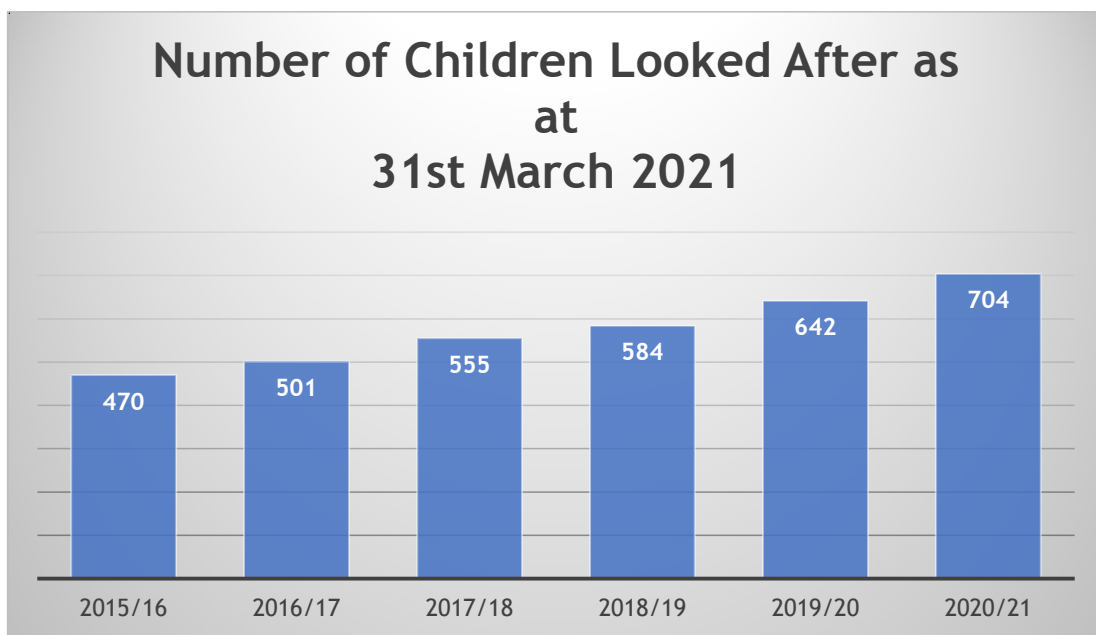
The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the responsibilities of Leicestershire County Council as corporate parent to children in care. The Strategy outlines the expectations and key principles that provide the framework for a cohesive and effective corporate parenting response for children in care and Care Leavers. To hold ourselves to account to achieve this Leicestershire developed 'Our Promise' (April 2019) with our children and partners and this underpins the expectations for all.

 <p>We will support you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide emotional support • Whatever you do we will be there • Ensure all your needs are met • Provide advice, information, practical and financial support • We will make sure that you know what your rights are • Will not judge you if things go wrong. We all make mistakes! 	 <p>We believe in you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will value your strengths and talents • Support you to overcome any stumbling blocks you face • Support you to achieve your goals • Embrace your individuality • Encourage your aspirations • Support you to succeed in life 	 <p>We will respect your identity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will respect your unique identity • Support you to develop your own personal beliefs and values • Accept, respect and celebrate your identity, culture and heritage • Value, respect and support important relationships • Encourage you to express your identity positively 	 <p>We will listen to you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will listen and respect you • Strive to understand your point of view • Place you at the heart of all decisions • Support you to talk about your worries and happy times • Support you to seek independent advocacy 	 <p>We will support you to find a place you can call home</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will do our best to find you a home near to people who are important to you • Ensure you feel safe and secure • As you grow we will support you to learn new skills to support your independence • We are here to support if things go wrong 	 <p>We will inform you</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legal entitlements and services • Up to date and accurate information • Support you to access your care records • Provide information throughout your journey • We will support you if you need to make a complaint 	 <p>We will be a lifelong champion</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support you break down barriers to other agencies • Work together with other services to better meet your needs • Encourage and support you to make positive life choices • Will make sure you know how to get support when you need it! • Trust and respect you
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6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO - Looked After Children's Service?

Children in Care

As can be seen from the tables below, the children in care population in Leicestershire has increased further over 2020-21, in keeping with a steady year on year increase over the last 7 years. Leicestershire had an increase in looked after population from 642 at the end of March 2020 to 705 at the end of March 2021. During this time 195 children left the care of the local authority whilst 240 children became looked after by Leicestershire County Council. This equates to 49.7 looked after children per 10,000 which is an increase from 45.8 in 2019-2020 and 42.2 per 10,000 at the end of 2018/19, this compares with an average of 54.7 for our statistical neighbours average as of 1st April 2020.

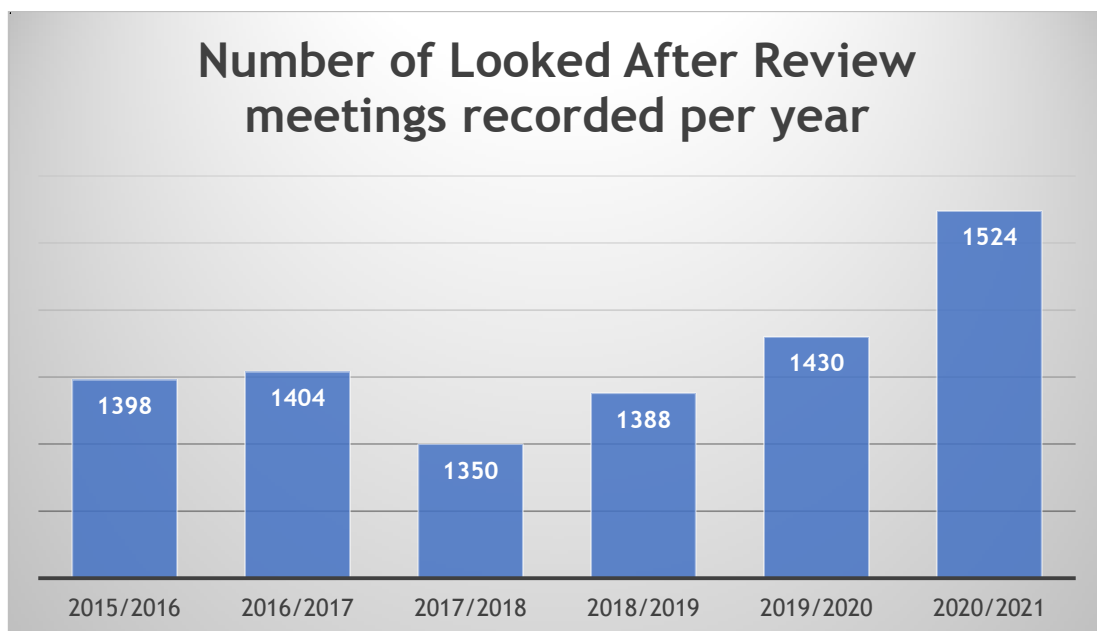


The activity generated from this increase is reflected in the number of review meetings held for children between 1st April 2020 and the end of March 2021 which totalled 1524, this is an increase of 94 meetings from the previous year. The increase of meetings aligns with the increase in the number of children entering care. In addition to the statutory reviews, IRO's can also arrange additional meetings for a number of reasons; including to review a case earlier due to concerns about drift and delay or because there has been a change in the child's care plan, such as a placement move. Meetings may also be arranged where there are concerns regarding risk of placement breakdown, these are agreed at the discretion of the IRO. Within Leicestershire County Council we have good placement stability with 164 having more than one placement in a 12-month period.

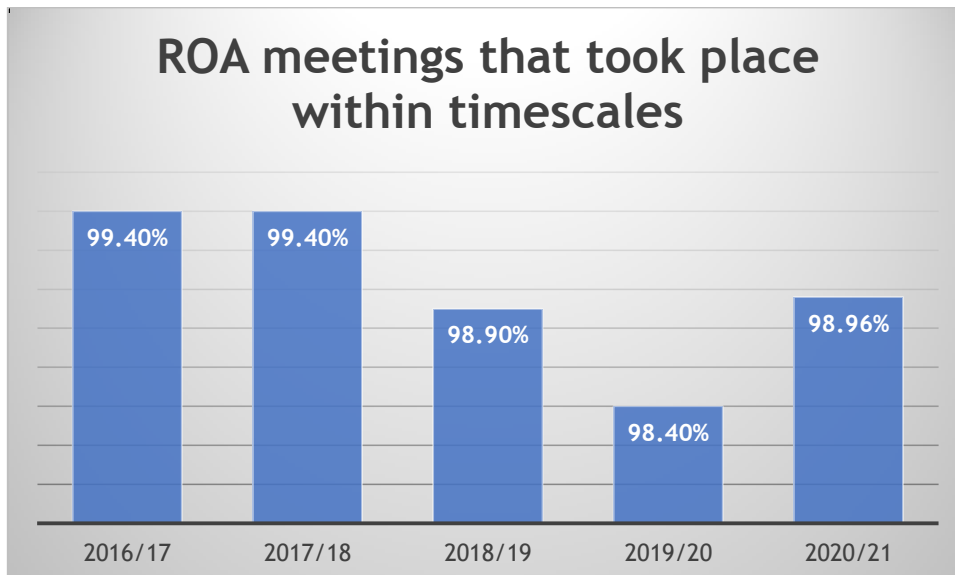
Placements over last 12 months

Number of Placements over the last year as at **01/04/2021**

No of Placements in last Yr	0-4	5-9	10-15	16-17	Grand Total
1	105	117	208	109	539
2	40	21	37	35	133
3	5	1	7	6	19
4	1		1	8	10
5				1	1
6		1			1
Grand Total	151	140	253	159	703



Performance in relation to timeliness of ROA meetings has been consistently strong over recent years, with improved performance over the past twelve months with the percentage of meetings taking place within timescales increasing by just over half a percent from 98.4% to 98.96%.



At the year ending 31st March 2021, the IRO Service had completed 1524 Review of Arrangement meetings for looked after children. Of these 1508 were within timescales which equates to 98.96%. This compares favourably to the previous year in which a slightly lower figure of 98.4% were completed on time. The Safeguarding Unit keep an 'out of date log' to record the reason for each case which does not take place in time. Out of the 16 ROA's that were out of date 9 of these were the initial 28 Day review whereby the child or young person had just come into care and the Safeguarding Unit had not been notified that they had now been looked after, this was either due to oversight or workers not being familiar with the process of booking in the initial review, in one case both the social worker and team manager left the authority shortly after the child became looked after and the incoming staff were not aware of the need for an initial review and on another occasion a young person who was serving a custodial sentence was also placed on remand for a further offence which meant that they became looked after but this was not identified by the locality team in time to arrange a review within timescales. Safeguarding Business Support have good oversight of cases requiring ROA and the timescales for these, ensuring they are arranged within time. Discussions have also been held with Team Managers to ensure their staff are aware of the processes for requesting ROA meetings, thus enabling these figures to continue to improve.

In the remaining six cases the second part of a review had gone out of date following a part 1 meeting being completed within timescales. Four of these cases were delayed with manager agreement as there were either changes in care plan or court timescales which meant that it would be in the child's best interests to wait until a particular issue had been resolved before the part 2 meeting took place. On both final cases which took place out of timescales they were late due to staff sickness.

A significant improvement during 2020/21 has been with getting records of Review of Arrangements written up and uploaded onto mosaic in a timely manner. In the previous year this was raised as a concern, therefore a plan was developed to aim to have all records written and uploaded within twenty working days of the review with a minimum target of this being achieved in 95% of cases. This was seen as highly successful and this success has continued throughout 20/21. At present we are awaiting tableau reporting against the timeliness, however the data collection used at present by our Business Support indicates this timescale is being met.

Similarly, IRO's now routinely upload all decisions and recommendations from ROA's within 5 working days. This is seen as an important part of the IRO role in ensuring the actions are progressed in a timely way to avoid any drift and delay in getting the right outcomes for a child or young person. Again, the Tableau report to monitor this has yet to be developed however it has been monitored via management dip sampling cases which have had positive findings. In the most recent dip sample of cases from March 2021, out of ten cases sampled eight had the five-day decisions uploaded onto case notes within timescales, one was uploaded one day late. In one case there was a greater delay however it was still found that the full set of review of arrangement minutes were uploaded within the required timescale (20 working days).

Another important development over the past eighteen months for the local authority is writing records to the child. The Safeguarding and Performance Service embraced this idea from the start in 2019 by implementing writing ROA records to the child. We have seen during audit activity some excellent examples of ROA minutes written to the child in a clear and sensitive manner. However this approach was not without its challenges not least in finding a suitable style of writing to very young children about decisions that were being made on their behalf, most significantly when it had been decided they were no longer safe to be living with their parents. After much consideration it was agreed that the records should be written not to the child at the age they were at the time the decision was being made but rather at the earliest age they may be able to read and understand their records i.e. the early years of senior school. In the writing to the child dip sample audit of early 2021 ROA's the auditor found that writing to the child was generally well embedded into practice with some excellent examples of work which by writing directly to the child it was clear that the child was at the centre of the decision making as well as explaining the thinking behind decisions in a detailed but sensitive manner. It was also found that this style of writing is well placed to keep a focus on understanding behaviours and difficulties in a way that fits with a trauma informed approach which Leicestershire County Council has now formal undertaken to do.

Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to the care planning. IRO's continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. However, due to the COVID19 restrictions during 2020/21 this is in no doubt a significant area that has been affected by the lockdown measures and the fact that most looked after reviews during this year have taken place virtually.

In every year it is acknowledged that not all children will want to attend their meeting and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways however as the table below show, there has been a consistent pattern of children increasingly attending their ROA's up until this year. Although it is perfectly acceptable for children to participate in their reviews in any way they chose such as via an advocate, sending their written views or asking their carers or social worker to speak on their behalf, nevertheless IRO's always value seeing children and young people face to face and getting to know them and understanding the issues that are most important to them.

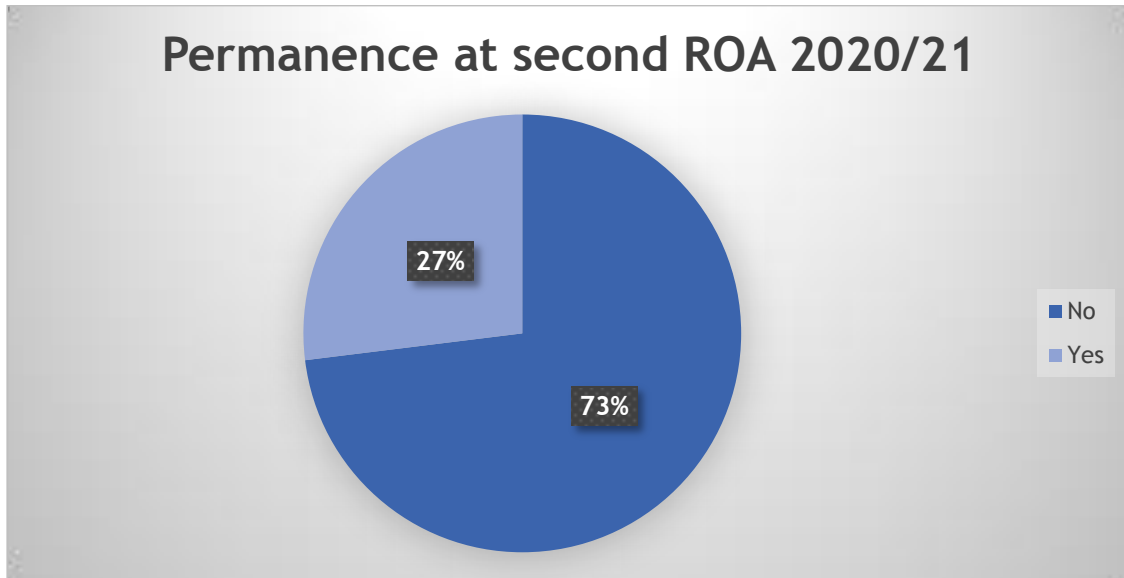
As can be seen below, despite an additional 57 children being in the care of the local authority PN1 shows that 98 less children and young people attended their reviews and spoke for themselves in comparison to 2019/20. It is positive to see that there was only a small increase in the number of children who chose not to participate in their reviews (PN7) with the vast majority of children choosing to participate in other ways – an increase of 186. Prior to COVID19, when completing reviews children or young people may have chosen not to attend the whole meeting, however may have joined for part of the meeting at either the beginning or

end, often this was once they felt more comfortable with those present in the room, this was particularly the case for younger children – thus this would have previously been recorded as the child having participated, if only for a short period. It is key to note, that whilst children and young people have been given the opportunity to join their virtual meetings, for some children joining a virtual meeting may not be something they feel comfortable with, seeing people on a screen and this being less personal. Therefore, they may have asked to speak to the IRO before the meeting to share their views and for these to be advocated on their behalf, this aligns closely with the increase of 186 of young people participating in other methods. Moving forward, with COVID19 restrictions being lifted, IRO's will begin completing the ROA to the preferred method of the child or young person, thus being face to face or via a hybrid model. It is expected IRO's will contact the child prior to the ROA meeting taking place to gain their views on how they wish for their meeting to be facilitated. IRO's are also resuming visits to children to gain their views face to face, whereas during the pandemic this process was completed virtually or via what's app and video calling.

	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21
PN0: Children under the age of 4	381	363	363	370	404	405
PN1: Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves	522	550	554	632	659	561
PN2: Those who attend but communicate via an advocate	10	13	4	10	7	18
PN3: Those who attend and convey their views non-verbally	7	3	2	3	0	4
PN4: Those who attend but don't contribute	15	4	11	10	11	7
PN5: Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf	74	70	52	98	87	81
PN6: Do not attend but communicate their views by another method	295	399	415	296	450	636
PN7: Those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way	100	50	87	163	103	118

Permanence

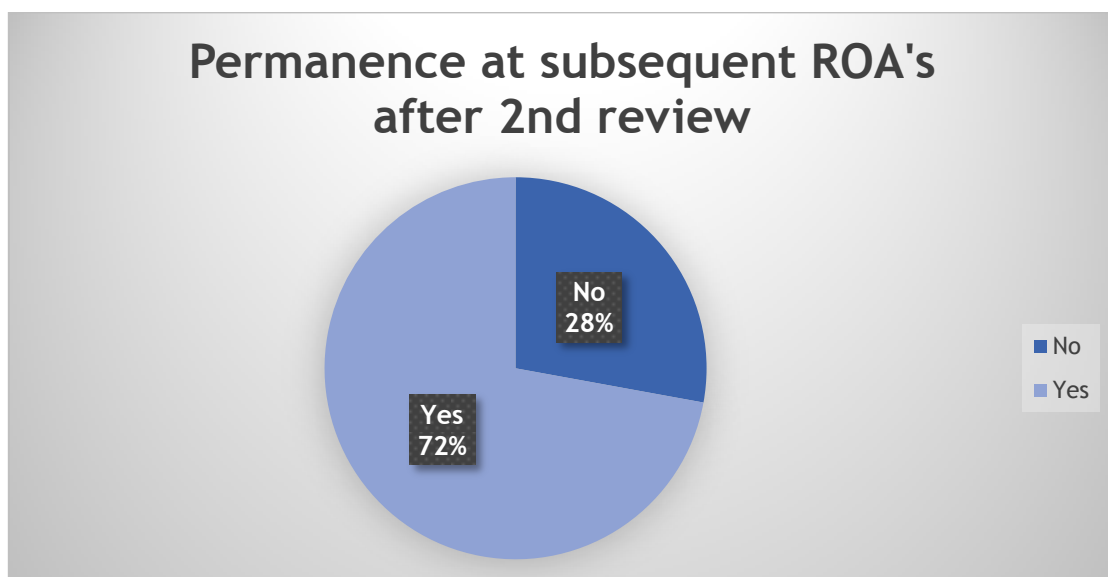
Permanence is described as the long-term plan for the child's upbringing. It aims to ensure a framework of emotional, physical, and legal conditions that will give a child a sense of security, continuity, commitment, identity and belonging.



Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. In 2020/21 only 27% of children had a permanence plan ready for ratification by the IRO, at second review this is slightly lower than in the previous year whereby 35% of second reviews included a permanence plan. Unfortunately, there are lots of reasons why permanence cannot be agreed at the second review, which may include further assessments needing to be carried out to identify if it is safe for a child to return to live with the parent or carer with whom they lived before coming into care and if this is not possible then what would be the best permanence option for their long-term care.

Permanence plans were evidenced in 72% of reviews subsequent to the 2nd review, although this again is below the 80% figure of last year.

During the first part of the COVID19 pandemic, delays were seen in Court timetabling for care proceedings which would have also impacted on the IRO's ability to ratify final care plans if assessments were still outstanding. As the country adapted to COVID19 restrictions and ways of working, we saw these figures begin to improve.



Securing permanence for children in a timely manner continues to be high on the agenda for IRO's and something which is routinely reviewed during ROA meetings. This is prioritised in line with the Leicestershire's drive to take the right actions and the right time, with a specific drive to prevent delay in permanency.

IRO's will arrange additional ROA meetings to be convened if there are concerns regarding drift and delay in respect of permanence and care planning as well as using the Quality Assurance alert and escalation process. If there are ongoing concerns that do not appear to be addressed through the normal escalation process the case will be referred to the Challenge meeting whereby the Service Manager for Safeguarding, the Agency Decision Maker and Assistant Director meet to look at what are the underlying cause for concern and seek the support of the relevant Head of Service to address these difficulties if necessary.

Beyond having a permanence plan for children in care it is important that a child's permanence is achieved, this means that the child has certainty about their living arrangements and that it has been agreed that those who care for them will be able to meet their needs not only now but right through until they are ready to live independently. This is agreed through the Permanence Panel and overseen by a Head of Service.

Both the Service Manager and Assistant Service Manager – Looked After Children lead are in members of the permanence panel and the QA and audit framework, ensuring rigorous oversight and IRO representation in this forum. Development work is being completed to update the Terms of Reference for this panel to have a focus on permanence being both legal permanence but also emotional permanence, thus ensuring the best outcomes for the long-term care of our looked after children.

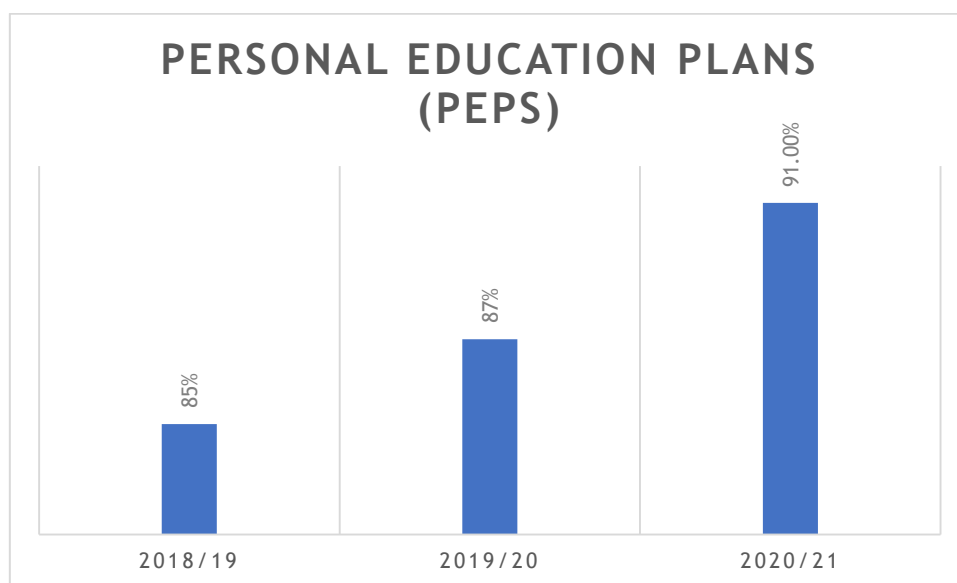
IRO Challenge & Escalation

Practice improvement and quality assurance is a central role for the IRO Service. Since September 2016, the Quality Assurance Alerts have been used by the IRO service effectively to identify areas of good practice as well as areas of concern, including quality and timeliness of reports, drift or delay in care planning, concerns regarding statutory duties not being met and areas of practice which need developing. As a service, we have routinely reviewed the Quality Assurance Alerts to help identify any key themes or areas which need to be addressed; this is then shared within the Senior Management Group.

From 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020 there were 130 Quality Assurance Alerts completed in respect of children in care. Of these there were 41 for good practice and 89 highlighting areas of concern. This was an increase in the overall number of alerts since the previous year by 37.7%. With the continued emphasis on quality assurance the Safeguarding and Performance Service worked with IT to build the QA process into mosaic, the purpose being to improve consistency and enable greater management oversight. Previously QA's were recorded by the Safeguarding Administration Team on Excel, this has now moved to Tableau, this provides a highly detailed range of data in relation to QA's including how many have been completed by each IRO, the reasons for each QA such as good quality social work report or concern about the suitability of child's placement, it can also breakdown the QA's by which team the alert is sent to. This provides important information in real time so management can see what the key issues are being raised within the local authority, where and specific difficulties may be and take the necessary remedial action. This enables themes to be identified and addressed more systematically to support improvement in practice generally and target training??

Although this has been a significant step forward there were some initial difficulties with the data validation and the overall statistics for the number of QA's in year 2020/21 are incomplete. The number of QA's recorded by the Safeguarding Administration Team for the year are 93 in total for all looked after cases, with 66 for concern and 27 for good practice. This is significantly lower than in the previous year which is undoubtedly linked to data being lost in the changeover to the new system. IRO's routinely use a check list know as Prep forms, to go through cases in advance of ROA meetings to ensure key practice standards are met, if there are any areas that are not met then they must either complete a QA or record on the child's file why they believe a QA is not necessary on this occasion.

Personal Education Plans



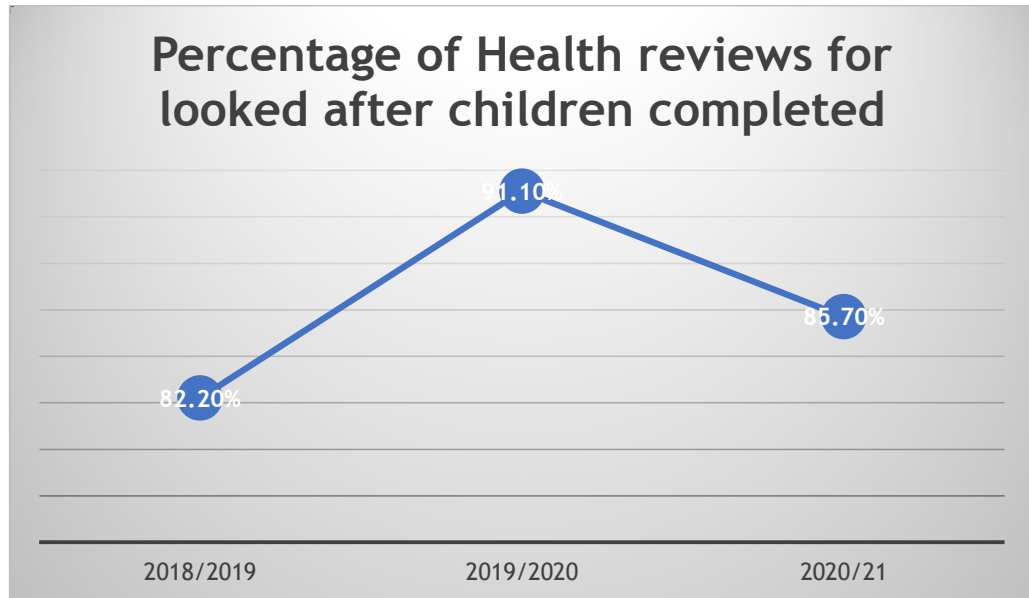
In 2020/21 of the all looked after children that were eligible for a Personal Education Plan (PEP) ninety one per cent were completed, this is an increase from the previous year during at which time eighty seven per cent of looked after children had a PEP recorded. This is a clear sign of continuous improvement and strong performance. Of the 139 children and young people that did not have a PEP 67 of these were recorded during a first review, this would be expected as the initial review must take place within 28 days of a child becoming looked after, although it could be held much sooner leaving little time for a PEP to be undertaken.

At ROA meetings IRO's routinely confirm if PEP meetings have taken place, that all recommendations are being progressed and if this is sufficient or whether further actions necessary. Completion of PEP's is seen as high priority as they are fundamental to ensuring each child has access to the right educational support to enable them to achieve their potential. To this end IRO's work closely with the Virtual School, with the Education Improvement Officers regularly attending the child's ROA.

There are several reasons why a child may not have a PEP on file, one of the most significant being that they are not in school due to an unplanned placement move. With any unplanned move the IRO will undertake a 28-day ROA to ensure the right steps have been taken to support the child in their new placement, including education provision. This has been an area of ongoing focus within the Safeguarding and Performance Service throughout 2020/21 to ensure there is no drift and Safeguarding Managers have been reviewing caseloads with IRO's

in supervision to identify any cases of ongoing concern where a young person is not accessing education and requires escalation within the Education Department through the Virtual School.

Health Check's completed within twelve months



In 2020/21 85.7% of children had their health reviews completed within timescales, this is a dip on the previous year's figure of 91.9% although still above the rate of 2018/19 when 82% had a health reviews within timescales. A key reason for the dip in performance this year appears to be outside of the control of the Safeguarding and Performance Service. LAC health reviews are monitored on via a performance dashboard on monthly basis and presented to the Leicestershire, Leicester, and Rutland Multi Agency Operational Meeting and then at the Multi Agency Strategic Meeting. The dashboard includes exception reporting that looks at the reasons behind any delays that month. In 2020/21 the dashboard indicates that the main reason for delay was the late submission of the referral from social care to health. This is an area that is being addressed by the nominated Leicestershire County Council strategic lead.

Safeguarding and Health undertake joint audits twice per year to assess the impact of the health assessment on children and young people's care plans. At the most recent audit it was found that health assessments were being referred to by IRO's in looked after reviews although this was not consistent in all cases. There were some good examples of how the LAC review covered all areas of health including discussing the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire and that even though the score was low and the young person was exhibiting good mental health it was important to consider the history of trauma and the potential for this to become an issue in the future.

In another example a young person had highly complex physical and mental health needs and although the review looked in these issues in great detail it was felt that direct reference to the health review would have assisted and in such a complex case the presence of a LAC Nurse would have been beneficial to ensure that all aspects of the health needs were discussed in sufficient detail.

Dental checks within a twelve-month period

As with health reviews dental checks are viewed with high importance in contributing to children and young people's well-being. In 2019/20 there were 407 (87.6%) of children who had a dental check within the last twelve months. This is an area which is routinely scrutinised by IRO's within the ROA's however performance dipped considerably in this area during 2020/21 with only 28.4% of all looked after children having their dental checks completed within timescales, this is due to the COVID19 restrictions being in place with dentist only having capacity to see patients for emergency treatment for much of the year.

7. What is the impact for our children and families – IRO: Looked After Children's Service?

Looked after children

Information from IRO's has indicated that virtual meetings and contacting children via Skype has worked very well for some children and young people whilst for others it has been more difficult. Prior to COVID19 restrictions IRO's would regularly encourage young people to chair their own meetings, although this may require some initial preparation work once the child or young person has had a positive experience of chairing their meeting they would happily do this routinely, however chairing a virtual meeting has a different feel to it and IRO's have reported that young people have been far less keen to do this and in some cases said the virtual meeting has felt so different they have chosen not to attend. During the pandemic we have seen a reduction in children attending their ROA's however an increase in them participating in other methods, including one to one discussions with the IRO whom then advocates their views during the ROA on their behalf, thus continuing to ensure the voice of the child is heard. All workers have shown inventive ways of engaging children such as using what's app and video calls.

Alternatively, there have been many reports of young people, in particular teenagers who had not previously been attending their meetings face to face but felt far more comfortable participating in a virtual meeting rather than having to attend in person. Moving forward, with COVID19 restrictions being lifted, IRO's will begin completing the ROA to the preferred method of the child or young person, thus being face to face or via a hybrid model. It is expected IRO's will contact the child prior to the ROA meeting taking place to gain their views on how they wish for their meeting to be facilitated. IRO's are also resuming visits to children to gain their views face to face, whereas during the pandemic this process was completed virtually or via what's app and video calling.

Permanence

It is essential that children experience not only physical permanence in the form of a family they are a part of and a home they live in but also a sense of emotional permanence, of belonging and the opportunity to build a strong identity. The IRO plays a pivotal role in promoting permanence being secure for children in a timely way, having rigorous oversight of the permanence process and using the QA process to raise any concerns regarding drift and delay.

Feedback from social workers who attend Permanence Panel regularly highlights how pleased children are to be reassured the case has been approved by panel and it has formally been agreed that their long term plan will be to continue to live with cares that they have identified where they feel happy and safe. The chair of the panel writes to the child direct to share this

decision with them, which not only provides them with written confirmation but also gives the child and foster family an opportunity to celebrate permanence being secured.

IRO Challenge & Escalation

The Safeguarding Service has worked hard to embed Quality Assurance Alerts into practice and become part of Leicestershire's culture of continuous improvement. It is important that when an alert for concern is raised that these are written in a clear and objective manner that highlights any work that needs to be done whilst acknowledging positives and difficulties in achieving the right outcomes. IRO's are aware of the pressures colleagues in social care may be working in and aim to ensure that any QA is not written as a criticism of the worker but rather to highlight the importance of the local authority getting things right for the child or young person. This is in keeping with the core values in the Road to Excellence of being outcome focused and ensuring everyone is accountable for delivering high quality services.

An example of how a QA makes a difference for a child is in case A, whereby the QA was raised by the IRO as they were concerned that A had not had their life story work completed. This was raised as a significant concern as the IRO found when discussing their care plan with them that they did not really understand their journey into care or why they had become looked after. On this occasion the IRO requested life story be completed as a matter of urgency to help the young person make sense of their situation. This is an area that IRO's have to monitor closely, not only as it is a concern if life story work is not completed but also it may be necessary for this to be revisited from time to time as children get older and ask more searching questions as to why they became looked after.

The QA processes ensure the IRO maintains independent oversight of the case, challenging areas of concern as well as identifying areas of good practice. This helps to ensure that children and young people's care plans are appropriate, in line with their identified needs and that any actions raised are addressed in a timely way, in line with the QA process. Thus, prompting improved and timely outcomes for children.

Health Assessments

Health assessments are always seen as a vital aspect of the local authorities corporate parenting responsibility and health routinely report on this at the Corporate Parenting Board. These are seen as vital not only to ensure children and young people's physical health needs are met but also the health review is a key opportunity to ensure that their emotional well-being and mental health needs are being met.

Feedback from children

A key theme that has been regularly raised at the Children in Care Council has been the importance of consistency. The Review of Arrangement expectation statement will go some way to addressing this however IRO's have undertaken to look at addressing consistency through a range of measures including team meeting discussions, peer supervision and in a development day. It is planned that colleagues will review a random selection of ROA records produced by their peers to get greater understanding of their fellow IRO's working practices, additionally they will talk through their individual approaches to chairing meetings with a view to collectively developing a clear standard of what good looks like and what children and young people can expect from their IRO.

Feedback from professionals

Feedback received by the safeguarding manager on the IRO service from professionals is often linked to their experience of receiving quality assurance alerts. There is a very clear message that social workers value the positive QA's and appreciate when IRO's take the time to highlight and document when a good piece of work has been completed. In relation the QA's for concern their has been increasing feedback to indicate that social workers and team managers appreciate being contacted by phone in advance of the QA being sent, on some occasions it might be found that the issue can be addressed immediately without the need for a formal QA to be completed. On other occasions it can help the person receiving the alert to understand why the concern has been raised and what needs to be done without feeling criticised or individually challenged. The IRO Service values feedback from professionals and acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with colleagues to get the best outcomes for children.

8. What can we do better - IRO: Looked After Children's Service?

Looked after children

Improving the participation and engagement of children and young people is central to the recovery plans for the Safeguarding and Performance Service. This includes, continuing to be creative with technology where children express their preference for the meeting is virtual, however IRO's resuming face to face ROA meetings where safe to do so and where this is the preference of the child. It is essential that the IRO obtains the views of the child regarding how they wish for their meeting to take place, but are also offered face to face visits with the IRO to obtain their views and wishes if they do not wish to participate in the ROA meeting itself.

As COVID restrictions have lifted IRO's have been going out to see children in a COVID safe way, going for walks, meeting in garden's or in schools which have been assessed as COVID secure.

However as some restrictions remain in place it is highly unlikely the IRO service will return to the previous way of working in the near future and there needs to be a greater investment in time to get to know children and young people through virtual means. All IRO's have been issued with iPhone's with the capacity to contact children and their carers by WhatsApp, as well as through Skype and Teams, thus ensuring the views of the child can be sought and advocated on their behalf.

Permanence

In between ROA meetings, IRO's have endeavoured to track cases and this is recorded on the child's file on Mosaic as IRO case tracking. The IRO 'footprint' has developed significantly during recent years. IRO's aim to ensuring they have oversight during review periods and addressing any concerns regarding drift and delay. Although good progress has been made in midway tracking there is room for improvement in relation to consistency, as there may be significant oversight on some of the more complex cases however as a service we now want to ensure this foot print is equally visible in all cases.

In addition to long term fostering some carers may wish to offer permanence by way of a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). This can be seen by many children and carers as a more

preferable option as this offers legal security without ongoing involvement of the local authority. In all appropriate cases this will routinely be discussed by the IRO at each review. IRO's will regularly discuss the potential for applying for and SGO and talk through any questions, worries or reservations that the carers may have, if appropriate the IRO will recommend that the family have a separate meeting with either the child's social worker or their supervising social worker to get more information about what financial, practical support and training they would be entitled to as part of an SGO support plan. Although this is clearly good practice, again the Safeguarding Service are challenging ourselves to look at what more we can do to progress appropriate cases to securing an SGO in a timelier manner.

IRO Challenge & Escalation

The Safeguarding Service is committed to improving consistency in how QA's are utilised. In addition to formal QA's there is also the option for informal QA's to be recorded. As part of the development of the new LAC focused team there will be an increased emphasis on all IRO's having a share understanding of when cases fall below the required standard.

Health Assessments

A key issue for Health and Safeguarding to address is the great use of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) to help establish an understanding of children and young people's wellbeing. This is usually completed by carers and then sent to LAC Health in advance of the review. However following audit activity, it has been found that getting completed SDQ's returned from carers and sent to Health in a timely way has presented some challenges. To address this Safeguarding has been working with social care administration to ensure that the process is as efficient as possible as well as looking to develop training for social workers to ensure that they fully understand the SDQ process and what their role is in this.

9. Identified areas of development - IRO: Looked After Children's Service

- A key objective is to see children face to face where it is safe to do so. IRO's have identified those young people on their caseloads that have found virtual communication most difficult and are now prioritising arranging visits and where possible face to face ROA meetings - **August 2021**
- Throughout this year the majority of virtual meetings have been held on Skype, although video connectivity is possible the local authorities preferred method of video conferencing is Microsoft Teams and it is planned to move all ROA meetings to Teams in the coming months – **October 2021**
- The child consultation booklet to be prompted and used, with the development of an electronic version for children to use if this is their preference – **September 2021**
- The implementation of the midway case tracking template and secondly the revision of the Review of Arrangements monitoring form to include enhanced monitoring of permanence data – **June 2021**
- The midway case tracking template will now be completed by all IRO's for looked after children at the half way point between reviews this is to ensure that all actions agreed at the previous review have been completed within timescales and no other issues are causing drift or delay. This process will be supported by the Administration Team who will include the date for the midway reviews in the IRO diaries. It is anticipated that this will provide not only greater IRO oversight but will make a real difference for children in progressing their journey to achieving permanence – **June 2021**
- The Review of Arrangements monitoring form is being revised as currently it highlights when a permanence plan has been agreed but not when it has been achieved which is

now being added along with monitoring the ongoing success of a permanence placement. In doing this there has been a greater focus within the IRO group on the full range of permanence and what steps need to be have both legal and emotional permanence – **October 2021**

- A major step forward in the application of QA's will be the use of the Tableau report which is now fully operational. This will enable IRO's and managers to see when QA's are still open and require a response from social care before the case can be closed. This should support the QA process to address concerns in a timely manner – **June 2021**
- Safeguarding managers to be part of the social care performance management group, this is important as by having a greater oversight on the full range of children's social care data it will be possible to cross reference any areas of concern with QA activity. The expectation will be that if any data highlight's concerns in certain areas, for example if a particularly team are not producing reports within given timescales it will be possible to see if IRO's are addressing this with the team on a case by case basis – **June 2021**
- As part of our ongoing to commitment to promote equality and diversity we have now added this as its own category of concern which enables IRO's to raise any issues whereby any child or young person's diversity needs are not being met. This will now be monitored within Tableau to enable managers to identify if there are any patterns or specific areas of concern which can be address as a matter of urgency – **August 2021**
- A further development this year will be with IRO's taking part in the thematic audit activity carried out by managers on a quarterly basis. The plan is for each full time IRO to complete two audits per year. Again, this will help the IRO's have a greater understanding of colleague's work, improve consistency, and give a more in depth understanding of what good looks like for Leicestershire. This is in line with the service being part of a learning organisation, using data and audit to know ourselves well and inform our learning – **May 2021**

10. Corporate Parenting Team

The Corporate Parenting Team is also based within the Safeguarding and Performance Service. This is comprised of two Participation Officers who lead on all participation activities including the Children in Care Council (CICC) and Beacon Voices, looked after children's choir. Additionally, there are three Children's Rights Officers who provided advocacy for young people who are both looked after or subject to Child Protection procedures.

The ethos of corporate parenting runs throughout the work of the Safeguarding and Performance Service. The Participation Officers work directly with children and young people to get their voice collectively, to hear their views about the local authority and the services they have experienced. We have a very active Children in Care Council who meet monthly to not only socialise and meet other looked after children and young people but also examine specific aspects of Children's Services and hold the local authority to account with delegated members of the CICC attending the quarterly Corporate Parenting Board.

The team consists of 3 FTE Children's Rights Officers, 1.6 FTE Participation Officers, who are lined managed by the Safeguarding Manager for the Looked After Children's Service.

11. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our Corporate Parenting Team?

Participation

The Participation Team have a strong ethos of working with children and young people following the 'you said, we did' philosophy, this is routinely evidenced within the work of the Children in Care Council. Members of the Children in Care Council continue to take part in the interview panels to have their voice in who the local authority recruits into key roles in the Children and Family Services. We continue to have positive participation in this process, where the young people design questions they wish to ask and feedback to the recruitment panel.

Children in Care Council recently participated in the development of a Contact Expectations Statement and a Review of Arrangements Expectation Statement to improve the experiences of our children who have contact and participate in their Review of Arrangement Meetings. These documents clearly identify the views, wishes and perspective of children and young people and have been welcomed by the workers to ensure they are reflected in contact with family members and Review of Arrangement Meetings. Young people met with a group of IROs and talked about their experience of their meetings, what they thought went well, where things could be better and shared their views on why consistency was so important so that all children and young people have a positive experience when attending their meetings. It is important to note that it was the young people themselves that wanted to meet with the IROs to be reassured that any expectation statement they designed would be a meaningful document that was both aspirational and achievable. The next step will be to obtain feedback from children and young people on the impact these Statements have had on their experiences.

Members of the Children in Care Council have also participated in the production of a young people's version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy. A video has been designed by members of the Children in Care Council. Young people were consulted on what the children's version of the strategy should look like and they were clear that they did not want it presented in a written

form that looked like a leaflet or booklet so it was agreed to record it as an animated video. The young people were involved in every step of the design process. They were asked what they thought the most important elements of corporate parenting was and what did it mean to them. This generated a lot of ideas that were developed into statements and they were then asked via mentimeter to identify the most important ones which were then used for the basis of the script of the video which the young people recorded.

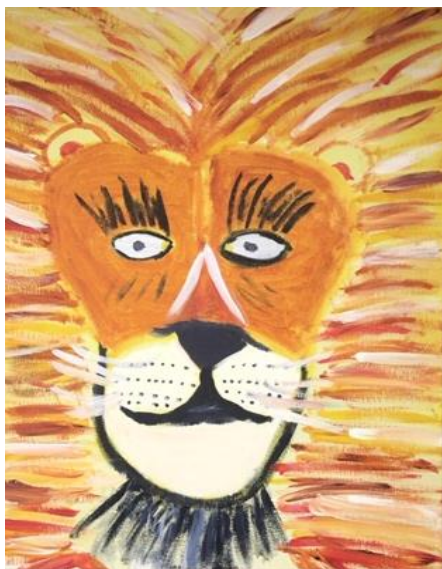
This has now been launched at the Corporate Parenting Board in April 2021 and subsequently shown in several forums including Child Care Managers Meeting. On every occasion the feedback has been positive and professionals have commented how powerful it is to hear the young people's comments. A link to the video can be found below:

<https://youtu.be/M-C7jdPB80s>

The Children in Care Council have also been working with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, to develop a number of different projects with a view to all the CICC members being Green Champions. One of the issues they are looking at currently is issues they have been exploring so far are; stopping the use of single use plastic in their own environment, it is planned in the summer they will be part of a tree planting campaign, setting up bug hotels and a wild life garden at County Hall. They are also planning an environment cleaning campaign such as going to Bradgate Park and do a litter pick. The young people are also really keen to have the opportunity to do a beach clean, this is likely to be planned when further COVID restrictions are lifted.

Beacon Voice's looked after children's choir has continued to meet throughout lockdown, despite it not being possible to meet face to face and sing together the group have met Monday, initially this was just to keep the cohesion of the group together and engaging in fun activities such as games and quizzes, more recently they have been working with our new choir master to write a new song they are looking forward to performing as soon as the COVID restrictions are lifted.

As it has not been possible to arrange face to face activities in the usual way during this year the Participation Team have been very creative in looking at other ways to engage children and young people. One popular way has been with virtual art workshops. These have been arranged with two separate companies. In one session there was an online tutorial where all the participants learnt to paint a tiger. An example of a tiger painted by one of our young people:



Our main participation event for the summer 2020 was the virtual Leicestershire's Got Talent competition that took place in August 2020. All our looked after children and young people and care leavers were invited to send in a short video clip of themselves performing their chosen talent. These were divided into three age ranges of junior, senior and care leaver. There was an excellent diversity of entries with children and young people not only singing and dancing but also dog training, trampolining and crocheting to name but a few. The finals were held on a Teams meeting with a judging panel including the director and assistant director of children's services and a young person who was the then Chair of the Children in Care Council. The winner of the youngest category sang and danced to a song from the Greatest Showman, the senior winner impressed the judges with their singing and playing the ukulele with the final winner being a young man who submitted a video of himself in a race against the clock to complete multiple Rubik's cubes. However, the judges were so impressed with all the entrants that on the night it was agreed everyone should get a voucher for their brilliant performances.

Additionally, there were two other events ran by Cathy Matthews - artist which focused on water colouring and drawing and a 'Swirly Sky's' workshop. Due to the positive feedback we are now exploring the option of having a monthly art club.

The Participation Team have also been supporting a new group for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or questioning (LGBTQ+) young people called Out in Care. This was devised by one of our care experienced young people who wanted to set up a forum for young people to meet in a safe environment, discuss issues and share information and experiences.

12. What is the impact for our children and families – Corporate Parenting Service?

CICC represents a group of YP that have been 'done to' and there have been lots of decisions made about them, the CICC given them the opportunity to work in a safe and secure environment, gives them a voice, influence and enables them to exercise their ability to show they are experts in their own lives. They can see their impact and influence in positive ways such as with their involvement with the recruitment of senior managers.

One of the Participation Officers commented 'on the journey of influence young people's confidence grows and helps them realise their potential...it's so rewarding to see young people develop their confidence, especially when you see them leading discussions at the Corporate Parenting Board, discussing important issues with the Director, Assistant Director and Heads of Service'. The discussions in Corporate Parenting Board can be very empowering for young people and helps the local authority and partnership agencies keep a clear focus on what the issues are for young people.

13. What can we do better – Corporate Parenting Service?

We are very mindful of the need to make the CICC and participation in general as representative as possible. As we start to return to more face to face participation activities it is important not to lose sight of how productive and engaging some of the virtual meetings and activities are. A key area of development for the coming year to look at different ways to engage our looked after children and young people who are placed out of county and help them feel more connected to Leicestershire and reassure them that their voice is just as important.

Furthermore, we would like to build stronger relationships between Participation and the IRO's as well as the locality teams, Children in Care Teams and the Disabled Childrens Service.

It is well established that the Corporate Parenting Team are a highly capable and committed group with a passion for supporting our children and young people. The vision of the team is to support all children and young people who require advocacy and ensure their voice is heard. The aspiration is to increase the range of participation events to enable a greater cross section of our children and young people to have a voice in shaping the services that are there to help them and more broadly to develop the ethos of Corporate Parenting across the Local Authority and with Partner Agencies including the introduction and co-ordination of Corporate Parenting Champions.

The roles within the Corporate Parenting Team have evolved since the job descriptions were first produced. As a result of the developments within the service, including the growth of the service and the roles and responsibilities, it was agreed an evaluation of the team was required and this will be completed in summer 2021, which will include service redesign and delivery focused on improving increased management drive and oversight to drive forward the development of the service further and thus enhancing service delivery to our children and young people.

Feedback from children

The Participation Officers work hard to support children and young people, development their confidence and reinforce to them how important it is that they have a voice and can express their view in a way that ensures they are being heard, probably nowhere more so than in the Children in Care Council. The monthly meetings are a mix of both fun activities and focussed work including looking at area's where the looked after services could change and improve to meet the needs of children and young people better.

A selection of quotes from young people can be seen below:

"Through the Children in Council we regularly attend Corporate Parenting Board meetings. This gives us a fantastic opportunity to meet senior managers and influence the important decisions that matter to Children in Care"

"CiC Council has really helped with my self-esteem and confidence. Before getting involved I was shy and very nervous, now I am far more confident to talk about how I am feeling and to challenge things in a positive way"

"Children in Care Council has not only been an amazing social experience to talk and get to know more people, but it's also been a rewarding experience to know the work that we do is helping improve the lives of other young people in care".

Unfortunately, the three major events whereby we are best able to capture the feedback of children and young people were all postponed in 2020/21 due to covid restrictions, these being the summer scheme, winter fun day and the Celebration of Achievement Awards. All of which are normally face to face activities whereby young people are given an opportunity to use a range of art resourced to express their views, hopes, thoughts and feelings, which can then be recorded on story boards. Although these did not take place in 2020/21 everyone is very much looking forward the August 2021 summer scheme, which will now be our first major face to face event since the start of the pandemic.

As a result of the success of the virtual art groups in lockdown, an exciting development is now planned, to introduce monthly art sessions in partnership with a local voluntary sector arts project, this will be a great opportunity to capture the views and insights of our younger children in care

It is also planned that a further means to capture children and young people's feedback in 2021/22 is by way of quarterly surveys to assess the impact of participation activities and inform the development of future work.

Feedback from professionals

Feedback from professionals in relation to the work of the corporate parenting team and the Children in Care Council has been highly positive this year.

The Corporate Parenting Team and the young people have had excellent feedback on the consultation work they have completed on the Defining the Future of Children's Service's. As referred to above, this was a group of young people that shaped the way the consultation was undertake and it challenged the consultants to rethink the way they interacted with young people to gain their views. Rather than ask young people to complete a questionnaire or talk to the consultants direct. A group of young people were supported by the Participation Officer to interview other young people peer to peer about the development of new services. This has been a high profile piece of work which is being used to inform the design and development of future services for children and families. The consultants developed a list of key areas they wanted the young people's views on and the young people developed and adapted the questions to ensure they would be meaningful to their peers. The consultants full of praise for all the young people that worked in this process, the strength of it being they were able to capture so much key information as there were no communication barriers in place as it was care experience young people talking to other care experienced young people seeking their ideas and views. This has been seen as a flagship piece of development work.

At the launch of the Children's Version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy at the Corporate Parenting Board, professionals commented how powerful it was hear children talk about what corporate parenting means to them and what they would ask of those with this responsibility.

Initially this was designed by young people for young people but the feedback has been so positive it is now being seen as a valuable tool in conveying the key messages of what corporate parenting means. It is being considered as a resource to be used in training for colleagues within children and families services and partnership agencies as well as it having the potential to be shown as part of an induction programme for newly elected members and part of ongoing training for existing counsellors.

The work the young people completed on the Review of Arrangements expectation document was very well received by the IRO's, firstly when it was shared with a number of them at a Children in Care Council meeting, then this was taken to the following IRO Team Meeting for the whole team to consider. The feedback on their work was very positive and the proposals the young people had made were fully embraced by the team who agreed this should be used to inform their day to day practice going forward.

14. Identified areas of development – Corporate Parenting Service

- The roles within the Corporate Parenting Team have evolved since the job descriptions were first produced. As a result of the developments within the service, including the growth of the service and the roles and responsibilities, it was agreed an evaluation of the team was required and this will be completed in summer 2021, which will include service redesign and delivery focused on improving increased management drive and oversight to drive forward the development of the service further and thus enhancing service delivery to our children and young people.
- The young people in the Children in Care Council have expressed an interest working with social workers to deliver a workshop on what makes a good social worker, sharing their views on what are the elements of their practice that are really important to young people and best practice in relationship building.
- The Children in Care Council have also been working with Leicestershire and Rutland Wildlife Trust, to develop a number of different projects with a view to all the CICC members being Green Champions. One of the issues they are looking at currently is issues they have been exploring so far are; stopping the use of single use plastic in their own environment, it is planned in the summer they will be part of a tree planting campaign, setting up bug hotels and a wild life garden at County Hall. They are also planning an environment cleaning campaign such as going to Bradgate Park and do a litter pick. The young people are also really keen to have the opportunity to do a beach clean, this is likely to be planned when further COVID restrictions are lifted.
- The Participation Team have also been working with the UASC Team to undertake a scoping exercise looking at what would be the best ways to plan regular engagement meetings and activities for our unaccompanied asylum seekers. Although there have been a number of events held for them previously including a theatre trip it is hoped that by having a regular activities or meetings it will make the Participation Team more accessible to this group of young people.

15. Independent Reviewing Officer - Service Developments 2021-2022

Looked After Children - Independent Reviewing Officers			
Objective	Actions	Lead	Date for implementation
Children have timely targeted high quality intervention to maximise their outcomes using skills across agencies			
An effective and consistent IRO Service to be implemented, providing expertise, knowledge and experience which can be shared with other Children and Families Services.	Joint IRO/CIC council Task and finish Group to work on the development of more consistency of the application of Signs of Safety within Looked After Children reviews; to enhance the inclusion of the voice and participation of the child or young person.	IRO's to be identified to attend CIC each month, to complete this work and keep an open source of communication between the IRO's and CIC.	Jun-21
	Care plans / Pathway Plans to be based on the individual needs of the child / young person and be SMART.	IRO's to be identified to attend CIC each month, to complete this work and keep an open source of communication between the IRO's and CIC.	Jun-21
Children receive the right intervention without drift and delay to ensure decisions are timely and appropriate to their needs to improve their outcomes			
Clear evidence of the IRO's oversight of cases, ensuring any concerns regarding drift and delay are addressed in a timely way.	Mid-way reviews to be completed on all cases, with the IRO reviewing the progress of the care plan, ensuring the IRO footprint and oversight is evident on case files. Any concerns raised during the review should be raised using the QA process.	IRO's	Jun-21

	The QA process to be effectively used to address any areas of concern, as well as recognising good practice.	IRO's	Jun-21
	Ensure the supervision policy is being adhered to, with cases having regular supervision discussions on file, in line with the timescales set out in the policy, including clear management oversight and driving forward the care planning.	IRO's	Jun-21

Clear, accessible and easily understood records support our children understanding their journey and decisions now and in the future.			
A timely, high quality and inclusive service is provided to children and families.	Exploration for ROA meetings to be held using Microsoft Teams whilst being held virtually.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	Service provision to be reviewed alongside the COVID recovery plans, with consideration of how virtual meetings can be incorporated into core service delivery. Putting in place learning from what has worked well during the virtual ways of working and what areas need to improve, whilst also having some meetings face to face.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	May-21
	Timescales to be met in	IRO's	Jun-21

	respect of 5 day decisions being inputted on Mosaic.		
	Timescales to be met in respect of ROA records being distributed.	Business Support	Jun-21
	ROA documents to be written to the child.	IRO's	Jun-21
	IRO oversight to be evident on case notes.	IRO's	Jun-21

Children experience stability in their long term care placements and certainty about their living arrangements and future plans

Achieving permanency at all pathways of the child's journey	IROs to ensure a consistent and robust approach to care and permanence planning for every child with strengthened management oversight processes – avoid drift and delay	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	Development of Mosaic steps to support with permanence performance data, including the updating of the ROA monitoring forms.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead, Kelda Claire - HofS CIC Services	Jun-21

There will be evidence of performance from analysis of key data driving improvements and experience of service delivery by children and young people

Learning will be shared and valued by staff as means to drive improvement for children.	IRO's will undertake a minimum of two thematic audits per year, in line with the other managers within CFS.	IRO's	From Q2 - May 2021
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	IRO's will complete audit activity throughout the year, identified by Stuart Jones - ASM and these reports will be shared with QAIT and the Learning Framework completed.	IRO's	Starting from May 2021
	Stuart to devise an audit timetable for the IRO's.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	IRO's identified to lead in particular areas of interest, service delivery and training to champion the improvement areas. This would include an attendance to represent the IRO views at Residential Review Groups, leads in permanence and other identified areas of specialism within LAC. This will provide development opportunities for IRO's in attending meetings with SMT and representing the IRO service.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead and IRO's	Jun-21

The safeguarding unit provides a work environment where all staff can access support, build positive career pathways and where reliance on temporary agency staff is reduced this stable staff group enables consistent, effective and meaningful engagement and progress for children and families - add in ADP

IRO's receive regular and quality supervision and support, as well as being supported with their own professional development.	Monthly peer supervision sessions will be held, with IRO's completed 3 monthly learning feedback and this being sent to QAIT.	IRO's	Jun-21
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	IRO's will receive bi-monthly supervision which will cover personal supervision and case supervision, in addition to the PDR process.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	Case supervision discussions held in supervision will be recorded on Mosaic.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	IRO's will be supported to attend regular training and development opportunities.	Hayley Binley - Service Manager and Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21

All staff are fully aware of the responsibilities they have, in their day to day roles in services and with colleagues at work, for advancing the council's equality and diversity objectives			
To ensure that all staff are enabled to feel safe and supported within the Safeguarding and Performance Service. The team are able to share worries or concerns openly and without judgement	Work towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to tackling inequalities - including relevant research, data, QA activity and engagement with children, young people and families.	Safeguarding and Performance Service	Jun-21
	Staff will be supported to be confident and capable of raising their experience of personal discrimination/'how your making me feel?' and challenging discriminatory practice or language either within the authority or outside of the authority irrelevant of status.	Safeguarding and Performance Service	Jun-21

	Supervision to be a safe and supportive arena to raise concerns and explore the wider ADP issues within their role. ADP to be added as standing agenda item on Personal Supervision.	Stuart Jones - ASM Looked After Children Lead	Jun-21
	ADP Action plan to be reviewed quarterly as a whole Service.	Safeguarding and Performance Service	Jun-21
	All staff to ensure mandatory training as well as bespoke equality, diversity and human rights training is completed and for bespoke training to be discussed in APR and Supervision.	Safeguarding and Performance Service	Jun-21

Authors:

Hayley Binley

Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding and Performance Service

Stuart Jones

Assistant Service Manager: Performance and Corporate Parenting Lead

Date: 04/08/2021

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
7 September 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES

LEICESTERSHIRE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES PARTNERSHIP
PLAN: PROGRESS UPDATE

Purpose of the report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide a progress update on the Children and Families Partnership Plan 2021-23.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. In November 2016 the Health and Wellbeing Board approved the Terms of Reference for a Children and Families Partnership to replace the Supporting Leicestershire Families Executive as a subgroup of the Health and Wellbeing Board. The expanded remit included oversight of how the priorities for children and families, as set out in the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy, are delivered.
3. In May 2018, the Health and Wellbeing Board approved the Children and Families Partnership Plan for 2018 – 21 and requested that it received regular progress updates.
4. In November 2020 the Health and Wellbeing Board approved the updated Terms of Reference for a Children and Families Partnership, required to reflect the decision to strategically align the Leicestershire Education Excellence Partnership, SEND and Inclusion Board, Youth and Justice Partnership Board and the Early Help Partnership to the Children and Families Partnership.
5. In November 2020 the Health and Wellbeing Board approved the refreshed Partnership Plan for 2021 – 23. The Partnership agreed that the current five priority areas and key actions were still relevant, and the focus of actions should remain on identifying where improved partnership working would add value.

Background

6. The Children and Families Partnership Plan is a strategic document which sets out the shared vision for children, young people and their families and the priority outcomes that need to be improved. The Plan is not intended to be a detailed description of the individual work of each partner, but rather a summary of key areas of work that are best delivered together to have the biggest impact on the lives of children and young people.

7. The Partnership has adopted the five supporting outcomes of the Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy relating to children and young people as the priority areas for the Plan. The five priorities are:
- i. Ensure the best start in life
 - ii. Keep children safe and free from harm
 - iii. Support children and families to be resilient
 - iv. Ensure vulnerable families receive personalised, integrated care and support
 - v. Enable children to have good physical and mental health

Progress to date

8. Priority leads have continued to work with partners and other key stakeholders to deliver the current action plans. It is important to note that the pace of delivery and progress of actions has been affected by Covid-19 due to resources being re-focussed on responding to the pandemic. Key progress includes:

Priority 1 - Ensure the best start in life

- Work is being undertaken to help understand the impact of the pandemic on school readiness. Plans are in place for a communications campaign to share key messages around the importance of accessing preschool places and getting school ready.
- Workshops have been delivered to council, health and midwifery staff to promote a greater understanding of the 1001 critical days agenda. 170 people attended across the five sessions.
- A universal offer has been developed to support children identified as at risk of delay through the two year health check.
- The model for virtual meetings, enabling providers to receive professional advice to support vulnerable children, is now well embedded. Providers and professionals have welcomed the virtual appointment system and feel that children have been better supported as part of the graduated approach.

Priority 2 - Keep children safe and free from harm

- The Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) Vulnerability Ops Group continues to meet and is making good progress against its Partnership delivery plan.
- Work has taken place across the Partnership to embed the role of the Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) Nurse and it is hoped that this will open up access to information for other organisations.
- Activity has taken place to produce a communications and training plan around broadening the approach to Operation Encompass. It is the intention that a pilot will take place in a specific area of the county before it is rolled out.
- A week of county lines intensification activity had taken place. Locally, this resulted in 33 search warrants and activity centred around Leicester train station led to 37

arrests and the seizure of Class A drugs and firearms. 27 vulnerable children and adults have been safeguarded as a result of the activity and visits to other vulnerable people have taken place.

- The Violence Reduction Network has visited a number of schools to talk about the dangers of county lines and how to report any concerns.

Priority 3 - Support children and families to be resilient

- The areas for action under this priority have been reviewed with a focus now on early help. The Early Help Partnership has identified shared priorities for action and leads have been identified to progress work against five workstreams:
 - To review Early Help Partnership governance and leadership
 - To develop early help data sets
 - To develop shared systems and process for early help
 - To develop the early help workforce
 - To engage communities in early help
- A shared vision, Terms of Reference and governance model have been agreed by the Early Help Partnership and approved by the Children and Families Partnership.
- An Early Help Partnership data group has been set up to scope the data available across the partnership and identify any barriers and opportunities for developing Early Help data sets. The group will now be extended to include City and Rutland representatives as many agencies work across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR).
- Consultation was undertaken with schools on the efficacy of current early help systems and possible improvements. Following feedback from schools, a pilot is being run with Hinckley schools to enable them to phone a dedicated line to discuss possible referrals into the County Council's Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS) before completing a multi-agency referral form (MARF). There has been a positive response from schools who have taken part in the pilot so far.
- Workstream leads met with the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnership Voluntary and Community Sector Reference Group to discuss effective means of engaging the voluntary and community sector in Early Help and ensuring they are enabled to participate and able to influence developments.

Priority 4 - Ensure vulnerable families receive personalised, integrated care and support

- Recruitment to the new Assessment and Resource Team (ART), providing wraparound therapeutic services to support step-downs from residential care, has been successful. Regular panels now take place to consider referrals, chaired by the Head of Service for Children in Care. The team is now working with a number of children and offering consultation sessions to social workers for other children.

- A meeting has taken place with district council housing leads and Children's Social Care (CSC) to start a piece of work to review the Joint Housing and Social Care protocol for 16 -17 year olds at risk of homelessness. CSC is undertaking an audit of cases where the protocol has been applied to consider the impact for young people and this will inform any updates required. Work will be completed by September 2021.
- Work is on-going to agree a protocol for the extension of the CAMHS offer to care leavers until they are 25. The protocol is part of the Strategic Looked After Children action plan and is an outcome of the two health summits that have taken place over the last year. It is recognised that this is an aspiration of both health and children's social care however, there are no defined timescales or specific actions currently against this outcome. A CAMHS representative and Adult Services have now been invited to join the strategic health meeting to provide oversight and move this action forward.
- Substantial work is underway to review the pathway to adulthood through the Council's Defining Children's Services for the Future transformation project. The data gathering stage identified the potential for more focussed planning for adulthood during the teenage years. Activity to address this includes coaching and mentoring for staff on independence focussed plans and 'enabling' outcomes written in a SMART format, with change measured in a way that recognises the significance of small steps.

Priority 5 - Enable children to have good physical and mental health

- The areas for action under this priority have been reviewed and action plans are being developed to progress work against the following:
 - i. To develop a programme of work to implement Trauma Informed Practice aligning to the LLR Trauma Aware workstream
 - ii. To understand why breastfeeding initiation across Leicestershire is lower than national average
 - iii. To reduce A & E attendances for 0-18s across the County
 - iv. To reduce food poverty (including holiday hunger) through further development of the Leicestershire Food Plan
 - v. To reduce maternal and child obesity
 - vi. To improve perinatal mental health
 - vii. To reduce/stop smoking in early pregnancy
- A Trauma Informed Practice launch event was held with schools with 140 delegates attending.
- The Council, working with Leicestershire and Rutland Sport and other partners, is co-ordinating the delivery of a DfE funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme across Leicestershire to target children at risk of holiday hunger and social exclusion. The Easter programme was delivered via a grant round to schools and 668 children accessed provision across 30 schools.

Youth Voice

- County Youth Council Leicestershire (CYCLe) members have continued to virtually participate in activity including the British Youth Council's meeting with government officers on Covid-19 messaging, the Big Conversation on poverty and the Making a Bigger Mark conference. They have also taken part in interview panel training with the County Council, Stop and Search awareness training with the Police and have provided advice and feedback for surveys undertaken by the Council and the Police.
- LCC participation officers also co-ordinated Leicestershire's online Make Your Mark ballot activity in December 2020 and have supported the three elected Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) to progress their campaign activity on improving cancer care for young people, the environment and poverty. The MYPs have been supported to discuss their campaign ideas and share their views with members of parliament, local councillors and senior managers from the Council and organisations, including Health, and attended Children and Families Partnership meetings in January and July 2021.

Integrated Care Systems – Children's Design Group

- It has been agreed that the Children's Design Group will provide regular progress reports to the Partnership. Discussion has taken place on linking the Design Group's pathway plan into priority 5 of the Children and Families Partnership Plan, specifically in relation to Leicestershire activity.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme 2021

- As a response to concerns over "holiday hunger", the Department for Education (DfE) had awarded funding to each local authority to oversee the delivery of Holiday Activities and Food Holiday clubs, targeting children eligible for free school meals. The aim is that the children who attend the provision will be supported to:
 - i. eat more healthily over the school holidays,
 - ii. be more active during the school holidays,
 - iii. take part in engaging and enriching activities,
 - iv. be safe and not be socially isolated,
 - v. have greater knowledge of health and nutrition,
 - vi. be more engaged with school and other local services.
- Leicestershire County Council, working with LeicesterShire and Rutland Sport and other partners, co-ordinated the delivery of the HAF programme which has been delivered over Easter and Summer holidays and will also be delivered over Christmas. Leicestershire schools were able to apply for HAF funding to deliver holiday clubs over Easter and provision was offered at 30 schools across the county. The application process was extended over the summer to enable Voluntary and Community Sector organisations and out of school providers to also deliver provision and 25 organisations were funded to deliver 1,500 places across 55 venues across the county.

Future Developments

9. Work over the next six months will include:
- The launch of the refreshed Partnership Plan for 2021-23,
 - On-going communications campaign to promote the benefits of early years provision for all children but especially those who are more vulnerable,
 - Multi-agency task group to explore what additional support may be needed for children who have missed out on health assessments due to Covid-19 pandemic,
 - LLR task group to consider the development of a shared early help assessment which could be used by all partners,
 - Developing an action plan around trauma informed practice, including a resources list for schools. A tender bid is being produced for an organisation to lead the strategy on how trauma informed practice could be embedded across LLR,
 - Co-ordination and delivery of the DfE funded Holiday Activities and Food Programme over the Christmas school holidays to target children eligible for free school meals.

Officer to Contact

Jane Moore
 Director of Children and Family Services
 Tel: 0116 305 2649
 Email: jane.moore@leics.gov.uk

Mala Razak
 Children and Families Partnership Manager
 Tel: 0116 305 8055
 Email: mala.razak@leics.gov.uk

Relevant Impact Assessments

Equality and Human Rights Implications

10. The Partnership has an interest in ensuring that there are effective arrangements in place so that the services provided meet the identified needs of local people. An EHIRA assessment has been carried out in relation to the impacts of the Plan.

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –
7 SEPTEMBER 2021**

**LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND LOCAL SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP ANNUAL REPORT 2020/21**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the draft Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2020/21.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties for local authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the local authority to provide services to children in need in their area; section 47 of the same Act requires local authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
3. These duties can only realistically be discharged with the full co-operation of other partners, many of whom have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Children Act 2004.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2018 (statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) give responsibility for this join-up locally with the safeguarding partners, the Police, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the local authority, which have a shared and equal duty to agree and make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area.
5. The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements locally are managed through the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership that covers the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland. The arrangements were published on 28 June 2019 and commenced on 29 September 2019. These arrangements replaced the former Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB).
6. It is a statutory requirement, as set out in Working Together 2018, that the Safeguarding Partners publish a report at least once every twelve months on the arrangements and their effectiveness.

Background

7. The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for Leicestershire and Rutland were presented to this Committee on 5 March 2019, prior to being published on 28 June 2019.
8. An update on progress including the first annual report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership, and the business plan for the period this Annual report relates was presented to this Committee on 1 September 2020.
9. The Safeguarding Children Partnership shares some operational arrangements with the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board (LRSAB) and some partnership structures with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCPb).

Annual Report

10. The key purpose of the Annual Report is to assess the impact of the work undertaken in 2020/21 on service quality and on safeguarding outcomes for children in Leicestershire and Rutland. Specifically it evaluates performance against the priorities that were set out in the LRSCP Business Plan 2020/21.
11. The Draft Annual Report 2020/21 can be found at Appendix A to this report. This is the content of the report which will go to design to be finished into the document that will be published.
12. The report will include an independent scrutiny assessment of progress from the Independent Advisor to the Partnership, Kay Whyte-Bell. This has not been able to be completed in time for this meeting due to the availability of the Advisor, but will be included in the final report.
13. The report outlines the learning, assurance, training and improvement activity of the LRSCP and its partners, particularly the response to difficult circumstances of the pandemic and the impact this has had on safeguarding children. Key messages from the SCP specifically in relation to Leicestershire are:
 - a) Partners have worked well together to safeguarding children and to identify needs and areas for improvement to safeguard children during the difficult and changing circumstances of the pandemic.
 - b) Continued work is required to sustain approaches that hear the voice and understand the lived experience of children in safeguarding and respond to this.
 - c) Safeguarding babies and the mental health of young people are notable areas to improve safeguarding identified during the pandemic.
 - d) The partnership will continue to work together and develop links across partnerships to foster a reliable, trusting culture in organisations and across the area and challenge and drive improvement in multi-agency safeguarding of adults.
14. The report outlines a change to the existing arrangements that the delegated officers of the statutory safeguarding partners will chair the partnership in place of the Independent Advisor. This comes into place in October 2021 and has been identified as the partnership has reviewed its working, in order to allow the Independent Advisor to give a greater focus to independent scrutiny of the effectiveness of the arrangements.

Proposals/Options

15. The Committee is asked to consider the Annual Report and make any comments or proposed additions or amendments to the report that will be addressed prior to the final version being published.

Consultation

16. The Annual Report includes a summary of the consultation and engagement work the SCP has carried out with children and young people and with practitioners.
17. The Business Plan has been directly influenced by the priorities identified by children and young people as part of the Leicestershire and Rutland SCP Young People's Advisory Group.
18. All members of the SCP have had opportunities to contribute to and comment on earlier drafts of the Annual Report and have been consulted in developing the Business Plan.

Resource Implications

19. Safeguarding partners have, along with Safeguarding Adults Board statutory partners, set a single agreement of principles to share the operating costs of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards for Leicestershire and Rutland.
20. As part of this agreement Leicestershire County Council contributes £102,496 to the SAB and SCP in 2021/22. This is 31% of the total funding for the Leicestershire and Rutland SAB and SCP (£325,779). This compares with £112,633 in the previous year which was 31% of the total budget for the Leicestershire and Rutland LSCB, SCP and SAB of £358,500 in 2020/21.
21. This compares with £137,897 in the previous year which was 40% of the total budget for the Leicestershire and Rutland LSCB, SCP and SAB of £343,419 in 2019/20.
22. Leicestershire County Council also hosts the Safeguarding Boards' Business Office that supports the SCP and SAB.
23. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the content of this report.

Timetable for Decisions

24. The Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership will be published by the end of September 2021. Any comments will be considered and addressed prior to the final report being published.

Background Papers

25. Report to the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee 1 September 2020.

Circulation under Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None.

Officers to Contact:

Jane Moore, Director of Children and Family Services
 Telephone: 0116 305 6340
 Email: Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk

List of Appendices

Appendix A - Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership 2020/21.

Relevant Impact Assessments:

Equality and Human Rights Implications

27. Safeguarding children, young people and adults concerns individuals who are likely to be disadvantaged in a number of ways. Information on differing needs of and impacts on different groups of individuals with regard to safeguarding is considered as part of the process to develop the Board's Business Plan. The Partnership has a specific priority in 2020/21 exploring safeguarding of children from diverse backgrounds..

Crime and Disorder Implications

28. There is a close connection between the work of the LRSCP and that of community safety partnerships in Leicestershire. For example the LRSCP works closely with community safety partnerships to scrutinise and challenge performance in community safety issues that affect the safeguarding and well-being of individuals and groups, for example domestic abuse and Prevent. The LRSCP also supports community safety partnerships in carrying out Domestic Homicide Reviews and acting on their recommendations.

Environmental Implications

29. The published LRSCP Annual Report will be made available on-line in electronic form, rather than paper. There are no other environmental implications.

Partnership Working and associated issues

30. Safeguarding is dependent on the effective work of the partnership as set out in national regulation, Working Together 2018, published by the Department for Education.

Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2020-21

Foreword

We are pleased to present this report of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership that covers the period from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021.

The early part of the year was dominated by the emergency response to the Covid-19 pandemic and the pandemic and changing circumstances of this heavily influenced the ongoing work of all partners, and the partnership as a whole through the year.

Despite the unprecedented challenges facing the many organisations that make up the partnership, overall the partnership has been able to progress its work to review and improve the approach to safeguard Children in Leicestershire & Rutland. We have adapted our methods, training approaches and continued to communicate important messages to the community and to all who work with children and families across the area.

During this period we have seen partnership working strengthened as working together becomes all the more important when facing uncertainty and challenges on many fronts. And as we have had to adapt how we work the involvement of every member of our communities in helping to protect children and respond to abuse and neglect has become even more important.

Workers and managers in organisations across Leicestershire & Rutland have worked hard in difficult circumstances to support the welfare and safety of children, and their wellbeing has been a key concern alongside those they serve.

Our thanks go to you all.

The Safeguarding Partners for Leicestershire & Rutland

(Signatures and pictures to be added)

The Partnership

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership brings together organisations across the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland with the vision:

“For children and young people in Leicester to be safe, well and achieve their full potential”

The Partnership commenced in September 2019 as the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements required by Working Together.

Its members include the statutory safeguarding partners: Police, Local Authorities, and Clinical Commissioning Groups, as well as other relevant agencies including schools, health agencies, Probation and other organisations working with children.

During 2020/21 the Partnership was Chaired by its Independent Advisor. This role was held by Simon Westwood until September 2020, and then taken on by Kay Whyte-Bell.

This is the statutory report of the SCP outlining the work it has carried out from April 2020 to the end of March 2021.

In Line with Working Together 2018 government guidance this report outlines:

- What has been done by the Partnership and the partners, to safeguard children and young people during the previous year and how effective the partnership arrangements have been.
- This report includes information about:
 - Agreed priorities
 - Analysis of progress against priorities
 - Decisions and actions taken by partners
 - Feedback from children and young people and how this has been utilised to inform work and influence service provision
 - Information on the delivery and impact of multi-agency safeguarding training
 - Information on the learning and impact of any Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
 - Any changes to the safeguarding arrangements and reasons for those changes

For more information on how the Partnership works please visit <https://lrsb.org.uk/lrscp>

The work of the Partnership

The Priorities of the Partnership

The SCP identified the following priorities and outcomes for 2020/21:

Statutory responsibilities

- The Partnership has carried out the statutory requirements of the Safeguarding Partners and assured itself they are meeting these.
- Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews and Partnership assurance work result in timely learning and changes in systems and practice to improve safeguarding/outcomes for children.
- The impact of COVID-19 on safeguarding and welfare of children is understood, emerging issues are identified, and partnership approaches to address this and mitigate future risk are in place.

Voice of the Child

- The priorities and work of the partnership has been influenced by the voice and experience of children who have received safeguarding support.
- Partners evidence that work with children to safeguard them is directed by their voice and lived experience and this is having a positive impact on their safety and wellbeing.
- The partnership is assured that messages and measures online safety are reaching children and young people and supporting them to be safe online.

Mental Health

- The emotional and mental health needs of children with learning disabilities and/or autism are understood in the context of safeguarding and support for this group of children is in place as required to reduce risk.
- Safeguarding and mental health support for children is joined up and partners work together and with young people to reduce risk of harm.

Communications

- People who work or live in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland report child abuse and neglect and concerns they are aware of.

Domestic Abuse

- The partnership is assured that there are appropriate support and interventions for children living with domestic abuse.

The work on these priorities was embedded within the assurance, training, procedure and review work of the partnership outlined further in this report.

“Just let me talk” (YPAG)

Response to COVID-19

The coronavirus pandemic had a significant impact on the work of partners and the partnership to safeguard children.

At the end of March 2020 the partnership had to react quickly to the emerging global pandemic and response to this. Within four days of lockdown, the four safeguarding partners had reviewed their arrangements and written out to the partnership identifying which SCP work would be prioritised in the changing circumstances.

The LRSCP and Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board also agreed a joint statement in relation to COVID-19 to encourage people to continue to report concerns regarding safeguarding.

The Partnership saw a significant reduction in the number of contacts coming into individual agencies' safeguarding teams and children's social care at the end of March and beginning of April and was concerned that children at risk of abuse would be seen by fewer professionals. In response to this, led by Rutland County Council, the SCP developed a safeguarding campaign #ourdoorisopen to encourage everyone to look out for the safety of children in their community during lockdown and act. This was promoted across the partnerships, through social media and in local communities linked to the pandemic response. Following the campaign reports and referrals to local authorities and police regarding safeguarding children increased and the campaign was recognised as good practice by the Local Government Association in June 2020.

Led by the local Clinical Commissioning Group, safeguarding partners across the locality were swift to adapt to the impact of COVID-19 by setting up a regular (weekly with flexibility to change) meeting of safeguarding leads with a view to achieve a collective understanding of the impact of COVID-19 on safeguarding children at an operational level, to share information about the impact of COVID-19 on services, and to address any emerging issues.

This Safeguarding 'Sub-Cell' allowed timely and flexible sharing of information, issues, and solutions for safeguarding children across the partnership in response to COVID-19. It also fed into a number

of different strategic bodies, avoiding duplication, which was particularly important at a time of crisis.

This group identified and responded to the following areas as follows:

Area of concern identified	Action taken
Increase in pregnant women known to substance abuse services	Hospital and Substance misuse treatment service data was reviewed and the positive management, engagement & regular caseload meetings between Safeguarding Lead of the substance misuse service and Hospital trust Substance Abuse Midwife was noted.
Increase in Concealed/ Denied Pregnancy	A deep-dive into midwifery records followed by multi-agency communication planning including a piece in our Safeguarding Matters newsletter to raise public and professional awareness alongside an update to procedures. The local Hospital Trust's work on this also helped influence a national public campaign.
Concern that changes in services resulted in risks to new-born babies being unseen	The partnership gained assurance that GPs had been requested to ensure that the SW was informed about any vulnerable babies (on Child Protection Plans) who were not brought for a face to face 6-8 week baby check with their GP.
A reduction in Community Child Protection Medicals	Medicals data explored for 3-months for all child protection medicals, identified overall figures in line with local authority data and no further reduction noted.
Concerns regarding the impact of the pandemic on workforce capacity and welfare	Assurance gained from all agencies that workforce capacity met demand.

The positive impact of this on children, young people, and their families is difficult to measure, however the group's ability to identify, analyse and respond to concerns raised meant that none of these areas became an ongoing or escalating safeguarding concern. The partnership has overall recognised a stronger approach to working together, and the approach of this group will be retained as part of the partnership's assurance process.

The impact of COVID-19 and the response of partners and the partnership was regularly reviewed to support effective safeguarding and use of partners resources.

Seeking Assurance

The partnership has developed and implemented a Quality Assurance Framework shared with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. This can be found here <https://lrsb.org.uk/aboutlrsb>.

Performance data

It has proved difficult to identify data from across partners that evidences the effectiveness of multi-agency working.

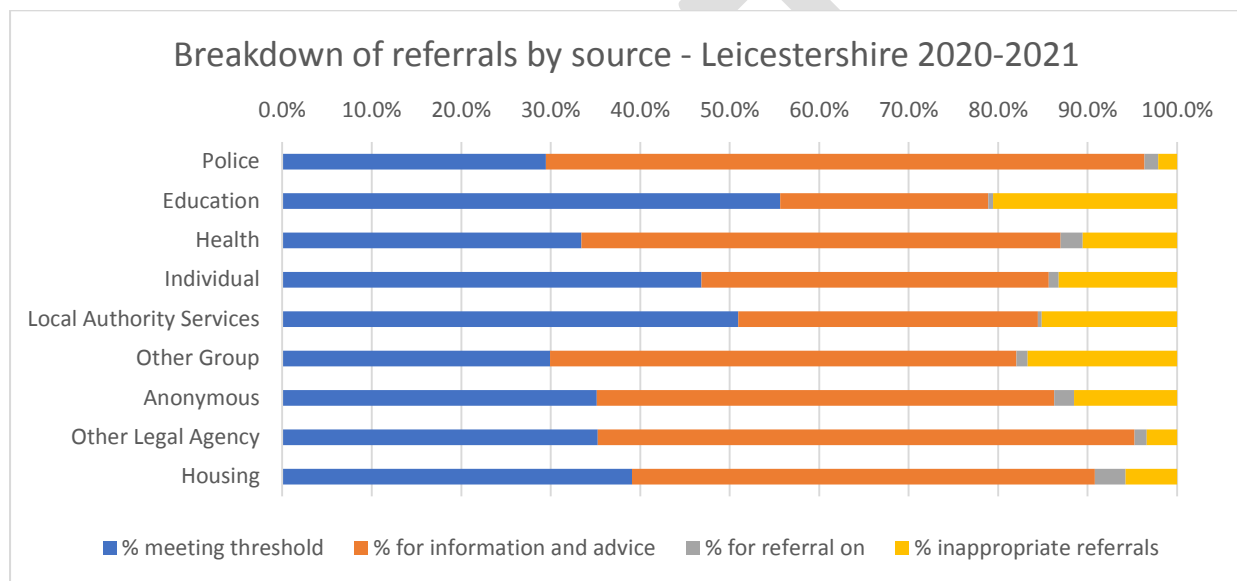
The partnership reviewed data regarding referrals to Children Social Care from different sources and partners involvement in multi-agency safeguarding.

To help understand impact of partnership working the partnership also reviewed data regarding 're-referrals' (children referred back to social care following safeguarding intervention) and 'repeat plans' (children needing a follow up child protection plans after initial plans had ended).

Leicestershire

As previously outlined partners and the partnership saw an initial reduction in referrals at the start of the year linked to the response to the pandemic, which was followed by an increase up to expected levels.

Of all contacts to the local authority around 40% met the thresholds for Children's Social Care or Children and Family Welfare Services for early help. 48% were for information and advice only, 1% were referred on to other services and 11% were deemed to be inappropriate referrals. Education sources had the highest proportion meeting thresholds (56%), but also the highest proportion of inappropriate referrals (21%).



This highlights some areas to work on with regard to awareness of safeguarding and thresholds. During the year we reviewed the thresholds and engaged schools in this work, this was a really valuable two-way process which led to further engagement work between social care and schools including a virtual meet and greet for school staff with First Contact managers to support the referral process.

In Leicestershire there were a high proportion of repeat child protection plans (26.3%) and re-referrals (26.2%) at the start of the year. Domestic Abuse became a more significant factor in cases during the pandemic and many repeat plans were related to domestic abuse. Audit work identified strengthening safety planning as a key area for improvement for both areas. Leicestershire has carried out focussed work to improve safety planning, and have been working to develop an improved approach to domestic abuse as part of their programme of defining services for the future. In the final quarter of the year re-referrals were down to 18.4% and Repeat plans 22.1%.

The partnership is following up assurance regarding domestic abuse in tis priority plans for 2021/22.

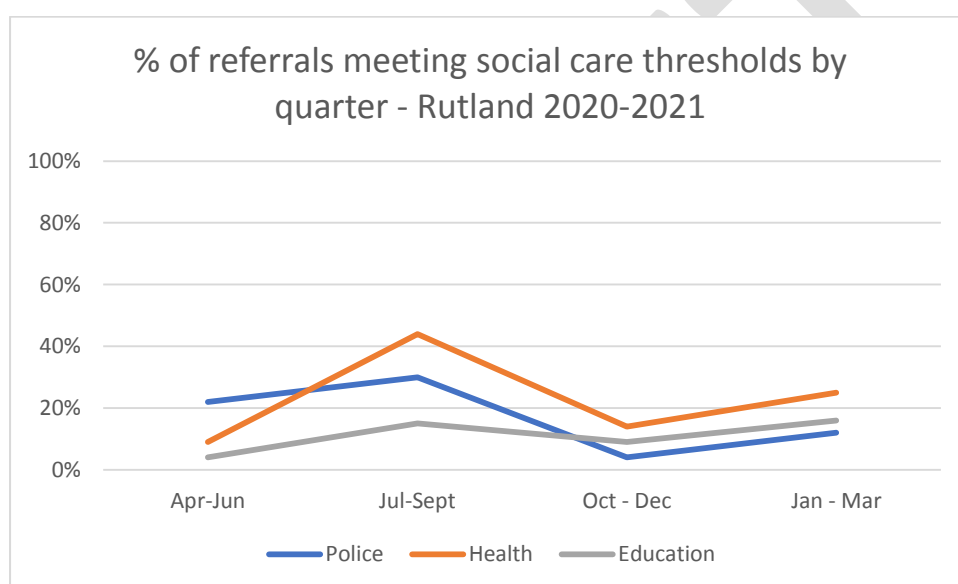
(Infographic of change in repeat plans and rereferrals to be added: Depict as two sets of 10 people shaded for each figure for each metric with arrow going from group shaded for start of year to group shaded for end of year figures.)

The introduction of online meetings due to the pandemic has resulted in better attendance at multiagency child protection and review meetings, for example by GPs and Mental Health Services. Feedback from families, children and young people has been positive and some have identified that they have felt less anxious and more engaged in the meeting.

Rutland

As previously outlined partners and the partnership saw an initial reduction in referrals at the start of the year linked to the response to the pandemic, which was followed by an increase up to expected levels.

As the first lockdown ended in the summer of 2020 referrals increased and the proportion of these that met thresholds for social care increased across the main referring agencies. As with numbers of referrals, the proportion meeting thresholds was in line with previous years by the end of the year.



While the numbers of contacts not meeting threshold for social care are high further analysis during the year identified that the referrals were appropriate in early identification of need and most have accessed early intervention through Early Help in Rutland. Further work will be done with partners regarding awareness of thresholds and appropriate referrals, linked to the refresh of the Partnership thresholds document in summer of 2021.

In Rutland there were a high proportion of repeat child protection plans (33%) and re-referrals (30%) at the start of the year. Proportions of repeat child protection plans and re-referrals can fluctuate significantly in Rutland due to the small number of referrals and young people on child protection plans. Rutland carried out work to improve quality and family ownership of Signs of Safety plans. This supported families to sustain changes, which has led to a reduction in re-referral rates. At the end of the year re-referral rates had reduced (22%) and there were no children on a second (or more) child protection plan.

In response to low number of CP plans Rutland audited CIN and strategy meeting decision making and put in place development plan regarding step down plans as part of 'back to basics' practice work. This included responsive plans that don't lose sight of original concerns. Rutland County Council also worked with partners regarding making appropriate referrals and supporting challenge.

(Infographic of change in repeat plans and rereferrals to be added: Depict as two sets of 10 people for each shaded for each figure for each metric with arrow going from group shaded for start of year to group shaded for end of year figures. Re-referrals; 30% at start 22% at end. Repeat CP plans: 33% at start 0% at end.)

Self-assessment

During 2020 partners carried out a self-assessment of their safeguarding effectiveness. The partnership focussed this assessment on specific areas of priority in the pandemic, including domestic abuse, safeguarding in service change and staff welfare and support.

All agencies provided some evidence that they were effective in their:

- Governance of safeguarding,
- Consideration of safeguarding in commissioning
- Consideration of safeguarding in service change, including the response to Covid-19
- Supporting workforce capacity and resilience in order to effectively safeguard children

Some agencies identified there was further work to improve effectiveness regarding:

- Engaging with children to hear and respond to their voice, and
- The response to children affected by domestic abuse

Those agencies identified plans in place within their organisations to increase effectiveness.

The assessment did not directly identify any areas for significant work across partners or on a multi-agency basis. However on the basis of the information provided the SCP identified that it could be challenging partners to be more ambitious in hearing and responding to the voice of children in safeguarding. The partnership will follow this up through its work in 2021/22.

Audits

The SCP followed up its assurance work in 2019-20 regarding Mental health with a multi-agency audit focussed on safeguarding of children on the waiting list for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services.

The audit highlighted that work takes place with children on the waiting list, but organisations are not always communicating well regarding the work taking place, young people's education and parental mental health. Understanding and joint working around mental health and safeguarding had improved following the findings and action from the SCP audit in the previous year, however there was still further improvement required. Further key findings were:

- CAMHS were not always invited to Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs)
- There is a need for greater consistency and quality in how Voice of the Child is heard and recorded
- In Leicestershire County it was identified that the local domestic violence support service had involvement in each case, but were not always invited to multi-agency meetings.

Approaches to multi-agency meetings are being reviewed to address these findings and in line with the finding from the self-assessment the partnership is seeking further information from agencies as to how they are improving how they hear and respond to the voice of children.

A multi-agency audit regarding domestic abuse and safeguarding was planned, but could not take place due to agencies capacity relating to the coronavirus pandemic. This will be carried out in 2021.

“Don’t pressure anyone into saying anything but make a more open and comforting environment for students to talk.” (Covid survey)

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Procedures

The partnership has ensured procedures are in place for multi-agency safeguarding in line with Working Together 2018 and has specifically revised the following procedures in response to learning from local and national reviews and assurance processes:

- Concealed/denied pregnancies
- Child Criminal Exploitation
- Allegations against people who work with children
- Female Genital Mutilation (FGM)
- Neglect Toolkit updated to include adolescent neglect, SUDI and pre-birth neglect

In addition work was underway at the end of the year to complete:

- Guidance regarding children with mental health needs/self-harm and suicide
- A procedure for Children on child protection plans who leave the UK,
- A review of the Pre-birth procedure for safeguarding
- A review of the Multi-agency Thresholds document
- A review of the Fabricated and Induced Illness procedures

Training

The SCPs training co-ordination and delivery function is shared with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board to support consistent and effective partnership working.

In the immediate response to the pandemic the training function of the SCP was suspended, apart from the ongoing offer to train multi-agency COVID-19 related volunteers.

The training programme re-commenced in September 2020 with a diversified approach delivering training in a more blended way, offering film clips, recorded webinars, live pdfs, and self-directed learning/reading alongside virtual-only delivery.

Along with a core safeguarding offer the programme also included we have also linked with the local Violence Reduction Network (VRN) to support a programme of delivery on ‘The impact of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Trauma on Children and Young People’.

In addition Leicestershire & Rutland County Councils ran training and development sessions for Safeguarding leads in schools and early years establishments in the area, incorporating learning from the SCPs.

“Encouraging students to talk about how they are feeling and not overloading them” (Covid survey)”

From September 2020 to March 2021 the SCP programme delivered training to 988 people over 58 training events. This number of attendees is almost equivalent to the face to face training of the previous year, which totalled just over 1000. This shows the ongoing need for learning and highlighted some potential benefits of a more diversified approach. A further 640 people attended 3 larger events, 2 webinars and a conference which brings this total to 1,628 across 2020/21.

Our training evaluation shows an increase of 80 to 90 points (on a scale from -100 to +100) across evaluated training in all areas of knowledge, confidence, and skills.

A particular session that had excellent feedback was ‘Understanding Neglect and its impact in adolescence’. This was commissioned and delivered in response to leaning from one of the Serious Case Reviews published this year. All attendees reported a significant increase in knowledge and skills following the training.

An end of year survey of training attendees found that 80% of respondents identify they have changed their practice at work as a result of SCP training.

The SCP intends to continue this diversified approach, with the addition of some face to face delivery when it is possible and beneficial.

“Absolutely fantastic learning experience. Incredibly in-depth, knowledgeable and informative” (Psychological Wellbeing Practitioner - Leicestershire CC, attending Understanding Neglect and its impact in adolescence).

“I found the safeguard core awareness course very informative. Being a newly qualified practitioner I was not confident in procedures of identifying and reporting safeguarding concerns. I now feel confident and skilled in this” (Pre- School Assistant, attending Core Awareness in Safeguarding CYP).

“This training gave more confidence when talking about mental capacity and awareness of law” and “My assessments now have a more informed consideration when looking at capacity with client cases. Trainer was superb.” (Mental Capacity Act training)

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

The partnership assesses Serious Safeguarding Incidents as defined by Working Together 2018 and decides whether a Child Safeguarding Practice Review (CSPR), in order to identify how to improve safeguarding responses in future, is required.

The Partnership carried out 4 Rapid Reviews following a Serious Incident Notification or referral in the period of this report. One of these was revisited later in the year when more information became available. From these the partnership commenced two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Both of these were in progress at the end of March 2021 to be completed later in 2021.

Local health agencies worked well to continue to contribute to these reviews whilst facing significant resource challenges during the pandemic.

The former Safeguarding Children Board published four Serious Case Reviews (SCRs) in 2020. The Partnership completed six other learning reviews that had not met the criteria for an SCR or CSPR.

These reviews identified the following key areas for further work:

- Identifying and responding to adolescent neglect
- Improved understanding and collaborative working regarding safeguarding and child mental health support
- Consistently hearing and responding to the voice and lived experience of children and evidencing this
- Effective engagement and involvement of all agencies in child protection conferences
- Improved confidence in recognising and responding to potential Fabricated and Induced Illness.

Action plans are in place to respond to these and learning has been shared with practitioners across organisations through the Safeguarding Partnerships' [Safeguarding Matters newsletter](#), through articles and '7-minute briefings' designed to convey key messages from reviews and encourage managers and workers to reflect on their practice.

"I want space to talk, but don't want to be pressured by anyone to say anything" (YPAG)

Action taken during the year can be seen in the work previously outlined on procedures, training and audit relating to adolescent neglect, mental health the voice of the child and concealed and denied pregnancy but also included:

- Production of standards and guidance to support effective child protection conferences with all agencies well engaged.
- Ongoing messages regarding hearing the voice of children and promoting the partnership's 'Was not heard' video.
- Additional clarification regarding the areas for further learning in the review of the Thresholds document.

"When I cry I'm talking to you, when I fall silent I'm talking to you..." (Was Not Heard)

During the period covered in this report the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published one national safeguarding practice review. '[Out of routine: A review of sudden unexpected death in infancy \(SUDI\) in families where the children are considered at risk of significant harm](#)' was published in July 2020.

The report identifies that '*Situational risks and out-of-routine circumstances act together to increase the risk of SUDI and may mean that families find it difficult or impossible to engage with standard safer sleep messages.*' (page 8). Within the published report, our local multi-agency [Strategy to Support Healthy Pregnancy, Birth and Babies](#) is referenced as an example of a strategy which brings together '*action to reduce poverty and health inequalities with systematic arrangements for prevention and early intervention to support vulnerable families*' (p.25).

Whilst the recommendations from the report are aimed at national bodies, locally we have embedded the learning about SUDI, situational risks, and out-of-routine circumstances into our multi-agency safeguarding children training programme and will continue to do so.

As part of our [2021/22 Business Plan](#), our Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group has been tasked with considering the impact of our work to date and to review SUDI awareness-raising and multi-agency training across the partnership as required.

It was notable that the majority of Rapid Reviews and referrals in the year related to children under 1 year old, whereas in previous years the majority of referrals related to teenagers. This has led to the partnership adopting a priority on safeguarding babies for the coming year incorporating a communications campaign across the partnership, raising awareness to support the safety of babies linked to local implementation of the Icon project regarding crying babies.

How feedback from children and families has informed our work and influenced service provision.

“a lot of groups don’t realise how young people can be overwhelmed by being asked too often ‘are you ok?’ blah, blah, blah...” (YPAG)

The Partnership has a Young Peoples Advisory Group, which includes young people from across Leicestershire and Rutland with a variety of backgrounds relating to safeguarding. The young people play a part in the priority setting and scrutiny of the partnership.

The pandemic initially limited the engagement work the SCP could carry out with young people, however the partnership adapted it’s approaches to ensure children and young people’s voices continued to influence the partnership approach.

In June 2020 the partnership supported a local extension of a national survey regarding young people’s emotional health and wellbeing in light of the pandemic. The survey had 221 responses from Leicestershire & Rutland.

This particularly highlighted that loneliness, stress and lack of sleep had increased for a large minority of young people (39%) and lack of contact with friends was having a large impact on the majority of young people’s wellbeing (70%).

“I really want to return to college. I'm looking forward to seeing my friends and teachers, but I am worried about being exposed to the virus” (Covid survey)

The partnership considered this in its requests for assurance and in setting its forward priorities. The findings of the survey were also fed into local work to develop responses to support children and young people’s emotional health and wellbeing.

Young people were involved in the recruitment panel for the Partnership’s new Independent Advisor.

Whilst the disruption to normal working made it difficult to set up planned scrutiny by young people the SCP was able to seek the views of young people to inform the Partnerships priorities for 2021/22. Young people helped to lead the Partnership’s priority setting meeting in March 2021 and shaped the priorities and actions beneath these. Young people continued to highlight mental health and domestic abuse as their biggest concerns.

“Young people prefer to talk to friends because professionals ‘rat you out’” (YPAG)

Partners commissioned some work to hear from children and young people whose parents have been considered at Domestic Abuse MARAC to understand their experience. This will report later in 2021 and be considered alongside the findings of a multi-agency audit focussed on domestic abuse to be completed in 2021.

The Partnership held an online launch of its 'Was not heard' film. The film was written and produced by young people locally with involvement from members of the Young Peoples Advisory Group. It encourages those who work with children to understand how children communicate with them and highlights the importance and legal duty to hear and respond to them.

This was nominated for a number of independent film awards and was included in national training on Psychological first aid as part of the response to the pandemic.

This took the message of the film to thousands of people across Britain, with feedback identifying it as one of the most powerful and important parts of the training.

In February 2021 LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Multi-Agency Training Subgroup posted the film on their [YouTube channel](#) and it has since received over 35,000 views.

"It's my life you're talking about. I might not understand everything yet but I'm living it." (Was Not Heard)

Changes to the arrangements

The partnership is committed to developing and improving. Following a number of changes during its first 6 months of operation there were no formal changes to the arrangements during 2020/21, however as outlined the partnership significantly adapted its working in response to the pandemic.

During the year the Partnership established stronger joint working with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board. A single Independent Advisor was appointed across both partnerships and the two SCPs held joint main partnership meetings throughout the year to more closely align approaches and make best use of partner agencies time.

Members of the partnership noted that during the year partnership working became stronger, as increased communication and planning together in response to the pandemic enhanced relationships. More organisations were more regularly involved in partnership safeguarding meetings and in the multi-agency safeguarding meetings working directly with children and families.

The Partnership's quarterly 'Safeguarding Matters' newsletter was also extended to cover the Leicester SCPB. This is a joint publication with the Safeguarding Adults Boards for Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland, highly regarded locally and used to communicate learning and developments with regard to multi-agency safeguarding with those working with Children and Young people.

From 2021 the Safeguarding Partners have decided that the Partnership will be chaired by the Safeguarding Partners in rotation. This will support the Independent Advisor to focus on leading Independent Scrutiny of the arrangements and providing independent advice. In addition to this the partnership will continue to review the arrangements learning from working during the pandemic.

Independent Scrutiny - Report of the Independent Advisor, Kay Whyte-Bell

Scrutiny Activity

Summary to be added

DRAFT

Finance

The work of the SCP is supported by the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Partnership Business Office that also supports the Safeguarding Adults Boards and carries out Domestic Homicide Reviews for Community Safety Partnerships in Leicestershire & Rutland. The SCP is funded by contributions from its partners.

A single funding arrangement for the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards for 2020 onwards has been agreed between the statutory partners for the Safeguarding Adults Boards and the children's Safeguarding Partners for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland.

The contributions from partners for the Leicestershire & Rutland SCP and SAB as a whole for 2020/21 were as follows:

	£
Leicestershire County Council	112,633
Rutland County Council	50,367
Leicestershire Police	89,000
West Leicestershire CCG and East Leicestershire & Rutland CCG	106,500
National Probation Services	1,348
Total income for SCP and SAB	359,848

Overall expenditure across the SCP and SAB was £334,104. The balance will go into reserves. From 2021 onwards the reserves of the SCP and SAB will be used to reduce partner contributions to the partnership whilst leaving a contingency to cover the cost of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews going forwards.

Expenditure for the SCP is apportioned as follows:

	£
Staffing	110,676
Independent Chairing	14,113
Support Services	3,250
Operating Costs	9,128
Training	41,200
Case Reviews	3,760
Total Expenditure	182,127

With the joint funding arrangement across the SCP and SAB and a more even balance of work 50% of the overall business office staffing cost and support services costs have been allocated to the SCP rather than 63% in previous years. Planned changes to ways of working, as well as changes enforced by the pandemic have reduced support services and operating costs compared to previous years. Expenditure on safeguarding case reviews reduced as the majority of work by independent reviewers had been completed before the start of the year or commenced towards the end of the year.

Priorities 2021/22 onwards

The partnership has reviewed learning from local and national reviews, and from local assurance and engagement work, as well as speaking to children and young people and considering the current

context of the pandemic in determining its priorities going forward. The Partnership has identified the following forward priorities shared with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board:

Safeguarding Babies - Improve how we work together with families before and after births to safeguard babies

Child Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing – Seek assurance that partners are working to support good mental health for children and that mental health and safeguarding are effectively addressed together

Domestic Abuse and Child Safeguarding – Seek assurance that partners are responding appropriately to safeguard and support children living with domestic abuse

Harm outside of the Home – Seek assurance that the local approach to safeguarding children from extra-familial threat is effective.

Safeguarding Children from Diverse backgrounds – Understand and improve how well partners work together with children and families from diverse backgrounds

Covid-19 (Shared with Leicester SAB and Leicestershire & Rutland SAB) – Reflect on and respond to the ongoing impact of the Coronavirus pandemic on safeguarding children and adults.

“I feel like I was listened to” (YPAG)

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