



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

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 2 November 2021 at 2.00 pm**

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

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

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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

Please note: this meeting will be filmed for live or subsequent broadcast via the Council's web site at <http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk>
– 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 7 September 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.

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| 8. Engagement of the Council's Strategic Plan. | Chief Executive | (Pages 13 - 66) |
| 9. Defining Children and Family Services for the Future. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 67 - 74) |
| 10. Written Statement of Action and High Needs Block Development. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 75 - 82) |
| 11. Quarter 2 2021/22 Performance Report. | Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 83 - 90) |
| 12. Leicestershire Fostering Agency Statutory Report. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 91 - 134) |
| 13. Leicestershire Adoption Agency Statutory Report. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 135 - 174) |
| 14. Leicestershire's Response to Tackling Child Criminal Exploitation. | Director of Children and Family Services | (Pages 175 - 184) |
| 15. Date of next meeting. | | |

Future meetings of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be held at 2.00pm on the following dates:

25 January 2022
8 March 2022
7 June 2022
6 September 2022
8 November 2022.

16. 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, 7 September 2021.

PRESENT

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. Frisby CC

Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC

Mr. R. Hills CC

Mr. N. Lockyer

Ms. Betty Newton 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

15. Minutes.

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 June 2021 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Question Time.

The following question, received under Standing Order 34, was put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Mrs Sue Whiting asked the following question of the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Could the Chair please confirm that there will be Dyslexia Awareness Events planned for the International Dyslexia Awareness Month in October according to the three year cycle that has happened previously, with the last Dyslexia Awareness Event for Children and Families being held in 2018 at County Hall?

Mrs H Fryer CC replied as follows:

The department plans to write a 'Dyslexia Awareness' briefing that will be sent out using various methods during International Dyslexia Awareness Month in October (this will include SEND news, the Headteachers briefing and governors newsletter).

Unfortunately, many planned face to face events have been delayed due to Covid restrictions, although the department is planning to start up the Local Offer Roadshows in the near future in line with guidance; these will have information about Dyslexia and Support available at them.

Unrelated to the awareness month, the department launched a virtual training and learning platform in August which schools can sign up to; this includes Dyslexia Awareness training designed at a universal level and signposts to the Learning Support team for more information. It is hoped that this tool will make this training easier to access for more staff working in Leicestershire Schools.

Supplementary Question:

Mrs Whiting asked a supplementary question which asked for the following information:

- An outline of exactly what will be included in the Dyslexia Awareness Briefing
- The approximate number of families who will be reached by the SEND news and whether this correlates with the latest figure from the Government Statistics of children identified in Leicestershire with specific learning difficulties
- For Councillors to also receive the briefing as Dyslexia is life long and affects adults as well as children
- What is included in the 'Dyslexia Awareness training designed at a universal level'
- Whether schools have to pay for the information from the Learning Support Team
- Whether parents have any direct access to the information provided by the Learning Support Team.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services replied to the effect that work was still taking place on developing the Dyslexia Awareness briefing. In relation to the number of families reached by SEND news, the Director reported that a new sign up process had recently been created to ensure that this was in line with GDPR and to date, approximately 400 individuals had signed up. Many of these were SENCOS within schools so the reach was not currently measurable. The information was shared on Facebook and internally within the County Council, so after an addition was published, it was possible to look at the data on how many views there had been.

The Director stated that it would be possible to consider sharing the briefing with Councillors. In terms of the information in the training, the Director reported that rather than just focussing on difficulties with reading and writing, the presentation looked at the bigger picture of dyslexia, considered the Rose definition of dyslexia and what were considered to be the defining, underlying characteristics of dyslexia and the impact of these on the learner. The training notes took around 15 minutes to watch although there were slides available afterwards and it was also possible to provide a transcript of the training.

The Director reported that the support from the Learning Support Team was free to Leicestershire schools and that parents did not currently have direct access to information from the Learning Support Team. The service provided by the Learning Support Team was provided directly to schools. However, there was a range of information on the Local Offer website which parents could access and this included a list of resources.

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

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

18. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

19. 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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

21. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

22. Children's Innovation Partnership.

The Committee received a presentation from the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work of the Children's Innovation Partnership. A copy of the presentation is filed with these minutes.

Part of the presentation related to the Residential Design brief that had been developed. The Residential Design Brief had three elements – the Assessment and Resource Team (ART) and Hub, Assessment beds, two residential homes and a parent-child assessment home. The properties had been purchased and were owned by the County Council and the service was delivered through Barnardo's.

The Director reported that the ART was already working with 13 children and the aim was to support their transition from a residential placement to long term foster care. To date, there had been a number of positive outcomes.

In terms of the financial benefit, it was noted that the total investment would be £2.9m but this would generate approximately £0.75m annualised benefits and assets would be retained with an estimated value of over £2m. Benefits were expected in reduced placement costs and social worker time and travel to out of county placements. The estimated benefits exceeded the MTFS target but this would be dependent on children's needs and property utilisation.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- i) A query was raised around the impact on children who had been placed in a residential home for a long time and the care that was given to them during the transition period. In response, the Director reported that an approach was being cemented for all children in care to have a trajectory to ensure that their needs were being met, including their care needs and assessment needs. Where it was difficult to meet the necessary timescale, the child's case was reviewed by the Head of Service. However, assurance was given that there was a process in place to monitor each individual child specifically to their needs.
- ii) A member raised a concern that a number of children did not have a proper care plan in place. However, the Director gave assurance that every child in care had a care plan and a trajectory plan to help them get to their permanent home. This statement related to the sign off of permanency plans, which could sometimes be delayed.

RESOLVED:

That the presentation be noted.

23. Quarter 1 2021/22 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services which presented an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2021 (Quarter 1). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

From the 24 measures that had been reported, three had improved, five showed no significant change and five had declined. In addition, nine indicators provided information only and two had temporarily been suspended. From the 14 measures that had a national benchmark, four were in the top quartile, six were in the second quartile, three were in the third and one was in the fourth quartile.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) In response to a query around whether there were any common trends with the NEET increase, it was noted that over the last year there had been less contact with young people as a result of Covid-19. Evidence was currently being gathered in relation to the challenges being faced, but it was acknowledged that this was a national issue. It was known that Covid-19 had had a disproportionate impact on young people but assurance was given that appropriate provision and support was available for young people. A further update would be provided to a future meeting of the Committee.
- ii) A member raised the issue that the percentage of children in care who had had a dental check was 35.1%. It was stated that routine dental checks had been limited during Covid-19 lockdown and figures were now beginning to increase. The Director reported that the department took the general health of all its children in care seriously and encouraged visits to the dentist. Post lockdown, the department was working closely with health partners to improve access to dental treatment and was also working with carers to encourage good dental hygiene.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That a report be presented to the next meeting of the Committee around Young People who are Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET).

24. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) with regard to children in care. The report evaluated the extent to which the County Council had fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021, including its corporate parenting function. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) It was noted that the number of looked after children per 10,000 population had increased over the period, although this number had now decreased and stabilised. The Director stated that the increase had been forecasted as work had been undertaken around key groups of children who had not previously been in care but who the department felt should be supported, for example 16/17 year olds. It was felt that this had been positive in stabilising children. It was also reported that the department was now supporting more older young people who had very complex needs such as those who had been victims of Child Criminal Exploitation and Child Sexual Exploitation. However, despite the increase, the number in Leicestershire was still lower than that of its statistical neighbours. It was agreed that the higher number had been as a result of greater accessibility to and awareness of provision and a greater understanding of the older age group.
- ii) It was highlighted that children struggled mentally, not only due to Covid-19, but also physically and the Corporate Parenting Team had worked hard to ensure participation in a number of activities during the lockdown period. A question was raised around what provision was in place in terms of fitness and nutrition, which could directly impact on children's mental health. In relation to older young people, who were living in more independent supported accommodation, the department worked with Personal Assistants around the whole child and this included consideration of diet, cooking skills and how to look after themselves. A Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire was completed with all young people in care and their carers; this looked at emotional wellbeing and general health. Dedicated looked after children Health staff within the Health Service focussed their attention on the whole wellbeing of children and this included medicals when a child came into care and review medicals. The department also engaged children to participate in all activities, including those within school and the Virtual School worked hard to ensure that physical and educational activities took place. Through communication with foster carers, the department promoted physical activity and the service would have promoted the online resources available during lockdown. Encouraging physical activity was considered to be a key focus and there was also a scheme whereby children could access funding to join a gym.
- iii) The role of young carers was highlighted and it was agreed that a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee around the work the department undertook with young carers.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report be noted;
- b) That a report be presented to a future meeting of the Committee around the work undertaken with Young Carers.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a progress update on the Children and Families Partnership Plan for the period 2021-2023. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

It was reported that priority leads had continued to work with partners and other key stakeholders to deliver the current action plans. The pace of delivery and progress of actions had been affected by Covid-19 but the key progress across the five priorities was highlighted along with work proposed over the next six months.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

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

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented the draft Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2020-2021. The Committee was asked to make any comments or proposed additions to the report prior to the final version being published. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following comments were raised:

- i) It was noted that there had been an increase in the number of domestic violence incidents during the lockdown period and it was questioned what was being undertaken to reduce this. The Director reported that the Domestic Abuse Strategy Group had led on developing a service delivery plan to work with families who had experienced domestic abuse more creatively. Over the last two years, the department had established a team which worked alongside the Police at Wigston to ensure that any referrals into the Police were being received to enable the service to offer support to the families involved. Part of this service included Operation Encompass, which was a notification to schools of children who it was known had been involved in a domestic abuse incident, allowing the schools to support those children. It was noted that this project had been extended and a member of staff from the Children and Family Wellbeing Service now sat within this service.
- ii) The number of cases during the pandemic being subject to the Children and Family Wellbeing Service had increased significantly and the majority had been where domestic abuse had been a factor. A Head of Service and Service Manager had been enabled to take part in national research around domestic abuse and some key learning had been taken from this; as part of the Defining Children and Family Services work, this had enabled the service to consider different ways of engaging with families. The department had worked very closely with Doncaster, who had received government funding, to develop a response to domestic abuse and to learn from the findings of the work undertaken. A domestic abuse toolkit had been developed, which was being launched on 13 September, and this would support staff in their work with children and families and would provide a more consistent approach. This also included work with Public Health around how services were commissioned, for example working with perpetrators. In addition, new legislation around domestic abuse had been developed and work was taking place to complete a needs assessment; part of the work was how the service had engaged with members of the public where domestic abuse was a factor.

RESOLVED:

That the report be noted.

27. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 November 2021 at 2.00pm.

2.00 – 3.21pm
07 September 2021

CHAIRMAN

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 2
NOVEMBER 2021

ENGAGEMENT ON THE COUNCIL'S STRATEGIC PLAN

REPORT OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on the draft Strategic Plan (2022-26), a copy of which is appended to this report. A 12-week public consultation is set to commence on 1 November 2021, subject to approval being given by the Cabinet at its meeting on 26 October 2021.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Strategic Plan is complemented by the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which sets out a financial plan supporting the priorities in the Strategic Plan, as well as by the Strategic Change Portfolio which outlines how the Council will transform local services in response to national and local drivers for change whilst seeking to maintain or improve outcomes. The Plan is also underpinned by Departmental Business Plans and strategies which provide further detail on how the Council will deliver the aims and actions in the Plan.
3. On 6 December 2017, the County Council approved the current Strategic Plan (2018-22). This Plan was based on five aspirational outcomes which described the County Council's vision for Leicestershire. On 15 May 2019, the County Council declared a climate emergency. On 8 July 2020, the County Council approved a revised version of the Plan (still to expire in 2022) to reflect the Council's declaration of a climate emergency, with recognition that it would need to be revisited as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Background

4. The Strategic Plan sets out the Council's ambitions and priorities for the next four years. It outlines what it aims to achieve and how it intends to do it.
5. The current Plan is due to expire in 2022. Work has been undertaken to review and refresh the Plan and to re-assess the Council's strategic priorities, particularly in light of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Plan Structure and Contents

6. The draft Plan (2022-26) is based on five strategic outcomes which describe the Council's vision for Leicestershire. Each outcome includes four or five sub-outcomes which will need to be achieved to deliver the outcome.
7. The outcomes are broad and aspirational, reflecting the County Council's significant and wide-ranging responsibilities and capacity to influence. Therefore, to ensure that the Plan provides a clear strategic direction for the Council, it also includes specific aims and actions to deliver each outcome over the next four years.
8. The Plan also includes a section on 'enabling services' which is intended to highlight the contributions of corporate functions to outcome delivery as well as sustaining good governance. This is followed by a section on the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) which highlights the Council's aims and actions to maintain a balanced budget whilst protecting frontline services and weathering the coronavirus crisis. Finally, there is a section on the Strategic Change Portfolio, summarising the aims and actions of the four key pillars of this internal transformation programme.

Strategic Outcomes

9. The outcomes, which are detailed below, are intended to broadly reflect the remits of departments and the portfolios of lead members. However, successful delivery of the Plan will rely upon departments sharing ownership of the outcomes in addition to the outcomes being reflected in all relevant Council plans and strategies. Outcome Boards, consisting of representatives from all Department Management Teams in addition to corporate services, will review and inform the development of Council strategies to ensure that they reflect the aims of their respective outcomes.

- 'Clean, Green Future' Outcome: *Reflects the need to protect and enhance the environment and tackle climate change, biodiversity loss and unsustainable resource usage.*

Sub-outcomes:

- People act now to tackle climate change
- Nature and the local environment are valued, protected and enhanced
- Resources are used in an environmentally sustainable way
- The economy and infrastructure are low carbon and environmentally-friendly.

- 'Great Communities' Outcome: *Aims to ensure Leicestershire has thriving, inclusive communities in which people support each other and take responsibility for their local area.*

Sub-outcomes:

- Diversity is celebrated and people feel welcome and included
- People participate in service design and delivery
- Communities are prepared for and resilient to emergencies
- Cultural and historical heritage are enjoyed and conserved

- People support each other through volunteering.
- ‘Improving Opportunities’ Outcome: *Aims for all children to get the best start for life and to have access to a good quality education. Also aims for everyone to have the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential.*

Sub-outcomes:

- Every child gets the best start for life
- Every child has access to good quality education
- Families are self-sufficient and enabled to be resilient
- Everyone is able to aim high and reach their full potential.
- ‘Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure’ Outcome: *Aims to ensure that we build a productive, inclusive and sustainable economy at the cutting edge of science, technology and engineering. Also reflects the need for our infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population and economy.*

Sub-outcomes:

- There is close alignment between skills supply and employer demand
- Leicestershire has the infrastructure for sustainable growth
- Leicestershire is an attractive place where businesses can flourish
- Economic growth delivers increased prosperity for all
- Leicestershire has the right homes in the right places to meet needs.
- ‘Keeping People Safe and Well’ Outcome: *Aims to ensure the people of Leicestershire have the opportunities and support they need to take control of their health and wellbeing. Also reflects the need to ensure people are safe and protected from harm.*

Sub-outcomes:

- People are safe in their daily lives
- People enjoy long lives in good health
- People at the most risk are protected from harm
- Carers and people with care needs are supported to live active, independent, and fulfilling lives.

Progress and Performance Monitoring

10. The Council’s progress in delivering these outcomes will be monitored by the Outcome Boards, which will provide six-monthly reports to the Corporate Management Team to highlight key achievements, challenges and priorities. The Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committees will continue to receive quarterly updates on departmental performance for the areas they cover.

Children and Families

11. The outcome in the draft Strategic Plan with the most direct links with Children and Family Services is the 'Improving Opportunities' outcome, which aims to support disadvantaged people (primarily disadvantaged children and families) to access the opportunities they need to fulfil their potential. Children and Family Services also has strong links with the 'Keeping People Safe and Well' outcome, which covers the Council's duties to protect vulnerable people from harm and abuse.
12. However, the aims and actions of Children and Family Services are also embedded in other outcomes. For example, the 'Great Communities' outcome includes, for sub-outcome 6.5 'People support each other through volunteering', an aim to develop and maintain a volunteering offer in social care services and to support the development of Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector services which support children, young people and families. The 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' outcome includes, for sub-outcome 8.1 'There is close alignment between skill supply and demand', aims and actions to work with partners to increase opportunities in the labour market for young people. Further, sub-outcome 8.4 'Economic growth delivers increased prosperity for all' aims to ensure that economic growth delivers increased prosperity for all, with a specific aim for growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) in the local economy to correspond with a reduction in the percentage of children eligible for free school meals.
13. The 'Improving Opportunities' outcome includes the following aims and actions of relevance to Children and Family Services.

Sub-outcome 7.1: 'Every child gets the best start in life'

Aim: Services working in more integrated and collaborative ways to support pre-school children and their families

Actions include:

- We will focus on strengthening collaboration between partners to improve early education, health and wellbeing outcomes for pre-school children
- We will work with partners across education, health and care to promote breastfeeding
- We will develop an integrated Early Years Pathway to ensure that vulnerable children are identified and supported early
- We will develop an integrated communication strategy to promote the 1001 Critical Days Children's Manifesto
- We will join up how services for pre-school children and their families report on performance to support understanding of our progress and where we need to improve
- We will help to ensure staff across health, care and education are informed about the needs of children with SEND and available support

Aim: Increase in the proportion of young children achieving a good level of development at foundation stage

Actions include:

- We will focus on narrowing the development gaps that affect children and families who are at the greatest disadvantage (e.g. those who live in poverty or have a poor home environment, have special educational needs and/or are in our care)

- We will support parents and families to build on their understanding of children's needs so that they are able to get their children off to a good start
- We will help families access free childcare and provide high-quality childcare and early education that is fully inclusive and accessible
- We will support childcare providers to offer sufficient high-quality early education
- We will protect and where possible strengthen the service provided by our Children and Family Wellbeing Centres
- We will provide greater clarity on what success looks like when children are ready for school and on how we can support schools to be ready

Sub-outcome 7.2 'Every child has access to good quality education'

Aim: Sufficient, high quality mainstream school places and specialist SEND provision to meet growing demand

Actions include:

- We will work with partners to ensure that admissions arrangements promote diversity and choice and meet the needs of vulnerable groups
- We will ensure a sufficient supply of high-quality school places by monitoring capacity and extending or building new schools where required
- We will implement an ambitious sufficiency programme to develop SEND provision across the local area, including development of resources in pre-school settings and mainstream schools to promote inclusion and expansion of existing special schools
- We will maintain strong arrangements for the management of our assets, and strengthen our relationship with Academies, to ensure all school buildings (irrespective of their designation and funding arrangements) are fit for purpose

Aim: Improved educational attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils (e.g. those in receipt of free school meals, with SEND)

Actions include:

- We will aim to help school pupils catch up with learning missed during the pandemic and continue to improve educational attainment
- We will focus on ensuring all children in our care access appropriate, stable education placements and positive educational experiences
- We will work with partners through the SEND and Inclusion Board to ensure the culture of all mainstream schools and providers is inclusive and staff are well-equipped and supported to meet the learning needs of the vast majority of children with SEND.
- We will work with further education colleges to develop opportunities for a more individualised learning experience for young people with SEND.
- We will focus on improving the quality of EHCPs and developing the EHCP process and Annual Reviews both within the local authority and between the local authority, clinical commissioning group and provider services
- We will ensure that when a child or young person needs move to a different educational provision or service, this is done in a timely manner with the appropriate information being made available so that needs are well understood

Sub-outcome 7.3 'Families are self-sufficient and enabled to be resilient'

Aims:

- Families are able to identify their own support networks and feel more able to deal with issues as they arise

- The Council continues to achieve its target for the number of families achieving significant and sustained progress

Actions include:

- We will develop the Leicestershire Information and Support Directory and Local Offer to help families access information, guidance, and support
- We will support the delivery of Citizens Advice services and crisis and hardship support for people in need
- We will work positively with parents and carers opting for EHE, offering a range of support to ensure that statutory duties are met
- We will work across the early help partnership to ensure agencies are able to identify families who may require additional support at the earliest possible opportunity, and will work with partners to make sure families receive the best response to their needs
- We will continue to prioritise investment in preventative services to help to avoid the need for children to become looked after. We will ensure children who are at risk of family breakdown receive timely and, if necessary, intensive support to help them to remain living with their families
- We will develop our support to young people who encounter emotional difficulties or require other targeted early help support

Sub-outcome 7.4 Everyone is able to aim high and reach their full potential

Aim: Below national average rate of vulnerable young people who are not in education, employment or training (NEET)

Actions include:

- We will challenge schools in relation to statutory individualised careers guidance for vulnerable groups
- We will monitor the progress of learners beyond age 16 to ensure good progress and identify those at risk of becoming NEET in order to target them for additional support
- We will identify the interests and skills of children in our care and provide them with information and advice about educational and career options
- We will raise employers' awareness of the issues affecting care leavers to help ensure they offer the right support to care leaver employees
- Through our Teenagers with Babies Action Group, we will deliver actions to reduce NEET amongst Teenage parents, such as ensuring seamless support pathways and improving access to educational opportunities
- Our Youth Offending Team will provide young offenders with dedicated Education Worker and Careers Advisors to ensure they are actively engaged in education, training or employment
- We will expand the range of alternative providers for young offenders and others for whom formal educational placements are not suitable

14. The 'Keeping People Safe and Well' outcome includes the following aims and actions of relevance to Children and Family Services.

Sub-outcome 9.1 People are safe in their daily lives

Aim: Fewer children and young people involved in and impacted by criminal behaviour

Actions include:

- We will deliver a robust, whole-family approach to prevent children and young people from engaging in criminal behaviour
- We will work with partners to provide safe spaces for children and young people to play, without the risk of being groomed into criminal exploitation
- We will deliver preventative street-based work with young people targeted in areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour
- We will identify and address the exploitation of children and young people and provide care and support to those affected

Sub-outcome 9.2 People at the most risk are protected from harm

Aim: Safeguarding approaches are effective in recovery from Covid-19 and informed by learning from the pandemic

Actions include:

- We will focus on identifying and responding to hidden harm (e.g. self-neglect, mental ill-health and/or learning disabilities, domestic abuse)
- We will support care homes with Infection Control, vaccination, and Personal Protective Equipment support to minimise Covid-19 outbreaks
- We will risk assess and quality assure care providers to ensure services are safe and protect vulnerable children and adults
- We will work with partners to review the response to and forward implications of Covid-19 and recovery work regarding safeguarding

Aim: Vulnerable people are identified and protected from harm and abuse

Actions include:

- We will improve how we work with families to safeguard babies by ensuring robust procedures are in place and raising awareness of risk factors
- We will develop a communications strategy to support partners to deliver universal safety messages to children and young people
- We will work with partners to develop joint responses to risk including child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, gangs, missing from home
- We will focus on combatting sexual violence and domestic abuse by developing a Domestic Abuse Strategy, protecting all survivors and their families in safe and appropriate accommodation
- We will develop trauma-informed practices and offer direct work to support children to recover from Adverse Childhood Experiences
- We will ensure that work with young people to reduce risk and vulnerability assists prevention of adult safeguarding need

Consultation and Timetable for Decisions

15. Development of the Plan has so far included engagement with lead officers for supporting strategies and the current (2018-22) outcomes, Department Management Teams, Corporate Management Team and the Lead Member for Community and Staff Relations.
16. Subject to the Cabinet approval at its meeting on 26 October 2021, a 12-week public consultation on the Plan will begin on 1 November 2021 and run until 21 January 2022. As part of the consultation all of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees and the Scrutiny Commission (from 1 -17 November), and key

partnership boards such as the Children and Families Partnership and Health and Wellbeing Board (17 and 25 November respectively) will be provided with an opportunity to comment on the draft Plan.

17. Residents, community groups and partner organisations will also be invited to provide feedback on the draft Plan through a variety of methods including a public survey and meetings in which the Plan will be presented and reviewed.
18. Findings from the consultation will be used to inform development of the final Plan and it is intended that, in March 2022, a report will be presented to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration and then to the Cabinet presenting the outcome of the consultation and seeking agreement for the revised draft Plan to be submitted to the County Council for approval on 18 May 2022.

Resource Implications

19. All actions within the Plan are from existing service/business plans and strategies. As such, there should not be any additional resource investment required to deliver the Plan beyond that which has already been approved.
20. However, as referenced in Section 11 of the Plan ('Monitoring Outcome Delivery'), officer resources will be required to monitor delivery of the Plan and ensure that the strategic outcomes are reflected in and supported by all relevant underpinning Council plans and strategies. These tasks will be carried out by Outcome Boards, consisting of representatives from departments and corporate services. As delivery of the Plan will require continued collaboration with partner services, representatives from the Outcome Boards will interact with relevant partnership boards to monitor outcome delivery and promote integration of strategies.
21. The number of Outcome Boards has been reduced following a review of outcome delivery arrangements. Therefore, fewer officer resources will be required than have been utilised to monitor and support delivery of the current (2018-22) Plan.
22. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on the Plan and will have a further opportunity to comment following the public consultation (prior to the March 2022 Cabinet meeting).

Conclusions

23. The Committee is asked to provide its views on the draft Strategic Plan (2022-26) as set out in the Appendix, including the content highlighted in this report.

Background papers

[Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan \(2018-2022\)](#) (Previous Plan)

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

25. A screening assessment of the Strategic Plan concluded that a full impact assessment is not required. The Strategic Plan is a high-level document which reflects the content of existing Council plans and strategies in order to set out a clear summary of the Council's overall ambitions and delivery approach; it does not include new actions which could have Equality and Human Rights Implications.
26. The Plan will, however, have a positive impact as it promotes Equality and Human Rights, primarily by including, within the section on the 'Great Communities' outcome (see sub-section 6.1), specific aims and actions to deliver the sub-outcome: 'diversity is celebrated, and people feel welcome and included'. This sub-outcome highlights issues around community cohesion and hate crime along with specific actions which the Council will deliver over the next four years to address these issues. Equality and Human Rights are also embedded throughout the Plan.

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

Crime and Disorder Implications

27. There are no direct crime and disorder implications arising from this report. The Plan promotes community safety by including, within the section on the 'Keeping People Safe and Well' outcome (see sub-sections 9.1 and 9.2 of the appendix), specific aims and actions to deliver the sub-outcomes 'people are safe in their daily lives' and 'people at the most risk are protected from harm'.

Environmental Implications

28. The Plan raises the profile of environmental issues by including, within the section on the 'Clean, Green Future' outcome, aims and actions to tackle climate change and biodiversity loss and promote sustainable resource usage. Aims to ensure infrastructure supports the transition to net zero carbon emissions are also reflected in the section on the 'Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure' outcome (see sub-section 8.2 of the appendix).

Appendices

Appendix: Leicestershire County Council Strategic Plan (2022-26) **(Revised Plan)**

Officer to Contact

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Strategic Plan

2022-26



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1. Glossary

Term	Definition
LLEP	Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership
VCSE Sector	Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise Sector
SEND	Special Educational Needs and Disability
EHCP	Education, Health and Care Plan
EHE	Elective Home Education
NEET	Not in Education, Employment or Training
GVA	Gross Value Added
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
R&D	Research and Development
SMEs	Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises
GDHI	Gross Disposable Household Income
PM2.5	Fine Particulate Matter
CO2e	Carbon Dioxide Equivalent

2. Foreword



Cllr Nick Rushton

Leader of Leicestershire County Council

This Strategic Plan sets out our ambitions and priorities for the next four years (2022-26). It outlines what we want to achieve and how we intend to do it.

It is based on five strategic outcomes which are aspirational; they outline the end results that we want to see for Leicestershire. For each outcome, we have identified specific aims which we will focus on achieving over the next four years, with corresponding actions. Further detail can be found through the relevant strategies in our Strategy Library.

Whilst the outcomes have been set out in separate sections, it is recognised that there are significant interdependencies between them. For example, reducing our carbon footprint supports not only our aim to tackle climate change but also to ensure positive health outcomes for current and future generations. Further, improving the educational attainment of disadvantaged children ensures they are able to access opportunities to fulfil their potential and supports economic growth in the county. Links between outcomes have been highlighted throughout the Plan and some actions support multiple outcomes.

We will deliver it by building upon our previous achievements, such as being recognised by Impower as the most productive Council in England and Wales, whilst being the lowest funded County Council in the UK. However, the Council alone cannot deliver all the change that will be needed. Through continued collaboration with our partners to coordinate and integrate our plans we hope to make the maximum impact on the most pressing issues that we face and celebrate and build on the success of this great county.

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "Nicholas Rushton". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The first name "Nicholas" is written in a larger, more prominent script, and the surname "Rushton" follows in a similar but slightly smaller script. The ink is dark and the background is plain white.

3. Vision

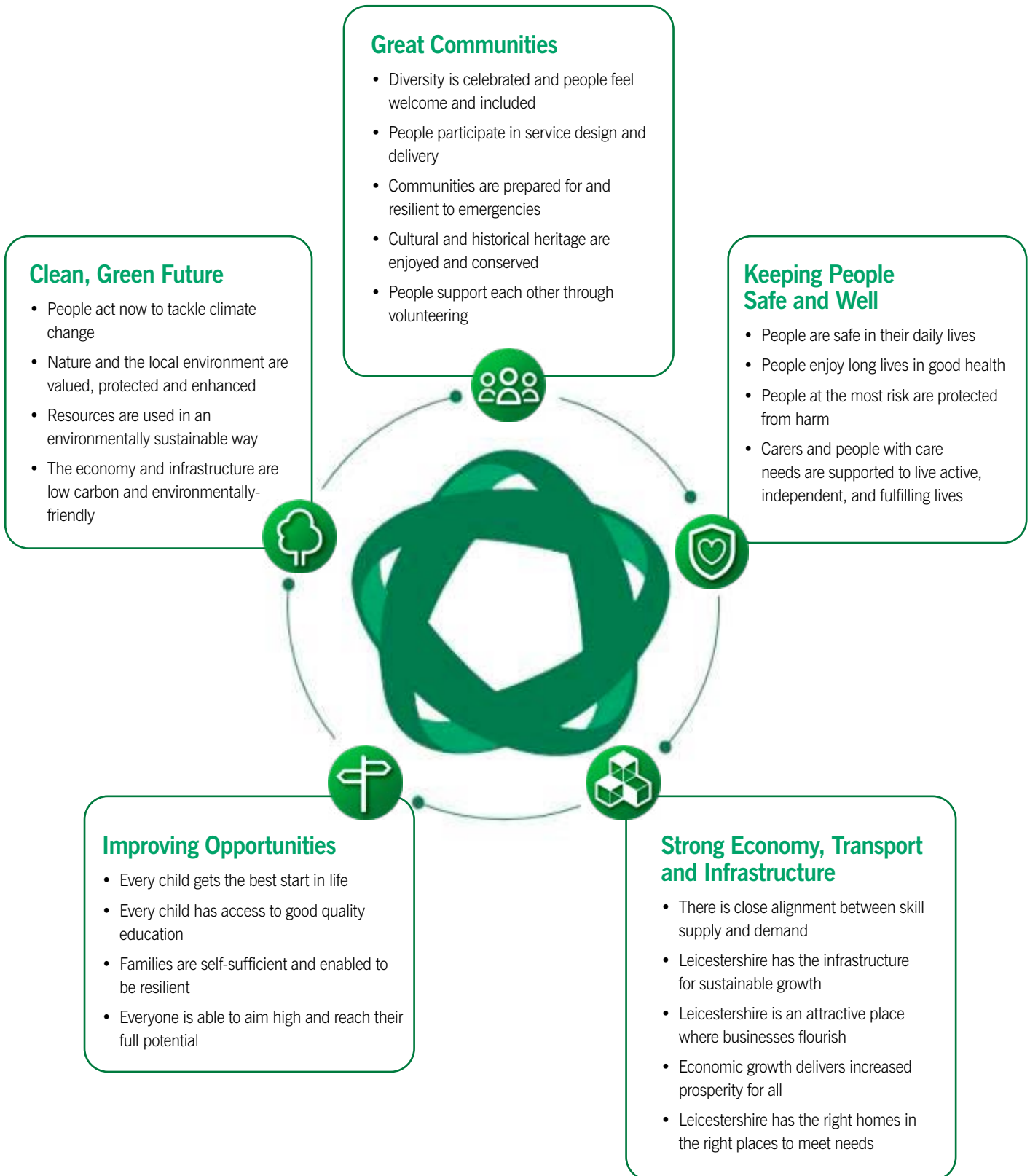
The vision below summarises our ambitions for Leicestershire and puts us on the right path to secure the best possible future for local residents.

An inclusive county in which active communities, great connections and greener living enable everyone to prosper, be happy and healthy.

We want Leicestershire to have welcoming and inclusive communities in which people take responsibility for their local areas and support each other. People are safe and well, living active, independent, and fulfilling lives. The local economy is flourishing with resilient, clean growth delivering increased prosperity for all. Everyone, regardless of their background or personal characteristics, has access to the opportunities they need to aim high and achieve their aspirations. People act now with urgency to protect and enhance the environment and meet the challenges of climate change.



4. Strategic Outcomes



5. Clean, Green Future

This outcome reflects the need to protect and enhance the environment and meet the challenges and opportunities of responding to climate change. Global warming is leading to an increase in the frequency and intensity of storms, flooding and heatwaves and changes in pests and diseases. It will affect social and environmental determinants of health including clean air, safe drinking water, supply of sufficient food and access to secure shelter. It will also damage local infrastructure and services, reduce productivity, increase the likelihood of conflict and climate migration and increase the loss of biodiversity.

There is increasing recognition of, and commitment to, the need to protect, promote and improve the environment at a local, national, and global level. The Paris Agreement of 2015 requires countries to limit global temperature rise to below 1.5 to 2°C. The interconnection between economic development, social equity and inclusion and environmental impacts has also been recognised internationally via the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The UK Government has prioritised action on climate change through the Climate Change Act 2008 (2050 Target Amendment) Order 2019, requiring the government to reduce the UK's net emissions of greenhouse gases to zero by 2050. This will require transformational action.

On 15th May 2019, Leicestershire County Council declared a climate emergency, making a commitment to achieving net zero carbon emissions from its own operations by 2030 and to work with others and to lobby government to achieve net zero carbon emissions for Leicestershire by 2045.

The Council has different levels of control and influence in protecting the environment and addressing climate change. It is responsible for complying with legislation relating to the environmental impacts from its activities, such as heating and powering our offices, using vehicles and generating waste; managing the environmental impacts from the activities of Leicestershire residents and businesses, such as air pollution from local transport and the reduction, recycling and disposal of household waste; and enforcing environmental legislation on businesses, such as in relation to product packaging, banned substances and energy certificates. It also has capacity to influence wider environmental action by lobbying government and working with partners within Leicestershire.

The Council commits to minimising the environmental impact of its activities and helping to protect the environment of Leicestershire. We will tackle climate change and embed environmental sustainability into everything we do. We will work with partners to deliver sustainable development by recognising and fostering the links between the environment, people, and the economy.

The priorities and commitments to deliver this outcome focus on how the Council will help to protect the environment and tackle climate change through its service delivery and interactions with residents and partners. Further detail on how the Council will reduce carbon emissions from its own operations can be found in the section on the Council's Carbon Reduction Programme.

5.1 People act now to tackle climate change and protect the environment

To achieve net zero carbon emissions in Leicestershire we need communities to be aware of the need for action on climate change and to act now to reduce environmental impacts. There is significant potential for individual action and community-led initiatives to support environmental sustainability (e.g. energy usage, sustainable transport, recycling). Our Community Survey highlights that 97% of residents feel protecting the environment is important. However, only 45% feel informed about what the Council is doing to protect the environment and tackle climate change, and 67% think the Council should be doing more.

Leicestershire has a higher rate of average waste produced per household than comparator counties, which may suggest that there is scope to reduce the amount of waste produced locally. We also have lower rates of electrical vehicle ownership than comparators and fewer electrical vehicle charging points.

There has been a 33% reduction in the rate of domestic CO2 emissions in Leicestershire since 2010. Leicestershire also ranks in the best performing 25% of comparators for the percentage of new-build houses with an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C+. However, the county ranks in the worst 25% comparators for the percentage of *existing* homes with this level of energy efficiency.

What will success look like?

- Residents actively involved in tackling climate change and protecting the environment
- Reduction in the rate of CO2 emissions per capita (average per resident)

Our Commitments

- We will use our interactions with communities to raise awareness of environmental impacts and harness community capacity to address them
- We will provide support and opportunities for learning to local communities, schools, and businesses to promote positive environmental action and collaborative working, leading to constructive behavioural change
- We will support residents to be more resource efficient in their energy and water use, such as through our Warm Homes service which provides free advice and information on managing heating costs and staying warm at home well as grants to deliver first-time gas central heating systems
- We will work with partners to expand zero and ultra-low emissions vehicles and charging, including Heavy Goods Vehicle refuelling, and promote sustainable modes of transport including walking and cycling



5.2 Nature and the local environment are valued, protected and enhanced

Biodiversity describes the enormous variety of life on Earth. Biodiversity and the eco-system cleanse our atmosphere, provide us with the oxygen we breath, the clean water we drink and the food we eat as well as many of the medicines which help to keep us well. The natural capital assets (geology, soil, air, water and all living things) of Leicestershire have an annual value of £388.45 million, with agricultural habitats generating £180.91 million annually.

Intensively managed farmland is poor for wildlife whilst land which is less intensively managed with little or no applications of chemical fertiliser, pesticides and herbicides is much richer in wildlife. In Leicestershire and Rutland where more than 80% of the land is farmed, good habitats for wildlife are now few and far between and much of our wildlife is being squeezed out and continues to decline. Leicestershire and Rutland are amongst the poorest counties for sites of recognised nature conservation value. The best sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) represent only about 1%% of the land area in Leicestershire.

Natural green space includes a wide variety of land from scrub and wetland to woodland and meadow. Access to natural green space supports our health and well-being. There is a risk that future development may not sufficiently consider the value of natural capital and green space.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the percentage of county land which promotes diversity of habitat and species

Our Commitments

- We will support awareness raising and education on biodiversity and the value of natural capital to society and the economy
- We will create, protect, enhance, and manage sustainable green infrastructure and biodiversity on Council managed land and assets
- We will seek to improve the biodiversity value and condition of natural capital features on Council managed land and assets
- We will seek to demonstrate and support environmentally sustainable farming practices that support the maintenance and enhancement of biodiversity and the condition of natural capital features
- We will work with partners through the LLEP to develop a Natural Capital Investment Plan, and deliver the roadmap the recent Natural Capital Review Report set out for Leicestershire, minimising the loss of habitats and the impacts of development and encouraging innovative land use

5.3 Resources are used in an environmentally sustainable way

A further environmental crisis we are facing, in addition to climate change and biodiversity loss, is unsustainable resource usage. We are using the planet's resources at a faster rate than they are being replenished and in a way which does not allow most of these resources to be reused within our economic systems. In order to address this crisis, we need to move to a circular economy model. This is a more resource efficient alternative to a traditional linear economy (make, use, dispose) where resources are used for as long as possible, then products and materials are recovered, regenerated, or recycled.

Leicestershire County Council is responsible for the reuse, treatment, recycling, or disposal of the collected wastes. In addition, it has the duty to provide places for the deposit of household waste from residents (Recycling & Household Waste Sites). Compared to other county areas, Leicestershire has a lower rate of household waste which is recycled and has a significantly higher percentage of waste which is landfilled.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting and reduction in the percentage landfilled

Our Commitments

- Increase in the percentage of household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting and reduction in the percentage landfilled
- We will reduce the tonnage of household waste produced in Leicestershire and minimise its environmental impact by applying the waste hierarchy in the priority order of prevention, preparation for reuse, recycling, other recovery, and disposal
- We will continue to encourage appropriate use of the Recycling & Household Waste Sites service
- We will provide a trade waste recycling, treatment and disposal service for businesses in Leicestershire, where practicable and cost-effective to do so
- We will work closely with other Waste Disposal Authorities to share ideas and opportunities for joint working / collaboration and innovation

5.4 The economy and infrastructure are low carbon and environmentally friendly

Decarbonising the economy and infrastructure is the key solution to addressing the climate emergency. Nearly 70% of Leicestershire's emissions come from commercial, industrial and transport sources, with the remaining 30% coming from domestic sources (how we heat and use energy in our homes). Total commercial CO2 emissions in Leicestershire have reduced by xx% since 2005 and industrial CO2 emissions have reduced by xx%. However, transport emissions have only fallen by x%. The move to a low carbon, environmentally-friendly economy will require policy, technological and behavioural changes.

The Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP)'s survey of local businesses from March-June 2021 found that 35% of businesses had taken action to reduce carbon impact in the past 2 months and 50% planned to take action over the following 6 months.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the percentage of businesses taking action to reduce their carbon impact
- Reduction in CO2 emissions under the Council's influence in the local area

Our Commitments

- We will ensure that our Corporate Asset Investment Fund owns efficient assets which enhance the environment and biodiversity in the county
- We will reduce the impact of the Council's procurement and delivery of goods and services on the environment, including through the reduced use of raw materials and fossil fuels, increased use of renewable energy and deployment of smarter and more efficient processes
- We will work with businesses to raise awareness of the need to act on climate change and to support carbon reduction and circular economy practices
- We will identify and promote business opportunities arising from the move towards a circular economy

- We will work with partners to identify the investment requirements for zero carbon development and develop associated training and skills routes
- We will work with partners to create new, low-carbon business units and managed workspaces for start-ups and small companies
- We will work with partners and developers to ensure developments are low or zero carbon, climate resilient and enhance biodiversity
- We will ensure effective restoration of public transport services following the pandemic and identify opportunities to make transport more efficient
- We will encourage and support active and sustainable travel options, where appropriate, by learning from best practice and encouraging the uptake and use of electric vehicles and micro-mobility as appropriate, including through provision of infrastructure
- We will reduce pollution and contamination in Leicestershire through our Trading Standards service and other areas of control and influence
- We will continue to investigate and pursue opportunities to increase carbon sequestration through nature based solutions, such as tree planting



6. Great Communities

The Great Communities outcome aims to ensure that Leicestershire has thriving, integrated and inclusive communities in which people support each other and take responsibility for their local area. We want communities to frequently tell us what is important to them and how well services are working and to work with us to improve services. Communities also need to be resilient and adaptable during emergencies to ensure a seamless return to normal life.

The communities we live in and the relationships we have are the primary source of our physical and mental health – which in turn affects the kind of life we are able to live and the part we play in society. Our communities are key assets and by investing in them we can cultivate the conditions for people to flourish.

Whilst the pandemic has presented significant challenges for communities, it has also offered many examples of positive community spirit and highlighted the willingness of people to volunteer to help others, particularly the most vulnerable. Leicestershire's thriving and diverse Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) sector, comprising over 3,000 organisations, has continued to provide essential services. Over 1,000 Covid-19 volunteers have been recruited to support vulnerable people through activities such as providing food and medication, transport to and from appointments, information about support available and check-in/befriending contact. A further 1,250 county volunteers were recruited to support the Covid-19 vaccination programme.

We aim to encourage more people to become active citizens, taking responsibility for their local areas. We will 'help communities to help themselves' by supporting them to take advantage of and build on the assets within their local area (e.g. buildings, people, skills, and networks) to help solve local challenges. We will build upon the successful partnerships and initiatives which have developed during the pandemic to further strengthen and empower communities. We will also provide VCSE organisations with tailored information, advice, and support to build community capacity and strengthen universal services.

The council has a strong record of engaging with communities on services and strategies. This reflects our commitment to openness and transparency and supports informed decision-making on council services. We also encourage and support communities to direct development in their local areas. We aim to increase the involvement of residents in service design, such as by using a wider range of engagement methods and reaching marginalised communities.

Culture is our past, present and future. It's what we have inherited, what we are experiencing now and what we would like to see remembered. It's myths and legends, faiths and religion, buildings, villages, cities and landscapes, art, dance, music, and food, treasured and meaningful objects and possessions, values, beliefs and memories. We will preserve and make accessible our local cultural and historic heritage to enhance the wellbeing of local residents.

Resilient communities are capable of bouncing back from adverse situations. They do this by actively influencing and preparing for economic, social, and environmental change. We will work with partners to support society to avoid, prepare for, respond to, and recover from emergencies.

Our specific priorities and commitments to deliver this outcome are set out in the following pages. To deliver them, we will work closely with residents, VCSE organisations and partner services.

6.1 Diversity is celebrated and people feel welcome and included

Our Community Insight Survey finds that as of Quarter 1 2021/22 the vast majority of residents (92%) agree that their local area is a place where people from different backgrounds get on well together. However, this percentage represents a decrease from 96% in Quarter 2 2020/21. The rate of hate crime has also increased since the EU referendum and during the pandemic.

What will success look like?

- Increased community cohesion
- Better reporting and reduction in hate crime
- Council services are accessible and inclusive for all

Our Commitments

- Our Equalities strategy will focus on providing accessible services, promoting community cohesion and ensuring equity in employment opportunities
- We will sign up to the Race at Work Charter, The Disability Confident Scheme and the Stonewall Workforce Equalities Index
- We will provide guidance, training and support for all staff to address equalities issues
- We will organise and promote civic events throughout the county to celebrate our diverse communities
- We will support the Inter Faith Forum to promote greater understanding and awareness of religion, faith, and belief
- We will support the Leicestershire Equality Challenge Group to provide an independent challenge to our work to ensure service accessibility
- We will work with partners through the Leicestershire Safer Communities Strategy Board to tackle all forms of hate crime

6.2 People participate in service design and delivery

Our Community Survey suggests that 94% of residents are satisfied with their local area as a place to live. The majority of residents (57%) feel well informed about the Council and 67% state that they trust the Council. However, only 33% feel that they can influence Council decisions.

Neighbourhood Plans enable residents to develop a shared vision for local neighbourhoods and to shape the development and growth of local areas. There are now 125 active Neighbourhood Planning groups and there has been an increase in the number of Plans adopted, from 34 in 2019/20 to 38 in 2020/21. There are also 35 communities managing their local library, with many of these being community hubs which support the needs of local people.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the proportion of residents willing to work together and who feel that they can influence Council decisions
- Increase in the number of Neighbourhood Plans adopted

Our Commitments

- We will engage residents, service users and partners in the planning of services, through a variety of means
- We will sign the Consultation Institute's Charter and follow the best practice principles for consultation and engagement
- We will actively encourage community participation through the planning process, for instance through consultation on planning applications
- We will support Neighbourhood Plan development and provide timely and co-ordinated consultation responses from the Council
- We will continue to support Parish and Town Councils in their role as community leaders and providers of community managed services
- We will continue to support communities to plan and deliver devolved services, such as community-managed libraries and heritage sites

6.3 Communities are prepared for and resilient to emergencies

Leicestershire County Council aims to ensure that communities are ready for emergencies and prepared to respond. This can be supported through the development of Community Response Plans, which help communities to identify the skills, knowledge and resources that can be mustered to help those within the community who have been affected. There are currently 53 Community Response Plans across Leicestershire.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the number of active Community Response Plans

Our Commitments

- We will work with the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland Resilience Partnership to prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies
- We will support communities to develop Community Response Plans, so they are in a position to help themselves in exceptional circumstances
- We will provide advice and assistance to businesses and voluntary organisations to ensure effective business continuity management
- We will take action to support the resilience of the County to the existing and predicted changes in climate
- We will undertake the Lead Local Flood Authority statutory duties including reviewing Leicestershire's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy
- We will maintain our Resilient Highways Network, targeting works to ensure that traffic is kept moving despite disruptive events (e.g. severe weather)
- We will work with partners through the Signposting and Community Support Service to provide emergency short-term food and fuel support

6.4 Cultural and historical heritage are enjoyed and conserved

There was an 8% reduction in visits to heritage sites between 2018/19 and 2019/20. The pandemic has also had a significant impact on the county's museum and heritage sites and library services, with premises having closed during the restrictions. However, services have adapted through digital delivery including virtual museum tours, whilst libraries have seen an 89% increase in the number of e-loans from 2019/20-2020/21.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the number of Leicestershire residents and visitors engaging in cultural and heritage activities

Our Commitments

- Our libraries, heritage, country parks and adult learning programmes will promote wellbeing by providing free and accessible community facilities, exhibitions and parks and outdoor activities and offering a range of learning opportunities
- Our Audience Development Team will ensure that new audiences obtain the wellbeing benefits associated with cultural participation and support communities through the Cultural Communities Network to develop their own bespoke programmes of cultural events and activities
- Our Creative Learning Services will support schools with a wide range of resources, pupil sessions and professional help to stimulate reading for pleasure and creative learning across the curriculum
- Our Record Office will preserve and provide access to resources which can be used to research Leicestershire's history and culture
- Our Museums', Curatorial and Collections teams will maintain the County's natural history, artefacts, specimens, information and objects as well as the stories of the people who have made Leicestershire their home for thousands of years
- Through GoLearn! (Leicestershire Adult Learning Service), we will offer a wide range of online adult learning courses in venues across Leicestershire

6.5 People support each other through volunteering

As highlighted previously, there has been a surge in prospective and mobilised volunteers during the pandemic, which is reflected nationwide; 750,000 people registered to volunteer for the NHS Volunteer Responders scheme within four days of its launch in April 2020 and over 4,000 mutual aid groups formed. Locally, 1,077 volunteers were recruited to support vulnerable people at the beginning of the pandemic and a further 1,250 recruited to support vaccination. However, pre-pandemic there was a long-term downward trend in volunteer numbers and our latest Community Survey finds that 39% of resident respondents had given unpaid help in the last 12 months, suggesting that there may be scope to increase the rate of volunteering.

VCSE organisations have taken a leading role in ensuring the provision of support for vulnerable people throughout the pandemic, however they have faced significant financial pressures due to reduced income, the costs of making facilities Covid-19 secure and increases in demand.

What will success look like?

- There is a sustained increase in volunteering post-pandemic

- VCSE organisations remain financially viable and maintain service delivery

Our Commitments

- We will continue to provide communities with up-to-date information and advice to support and promote volunteering
- We will develop and maintain a volunteering offer across services such as libraries, museums and heritage, social care and environment and waste
- We will encourage Council employees to volunteer to develop their skills and experience, build links with communities and support local initiatives
- We will support volunteers to maintain their health and wellbeing
- We will support the growth and development of VCSE organisations by providing targeted grants and funding
- We will commission an ongoing programme of support for VCSE groups in areas such as governance, income generation, commissioning support, representation, and establishment



7. Improving Opportunities

This outcome aims to ensure that all children get the best start for life and have the opportunities they need to reach their potential, regardless of where they grow up, or the family circumstances they are born into. This reflects evidence that the first 1001 critical days of life (from pregnancy to age two years) have a significant influence on neurological brain development and lifelong outcomes for the child. We believe children are best supported to grow within their own families and as such the outcome also reflects the need to ensure families are resilient and self-sufficient. Further, it aims to ensure that disadvantaged adults, such as those with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health conditions, are able to aim high and achieve their aspirations.

The impact of family and community disadvantage is felt before a child enters school and is likely to have a significant impact on their future educational attainment and life chances. Whilst the term 'disadvantage' is usually linked to a family's income, a wider definition incorporating the child's vulnerability in the context of their family or community is more useful. For example, children living in a home where there is domestic abuse, a parent has poor mental health and/or problematic usage of drugs or alcohol, are at greater risk of experiencing mental illness and engaging in harmful behaviours. We also know that children with special educational needs and/or disabilities may be disadvantaged.

A report from the Association for Young People's Health suggests that many of the risk factors for poorer outcomes amongst children and young people have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including financial hardship, poor emotional health and wellbeing and academic pressures. Young people already facing challenges in their lives (such as living in poverty, with a disability and/or in challenging family situations) seem to have been hardest hit.

Early education has the potential to drive social mobility and improve outcomes for the next generation. It is therefore essential that children arrive at school ready to learn. High quality care in the early years of a child's life supports better readiness for school, stronger cognitive skills and speech and language development. Investing in children's development in the early years leads to large payoffs for children, communities and the wider economy. It is estimated that individuals with five or more good GCSEs have average lifetime productivity gains of £100,000, compared to those with qualifications below this level.

Our services will be flexible and responsive to the needs of children and families, providing the right level of support at the right time. Wherever possible children's and families' needs will be met by universal services, however we will also invest in effective, targeted services that identify and support vulnerable families at an early stage. Supporting families requires effective collaboration between partner services. We will therefore work closely with partners, including through Leicestershire's Children and Families Partnership - a sub-group of Leicestershire's Health and Wellbeing Board which brings together local authorities, police, health, schools, probation and the voluntary sector - to help ensure children and young people reach their full potential.

7.1 Every child gets the best start in life

The 1,001 days from pregnancy to the age of two set the foundations for an individual's cognitive, emotional and physical development. These 1,001 days are a critical time for development, and we are committed to improving how we support families during the 1,001 critical days.

Leicestershire generally performs well in child and maternal health, with a lower rate of under-18 conceptions, smoking at the time of delivery and low birth weight babies than England. It also currently has a slightly higher percentage of children achieving a good level of development at age 5 than the national average, although performance on this measure has historically tended to be below comparators.

However, Leicestershire ranks in the worst 25% of county areas for the percentage of children achieving the expected level of development at age 2-2.5yrs. It also performs poorly in terms of the percentage of eligible 2 year olds taking up free early education in Leicestershire (an initiative focused on the most socio-economically deprived households) and the percentage of children eligible for free school meals who achieve a good level of development at age 5. There is also further work to do around maintaining breastfeeding rates after initiation across the County.

There are 2 tiers of support for children with special educational needs (SEND): 'SEN Support' and 'Education, Health and Care Plan' (EHCP). EHCPs are the higher level of support. In Leicestershire, the percentage of children with SEND who have an EHCP and achieve a good level of development by age 5 is significantly higher than national average. However, for children on SEN Support, performance is below the national average.

For the past 10 years in Leicestershire there has been a year-on-year increase in the rate of children who are looked after in our care. Locally, as of 2019, Looked After Children were working below age related expectations when they start school - 72% were below age related expectations for Personal, Social and Emotional Development and 78% were below in Communication, Language and Literacy.

What will success look like?

- Services working in more integrated and collaborative ways to support pre-school children and their families
- Increase in the proportion of young children achieving a good level of development at foundation stage

Our Commitments

Services working in more integrated and collaborative ways to support pre-school children and their families

- We will focus on strengthening collaboration between partners to improve early education, health and wellbeing outcomes for pre-school children
- We will work with partners across education, health and care to promote breastfeeding initiation and continuation
- We will develop an integrated Early Years Pathway to ensure that vulnerable children are identified and supported early
- We will develop an integrated communication strategy to promote the 1001 Critical Days Children's Manifesto
- We will join up how services for pre-school children and their families report on performance to support a coherent understanding of our progress and where we need to improve
- We will help to ensure staff across health, care and education are informed about the needs of children with SEND and available support

Increase in the proportion of children achieving a good level of development at foundation stage

- We will focus on narrowing the development gaps that affect children and families who are at the greatest disadvantage (e.g. those who live in poverty or have a poor home environment, have special educational needs and/or are in our care)
- We will support parents and families to build on their understanding of children's needs so that they are able to get their children off to a good start

- We will help families access free childcare and provide high-quality childcare and early education that is fully inclusive and accessible
- We will support all childcare providers to offer sufficient high-quality early education places
- We will protect and where possible strengthen the service provided by our Children and Family Wellbeing Centres
- We will provide greater clarity on what success looks like when children are ready for school and on how we can support schools to be ready

7.2 Every child has access to good quality education

As of 2018/19, Leicestershire had a higher proportion of primary and secondary schools rated either good or outstanding than the national average. The vast majority of children and families are offered their first preference of school placement. Leicestershire also has better overall educational attainment rates than the national average from key stages 1-4, although outcomes at A-Level are consistently below comparator levels.

Although children in our care have significantly poorer educational outcomes than their peers, Leicestershire performs well compared to other counties in this area. Additionally, educational attainment for children with SEND who have an EHCP is better in Leicestershire than the national average at all key stages except key stage 2. However, for children on SEN Support, educational attainment is consistently below comparator levels. Further, for children in receipt of free school meals, educational attainment rates at key stages 2 and 4 are consistently lower locally than the national average.

One of the key challenges in Leicestershire is a growing need for school places. Demand for EHCPs to support children with SEND has also increased significantly locally, at a rate higher than regionally or nationally. We recognise that the majority of children with SEND can and should have those needs supported in a mainstream setting at the SEN Support stage, without the need for an EHCP.

What will success look like?

- Sufficient, high quality mainstream school places and specialist SEND provision to meet growing demand
- Improved educational attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils (e.g. those in receipt of free school meals, with SEN and/or a disability)

Our Commitments

Sufficient, high quality mainstream school places and specialist SEND provision to meet growing demand

- We will work with partners to ensure that admissions arrangements promote diversity and choice and meet the needs of vulnerable groups
- We will ensure a sufficient supply of high-quality school places by monitoring capacity and extending or building new schools where required
- We will implement an ambitious sufficiency programme to develop SEND provision across the local area, including development of resources in pre-school settings and mainstream schools to promote inclusion and expansion of existing special schools

- We will maintain strong arrangements for the management of our assets, and strengthen our relationship with Academies, to ensure all school buildings (irrespective of their designation and funding arrangements) are fit for purpose

Improved educational attainment amongst disadvantaged pupils

- We will aim to help school pupils catch up with learning missed during the pandemic and continue to improve educational attainment
- We will focus on ensuring all children in our care access appropriate, stable education placements and positive educational experiences. Our Virtual School will ensure children in care and care leavers receive the best education possible and develop skills and knowledge for a successful future.
- We will work with partners through the SEND and Inclusion Board to ensure the culture of all mainstream schools and providers is inclusive and staff are well-equipped and supported to meet the learning needs of the vast majority of children, including those with SEND.
- We will work with further education colleges to develop opportunities for a more individualised learning experience for young people with SEND.
- We will focus on improving the quality of EHCPs and developing the EHCP process and Annual Reviews both within the local authority and between the local authority, clinical commissioning group and provider services
- We will ensure that when a child or young person needs move to a different educational provision or service, this is done in a timely manner with the appropriate information being made available so that needs are well understood

7.3 Families are self-sufficient and enabled to be resilient

Many families have emerging or complex needs which require support to enable their children to achieve good outcomes in life. To provide an effective response, we need to identify issues early, ensure joined-up working between services and work directly with families.

In 2019/20, Leicestershire County Council achieved its target for the number of families achieving significant and sustained progress through the Troubled Families programme, which aims to improve the lives and outcomes for England's most complex and 'troubled' families.

Disruption in family lives can lead to children missing education, with the impacts felt by children themselves, families and society. Leicestershire has low rates of children missing education. The number of elective home-educated (EHE) children has increased from approximately 150 six years ago to over 790 children which highlights the need to ensure families are well-equipped and supported to provide a suitable education.

Leicestershire has a high rate of children with SEND who have an EHCP and this has increased in recent years. As the majority of children with SEND can and should have those needs supported in a mainstream setting at the SEN Support stage without the need for an EHCP, this may suggest a need to develop the confidence and capacity of families to manage the needs of children with SEND.

What will success look like?

- Families are able to identify their own support networks and feel more able to deal with issues as they arise
- The Council continues to achieve its target for the number of families achieving significant and sustained progress

Our Commitments

- We will develop the Leicestershire Information and Support Directory and Local Offer to help families access information, guidance, and support
- We will support the delivery of Citizens Advice services and crisis and hardship support for people in need
- We will work positively with parents and carers opting for EHE, offering a range of support to ensure that statutory duties are met
- We will work across the early help partnership to ensure all agencies are able to identify families who may require additional support at the earliest possible opportunity, and will work with partners to make sure families receive the best response to their needs
- We will continue to prioritise investment in preventative services to help to avoid the need for children to become looked after. We will ensure children who are at risk of family breakdown receive timely and, if necessary, intensive support to help them to remain living with their families
- We will develop our support to young people who encounter emotional difficulties or require other targeted early help support

7.4 Everyone is able to aim high and reach their full potential

Only 2% of children aged 16-17 in Leicestershire are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET), below the national average (2.7%). The sub-groups we know are most likely to be NEET are care leavers, young carers, young offenders, young parents, and young people with learning and/or other disabilities. For example, the proportion of children with SEND who have an EHCP and are NEET at ages 16-17 is 9.4%; above the national average (8.9%).

The percentage of young people aged 19 with at least a level 2 qualification is consistently higher locally than the national average, however for those from poorer backgrounds who claimed free school meals during school, performance is consistently lower locally than the national average.

Leicestershire is in the best performing 25% comparators for the percentage of care leavers who are in education, employment, or training as well as for the percentage of care leavers who are living in suitable accommodation.

It is also in the best performing 25% comparators for the proportion of people aged 18-64 with a learning disability who are in paid employment and the proportion who are living in their own home or with their family. However, it is in the worst 25% of comparators for the proportion of those in contact with secondary mental health services who are in paid employment, and below the average amongst comparators for the proportion who are living independently.

What will success look like?

- Below national average rate of vulnerable young people (e.g. unaccompanied asylum-seeking children, those with SEN and/or disability, those who are from poorer backgrounds and/or care leavers) who are NEET
- Above national average rates of disadvantaged adults (e.g. those with learning disabilities, autism and/or mental health conditions) who are in paid employment and living independently

Our Commitments

Below national average rate of vulnerable young people who are NEET

- We will challenge schools in relation to statutory individualised careers guidance for vulnerable groups
- We will monitor the progress of learners beyond age 16 to ensure good progress and identify those at risk of becoming NEET in order to target them for additional support to participate in education or training and make positive and well-informed choices
- We will identify the interests and skills of children in our care and provide them with information and advice about educational and career options
- We will raise employers' awareness of the issues affecting care leavers to help ensure they offer the right support to care leaver employees
- Through our Teenagers with Babies Action Group, we will deliver actions to reduce NEET amongst Teenage parents, such as ensuring seamless support pathways and improving access to educational opportunities
- Our Youth Offending Team will provide young offenders with dedicated Education Worker and Careers Advisors to ensure they are actively engaged in education, training or employment and will advocate for them with schools, colleges, alternative providers, and employers
- We will expand the range of alternative providers for young offenders and others for whom formal educational placements are not suitable

Above national average rates of disadvantaged adults who are in paid employment and living independently

- We will maintain a person-centred process to support navigation through transition, from child to adulthood
- We will continue to offer engaging 'first steps' learning opportunities through our Adult Learning Service as a way of increasing participation for disadvantaged learners, and to prepare them for a more formal programme of learning
- We will work with all partners to promote and extend opportunities for supported employment for disadvantaged people
- We will support people to live in the least restrictive environments possible, by developing more supported accommodation, including 'step down' temporary accommodation, and exploring the benefits of single accommodation units with on-site shared support for adults with mental ill-health

8. Strong Economy, Transport and Infrastructure

This outcome aims to ensure that, using our local capabilities, innovations, and skills – we build a productive, inclusive and sustainable economy at the cutting edge of science, technology and engineering. It also reflects the need for our infrastructure to meet the demands of a growing population and economy, by providing great connections and sufficient employment space and housing of a range of types and tenure.

Our economy is primed for success. We have unrivalled assets such as a world-class university with one of the UK's largest science parks, a central location with the largest distribution park in Europe and the UK's 2nd largest freight airport. Our strong and growing manufacturing sector forms the backbone of our economy. Recently, the East Midlands Airport and Gateway Industrial Cluster sites in North West Leicestershire were selected for Freeport Status. This could provide a significant boost to manufacturing and logistics industries and create up to 60,000 additional jobs.

However, our economy faces significant challenges including lower productivity than the UK. This may be in part due to a lack of training, investment and innovation. Productivity helps businesses to grow more profitable and is a key determinant of the pay and living standards of residents.

The pandemic has also had a significant impact; leading to many jobs being classified as 'vulnerable' (particularly in hospitality, tourism, retail and manufacturing) and a contraction in job vacancies and hiring. This has impacted workers in low pay and/or insecure jobs the most and increased the risk of lower-skilled workers facing unemployment and job insecurity. Young people have been particularly affected by a reduction in entry level positions and apprenticeships. The capacity and capability of many businesses has also been significantly stretched in terms of their resilience and financial health, and rural areas have experienced disruptions to harvesting and demand for agricultural produce, as well as supply chain disruptions in the food and drink sector.

Pre-Covid, the Leicester and Leicestershire economy generated £24.5 billion in GVA, with 42,000 businesses and 538,000 jobs. Testament to its resilience and growth potential, we expect this to increase, despite the impacts of the pandemic, to £30.2 billion and 568,000 jobs by 2030.

The specific priorities and commitments for this outcome, outlined in the following pages, will enable the economy to recover from the Covid-19 pandemic and support long-term growth. To deliver them, we will continue to work in close partnership with public sector partners, businesses, and universities. We will focus on ensuring that people have the skills they need to access employment, as this will support a good quality of life and help businesses to grow. We will ensure that infrastructure provides excellent connectivity, enabling access to opportunities and opening up sites for development. As highlighted in the [Clean, Green Outcome](#), we also need to ensure that economic growth and infrastructure development supports the transition to net zero carbon emissions.

8.1 There is close alignment between skill supply and demand

Manufacturing and logistics are the key employment sectors in Leicester and Leicestershire, and we aim to accelerate growth in these areas. However, we also want to increase employment in business and financial services, tourism and hospitality and creative design, as well as facilitate growth in life sciences, environmental/low carbon technologies and space and aerospace. Local skills needs will also be driven by the shortfall in overseas workers, caused by Covid-19 and the fall in EU workers. This is likely to have a significant impact on the social care sector, which has already been facing recruitment and retention

difficulties for many years. There will be a need to encourage life-long learning, and to improve skills attainment across all of these priority sectors.

Leicestershire performs well in terms of the percentage of working-age population qualified to Levels 2+ and 3+, and the percentage of residents qualified to NVQ Level 4+ is similar to the national average. It also has a good supply of graduates to the local labour market and a strong and improving further education sector which provides a wide range of vocational training to meet local employer needs. However, there are insufficient numbers of local young people choosing to pursue careers in Science, Technology, Engineering & Mathematics (STEM), which is critical for our growth sectors.

Leicestershire has lower levels of in-work training than comparators and employers are reporting a lack of skilled workers in key sectors which is impacting business performance. The Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP)'s survey of local businesses in 2021 found that 21% of businesses had recruitment difficulties, 60% required improvement in basic work-based skills and over a third in digital skills.

Leicestershire has a lower unemployment rate than the national average. However, the rate has increased locally during the pandemic; the rate of Job Seekers Allowance and Universal Credit claimants increased from 1.6% in March 2020 to 3.3% in June 2021. Young people are likely to be disadvantaged due to missing education, reduction in apprenticeship opportunities, a more competitive labour market and lack of workplace digital skills.

What will success look like?

- Improvement in population skills and reduction in the proportion of employers reporting skills shortages or gaps
- Increased opportunities in the labour market for young people and reduced unemployment and job insecurity

Our Commitments

Improvement in population skills and reduction in the proportion of employers reporting skills shortages

- We will work with partners through the LLEP to:
 - Capture and analyse labour market information to identify skills shortages and growth businesses
 - Support the Further Education sector to expand and improve their facilities, especially where there is a strong link to growth sectors
 - Develop Skills Plans for priority sectors to promote relevant job opportunities and help businesses meet their recruitment and skills needs
 - Create a Leicester and Leicestershire Digital Skills Partnership to address digital skills deficiencies in the workplace and wider society
 - Focus on embedding employability skills so that individuals are well-prepared for employment and attractive to employers
 - Provide flexible leadership and management skills development programmes
 - Promote enterprise skills programmes to help people think about self-employment and support start-ups and existing businesses

Increased opportunities in the labour market for young people and reduced unemployment and job insecurity

- We will provide information, advice, and guidance on the labour market to parents, teachers and young people and promote STEM careers
- We will work with partners to identify pathways into employment and support youth engagement in emerging, productive, and buoyant sectors
- We will work with partners to continue provision of youth, employment, and career services such as Careers Hub and Youth Employment Hub
- We will work with partners to support the graduate careers and retention initiatives of local universities and to incorporate graduate skills into enterprise support, innovation, and growth initiatives
- We will work with partners to produce an Apprenticeship Action Plan to address the decline in apprenticeships due to Covid-19
- Our Kickstart scheme will provide employment placements for young people aged 16-24 at risk of becoming long-term unemployed
- We will work with local authorities, businesses, and education providers to support Leicestershire people back into employment following the Covid-19 crisis through re-training/job matching and stimulating entrepreneurialism
- Our Work + scheme will provide free one-to-one support, advice and information to people looking for secure paid employment or training

8.2 Leicestershire has the infrastructure for sustainable growth

We need our infrastructure to support continuous economic growth, whilst helping to tackle the climate emergency. There is a need to develop and promote sustainable forms of transport and decarbonise road transport.

Leicestershire's population is projected to rise to 860,618 by 2043 – an increase of 23% from 2018. Leicester and Leicestershire's Strategic Growth Plan identifies the need for 96,580 more homes by 2031 and a further 90,500 dwellings from 2031-50. Just under 200,000 new homes are therefore set to be built by 2050. These will need to be supported by new roads, schools, transport, and other infrastructure – estimated to cost £600m over the next 25 years.

The Strategic Growth Plan also identifies the need for an additional 367-423 hectares of land for employment use by 2031. Since 2010, there has been a transformation of the provision of world class business locations and premises in Leicester and Leicestershire; brand new Grade A office, technology and manufacturing premises accommodate 5,000 high-technology jobs. There is a need to continuously explore how existing employment areas can be supported and where new growth should be directed.

Road networks in Leicestershire are in fair condition with a relatively low percentage of roads requiring consideration of structural maintenance, although the percentage is higher for unclassified roads. However, unreliable journey times and congestion on local roads in county towns and on parts of the strategic road network (M1 Junctions) are a frequent complaint. Further, the predominantly rural nature of the county presents viability challenges for medium and long-distance public transport, which in turn means that it can be difficult to identify opportunities to travel by sustainable modes. Where mid or long-distance bus and rail opportunities exist, they may be infrequent, with long journey times, and stops located at potentially inconvenient locations.

In terms of digital infrastructure, the pandemic has accelerated the pace of digital transformation of businesses and public services, with employers expecting digital skills to become increasingly important.

Whilst this has created opportunities for enhanced business efficiency, productivity and resilience, it has also exposed the 'digital divide' in society with residents unable to afford and/or use digital devices, rural areas lacking access to high speed broadband or 4G or 5G services and independent retailers in our Towns and Rural areas struggling to sell on-line or advertise themselves by social media.

What will success look like?

- Infrastructure capacity and capability supports growth, whilst supporting net zero carbon emissions
- Sufficient employment sites and premises for growth

Our Commitments

Infrastructure capacity and capability supports growth, whilst supporting net zero carbon emissions

- Through our Corporate Asset Investment Fund, we own and manage a diverse portfolio of property and other investment assets. We will use this to support growth in the county and ensure there is a diverse range of properties and land assets available to meet the aims of economic development
- We will continue to provide safe, suitably maintained highways that support and encourage new housing development and economic growth and employ a flexible approach to reviewing, amending, and developing the network to reflect changing travel demand and traffic patterns
- We will maximise opportunities from technological innovations; utilising evidence gathered on the Major Road Network and from key radial routes to support end to end journey planning and better traffic management
- We will continue to press Government for long-term funding streams to help us maintain our highway assets and support passenger transport services
- We will work in partnership with local bus operators to promote and champion the provision of affordable, frequent, and high-quality passenger transport services and support with the recovery of the passenger transport market following the Covid-19 pandemic by identifying opportunities to provide access to essential services in the most cost effective and efficient way
- We will engage with the freight and logistics sector, to better understand the needs of the sector and ensure that schemes are developed which support the efficient movement of freight into, around, and out of Leicestershire
- We will work with partners through Midlands Connect to invest in strategic road and rail improvements to reduce congestion, improve journey times and support housing growth (e.g. Midlands Rail Hub proposal - rail infrastructure improvements to provide better rail links across the Midlands)
- We will continue engaging with HS2 Ltd to ensure that Leicester and Leicestershire's interests are protected and/or advanced throughout construction
- We will encourage and support active and sustainable travel options, where appropriate, by learning from best practice and encouraging the uptake and use of electric vehicles and micro-mobility as appropriate, including through provision of infrastructure
- We will work with partners through the LLEP to improve digital connectivity through broadband, Wi-Fi and 5G connectivity in rural blackspots and will define and implementing the Council's first digital connectivity strategy

Sufficient employment sites and premises for growth

- We will work with partners to renew existing employment sites and premises where there is demand
- We will work with partners to maintain confidence and momentum of development of strategic sites and the Freeport

8.3 Leicestershire is an attractive place where businesses flourish

The Leicestershire economy is dominated by small businesses - with 89.2% of businesses micro-sized (employing 9 or fewer people). Building on the support from our growth hub and successful partnership initiatives, we can continue the substantial progress made in the last 10 years, as evidenced by the growth in number of businesses (+18% between 2014 and 2019) and improvements in start-up and survival rates.

However, productivity rates are lower locally than the national average. Investment in research and development (R&D) is a key driver of innovation and productivity growth. Investment in R&D in Leicestershire has however been consistently below the national average; In 2016 R&D expenditure was equivalent to 1.5% GVA for Leicestershire, Rutland, and Northamptonshire – below the UK average (1.7%), and government target of 3% in the longer-term. This highlights the need to increase investment and activity in R&D and innovation and to lever existing R&D capabilities from our leading corporations.

Leicester and Leicestershire is a prime location for international businesses – with 18% of all businesses exporting overseas in 2020, and 83% of exporters selling to markets in the EU. Over the next 10 years, businesses must adapt to the new challenges and opportunities posed by Covid-19 and EU-Exit, as illustrated by the value of goods exported from the UK declining by 16% throughout 2020 – the largest drop since comparable records began.

What will success look like?

- Growth and expansion of existing innovation and R&D strengths
- Further increase in business density; particularly in growth sectors and knowledge-based businesses

Our Commitments

Growth and expansion of existing innovation and R&D strengths

- We will work with partners through the LLEP Innovation Board to drive forward accelerated innovation priorities
- We will work with partners to ensure the R&D sector has sufficient skills, capabilities and support to retain and attract new R&D programmes
- We will support R&D funding bids, innovation and knowledge transfer initiatives and increase public and private investment in R&D and innovation
- We will work with partners to increase opportunities for collaboration, knowledge exchange, pooling of resources, and applied problem solving
- We will support development of business and university networks to promote technology adoption and digital transformation
- We will work with businesses to improve the culture of innovation and awareness of the business performance benefits

Further increase in business density; particularly in growth sectors and knowledge-based businesses

- We will continue to support the key growth sectors of life sciences, space and earth observation, sports and sport science, advanced engineering, ICT, food and drink, logistics and professional and financial services – as well as the locally important sectors of agriculture, textiles, creative and cultural, construction, tourism and the visitor economy, and the voluntary and non-profit sectors
- We will work with partners to encourage and support international business expansion, including in the Freeport site
- We will develop and implement the Freeport strategy and SME support for exporting, identifying key sectors and opportunities
- We will continue to provide advice and support to businesses to assist recovery from Covid-19 and adaptation to the new EU trading relationships

8.4 Economic growth delivers increased prosperity for all

We aim for local economic growth to advance equality by creating opportunities for all, and for the benefits of increased prosperity to be distributed fairly.

Leicestershire is not deprived overall; the county is ranked 137th out of 152 upper tier authorities in England for Multiple Deprivation, where 1st is the most deprived. However, pockets of significant deprivation exist; four neighbourhoods in the county fall within the most deprived decile in England.

There is a lower number of children living in poverty locally than the average amongst county authorities and a lower percentage of children in secondary schools receiving free school meals. However, the percentage is higher than comparators for nursery and primary school children. Further, Gross Disposable Household Income (GDHI) is lower locally than average amongst county authorities.

Leicestershire has a low rate of households assessed as being at risk of homelessness, ranking in the best performing 25% comparators. However, financial pressures on residents are likely to increase as government Covid-19 support measures end. Local survey data suggests that over half of residents are worried about the economic wellbeing of their friends and family and significantly more are worried about their own economic well-being.

What will success look like?

- Growth in Gross Value Added (GVA) corresponds with an increase in GDHI and a reduction in the percentage of children receiving free school meals

Our Commitments

- We will focus on supporting inclusive economic growth in the disadvantaged areas and groups of Leicestershire
- Our Work + scheme will provide free one-to-one support, advice and information to people looking for secure paid employment or training

8.5 Leicestershire has the right homes in the right places to meet needs

Housing is generally an area of good performance, as Leicestershire ranks in the best performing 25% of comparators for the rates of new houses and affordable houses built. However, expensive house prices in rural areas puts housing out of reach for many and Leicestershire has a high rate of local authority owned homes which are 'non-decent' (an issue in Charnwood, Hinckley and Bosworth, North West Leicestershire and Melton). As highlighted, there is a need for 187,096 new houses by 2050, with 96,580 of those required by 2031. These will need to be low carbon developments and include affordable housing. The number of older people living in Leicestershire is also forecast to increase significantly, and many will require specialist accommodation.

What will success look like?

- Leicestershire is on track to deliver the 187,096 new dwellings required by 2050

Our Commitments

- We will work with developers, landowners, and statutory agencies to remove the barriers to development
- We will focus development in major strategic locations to reduce the amount that takes place in existing towns, villages, and rural areas. This will allow us to plan for new housing and employment with new and improved roads, public transport, schools, health services, shops, and open space
- We will explore ways to secure financial contributions through development to support essential infrastructure (e.g. highway capacity, schools etc)
- Through the Leicestershire Rural Housing Group, we will guide work to assess and meet the housing needs of people in the villages of Leicestershire
- We will work with partners and developers to help ensure all housing developments are low carbon and enhance biodiversity
- We will develop further the Social Care Investment Plan to secure suitable accommodation choices for social care service users



9. Keeping People Safe and Well

This outcome aims to ensure the people of Leicestershire live in a healthy environment and have the opportunities and support they need to take control of their health and wellbeing. It also aims to ensure people are safe and protected from harm.

Health and wellbeing is an asset to individuals, communities and wider society. Good mental and physical health is a basic precondition for people to take an active role in family, community, and work life. However, these benefits are undermined by health inequalities. Those living in the most disadvantaged areas often have poorer health outcomes, as do some ethnic minority groups and vulnerable people. Health inequalities have been further exposed by Covid-19 as it has taken a disproportionate toll on groups already facing the worst health outcomes.

Health inequalities are driven by factors beyond age, gender, genetics, lifestyle, social and community networks, socio-economic, cultural and environmental factors. The Council has influence and responsibility over some of these 'wider determinants of health' such as education, housing, transport, culture and clean air. It also fosters economic opportunity which is reflected in the supply and quality of jobs in the local area. Further, it empowers people to help themselves and each other, for example through volunteering and local initiatives.

We will work with partners through Leicestershire's Health and Wellbeing Board to improve the health and wellbeing of children and adults and reduce health inequalities. This will include addressing the wider determinants of health, with a focus on breaking down intergenerational cycles of deprivation and poor health outcomes. We will ensure that everyone has access to information and advice which supports their wellbeing and enables them to think ahead and plan for their future. We will promote wellbeing by building upon peoples' strengths and community assets. We will identify people who may be at risk of needing social care support in the future and help them to gain or regain the skills to live independently. We will also enable those requiring further support to take control of their health and wellbeing and to live active, independent, and fulfilling lives through easy access to effective, personalised care.

To help keep people safe, we will work with partners through Leicestershire's Safer Communities Board to strengthen links between work-streams being undertaken to reduce crime and disorder within communities. We will also fulfil our statutory duties to safeguard vulnerable children and adults who have experienced, or may be at risk of experiencing, abuse, or neglect. This will include work with partners through the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Adults' Board and Safeguarding Children's Partnership to coordinate and continuously review and improve safeguarding practices.

9.1 People are safe in their daily lives

Total crime levels are relatively low in Leicestershire compared to other areas and have reduced in recent years. The number of people killed or seriously injured on the County's roads is also low and public satisfaction with road safety is high. Leicestershire also has low rates of youth offending.

However, during 2020/21 there were significant increases in: hate crime (+32%); sexual offences (+32%); drug offences (+24%) and violence with injury (+13%). There was also an increase in reported anti-social behaviour across the County during 2020/21. There has been a reduction in the percentage of residents who feel safe when outside in their local area after dark, from 88% in 2019/20 to 79% in 2020/21. A survey by the Leicestershire Police and Crime Commissioner found that respondents tended to attribute this to a lack of street lighting and the proximity of anti-social behaviour and crime.

From 2018/19 to 2020/21, there has been a year-on-year reduction in the number of referrals to child safeguarding for child sexual exploitation. However, the rate of referrals for child criminal exploitation has

however increased slightly from 140 in 2019/20 to 145 in 2020/21. There is a risk that child criminal exploitation and violence related to young people may increase or become more visible during Covid-19 recovery.

What will success look like?

- Less crime and fear of crime and increase in the percentage of residents who feel safe when outside in their local area after dark
- Fewer children and young people involved in and impacted by criminal behaviour

Our Commitments

Less crime and fear of crime and increase in the percentage of residents who feel safe when outside in their local area after dark

- We will work with Police and other agencies to ensure anti-social behaviour is dealt with swiftly and effectively
- We will work with partners to raise awareness of and tackle all forms of hate crime in which people are targeted based on their personal characteristics
- We will help to reduce the prevalence of modern slavery and trafficking by ensuring our suppliers adhere to the highest standards of ethics and working with the Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland Modern Slavery Action Group to raise awareness, disrupt crimes and safeguard victims
- We will work closely with partners and communities through the Violence Reduction Unit to prevent serious violence
- We will work with partners to raise awareness of and tackle scammers and rogue traders who exploit vulnerable consumers
- We will enforce standards related to food and product safety

Fewer children and young people involved in and impacted by criminal behaviour

- We will deliver a robust, whole-family approach to prevent children and young people from engaging in criminal behaviour
- We will work with partners to provide safe spaces for children and young people to play, without the risk of being groomed into criminal exploitation
- We will deliver preventative street-based work with young people targeted in areas with high levels of anti-social behaviour
- We will identify and address the exploitation of children and young people and provide care and support to those affected

9.2 People at the most risk are protected from harm

There is an upward trend in demand for child safeguarding, with an increase in the rate of Section 47 enquiries (initiated to decide whether action should be taken to safeguard a child suspected to be suffering or at risk of suffering harm) and children on child protection plans. The rate of children looked after by the local authority has also increased year-on-year for the past 10 years.

Whilst the rate of reported domestic abuse-related incidents remains below the national average, it has increased in Leicestershire from 21.1 per 1,000 population in 2017/18 to 23.1 in 2019/20 and during

2020/21 there was a 20% rise in Domestic Violence with Injury and a rise in psychological abuse. Domestic abuse has also been a more prominent feature in child safeguarding cases during the last year.

What will success look like?

- Safeguarding approaches are effective in recovery from Covid-19 and informed by learning from the pandemic
- Vulnerable people are identified and protected from harm and abuse

Our Commitments

Safeguarding approaches are effective in recovery from Covid-19 and informed by learning from the pandemic

- We will focus on identifying and responding to hidden harm (e.g. self-neglect, mental ill-health and/or learning disabilities, domestic abuse)
- We will support care homes with Infection Control, vaccination, and Personal Protective Equipment support to minimise Covid-19 outbreaks
- We will risk assess and quality assure care providers to ensure services are safe and protect vulnerable children and adults
- We will work with partners to review the response to and forward implications of Covid-19 and recovery work regarding safeguarding

Vulnerable people are identified and protected from harm and abuse

- We will improve how we work with families to safeguard babies by ensuring robust procedures are in place and raising awareness of risk factors
- We will develop a communications strategy to support partners to deliver universal safety messages to children and young people
- We will work with partners to develop joint responses to risk including child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, gangs, missing from home
- We will focus on combatting sexual violence and domestic abuse by developing a Domestic Abuse Strategy, protecting all survivors and their families in safe and appropriate accommodation and improving our understanding of perpetrators and how to respond to them
- We will develop trauma-informed practices and offer direct work to support children to recover from Adverse Childhood Experiences
- We will ensure that work with young people to reduce risk and vulnerability assists prevention of adult safeguarding need
- We will work with communities to prevent people becoming victims and ensure they know how to seek help and have the confidence to do so
- We will develop understanding of equality and diversity issues and the impact on access to safeguarding services
- We will review and change systems to ensure that the new Liberty Protection Safeguards Legislation and codes of practice are in place

9.3 People enjoy long lives in good health

The health of people in Leicestershire is generally better than the England average, as it is one of the 20% least deprived counties in England. Life expectancy for both men and women is higher in Leicestershire than the England average. However, healthy life expectancy (an estimate of how many years people might live in a 'healthy' state) is only marginally higher than the national average and there are significant health inequalities in the county, as life expectancy is 6.3 years lower for men and 5.0 years lower for women in the most deprived areas of Leicestershire than in the least deprived areas.

As highlighted, health outcomes are influenced by a range of social, economic and environmental factors, known as the 'wider determinants of health'. Air pollution, particularly fine particulate matter (PM2.5), is a significant health hazard. PM2.5 is the 3rd leading cause of preventable deaths in Leicestershire.

Additionally, two thirds of adults, and one third of children in year 6, are either overweight or obese. This increases their risk of having long-term conditions like type 2 diabetes and reduces expected lifespan. There has also been a rise in adults classified as physically inactive from 19.5% in 2018/19 to 21.9% in 2019/20. Whilst these figures are similar to the national average, some areas of the county have higher rates of overweight/obesity and physical inactivity than England. Physical inactivity has also been exacerbated by the pandemic, with the deconditioning of the population during lockdown restrictions.

In terms of mental health and wellbeing, Leicestershire has a high rate of people reporting a low happiness score and a high rate reporting a high anxiety score. Although there is a low rate of suicides in Leicestershire compared to other counties, the county has a high rate of excess deaths amongst those aged under 75 with a severe mental illness. These excess deaths are explained not only by suicides and accidents but also physical illnesses; studies show that that all-cause mortality in people with severe mental illness is 2 to 3.5 times higher than in the general population. There has also been a significant increase in the number of cases referred to adult social care mental health teams during the pandemic, which has also occurred across the country. Surveys and cases also suggest that ongoing Covid-19 restrictions are having an impact on mental health of children and young people.

What will success look like?

- Improved healthy life expectancy and reduced health inequalities
- Increased proportion of residents with a healthy weight
- Improved mental wellbeing and reduced prevalence of mental ill health

Our Commitments

Improved healthy life expectancy and reduced health inequalities

- We will focus on breaking down intergenerational cycles of deprivation and poor health, promoting new ways of working to tackle disadvantages
- Through Healthy Together 0-19 we will provide Health Visiting and School Nursing to support the health and wellbeing of children and young people
- We will provide information and advice to enable people to access services, facilities and resources which contribute towards wellbeing
- We will deliver a wider determinants programme of work to address the range of social, economic and environmental factors which influence health outcomes, thereby improving health and reducing health inequalities. This will include for example our work with partners to improve air quality.

- We will embed a Health Equity in All Policies approach to ensure policy decisions help to improve health outcomes and reduce health inequalities
- We will identify those at risk of needing social care support in the future and intervene early wherever possible to maintain wellbeing

Increased proportion of residents with a healthy weight

- We will provide weight management support and guidance to residents, so that they can achieve and maintain a healthy weight
- We will work with partners through Active Together (Leicestershire and Rutland Sport) to support people to get and stay active; ensure physical activity and sport facilities are high quality and accessible and promote the county as a premier location for sport businesses
- We will work with partners in a 'whole-system' approach to deliver the Healthy Weight Strategy; creating an environment which facilitates healthy choices and supports individuals to be physically active and maintain healthy weight

Improved mental wellbeing and reduced proportion of residents experiencing mental ill health

- We will promote positive mental health and improve awareness of risk factors for poor mental health to increase resilience
- We will learn from and sustain the excellent customer satisfaction with our cultural, wellbeing and adult learning services; promoting and facilitating access to our libraries, museums and learning centres to promote the wellbeing of residents and their communities
- We will implement Making Every Contact Count Plus to make the most of opportunities to support peoples' wellbeing
- We will work with partners to improve access to mental health services for all ages to promote recovery and independence
- We will work with partners to ensure the early detection and treatment of child mental health and wellbeing needs

9.4 Carers and people with care needs are supported to live active, independent, and fulfilling lives

Leicestershire's reablement services effectively support those with physical or mental health needs to maintain or regain their independence and avoid unnecessary admissions to hospital or residential care; In 2020/21 Leicestershire ranked in the best 25% of comparators for reablement outcomes. Additionally, Leicestershire has low rates of adults aged either 18-64 or 65+ being permanently admitted into residential or nursing care. This is important because residential care is an expensive resource for individuals and the local authority and research suggests that people tend to prefer alternative options.

Leicestershire also has a high proportion of people with social care needs who are in receipt of a direct payment or personal budget; enabling people to access personalised care and support by choosing provision which is suitable to meeting their outcomes.

However, there is a need for improvement in the proportion of people who find it easy to access information about adult social care services and in the quality of life and overall satisfaction of those who receive care and support. In 2019/20, Leicestershire also ranked in the worst 25% comparators for the proportion of adult service users who felt safe or that they had control over their daily lives. The level of

social contact in the daily lives of carers and users of social services also remains comparatively low and an area for improvement, something which the Covid-9 crisis has made worse.

As mentioned, the number of older people, and those living with dementia and/or mobility problems, is forecast to increase significantly. Some will require housing adaptations to meet their changing needs and others will need more specialist accommodation or support.

What will success look like?

- Increase in the proportion of people who find it easy to access information and advice about adult social care services
- Improvements in the experiences of those who receive adult social care and support
- Carers are recognised, valued, and supported to undertake their caring role, whilst maintaining their own health and wellbeing

Our Commitments

Increase in the proportion of people who find it easy to access information and advice about adult social care services

- We will improve access to information and advice through our digital plans including the directory of services and First Contact Plus
- We will work closely with partners to take a more proactive approach to providing advice and information relating to housing, including development of social prescribing and empowering frontline staff to encourage people to take responsibility for their housing needs
- We will continue to provide good quality information, advice, and guidance for those living with dementia and their informal carers

Improvements in the experiences of those who receive adult social care and support

- We will implement activities identified through research with our customers to improve satisfaction with our adult social care services
- We will work with partners to deliver integrated services at the point of delivery with seamless transitions between health and social care
- We will provide effective crisis response, reablement services, equipment, and technology to enable people to be self-reliant
- We will review progress on the Living Well with Dementia Strategy 2019-22 and co-produce a new strategy and action plan with our partners
- We will continue to ensure care services and support procured by the Council provide a good supply and quality of dementia care
- We will explore solutions to transport issues, enabling older people to remain active and independent and connected to community
- We will support people in receipt of direct payments and Personal Assistants to choose the provision suitable to meeting their outcomes
- We will develop further the Social Care Investment Plan to secure suitable accommodation choices for social care service users

- We will work with providers of services to maximise peoples' opportunities for independence, health, and wellbeing

Carers are recognised, valued, and supported to undertake their caring role, whilst maintaining their own health and wellbeing

- We will work with partners to identify carers and ensure they are signposted, if required, to relevant information and services
- We will ensure accurate advice, information and guidance is available to assist carers to navigate health and social care services
- We will listen and involve carers in the development of services that enable them to continue to provide their caring role
- We will develop carer-friendly communities by awareness-raising within existing community groups
- We will promote health checks for carers to help them to maintain their own physical and mental health and wellbeing
- We will work with housing and other organisations to ensure carers can access technology, equipment, or adaptations
- We will ensure carers have access to assessments which will determine if social care services have a statutory duty to assist them

10. Enabling Services

Delivery of this Plan is dependent on a wide range of 'back-office' services such as Finance, IT, HR, Legal, Communications, Property Services, Strategy and Business Intelligence, Democratic Services and Business Support. These organisation-wide functions support frontline services by providing business support based on specialised knowledge, best practice and technology. They also support good governance, ensuring that:

- Resources are directed in accordance with agreed policy and according to priorities
- There is sound and inclusive decision making
- There is clear accountability for the use of those resources

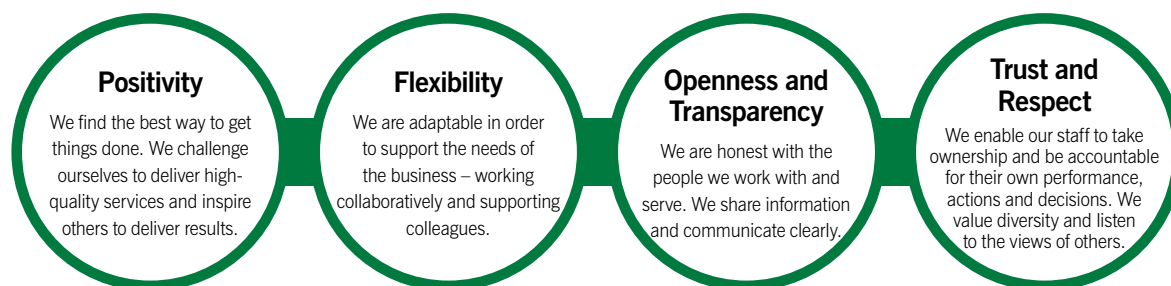
Good governance is about ensuring the Council is doing the right things, in the right way and for the benefit of the communities it serves. It leads to high standards of management, strong performance, effective use of resources and positive outcomes. The diagram to the right illustrates the core principles of good governance which the Council is committed to and how they relate to each other: Principles A and B permeate implementation of principles C to G.

Back-office services have a key role in ensuring that the Council adheres to these principles and achieves positive outcomes for service users. For example, Strategy and Business Intelligence support principle C by assisting decision-makers in defining the Council's overall vision and outcomes. Additionally, Finance support Principle F by enforcing financial discipline, strategic resource allocation and efficient service delivery.



10.1 Leicestershire County Council Values and Behaviours

Good governance flows from shared values and culture. Our values, set out below, underpin everything we do and describe how we will deliver this Plan.



11. Monitoring Outcome Delivery

Council officers will oversee delivery of this Plan through Outcome Boards which will meet on a quarterly basis. These will ensure that the Council maintains focus on achieving the outcomes throughout service planning and delivery and that the aims of this Plan are reflected in all relevant supporting strategies.

The Council's Scrutiny Committees will receive quarterly reports on progress in delivering the outcomes in this Plan and our Annual Performance and Benchmarking Reports will provide a summary of progress each year.

Progress in delivering the outcomes will also be monitored internally by the Outcome Boards through updates on delivery of key activities supporting outcome delivery along with reviews of Leicestershire's performance on the Performance Indicators set out in Appendix A. Updates on outcome delivery and performance will be shared with our Corporate Management Team, led by the Chief Executive, to inform strategic decision-making and resource allocation.

12. Medium Term Financial Strategy

The Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) provides information on its financial planning over a four year period. Our latest Strategy, covering 2021-25, focuses on protecting frontline services and weathering the coronavirus crisis. The MTFS, along with other plans and strategies such as the Strategic Change Portfolio, aligns with and underpins the Strategic Plan.

The Council continues to operate in an extremely challenging financial environment following a decade of austerity and spending pressures, particularly from social care. The position has also been severely affected by Covid-19 and the ongoing financial impacts of the pandemic are unclear. There is also significant uncertainty and risk around future funding levels.

What will success look like?

- A credible 4-year financial plan to deliver at least 2-years of balanced budget followed by 2-years with a financial gap that is at a manageable level
- A financial plan that reflects the council's key priorities
- Delivery of planned savings and active pipeline of new initiatives
- Sustainable level of service growth, particularly in social care
- SEND capital and revenue costs contained within designated external funding streams
- Capital programme that balances support for the Council's priorities with financial sustainability
- Balance-sheet that supports the Council's resilience to financial shocks
- Above 'normal' share of eligible funding schemes secured and sufficient developer contributions towards the cost of local infrastructure
- Progress on Fair Funding to increase Leicestershire's share of national funding

Our Commitments

- We will raise awareness inside and outside of the Council of our financial position and the challenges faced
- We will maintain transparency around our savings proposals
- We will target efficiency savings and new income generation before service reductions
- We will ensure regular updating of assumptions to support the efficient flow of resources to Council priorities
- We will promote a culture of forward planning to ensure there is time for corrective action
- We will embed financial discipline in decision making to increase value for money assurance for Council Taxpayers
- Through our Corporate Asset Investment Fund, we will continue to invest in commercial schemes which support the Council's budget

13. Strategic Change Portfolio

The Council has long held an internal approach to transformation that ensures we respond effectively to national and local drivers of change, including the need to transform local services whilst seeking to maintain or improve outcomes. The Council's Strategic Change Portfolio (SCP) brings together the collective response to these drivers of change, delivered through four primary programmes:

- Sustainable Finances
- Customer & Digital
- Carbon Reduction
- Ways of Working

Overseen by the Council's Transformation Delivery Board, and managed through Departmental Change and Programme Boards, the SCP contains key targets and deliverables for each programme as described below.

13.1 Sustainable Finances Programme

The savings requirements contained within the Council's annually refreshed Medium Term Financial Strategy remain a central driver for the Council's change portfolio. However, the scale of the financial and transformation challenge is increasing, with the simple changes having been made and the straightforward savings long-since delivered. What remains is complex change, often involving multiple partners and many risks.

The body of work contained within the portfolio, refreshed annually, currently represents future savings targets in excess of £48m, including £21m for SEND.

13.2 Customer & Digital Programme

The Covid-19 pandemic has changed customer expectations of how our services should be delivered and the need for more immediate access to information and support via a broader range of channels is greater than ever before. In response to the changing needs of our citizens we will focus on developing and delivering against an improved, council-wide customer and channel strategy which supports the delivery of modern and effective services in the most efficient and sustainable way. By promoting innovative, digital ways of working, we will seek to shape the Council's interaction with its customers as part of our digital revolution and to enable improved customer journeys leading to an enhanced customer experience and faster, first time resolution of customer needs.

By 2024...

- Innovation will be our business as usual
- Automation and digital will have improved services and reduced cost
- Customer journeys for staff and residents will be simple

What will success look like?

- Customers directed to the right channel, at the right time, in the most efficient way
- Our customer channels maximise citizen value whilst reducing the cost of service
- A whole system approach is taken to designing our customer journey and back office processes

Our Commitments

Customers directed to the right channel, at the right time, in the most efficient way

- We will further develop our Customer and Digital strategies to shape our delivery of services
- We will increase our customer understanding and actively involve our customers to inform our channel development
- Through engagement with groups such as the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group, we will continuously seek to understand and mitigate the impact of digitalisation and channel development on those with protected characteristics, to ensure services remain accessible to all
- We will improve our front-end communications interfaces to support the routing of customer enquiries to the right channel at the right time
- We will deliver a new target operating model for our Customer Service Centre
- We will support high-quality, consistent customer experience council-wide
- We will enhance the customer experience through improved digital services

Our customer channels maximise citizen value whilst reducing the cost of service

- We will increase the amount of automation for repetitive, low value activities and integrations
- We will increase customer adoption of improved digital solutions driving a cultural shift to “digital by choice”
- We will improve our ability to resolve queries on first contact using the optimal channel
- We will identify opportunities to reduce the cost of service provision through more effective deployment of resources and/or efficiency savings

A whole system approach is taken to designing our customer journey and back-office processes

- We will work jointly with departments to develop and deliver improved customer journeys
- We will improve our contact and system data to inform continuous improvement activity
- We will seek to exploit emerging technologies and system integration where possible to enable more streamlined end-to-end working

13.3 Carbon Reduction Programme

The Carbon Reduction Programme aims to achieve net zero carbon from the Council's own operations by 2030, with an interim target of 64% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2025 (compared to 2016/17 emissions)

The Council's emissions are set out in our annual Greenhouse Gas Emissions Report (GHG) and expressed in a standard measure of tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO₂e) in line with national guidance which follows the international Greenhouse Gas Protocol Corporate Accounting and Reporting Standard. Existing

efforts and future opportunities to reduce our carbon emissions from internal operations were documented, resulting in the development of a draft roadmap to net-zero emissions by 2030.

The Council is in a good position in comparison to many other authorities due to the quantity and quality of data we have in relation to our emissions and our historic efforts to reduce emissions which date back as far as 2008/09. Overall, in 2019/20, the council had reduced its greenhouse gas emissions from its own operations by 67% to 11, 663 tCO₂e compared to 35, 778 tCO₂e 2008/09.

The impact of Covid-19 has been seen most significantly in business mileage and to a lesser degree in emissions from our estates, and an emerging objective is to look to retain as much of these carbon reductions as possible, primarily through close engagement with our Ways of Working Programme. Even before the impacts of Covid-19 on carbon emissions are considered, Leicestershire County Council is ahead of target in the delivery of net-zero emissions by 2030.

As highlighted, the recognition of the climate and biodiversity emergencies mean that there is increased local, national and international policy commitments to address the issues. This has led to increasing opportunities to secure external funding and investment. The most recent success has been in our bid for decarbonisation funding, securing £3.6m towards works on our key buildings, including expansion of the biomass heating system across County Hall.

However, meeting the ambitious net-zero 2030 target remains a significant challenge, particularly in light of the challenging financial position of the council and demands on staff resources. There is also the risk that national legislation or local policies change, impacting on our baseline or possible solutions to decarbonise our operations.

What will success look like?

- Net-zero carbon emissions from the Council's own operations by 2030, with an interim 64% reduction by 2025
- Leicestershire County Council is a climate active organisation – carbon reduction and adapting to climate change are included in decision making

Our Commitments

- We will complete an assessment of the cost and technology implications of achieving net zero carbon by 2030 for the council
- We will produce a Net Zero Carbon 2030 Plan for the council
- We will reduce our demand for energy, increase our use and generation of clean energy
- We will explore opportunities to remove carbon from the atmosphere through nature based solutions such as tree planting
- We will include net zero carbon criteria in our decision making
- We will create a culture for carbon reduction through communications, training, tools and guidance

13.4 Ways of Working Programme

The Covid-19 pandemic saw a huge shift in organisational culture – with many working from home for the first time. This brought about a change in mentality around how we work with each other and how we serve our customers. It led to a wholesale rethinking of how departments and teams need to operate in the future; including the need for a higher degree of flexibility and more remote working than previously thought possible.

In the latter half of 2020, the Workplace Programme Board, along with wider stakeholders came together to rescope the vision and objectives into a new programme called “Ways of Working” – building on the already great foundations and principles established through the workplace programme as well as key learnings and opportunities presented throughout the pandemic in relation to changing ways of working.

What will success look like?

- All staff are provided with the technology and training needed to do their job effectively
- The way we work embodies continuous improvement, innovation, and ambition
- Council-operated workplaces are a shared resource based on need, where staff and customers can collaborate

How are we doing this?



Our Commitments

All staff are provided with the technology and training needed to do their job effectively

- All staff will have an assigned 'worker style' and the IT kit they need
- All IT equipment will be centrally owned and replaced in good time to ensure technology is effective and productive
- All staff will have the ability to work remotely through specialist technology, software, and remote access – no one will be tied to a specific location
- Where appropriate, staff meetings will be 'digital by default' - hybrid and face-to-face meetings will be supported with investment in workplace technology and collaboration spaces

The way we work embodies continuous improvement, innovation, and ambition

- We will focus on objectives and outputs not on presenteeism for office-based staff
- Staff - in consultation with managers - will be empowered to choose the right location to deliver their work - freedom to choose with responsibility to meet service and customer needs first
- Senior leaders and managers will lead by example – champion > role model > challenge

Council-operated workplaces are a shared resource based on need, where staff and customers can collaborate

- Our workplaces will be set up to better support collaboration, productivity, wellbeing, and customer service
- We will prioritise space for activities, not individuals - flexibility will be the norm and use of fixed desks will be kept to a minimum
- We will all work in the most appropriate location for the task we are doing rather than being at a council office or workplace by default
- Staff will be encouraged to work as flexibly as possible, using a mix of workplaces (offices, working from home, remote working) to best meet service and customer needs, and support staff wellbeing.



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 2 NOVEMBER 2021**

DEFINING CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES FOR THE FUTURE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Committee of the progress made with respect to the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future (DCFSF) programme since the decision made at the Cabinet on 20 November 2020 to proceed with the programme alongside Newton Europe as delivery partners.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 placed a duty upon Local Authorities to commission education, health and social care services jointly and provide more streamlined and co-ordinated assessment processes. These pieces of legislation are key influences for the future work of Children and Family Services with children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and the response to parents and young carers.
3. The Children Act 2004 allocates duties to Local Authorities to ensure that children are safeguarded, and their welfare is promoted. This underpins the work of Children and Family Services with respect to Looked After Children, Children in Need and Child Protection cases.
4. The improvement journey and aspiration for Children and Family Wellbeing and Children's Social Care services, which sit within the Children and Family Services department, is set out in the *Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2023, The Road to Excellenceⁱ* and underpins all change and development in the programme.
5. Other relevant policies include:
 - Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022
 - Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2020-2023
 - Road to Excellence – Continuous Improvement Plan 2021-2023
 - Placement Sufficiency and Market Position Statement 2021-2023

- Voice and Influence Strategy 2020-2023
 - Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018.
6. All the relevant legislation and policies outlined above have informed the proposed programme which will ensure that the department is able to provide the right interventions at the right time and in the right way, improving outcomes for children, young people and families while ensuring that the service is financially sustainable.

Background

7. The Children and Family Services Department faces significant challenges due to increased growth and demand on its services; this is reflected in the £23.1m growth to 2024/25 approved within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by the County Council on 17 February 2021.
8. The County Council as a whole is operating in an extremely challenging financial environment, following a decade of austerity and spending pressures, particularly with respect to social care. The position in 2020/21 was severely affected by Covid-19 with the on-going financial impacts of the pandemic unclear at present.
9. The growth reflected within the MTFS (2021/22-2024/25) is mainly due to pressures on the budget for placements, which are currently rising by over 10% a year, and difficulties in staffing (reflected by the use of agency social workers).
10. The Children and Family Services department is required to make £16.0m savings to 2024/25, with this figure including the expected £13.2m savings attributed to the DCFSF programme.
11. The diagnostic completed by Newton Europe in October 2021 identified an initial list of potential change opportunities. These were subject to further validation and prioritised into a short list.
12. A gateway review workshop was held in October 2020 and was attended by representatives from across Children and Family Services, with independent challenge provided by the Director of Adults and Communities.
13. The workshop assessed each of the opportunities in turn looking at financial and operational confidence, required investment, delivery timescales, change complexity and organisational change capacity, alignment to the department's vision, impact for service users, wider Leicestershire County Council impact and impacts for external partners.
14. The assessment provided assurance on the validity of opportunities from a financial and operational perspective, assessed the deliverability of

opportunities and sought to confirm whether opportunities represented an extension to existing work or new areas of work for the Department. Eleven opportunities were recommended for further work. These were categorised into four main themes:

- i) Greater focus on earlier interventions and preventing the level of need escalating into Social Work interventions.
- ii) Ensuring that interventions are delivered in a timely way as part of a Child/Young Persons journey.
- iii) Ensuring that children and young people are placed in the most appropriate setting for their level of need.
- iv) Ensuring that Children and Young People with Disabilities are supported to achieve greater levels of independence.

15. The detail of these themes, resulting in projects, is provided in Appendix 1 of this report.
16. The recommendation of the gateway review, to approve the commissioning of Newton Europe to support the delivery of opportunities identified through the diagnostic assessment, was taken to CMT on 5 November 2020, where it was agreed that this be presented to the Cabinet at its meeting on 20 November 2020. This was also reported to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 November 2020.

Progress Update on Delivery of Identified Opportunities

17. Following the approval of the Cabinet to commission Newton Europe to support the delivery of opportunities, this work has been divided into two stages:
 - Design Stage – the development of new ways of working to realise the opportunities identified within the diagnostic.
 - Implementation Stage – the roll-out of new ways of working to front line social work and early help teams across the county.
18. The Design Stage has been concluded for all of the workstreams outlined above and the new ways of working developed by professionals within the department, supported by Newton Europe and the Transformation Unit, are now being rolled out across the service. This includes the development of:
 - A new domestic abuse toolkit
 - The introduction of a domestic abuse intervention worker
 - Mosaic and report development for improved data capture and visibility of timely actions in plans

- A meeting to improve access to services (right service at the right time) for children and families
 - New processes to ensure that children achieve permanence through other legal routes and as such, less time in care
 - Risk of residential meeting to ensure children have access to family-based placements and/or service that will reduce the need for residential care
 - Residential review meetings led by Heads of Service that focus on the robust use of trajectory planning to ensure children and young people exit residential care in a timely way
 - Enhanced responses to enquiries to be foster carers
 - Reduced times for completion of fostering assessments
 - Improved utilisation of fostering provision through the introduction of a duty system
 - Weekly change improvement meetings to identify barriers to improved performance in fostering, reporting to the Assistant Director
 - New focus for child in need plans for children with a disability, focusing on the future and preparing for adulthood.
19. The new ways of working have been piloted and tested with practitioners in real world situations, with digital tools being developed to support and embed these.
 20. Training has been provided to front line practitioners accompanied by intensive support to practitioners in order to apply the training in new ways of working to their caseloads.
 21. As of 9 September 2021, the new ways of working are currently delivering an annualised benefit of £7 million, which represents significant progress towards the target annualised benefit of £8.7 million.
 22. As the implementation period progresses and new ways of working become embedded it is expected that the annualised benefit which can be achieved will approach the stretch target of £13.4 million. Work is currently being undertaken to translate the expected benefits into savings for the MTFS up to the financial year 2024/25.

Remaining Programme Work

23. There are two areas of work that are still in design or in pilot phase – consideration of how non-social worker qualified staff can be best used to provide services to children and families at the right time (called ‘further establishment modelling’ workstream) and the domestic abuse intervention officer (evaluation scheduled for December 2021).

24. All other projects and related workstreams are in implementation phase, with focus on evidencing sustainability of benefits and moving to business as usual.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

25. Public authorities are required by law to have due regard to the need to:
- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not
 - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
26. Rigorous assessments of the impact of emerging proposals during the 'Design Stage' were undertaken by individual workstreams and assured by the Programme Management Office function; these assessments did not indicate any adverse impacts on people with protected characteristics. In addition, the assessments undertaken demonstrated that all of the proposed changes were consistent with current policy with changes designed to improve service delivery to people with protected characteristics.
27. Furthermore, the decision-making governance of the programme included legal representation, in order to provide an appropriate level of assurance and challenge to inform decision makers, so that the decisions taken would not adversely impact upon people with protected characteristics.
28. The views of children and young people were also captured through a specific piece of work and these views have influenced how services will be delivered in the future.

Environmental Implications

29. Based upon cross referencing the proposals outlined within this report with the Environmental Implications Tool, it can be seen that the proposals are neutral with respect to the Council's environmental impact.

Background Papers

30. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

31. None.

Officer(s) to Contact

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Appendix 1

Appendix 1: Project line descriptions

The Pathways Project area comprises the following workstreams.

Safeguarding Case Drift	Description
Practice	To ensure that that we provide the best outcome for every child requiring support from our services, in the most appropriate timeframe.
Intervention Effectiveness	To ensure that the support services that are provided to a child or family are effective and prevent children from escalating to higher levels of care or returning to the service in the future.
Interfaces	Enhancing the way that professionals work together across services to provide the best outcomes for children and families.

The Placements Project area comprises the following workstreams.

Workstream	Vision
Redefining Residential	To ensure that every child has access to the setting of care that will deliver the best outcome for them, focussing on reducing the inappropriate use of residential care by creating viable alternatives and a robust system of reviewing and stepping down.
Internal Capacity	To deliver improved outcomes for children and young people in care in Leicestershire by maximising the availability and utilisation of our high-quality in-house services, including mainstream and special fostering, and supported lodgings.
Permanence	To ensure that more children achieve permanence outside of care settings, by promoting the use of SGO's.

The Children with Disabilities Project area comprises the following workstreams and the corresponding vision.

Workstream	Vision
Enabling Children with Disabilities	This workstream is looking to enable greater independence for Children and Young People as they progress towards adulthood by: Using formal and informal networks of support, linking people into their own community capacity; Working with individuals, families and carers to reduce the impact of the transition to adulthood; Ensure Children and Young People are supported to develop the skills they need to lead a more independent life; Taking a holistic approach to Education, Health and Care Plans working collaboratively with partners to offer the most appropriate solutions for Children and Young People.
Planning for Adulthood	This workstream is looking to develop and implement a model which will better enable Children and Young People with Disabilities and ensure that they are better prepared for adulthood.

ⁱ The Road to Excellence:

https://www.proceduresonline.com/lr/childcare/leicestershire/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/U0706%20CFS%20Road%20to%20Excellence%2013.pdf

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 2 NOVEMBER 2021**

**WRITTEN STATEMENT OF ACTION AND HIGH NEEDS BLOCK
DEVELOPMENT**

**REPORT OF THE
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the progress being made against the Written Statement of Action and High Needs Development programme.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The primary legislation regarding children and young people with SEND is the Children and Families Act 2014. The 0-25 SEND Code of Practice (2015) is the statutory guidance that sets out how local authorities and Clinical Commissioning Groups must work together to support children and young people with special educational needs.
3. In December 2018 the Cabinet authorised a consultation on the High Needs Block development plan, including proposed development of enhanced and expanded SEND provision across the County.
4. In October 2019 the Cabinet was advised of the progress of the High Needs development plan and on 5 November 2019, a report was considered by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee summarising the national and local context relating to SEND along with an overview of the plans to continuously develop and improve services to support children and families who are experiencing SEND.
5. On 21 January 2020, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report that provided an overview of the Ofsted and Care and Quality Commission (CQC) SEND Inspection Framework. An update was provided on 1 September 2020 following the local area SEND inspection that took place in Leicestershire in February 2020, resulting in a Written Statement of Action. The report gave an update on the progress of the High Needs Block development programme.

SEND local area inspection

6. Ofsted and the CQC had conducted a joint inspection of the local area of Leicestershire between 3 and 7 February 2020, to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and disability reforms as out in the Children and Families Act 2014.
7. On 15 May 2020, the inspection report for Leicestershire was published and as a result of the findings, and in accordance with the Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015, Her Majesty's Chief inspector (HMCI) had determined that a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) was required because of two areas of significant weakness in the local area's practice. The local authority and the area's Clinical Commissioning Group are jointly responsible for ensuring actions are progressed.
8. The areas of weakness outlined in the report are:
 - The absence of a clearly defined joint commissioning strategy for 0-25 SEND provision.
 - Systemic weakness in the quality of Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans including the drawing up of these plans; the inaccuracy with which the plans reflect children and young people's needs; the absence of good quality outcomes in EHC plans; the inconsistency with which plans include contributions from education and particularly health and care professionals; and the lack of any formal quality assurance framework to improve new and existing plans.
9. In preparation for the submission of the WSOA to Ofsted by the agreed revised deadline of 7 October, a number of meetings and formal discussions were held involving stakeholders including parents, carers, children and young people. Additionally, parents, carers, children and young people also provided feedback through surveys and questionnaires to supplement the meetings.
10. At the time of the development of the WSOA, the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum (PCF) were the main conduit for co-production with the wider parent body. A local SEND Alliance group were also represented to enable their views and suggestions to be considered. Some members of this group have now formed a new Parent Carer Forum for Leicestershire, known as the Leicestershire SEND Hub.

Progress on the Written Statement of Action

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy

11. The strategy, jointly developed by Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Councils and the Clinical Commissioning Groups for the area has received final sign-off. The strategy contains a high-level vision for joint commissioning that ***'we will work together across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND'*** and a

set of priorities to focus joint work over the coming three years with clearly defined actions.

Neurodevelopmental (ND) Pathway

12. The mandate for the development of a Neurodevelopmental Pathway included a recognition for the need to progress the improvements to the local service offer to children and young people with known or suspected ASD/ADHD disorders. The development of the ND pathway is a priority within the LLR SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy. A delivery model has been developed and is currently being presented across the partnership and has been agreed by the ND programme board. Full timescales for implementation will be brought to a future Committee.

EHC plan Statutory assessment

13. A significant amount of work has taken place across the statutory assessment process which has previously been reported to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Further progress outside of the High Needs Development programme is outlined below:

EHC plan development

14. A Quality Assurance and Learning Framework has been implemented since March 2020 and a key feature has been the EHC plan audit from a multi-agency perspective. Six audits have taken place, with the first three looking across the whole of the EHC plan and the remaining three taking education, health and social care advice. A judgement is made on each EHC plan: Outstanding, Good, Requires Improvement and Inadequate. The majority of EHC plans are still rated as Requires Improvement. By taking each aspect of an EHC plan individually for a series of audits, it has highlighted the areas for improvement at an individual service level both as an advice giver and for the SENA service that draws the information provided together.
15. Health and social care were particularly highlighted within the SEND inspection report as needing to improve their input into an EHC plan. The Designated Clinical Officer has drawn up an audit schedule, working with health leads to improve the quality of health advice, including the development of an aide memoire for health advice givers, briefings within team meetings and an afternoon surgery for plan writers to discuss health advice received. Social care has recently appointed a Designated Social Care Officer to take the lead on improving the quality of advice for Social Care and Early Help.
16. A recent parent/carer survey called Make Your Voice Count asked parents and carers for their opinion on outcomes within their child's EHC plan. Of the total respondents, this question was pertinent to 40 parents/carers. 48% felt that they were clear, 24% felt that they were neither clear nor not clear and 28% felt that they were not clear. Specific work to improve the writing of SMART outcomes continues across the partnership through a range of targeted activity, for example an e-learning module that follows virtual training that has taken

place across Local Authority teams over the last year, an aide memoire for health advice givers and a DCO surgery for Case Managers.

Satisfaction surveys

17. Across the different processes and communication with parent/carers on decisions made within the EHC plan statutory assessment process, electronic surveys have been developed to capture the customer experience. The first of these has been made available at the decision to assess the stage where there has been a turn down for an assessment. This survey supplements the SENA service request for feedback on proposed EHC plans. The first set of results of this will be collated and analysed by the end of the calendar year in order to account for the six-week timescale associated with this part of the process.

Implementation of a SEN portal

18. The implementation of the SEN portal (Synergy) is now progressing. A project team has been established and regular meetings are being held with various staff from across the local authority, overseen by the Assistant Director, Education, SEND and Commissioning. The case management system for use by the SENA service is due to go live in December 2021, with testing taking place currently, and the customer facing portal is anticipated to be launched in April 2022. This case management system and portal will ensure case recording is accurate, improve communication with parents, carers and other agencies and make the process much more efficient. Service standards for SENA have been produced and are available to the public through the Local Offer. Adherence to the service standards are being monitored by the service.

Responsive processes in place where needs or requirements change including at times of crisis

19. A review of processes and procedures relating to statutory processes overseen by the Inclusion team, for example Elective Home Education, Children Missing Education and Children with Medical Needs, has taken place. Schools receive regular reminders with the key points for them to follow when a pupil falls under a particular statutory policy.
20. The Virtual School oversees the education for Looked After Children and has good communication with schools to identify any issues arising at the earliest opportunity, taking prompt action to develop solutions.
21. Developments as part of the Transforming Care Programme (TCP) for young people and adults with a Learning Disability and/or Autism have developed a Risk of Admission Register (ROAR) process to better identify and provide support to those young people who may be at risk of hospital admission. A further development has been the LLR Keyworker project. This will provide support below the level of the ROAR and will work as part of a multi-disciplinary team to improve early identification and track children and young people at risk of escalation and provide timely, personalised support working with all professionals involved.

High Needs Block Development programme

22. The High Needs programme was agreed by the Cabinet in 2018 to respond to the pressures faced by local areas in implementing the 2014 SEND Reforms and subsequent financial pressures. The Committee has received several reports on progress and further achievements within the programme are set out below along with next steps for further development.
23. The SEND and Inclusion services have been working closely with the Transformation Unit to diagnose and remedy specific lines of enquiry to develop consistent working practices and a continuum of support for children and young people with special educational needs, from school-based support through to more intensive, low incidence, high cost provision.
24. The programme continues to focus on a system wide approach and is implementing improvements across a wide range of teams. The High Needs Block programme looks at best practice across the country and uses comparative data to inform its decision making, enabling the programme to constantly identify further opportunities.
25. The Inclusion Service is aiming to continue to focus on providing schools with the training and advice required to identify need early and to provide appropriate support for children and young people in mainstream settings.
26. An Improvement Cycle has been established within the SENA service that is underpinned by an ethos of continuous improvement and a focus on improving outcomes for children. This approach allows the use of indicators that focus on quality and other data to inform consistent decision making.
27. The SENA service has been restructured to clarify roles and responsibilities within the teams and a locality model has been implemented to promote local knowledge and build relationships with schools within a geographic area. The service structure is supported by 'fit for purpose' documented processes that are improving consistency in decision making and have significantly increased management oversight. To further support this, performance dashboards have been designed to support SENA management to understand and better monitor workflows and performance.
28. The SEN Sufficiency programme has delivered a £30 million capital investment over a three-year period and currently encompasses 35 projects resulting in there being 534 additional school places in the system to support children with special educational needs. There has been positive feedback from parents, carers and young people about some of this provision, namely Foxfields, Fusion and the new Oakfield site.
29. Further work is now in progress to develop a second phase of the HNB sufficiency programme which could include the further expansion of special schools, two new resource bases in secondary schools and potentially a new 50+ place Communication & Interaction school to serve the north of

Leicestershire. Capital funding will need to be secured to support these additional developments.

30. Decisions to assess panels have been refreshed into a multi-disciplinary model that includes a range of educational specialisms and health and social care involvement. This has resulted in more consistent and robust decision making within the legal framework whilst ensuring that the right children receive timely support or assessments where appropriate.
31. The EHCP has seen significant changes making it fit for purpose. It now allows for things such as personal budgets and health and social care input. EHCPs are now audited by experts through the Quality Assurance and Learning Framework, which provides oversight against the service quality standards and drives performance within the SENA service.
32. Annual Reviews are now being undertaken more consistently by the service, ensuring that where children are achieving their outcomes, they can move on and transition whilst ensuring that children's needs are continuously reviewed, and needs continue to be met. Performance against this area of work is monitored at Assistant Director level through the Improvement Cycle Meeting.

Next Steps

33. Monitoring of the actions within the WSOA sits within the governance arrangements for the SEND and Inclusion Board. All of the actions contained within the WSOA are also featured within the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2020 to 2023. Performance reports relating to delivery of the strategy, including the actions within the WSOA, are developed in preparation for the re-inspection. The latest formal meeting with DfE and NHS England was held on 11 October 2021.
34. The HNB Programme continues to ensure that best practice is being adopted within the SENA service as well as some new areas that the programme will focus on in the coming months:
 - Considering next steps around the approach to funding placements for children and young people with EHCPs to ensure it is fair and consistent;
 - Ensuring provision for children and young people is jointly planned and commissioned with other services and Health partners; and
 - the approach taken with Post 16 learners is as effective as possible and EHCPs for these young people are focused on preparation for independence and adulthood.

Background Papers

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2020 to 2023 –
Leicestershire Written Statement of Action –

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needs-and-disability/where-to-start-with-send/send-strategic-developments>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

35. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members under the Members News in brief service.

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Equalities and Human Rights Implications

36. An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment screening tool has been completed and a decision was been made that a full impact assessment did not need to be completed.

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2 NOVEMBER 2021**

QUARTER 2 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 July to September 2021 (Quarter 2).

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 2.
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. The Committee 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 19 measures that have been reported, two have improved, six show no significant change and four have declined. In addition to this, six indicators provide information only with no polarity. Data for one indicator is unavailable at the time of writing.
7. From 12 measures that have a national benchmark, two are in the top quartile, six are in the second quartile, one is in the third quartile and two are in the fourth quartile. Data for one indicator is unavailable at the time of writing.

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 percentage of 'Children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time' increased to 28.4% in quarter 2 (47 children). This is a rise of eight children compared to Q1. Leicestershire is now in the fourth quartile of local authorities compared to most recent national results published for 2019/20.
10. The percentage of re-referrals to Social Care within 12 months was 19.3% in Q2 (234), a small decrease of 0.4% compared to Q1 and a similar number of children. Leicestershire remains in the second quartile of local authorities.
11. The percentage of single assessments completed within 45 days was 91.6%. This represents 847 assessments and is similar performance to Q1 (91.5%), continuing to place Leicestershire high in the second quartile of local authorities.
12. Ten Child Protection plans lasting two years or more were open at the end of Q2, representing 2.1% of cases. This is an increase from five plans at the end of Q1. The current figure moves Leicestershire into the second quartile of local authorities.
13. The 'percentage of children with three or more placements during the year' was 2.1% (20 children). This is very low and continues to place Leicestershire in the top quartile nationally. The 'percentage of children in the same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption' was 67.2% (174 children). This represents an improvement from 63.9% (161 children) at Q1 and would move Leicestershire up into the third quartile of local authorities.

14. The percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation was 95.4% at the end of Q2 (125 young people). This is small decrease from 97.9% at the end of Q1 and places Leicestershire high in the third quartile of local authorities.
15. The percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training was 62.6% at the end of Q2 (82 young people). This is a small decrease from 64.6% at the end of Q1 although it continues to place Leicestershire in the first quartile of local authorities. The service provides careful oversight to the care leaver indicators and is driven by a corporate commitment for creating mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers.
16. The percentage of 'Children in Care who have had a dental check' was 42.8% (291 children). This is higher than Q1 (240 children). Routine dental treatment has been limited during the period of the Covid-19 lockdown and figures are continuing to rise.
17. The percentage of 'Children in Care who have had an annual health assessment' within the last 12 months was 86.3% (587). This is 1.9% lower than Q1.
18. 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

19. During 2021/22 Q2, the Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS) worked with 3,972 individuals and 1,505 families across Leicestershire. This is a decrease compared with Q1 (4,183 and 1,601 respectively).
20. The Children and Family 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).
21. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire with an EHCP was 2,244 in the Summer 2021 school census. This is the latest data available and is 128 higher than the Spring 2021 census.
22. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire without an EHCP but in receipt of SEN Support was 11,371 in the Summer 2021 school

census. This is the latest data available and is 512 higher than the Spring 2021 census.

People are safe in their daily lives

23. Youth Offending statistics are usually reported one or two quarters in arrears. This is because data must be produced and validated by legal bodies such as the Police and courts before being released to local authorities. No update on the last quarter is currently available.
24. The Youth Justice Service were notified of the HMIP Inspection on 9 July and this commenced on 9 August for one week. The Board was due to take place in early September, and the formal agenda was stood down to undertake a reflection on the HMIP Inspection with Board Members who were interviewed as part of the Inspection. The focus was on developing a forward plan for Partnership Board reporting and to identify additional KPI's for Board oversight.

Help every child to get the best possible start in life

25. 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.
26. In the Summer Term 2021, 68.5% of eligible 2-year-olds took up their entitled FEEE. This is an increase from 63.6% in Spring 2021.
27. In the Summer Term 2021, 93.5% of eligible 3-year-olds took up their entitled FEEE. This is a slight decrease from 93.6% in Spring 2021.

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

28. No routine full school inspections took place during this period. Routine graded full school inspections have now resumed after being suspended since the beginning of the first COVID-19 lockdown in March 2020.
29. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 749 at the end of Q2. There has been a reduction in the number of cases since the end of Q1 (839 students), although this is to be expected as many cases close during the summer holiday due to the Year 11 cohort coming to the end of their time being monitored by the Inclusion Service. Compared to the end of Q2 2020 (666 students) and Q2 2019 (553 students), there has continued to be an increase in the number of students being registered as Home Educated. As well as this being driven by the impact of the period of enforced home schooling and parents opting to continue Home Educating as a lifestyle choice, this also continues to follow the trend of increasing EHE numbers nationally which all Local Authorities have been experiencing during the last 5+ years. The numbers will continue to be monitored closely.

31. Latest NEET data (young people Not in Education, Employment or Training) is for the end of August 2021 and shows a Leicestershire figure of 3% representing 420 young people. This is the same number of young people compared to Q1. The statistical neighbour average experienced a small decrease from 3.7% to 3.5% in the same period.

Conclusion

32. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of Q2 of 2021/22, covering the period July to September 2021.
33. 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

34. None

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

35. None

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List of Appendices

Appendix A – Children and Family Services Department Performance Dashboard, Quarter 2, 2021/22

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

36. 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.

Children and Families Performance 2021/22 Quarter 2

	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	N/A	(high is good)	>97.2%		N/A	89.8%
% of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for second or subsequent time	Q2	28.4%	(low is good)	<20.8%		4	22.9%
% re-referrals to Childrens Social Care within 12 months	Q2	19.3%	(low is good)	<18.7%		2	22.1%
% Single assessments completed within 45 days	Q2	91.6%	(high is good)	>90.3%		2	86.3%
% of Child Protection plans lasting 2 years or more open at the end of the quarter (low = good)	Q2	2.1%	(low is good)	<3.0%		2	1.4%
Placement stability - % children with 3 or more placements during a year (low = good)	Q2	2.9%	(low is good)	<9.0%		1	11.2%
Placement stability - % children in same placement for 2+ years or placed for adoption	Q2	67.2%	(high is good)	>70.0%		3	65.0%
% of Care Leavers in suitable accommodation (end of quarter)	Q2	95.4%	(high is good)	>92.0%		2	85.4%
The % of Care leavers in education, employment and training (EET) (end of quarter)	Q2	62.6%	(high is good)	>54.0%		1	53.0%
The % of children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	Q2	42.8%	(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)	Q2	86.3%	(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	Q2	3,972	(no polarity)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
No. of families worked with by Children and Families Wellbeing Service during quarter	Q2	1,505	(no polarity)	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	(no polarity)	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	(no polarity)	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	Summer 2021	68.5%	(high is good)	>70%		4	65%
The % of eligible 3 year olds taking up their FEEE	Summer 2021	93.5%	(high is good)	>95%		2	92%

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

No. of Children Electively Educated at Home	Q2	749	(no polarity)	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
NEET young people aged 16-17 (low = good)	Q1	3% (420)	(Low is good)	<1.9%		2	2.6%

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 – 2
NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to note the activity of the Leicestershire Fostering Agency between March 2020 and March 2021.

Background

2. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for the Local Authority Fostering Agency and undertakes statutory responsibilities relating to Fostering.
3. Under the National Minimum Standards (NMS) (25.7), all Fostering agencies are required to provide a report to the Executive¹ regarding its activity and work and that of the Fostering Panel. The full report can be found appended as Appendix A to this report.

Summary of Report

4. The service operates within a competitive market, with both surrounding local authorities and private providers of placements. As such, ambitious priorities and targets were set in the following areas:
 - Increasing Leicestershire's market share of mainstream foster carers
 - Increasing the numbers of kinship carers
 - Increasing the number of Supported Lodgings providers
 - Increasing Leicestershire's specialist foster carers
 - Ensuring carers are supported and trained to provide the best possible care.
5. A range of work is completed by several teams within the service to ensure priorities and targets are met:
 - The Recruitment Team – enhancing the overall recruitment and experience of prospective foster carers
 - The Assessment Team – to assess prospective foster carers and to ensure quality reports are presented to the Fostering Panel
 - The Team around the Child – supporting foster carers to provide the best possible care

¹ The executive in Leicestershire is the Lead Member and Scrutiny Members.

- The Kinship Team – to assess prospective foster carers who are known to the child (for example family or friends)
 - The Dedicated Placement Support Service – supporting specialist carers, assisting children to move or remain in family-based placements and the recruitment, assessment and support of independent visitors (and matching to children).
6. There have been a number of achievements delivered by the Fostering Agency in 2020-21. This includes that placement stability had been maintained during the Covid-19 lockdown and the support to carers had been strengthened. The service has provided high quality training through virtual forums and improved how the voice of the child and carers are captured in Annual Reviews.
7. A mentoring scheme for new and inexperienced carers has been developed and the service has increased the capacity of the Dedicated Placement Support Team to offer more advice and support to carers and children with complex needs. Over the year there has also been an increase in the number of Independent Visitors and Supported Lodgings Carers. The service has also maintained excellent staff retention.
8. A performance overview for 2020-21 is below:

Recruitment Targets for 20/21:		
25 Mainstream Carers	2 Specialist Carers	3 Supported Lodgings Providers
Recruitment Activity for 20/21:		
12 Mainstream Carers	1 Specialist Carer	12 Supported Lodgings Providers
11 Independent Visitors (Total 46)	30 Kinship Carers	40 Staying Put

9. The Fostering Service receives many calls from the public who are considering becoming a carer for children. Criteria is used to help the enquirers understand whether they are able to offer care; some of the questions the Service asks are very specific and relate to safeguarding. Other questions relate to the circumstances of the carer and their experience caring for children. Some enquirers are not able to be carers due to their histories or their current situations. The Service received 499 of these calls and 90 proceeded to what is called an initial visit.
10. A rigorous but supportive process is used to ensure that Leicestershire is able to offer children the best possible placements and where there are issues, the right support is offered carers to offer the best possible placements.

11. Having this level of detail also helps the service to understand the opportunities for service improvement and targets for the following year, which are set out in section 9 of the Annual Report.
12. An overview of targets and priorities for 2021/22 includes:
 - Recruitment of 35 mainstream Foster Carers, 5 Specialist Carers, 15 Supported Lodgings Carers and 20 new independent visitors
 - Greater investment in marketing to ensure all campaigns are running as effectively as possible, including an ongoing mainstream fostering campaign, Supported Lodgings campaign and a Specialist Carers campaign.
 - Retention:
 - a. The service will continue to look for opportunities to develop its carers and introduce the therapeutic model. It will ensure all carers have access to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting.
 - b. The service will embed a hybrid model of Foster Panels, incorporating both virtual and face to face meetings.
 - c. Return to face to face Foster Carer Forums, whilst following government guidance.
 - d. Review Practice Standards across the service ensuring that Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity are recognised.
 - e. Develop Reflective Supervision across the service.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire Fostering Agency Annual Report 2020-21.

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LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2020-2021





OUR SERVICE

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000.

Leicestershire County Council's carers are part of our "Fostering Family", an ethos we have continued to build upon over the last three years by listening and responding to our carers, being transparent in our decision making and policies and procedures.

The Fostering Service has two functions – recruitment and retention.

Our successes for 2020/21 have included:

- Maintained Placement Stability during Covid19
- Strengthened our Support to carers to promote placement stability
- Ensured we continued to provide high quality training by switching to virtual forums
- Reviewed and revised our Fostering Annual Reviews / Reviews following concerns to ensure all voice work is captured
- Engaged with the Defining Children and Families Services for the future Programme to redefine our services to children and Families, focusing on recruitment and utilisation of carers
- Continued to develop our Mentoring Scheme for new and inexperienced carers.
- Increased the capacity of the Dedicated Placements Support Team to offer more advice to foster carers and children who have more complex needs.
- Increased our numbers of Independent Visitors to provide support to our children and young people
- Maintained excellent staff retention

The Fostering Service is led by Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and Virtual School, managed through a Service Manager for Retention and Recruitment with an Assistant Service Manager to support the Service. This role ensures that both recruitment and retention receive the same high-quality management oversight, development and to be inspirational and aspirational for the Fostering Service.

In September 2019 Leicestershire's Children and Family Service was inspected by Ofsted. Whilst the Fostering Service was not subject to its own inspection the feedback for the service was exceptional. The overall judgement for services for children in care, was Good.

At the time of reporting on our performance last year we as a country were just going into a “Lockdown” environment due to the raising pandemic of Covid19.. The service had to respond quickly to ensure we found different ways to recruit, assess and support our carers.

We responded quickly, embraced the new technology afforded to us at this time and ensured we remained “present” for our carers. On the day England went into lockdown we introduced a private Facebook account for our carers. This ensured that we were able to get key messages out to our carers as the guidance was updated. This has remained an important tool to date, updating carers on Government and local guidance.

We have also used the private group to share good news stories, support, and photos / videos of our children’s artwork, cookery skills and artistic talents.

We held online support groups and a very successful “Leicestershire has Talent” where our young people entered a virtual Talent Show.

We are very proud that our placement stability remained high during this year, across our Children in Care Placement Stability has reduced to 3% (low is good).

Since our last report we have seen several older young people entering care and a growth in requests for placements larger sibling groups coming into care. This is not without its challenges when matching against carer availability, Terms of Approval, and carers skill sets. This has been a particular challenge when many carers ‘paused’ taking new placements due to vulnerability within their own homes or networks. They have taken the time to review their personal circumstances. Some who we anticipated would retire have now done so, and others decided to move on from fostering to care for family members.

We have also seen a rise in Court Ordered Placements (38.6) where the Kinship Team have identified that they would not meet Fostering Regulations and have worked closely with the fieldwork social work team to ensure subsequent care planning decisions have been informed and in the children’s best interest. We are pleased to have recruited to the Kinship Team Manager post, which has inherent pressures and challenges. We look forward to developing this role moving forward.

The Annual Report will provide feedback from the whole service, highlighting how we progressed our plans from last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.

This report should be read alongside the Market Position Sufficiency Statement for 2021-23 which provides the basis for commissioning decisions, setting out our intentions for improving life changes of children and young people in care. The statement sets out the current position and our objectives for placements for children and young people from within our internal services and those we source from the external market.

Other key documents include:

- Children and Family Departmental Plan 2017 – 2021
- Care Placement Strategy 2018-2021
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to excellence 2021
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Ofsted report 2019 (Inspection of children’s social care services)

Principles

LCC Children and Family Service works to a key set of principles that underpin our work with children and families. These are :

- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with connected carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging
- Children and young people's voice will be respected, and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future, and the provision of services
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people.
- Where possible and right to do so, children and young people should be placed within Leicestershire with Leicestershire carers to maintain a sense of connectivity with their community.
- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people.

Objectives

- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council, which will meet needs, and support good outcomes, now and into the future.
- Meet the recruitment targets agreed on an annual basis
- Contribute to the overall Council savings through sufficiency and utilisation of carers and reducing the amount of time children spend in care.
- For all Children and Family Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of foster carers, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care

The Service reports directly to the Service Manager who attends performance improvement meetings chaired by the Head of Service and Assistant Director.

Our Identified Tasks from 2019/20 Annual Report

- Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve:
 - 25 mainstream carers (net 14)
 - 2 Specialist carers
 - 3 Supported lodgings Placements (later increased to 5)
- We will continue to look for further opportunities to develop our carers and introduce the therapeutic model to all our carers
- Introduce forums to support our carers through Covid 19 pandemic.
- Where it is safe and right to do, we will continue to visit our carers face to face.
- Develop our Supported Lodgings Scheme, we recognise the wealth it brings to the service for our older children who continue to need support when coming into care at an older age
- Develop our Staying Put processes to ensure we capture all arrangements and provide the necessary support
- Welcome the UASC foster scheme "A Place to Call Home", as the hosting authority and look forward to the scheme going live in July.
- Increase our Reviewing Officer capacity as a net growth of foster carers continues.
- Continue to develop our Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedding PODS.

What we did to achieve this

- Nationally there was a significant decline as potential carers stopped making contact, and this was the initial experience of Leicestershire. We still had carers progressing through the recruitment and assessment progress. Due to lockdown we had to change our method of assessing in line with Government revised regulations and for some carers there was a delay as we / carers responded to pandemic meaning their panel dates were delayed. Subsequently that meant their approval moved into the next reporting period.
- We approved 12 foster carers (including 5 IFA carer transfers who had made an active choice to be part of our fostering family, recognising the level of support our carers receive, 1 specialist carer and 12 supported lodgings carers, giving us 25 new foster placements.
- In terms of foster carers leaving the service we lost (10) mainstream foster families. This was due to having the time to reflect on their personal circumstance. None expressed dissatisfaction with the service and support they had received.
- We engaged with Leicestershire County Council's transformation programmes - Defining Children and Families Services for the Future (DCFSF) and Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), with a particular focus for the Fostering Service on placing more Leicestershire children with Leicestershire's carers and utilising internal capacity, reviewing and removing any barriers that prevent increasing internal capacity.
- For supported lodgings we had a target of 5 approvals. We exceeded this target, approving 12. We had seen some excellent outcomes for our young people within the scheme.
- 1 supported lodgings carer retired.
- We presented our request to increase our reviewing capacity due to growth of carers and gained agreement to increase the post to full time. We appointed a second part time reviewing officer in November 2020.
- We went live with our UASC Foster Scheme hosted by Leicestershire on behalf of the region in September 20.
- We reviewed our Staying Put Process and now hold this within the Supported Lodgings Team to ensure that all Staying Put Providers receive the right support at the right time and that there is additional oversight to support Personal Advisors (PA) who are the young people's allocated key worker.
- We transferred much of our recruitment activity to online, using the forums of Facebook and the dedicated Leicestershire County Council website for fostering.
- We retained our dedicated recruitment team to respond to any requests for information or enquiries.
- We conducted our initial visits as virtual visits during lockdown, using WhatsApp videos to meet the carers and discuss their motivation to foster and see their properties remotely.
- We used the revised Assessment Guidance from Coram BAAF / Revised Fostering Regulations to assess our carers and returned to face-to-face assessment based on risk assessments.
- We implemented Panel Practise Standards to ensure consistency for all cases coming through to panel and improve the experience of panel and attendees.
- We used the revised regulations to implement Virtual Fostering Panels from April 20.
- In addition to our private Facebook account we also developed mentoring opportunities, held our locality support groups virtually and other opportunities to engage and support carers.
- All of our foster homes and the children placed were RAG rated in a risk assessment. Placements with worries regarding stability during the pandemic received both supervising social worker and support from the Dedicated Placement Support Team. PPE was used in line with government recommendations and local advice from Public Health.



- Despite some initial delay due to the pandemic our “Place to Call Home” project for unaccompanied asylum seeking children went live in September 20. The project is still active.
- Our Dedicated Placement Support Team, our service’s unique selling point, has continued to develop and has continued to support placement. The team has supported 74 placements during the year, stabilising care, stepping 5 young people into family-based care or into independence from residential placements, and returning 4 young people to their birth families
- We have also started to develop our Review Practise Standards by asking partners for feedback and by capture the voice of both birth and foster children.

Summary of Recruitment:

Recruitment Targets for 2020/21:

25 Mainstream Foster Carers	2 Specialist Carer	5 Supported Lodgings Providers	(Total 32)
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Recruitment Activity for 2020/21:

12 Mainstream Foster Carers	1 Specialist Carer	12 Supported Lodgings Providers	(Total 23)
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30 Kinship Carers

ROLES WITH THE FOSTERING SERVICE

Our Fostering Service consists of six separate teams

- Recruitment – fostering and adoption
- Assessments – Fostering
- Team around the Child
- Kinship
- Dedicated Placements Support – Placement Stability, Independent Visitors, Supported Lodgings Scheme, Staying Put, Specialist Foster Carers
- UASC Carers recruitment and Assessment Team

THE FRONT DOOR OF OUR SERVICE – THE RECRUITMENT TEAM

Welcoming – Informative - Efficient

The Recruitment Team are the 'Front door' to our Service and as such, play a vital part in attracting, filtering and processing enquiries from members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers and adopters with Leicestershire County Council.

The team provides a dedicated resource which manages all forms of contact, including contact by telephone, mail, website, text message enquiries. Regular public events are held to welcome members of the public to find out more about fostering and adoption which are also the responsibility of this team.

The team manager works closely with colleagues in the Communications Team to create appropriate and cost-effective recruitment campaigns, based on projected Service requirements, using various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. They also utilise more traditional methods of posters, postcards, and banners as well as Radio campaigns and adverts within Leicestershire publications and local business staff intranets.

It is vital that the service we provide is Welcoming and friendly, swift and efficient, informative and honest as well as ensuring that every enquiry is dealt with in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, representative of the key values and behaviours of Leicestershire County Council.

The Recruitment Team consists of:

1 Team Manager
1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator
2 Initial Assessment Workers plus 1 temporary worker for Kinship
1 Initial Assessment Worker (Casual)

Our digital strategy continues to support our recruitment having the flexibility to develop as our recruitment challenges change.

This approach includes:

- A largely digital marketing strategy
- A new website geared towards the customer needs and experience for prospective foster carers
- Surveys and "keep in touch" mechanisms via electronic communications, to provide excellent customer service, and manage feedback.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to share information about fostering, and about what to expect, at each stage of the journey, including access to forms and training information.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to upload documents, for safe and confidential access, storage, and visibility.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to read the Final Form F and confirm amendments and agreement.
- Use of Egress Secure Workspace to become part of the Fostering Community in Leicestershire County Council, with access to information, events, policies, procedures, and forms.
- Online Portal, after approval all our carers recordings can be sent and uploaded securely.
- Virtual memory box, we are very proud that our foster carers can upload all the child's memories – photographs, school certificates, and videos.

We are proud members of:



We received 549 Requests for Information of which generated:

365 Fostering enquiries received & serviced of which:

We undertook 70 Initial visits in applicants' homes
53 applications progressed to Stage 1

Approvals:

13 assessments resulted in approval of fostering households. (Including 5 x IFA and 1 x OLA transfers)
12 Supported Lodgings providers:
1 Specialist Carer
11 Independent visitors

What have we done?

Outcomes:

The Recruitment team communicate with potential applicants at the earliest stage and gain sufficient information to consider whether or not to progress to assessment.

This is a cost-effective method of 'filtering' enquiries at the 'front door' of the Service. It means less delay for applicants, with clear, swift, consistent, and fair outcomes to their enquiry.

This allows us to increase time spent on enquiries with a higher likelihood of progressing further.

Improved value for money due to the costly filtering of high enquiry numbers carried out at the beginning of the process, making better use of the availability of assessment capacity of the service.

In 2020-21 we welcomed 5 x Independent Fostering Agency carers and 1 x Other Local Authority Carer to Leicestershire – all chose to transfer to us via the foster Carers Transfer protocol.

Improved 'filtering' of applicants at the enquiry and initial visit stage has added to the reduction of applicants leaving the assessment process.

Our Fostering Events 2020-21

Our physical 'Find Out About Fostering' events were paused from February 2020 due to the Covid-19 Pandemic. In January 2021 we were able to convert to online events. As a service we felt it important to be able to offer any potential carers the opportunity to find out more. After recommencing our events in January 2021, we held a further four, with a total of 41 people attending. The events are held every 3 weeks virtually at 6:30pm in the evening and are advertised to the public. Our events are relaxed and informal and provide an opportunity for people to come along to find out about fostering and hear from some of our foster carers, what it's really like to be a foster carer. Our current foster carers also engage in our information evenings to speak about their own experiences. We publicise our events through our social media and contact individuals who have enquired with a text message reminder.

The event provides an opportunity for us to showcase the benefits of fostering with Leicestershire County Council, allowing us to focus on our 'unique selling points' for example, 'Leicestershire people caring for Leicester's children & young people' which emphasises that opposed to fostering for an Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) who may be placing children from all over the country with their carers, fostering with us means you will look after Leicestershire children – meaning local school and contact visits – not in different counties.

Our Find out about Fostering events – have gone Virtual!





we
LOVE
our
**FOSTER
CARERS**

Thank you, Cards & Hampers:

In June we wanted to thank our carers for all the support and care they have offered to our babies, children, and young people during the first lockdown. We wanted them to know that they were appreciated and valued. 'Thank you' cards and 'Thank you Hampers' which were delivered to all our carers households where our children and young people were placed.

We ensured that our hampers included ingredients to suit dietary requirements (including Gluten Free/Vegetarian) overall, they provided an activity to encourage carers to spend time baking and cooking with our children. They also included colouring books for the family to encourage relaxation and mindfulness. We received many images of our children baking and enjoying the contents as well as an overwhelming number of thank you messages to the service for the 'thoughtfulness of the hamper' during what was a very stressful time for many of our carers.



**Leicestershire
County Council**

**Leicestershire
Fostering
& Adoption**

In July 2020, we created a new brochure 'Welcome to our family' which explains the benefits of fostering with Leicestershire. This was part of our campaign to encourage people who were already foster carers to join us.

We focused on ensuring that our foster carers felt supported throughout the stressful times of the Covid-19 Pandemic but also shared this with potential carers to showcase Leicestershire's culture of caring for our carers.

We created fresh images that we shared on our social media platforms and added these to email signatures for all staff correspondence.

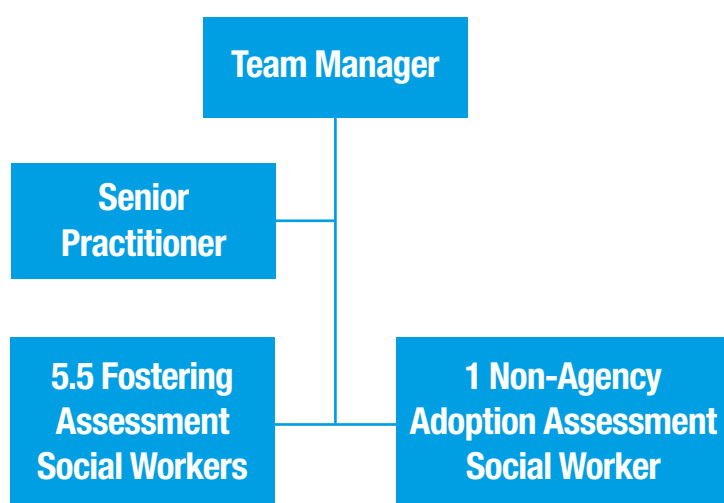


THE JOURNEY HAS STARTED - THE ASSESSMENT TEAM

Our Fostering Assessment Team works very closely with the Recruitment Team to bring the right carers through at the right time to be assessed. The Assessment Team are responsible for:

- Mainstream Fostering Assessments
- Private Fostering Assessments
- Non-Agency Adoption Assessments
- Leading on the delivery of Skills to Foster Training
- Jointly overseeing the Mentoring Scheme (for new Foster Carers)

Assessment Team Staff Structure:



Assessment Team Update:

The Assessment Team have been influenced by some key trends and events in 2020-21. It perhaps goes without saying that the Covid pandemic has had a significant impact upon the way the teamwork, and they have worked hard with each other and with their colleagues in other areas of the service, to overcome the challenges that such an extraordinary situation has caused. The team have also coped well with the fluctuations which we have seen in recruitment and the impact of this on assessments and approvals, which is touched upon again below, and they have also engaged enthusiastically with the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future Programme.

The Assessment Team experienced a quiet period in late spring and early summer (2020) in terms of mainstream assessments coming through the pipeline from the Recruitment Team, which ultimately impacted upon our ability to meet approval targets for the financial year. This quieter period coincided with the team running with three vacancies and a worker off on long term sick leave, and the other workers – whilst they were not as busy with mainstream assessments - supported the Connected Team and completed some assessments for them. The team has seen the introduction of 3 new members of staff over the course of the last financial year.

Mainstream assessment activity picked up from August 2020, which included a significant uplift in recruitment from other fostering agencies – this being one of the success stories for the Recruitment and Assessment Teams for 2020-21. The team successfully brought 5 of the 6 transferring carers to LCC Fostering Panel before Christmas 2020.

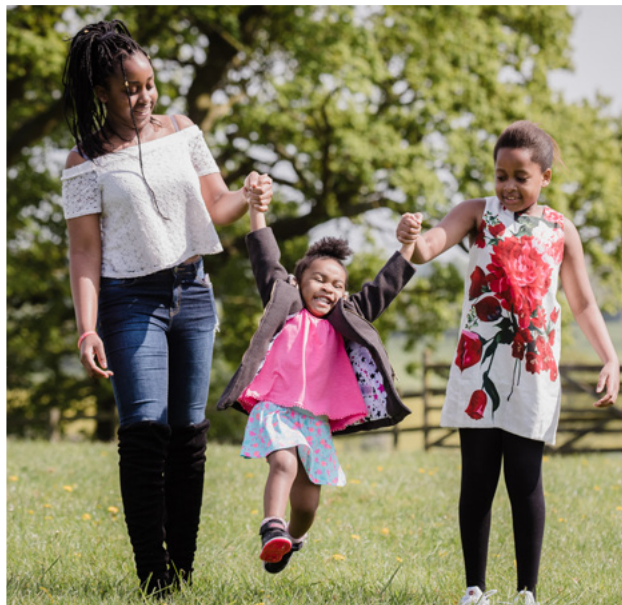
Impact of Covid

The Assessment Team have adapted to the new circumstances caused by the Covid pandemic. They have adopted a 'hybrid' way of undertaking assessment sessions, which has involved a mixture of virtual and face to face work. They have been tenacious in their approach to finding solutions and ways to continue to undertake robust assessments, whilst also ensuring that their activities fall in line with government and local guidance around public health and how to visit in a way that minimises risk of transmission of the virus (e.g. use of PPE and social distancing etc). We have also seen an impact of Covid in terms of delayed assessments, for example, applicants who want to go on hold or withdraw all together, because of things changing in their lives because of the pandemic.

The Assessment Team – along with colleagues within the Team Around the Child (TAC) and Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) – worked together to adjust their training material to ensure that during lockdown, a Skills to Foster training experience could still be provided to applicants, virtually. This involved them learning new ways of working and supporting each other, and they been successful in providing training to all our applicants.

Overall, the Assessment Team would say that the pandemic has brought them closer together. They meet up virtually more often than they would have done before the pandemic and find their weekly catch ups and important time to share with each other – they know each other far better than they did before, perhaps because home working has allowed personal glimpses into each other's lives.

The team think that whilst the pandemic has not been without its challenges, that they have learned about different ways of working and are confident that many of the skills they have learned will be useful moving forward into a hybrid, flexible way of working.



Mentoring Scheme

The mentoring scheme continues to be well organised, thanks to the joint work undertaken on this scheme between the Senior Practitioner from the Assessment Team and the TAC Team.

At the time of this Fostering Annual Report, the Mentoring Scheme's Annual Report 2020-21 is in its first draft. The headlines from this report, however, are that:

- All new applicants coming through the assessment process were offered a mentor.
- 100% of those applicants who want a mentor, have been matched to experienced carers.
- A recruitment drive is required in 2021-22 to encourage more experienced carers to take on a mentoring role.

Our aims for the next year:

- Meet our recruitment target of 35 carers, an ambitious target to meet the sufficiency of our children needing fostering placements
- Reduce our carers in the assessment process to panel to 16 weeks

SUPPORTING LEICESTERSHIRE'S CARER – TEAM AROUND THE CHILD

In Leicestershire, statutory support is delivered through the Team Around the Child (TAC).

The team consists of:
Team Manager
1 x FTE Senior Practitioners (2x 0.5 workers)
7x Social Workers
1x Support Worker

We are very proud of our Team Around the Child Team, working with our foster carers to achieve the best for the children they care for.

Areas of development during 2020/21.

- Foster Carer Forum – In 2019/20 we have continued to develop our work with the Foster Carers Forum. This has been useful to discuss policies and practice with foster carers to gain carers views and opinions. We hope to include Kinship carers in this forum in the future.
- Mentoring Scheme- A joint initiative across two teams to ensure we provide our carers the right support at the right time during their journey to become a foster carer. This has been invaluable during this time as other modes of support have been initially suspended
- We quickly risk assessed all of our fostering households and RAG rated them to ensure the carers that needed support continued to receive this in person through socially distanced contact and the use of PPE, whilst other foster homes were supported virtually and through doorstep visits.
- We developed our Facebook support as a live means of contact and ensured all our carers received regular updates via our learning hub / portal.
- Our Foster Carers Forum went virtual
- Foster Carer Handbook – Our foster carer handbook was updated.
- Foster Carer Training Programme. – Our training programme for “In Person” events were suspended, but we were quickly able to transfer over to virtual. We recognise that for some carers this move proved more difficult than others. With the support of the training support team we could talk through carers how to access forums, and virtual events
- The introduction of PODS following the Signs of Safety format, to discuss cases including a broader range of professionals has been introduced.
- Our Team Manager from TAC was appointed to the Assistant Service Post.

We are pleased to report that our retention of staff has remained high, and when posts have become available, we have high interest to join the service.

What we Plan for 2021/22

- We are excited about developing all areas of practice, and returning to the practices and support we know our carers appreciated and had such a positive impact on our foster families
- Due to Covid restrictions we were unable to hold our annual Carer Recognition Event. Plans are now in progress to hold this in Autumn 2021.
- We will also be planning our Family Events for Summer, our Sons and Daughters Events and Family Picnics. We know these events provide good ways for foster carers to build networks and feel supported and recognised for the care they provide.
- We intend to continue to offer a number of training options both virtual and face to face. This will support those carers that work full time and kinship carers who live outside Leicestershire.
- This year we will be introducing a membership for all carers to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting. This will offer additional emotional and practical support through listening circles, one to one consultation, trigger groups / webinars and training.
- Some carers tell us they are passionate about increasing their skills and understanding to meet the needs of complex children and young people. Whilst we have a development plan for the first three years of fostering, we intend to look carefully at professional progression beyond this and introduce an Annual Development Plan for our carers. We will be working collaboratively within the Foster Carers Forum to consider how to progress this.
- We will be introducing Kinship Locality Groups and we will invite representation to join the Foster Carers Forum
- As we have a number of kinship carers who live outside of Leicestershire, we will be taking advantage of the growing opportunities for virtual communication and we will be holding monthly virtual support group chats for kinship carers who are unable to meet in person.
- We continually hope to improve practice and an area of focus this year is the quality of the Carers Support Plans.
- Continue to develop our joint working with the Permanence Team for children requiring permanence through long term fostering
- Develop our in house duty system through working with DCFS program , by having a dedicated team who manage all in house placements.



Retention Activities

Our engagement with our carers has been very different than we would usually have, Covid gave us new challenges but also new opportunities, and certainly new opportunities for our foster families to show off their talents. We organised many online activities and celebrated many achievements of both our foster and birth children. We also used this time to capture events to be stored on the children's virtual memory boxes.

- As we commenced with doorstep visits our children would share with us pictures and prized craft work.
- Leicestershire has got talent
- Drawing competition
- Christmas card competition, the 4 winners then had their designs used as cards for the council.
- Newsletter sent every month

Engagement with carers is essential to communication – knowing what our carers think and what is important to them. We have increased our Locality Support Groups and we have a Carers forum which offers opportunities for discussion and feedback as well as a quarterly Information evening. Team Manager and Senior Practitioners stay in regular contact with Locality Support group leaders and hold quarterly virtual meetings, these will progress to face to face when restrictions lift.

The Kinship Team (Connected Carers)

The Kinship Assessment Team consists of:	
1	Team Manager
1	Senior Practitioner
4	Assessing social workers
1	Family Intervention Worker – SGO specific role
2	Assessment vacancies

The Kinship team has dual roles, to assess and support kinship carers throughout their journey within Kinship. We have developed the Service to include the completion of SGO assessments where determined within the care planning, actively supporting the carers through this journey, working closely with locality partners – this work will progress further across 2021/2022 with the recruitment of the Family Intervention Worker who will support and enable carers pre and post order for a period of 6 months – following the research and learning from the recent Agenda for Change in respect to Kinship and significantly Special Guardians

Alongside the enhanced support package for our SGO carers, we have expanded the access to training and support for all carers during the assessment period, with a We are Family skills over-view training day, followed with access to specific learning and development training, this not only strengthens the assessment with carers, but most importantly ensure that carers and children do not feel vulnerable in dealing with unfamiliar situations as a result of caring for family and friends.

Covid has presented some different challenges within how assessments are completed – and whilst we have adapted practices to ensure safety for all, our families have remained at the heart of our work, with PPE being utilised and creative use of spaces to ensure we remain physically able to assess our carers, but also to provide them with the support and connection with the service.

Friends and Families Kinship Care is unique to local Authorities – within Leicestershire we have experienced a significant growth in our Kinship Carers year on Year – we currently have 87 approved and active kinship carers, 63 approvals throughout the year, which is an increase of 30, over the period of 1st April 20 – 31st March 21.

From December 2020 we have entered into a joint working arrangement with the Locality Teams to undertake (where-ever possible) joint initial viability assessments and the provision of advice and guidance in assessments where we have limited capacity. As we continue with the development of our kinship offer, we recognise the benefits this will bring to children and families and aim to have secured agreement for additional resourcing in 2021 to enable the Kinship Team to jointly complete all viability assessments.

The strengths of this provision include:

- Kinship Team is alerted to the possibility of placements at the earliest opportunity
- Support is provided to the locality to understand the processes involved
- Support is provided at the Family Group Meetings to ensure prospective carers understand the role of a foster carer and what will be expected of them and to allow for consistency consideration of Fostering Regulations in all assessments
- Robust and comprehensive Initial Viability Assessments are undertaken, strengthening the assessment processes and ensuring informed decisions are made early.

Our plans for 2021/22 include:

- Further development of our assessments using feedback from our carers, panel and ADM to improve the quality of assessments using a strengths-based model and identifying risks and vulnerabilities and how we can mitigate them
- The development of the role of Family Intervention Worker to support carers with contact through advice.
- Embedding of the joint Initial Viability Assessment model
- Completion of Declaration of Compliance completed for every assessment to ensure consistency to panel for both Form F and Form C's.
- Training in localities for the use of kinship placements and the different regulatory requirements.

The Dedicated Placement Support Team

Leicestershire's Dedicated Placement Support Team has been in operation since 2016. This team can support placements to promote stability, support our specialist One2One, Pathway carers and young people in Staying Put and Supported lodgings arrangements. The team is unique to Leicestershire in that the service can provide the right support at the right time to maintain placement stability.

The Support workers work in a holistic way with the household, recognising the importance of giving everyone a voice, and helping them to reach their own resolutions and outcomes. As each worker carries their own caseload, they can be very creative in their engagement offering support in the evenings and weekends as the case requires. They will also offer direct work to young people and be an additional listening ear to carers to support them when times become difficult. In our 2019 Inspection Ofsted recognise this as one of Leicestershire's "Unique Selling Points".



The team consists of:

The team consists of:	
Team Manager	
Supervising Social Workers (3)	
Support Workers (5)	
Independent Visitor Co-Ordinator	

The team is responsible for:

- Supporting and promoting placement stability for young people living in our specialist foster care provision who most challenging behaviours
- Supporting our mainstream foster carers and young people stepping down from residential placements to return to family-based carer. This includes working intensively with families and young people and other professionals.
- Preparing return home trajectories and offering support at evenings and weekends to maintain the arrangement.
- Recruit and support Supported Lodgings Carers
- Supporting Staying Put Arrangements where there are no other foster children in placement. This includes both internal and external carers.
- Working with carers to understand the therapeutic needs using Thera play techniques
- Providing activity events to engage with both carers, foster children, and birth children.

Developments on Plans for 2020/21

- We worked with our Practise Excellence Team to use scaling and Safety Goals within our referral paperwork
- We had a recruitment target of 5 SLP, we approved 12
- We recruited one further Pathway carer and re-approved our current Pathway carer as a couple

Placement Support

- Over the last year the team have worked with 63 families and/or carers
- We have supported 7 young people to return home
- We have supported 1 young person to move into independence
- We supported 16 households who were experiencing difficulties with children's emotional needs and behaviour. All of these placements settled, and the child remains with carers
- Two young people stepped down from high cost placements in a planned manner.

Supported Lodgings

- We have 32 carers offering 46 placements.
- We have 31 young people in placement,
- We have 4 potential carers in assessment
- Ensured our supported lodgings providers have access to all training and support forums including portal, online training, and support groups

Staying Put

- We have 40 young people over 18 remaining in either their previous foster placement or supported lodgings
- Of these 22 are in Stay Put arrangements with their foster carers and 18 remained with their Supported Lodgings provider.

Specialist Foster Carers

- We have currently 5 carers under this scheme
- We have 6 young people in placement with a potential for another placement, child matched.

Throughout the pandemic the team have continued to work face to face with both carers and young people, this has helped to maintain placements and grow our resources.

We have over the last year we have gained 11 Supported Lodgings providers (approved 12, 1 retired)and one specialist carer.

Feedback from both professional and carers remain high in term of the work the team undertake.

Our Plans for 2020/21

- We have seen the evidence of the impact the team has on placement stability and we look forward to developing the design of the team moving forward, building capacity to work with more families at the time it is needed.
- To increase our management oversight by building into the staffing structure a senior practitioner role to oversee placement stability and supported lodgings.
- To work with Department of Education with the consultation regarding unregulated placements for 16-year olds
- To develop a tracking system and governance structure for our young people in residential care identifying the right time to manage step downs into family-based care
- Targeted recruitment of specialist carers within caring professions – Police, Probation, Teaching and Health Care
- Mentoring of supported lodging providers by older LAC to support potential young people by offering / guidance / befriending
- Implementing preparation training for supported lodgings providers
- Developing POD working for the team to discuss more complex cases
- Develop our relationship with the ART service ran by Barnardo's in partnership with Leicestershire so that we can make best use of our support services (ensuring that children and carers receive the right service at the right time)
- Review our Practise Standards for the support lodging providers, placement support and specialist carers
- Review LCC Staying Put Policy.

Retention Overview:

Last year we predicted a loss of 20 carers, we lost 14. The pandemic has led to some of those considering retirement or resignation due to a change of circumstances to make the decision.

During Covid we saw several carers going on hold due to health concerns. As we rolled out the vaccine to our fosters carers in January as essential workers, they felt more confidence and some have started returning to fostering. For others they confirmed their decision to stop being foster carers.

Fees and Allowances

In Leicestershire we review our fee structure annually in line with national fee structure. Any increase is implemented across allowances and fees.

Our Training

At the point of assessment our foster carers receive support and training to equip them for their tasks ahead.

In line with our “We are Family” approach, we use the skills of all our teams to ensure we prepare our foster carers through our bespoke ‘Skills to Foster’ preparation training. The Skills to Foster provides a safe space for carers to discuss any worries and seek reassurance from the service.

We have an online presence whereby video clips, online discussions and presentations which are presented to carers to give guidance and support and the tools to be able to commence their fostering journey. Our experienced foster carers and professionals also share their own experiences and support foster carers into their fostering role and beyond.

The training we provide is valued and important part of the support, preparation, and development of foster carers, including specialist foster carers. 90% of our Foster Carers identified that they were:

- Happy with training provided
- Felt training was relevant
- Training was appropriate and useful
- Supported them in their fostering roles

We have developed our training programme to ensure we grow the foster carers’ knowledge, skills, and development. The feedback we receive develops our training programme for the future. This year we have developed our virtual forums using Teams, Webinars and access to awards and certifications for courses with 3rd party providers such as colleges and Charities.

The service has continued to develop our eLearning through the Training Hub. This means that carers can complete training in a more flexible manner.

In addition to a set of courses offered, the Training Hub also has bi-monthly training themes where carers in their own time can develop their skills and knowledge in key areas – child development, self-harm and caring for traumatised children to name a few. We also welcome Special Guardians onto some of our training platforms.

We have a dedicated Training and Development Officer for the service supports and provides training for all our carers both mainstream, kinship and specialist carers as well as supported lodgings providers, independent visitors, and special guardians.

As part of our training offer, we have:

- 483 e-learning courses available of which:
 - 2 pre-selected specialist online courses every 8 weeks
 - 200 preventative and life skill courses for our young people in care
 - 150 wellbeing online courses to support an individual's mental health
 - Access to 800 additional specialist online courses
- Training Support and Development Standards– paper version or online assessment is available which can be completed on a tablet or mobile phone.
- Level 3 Diploma for the new Children and Young Peoples Welfare undertaken at the carer's home
- NHS Diana training for short breaks carers

Leicestershire
Fostering
& Adoption

FOSTER CARERS TRAINING PROGRAMME 2020/2021



Programme runs from 1st April 2020 to 31st March 2021



Feedback/ Evaluations on training

Evaluations are completed at the end of every training session by carers and reviewed by the course trainer as well as the Training Officer. Feedback collated from carers are noted and actioned to evaluate our current and future training courses.

We have designed a new feedback form to scale the learner's progress and knowledge from the beginning of the training to the end of the training session.

Trainers are also invited to provide feedback to gauge their overall experience with our venues /carers etc. which are also actioned and reported where necessary.

The Ofsted Inspection of Leicestershire's Children and Families Service recognised that our carers were well trained and well supported.

Our Plans for the forthcoming year

- Embed our therapeutic parenting membership offer to all our foster carers
- Develop more online opportunities for carers to learn including online forums
- Involve our experienced carers in the delivery of training
- Develop and introduce Information Technology workshops for carers
- Re-introduce face to face training safely

THE INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The scheme supports children in care up to the age of 21. The scheme is open to all looked after children who are identified as benefiting from the service, the scheme provides positive friendships and role models for our young people placed in foster care and residential care, with many friendships being maintained after young people have moved on from care and are living independently. The scheme assists with placement support and stability for both mainstream and connected carers.

What our children say:

“ She is consistent in my life amongst lots of other changes. ”

“ Its good to see someone else who I don't live with, or who isn't a social worker or teacher. ”

What our Independent Visitors say:

“ I love making her laugh and she makes me laugh too! ”

“ It feels good to make a difference to someone else ”

What they both say:

“ We have fun days out and try new things. ”

During 2020/21 we have reviewed our Independent Visitors Scheme.

Between April 20 and March 21, the scheme has approved a further 11 independent visitors taking the total to 46. However, 5 Visitors ceased being visitors in this period, 4 to become foster carers and 1 as their matched young person no longer wished to have an independent visitor and due to personal circumstances, the independent visitor did not want to be matched with another young person. The service currently has 41 approved independent visitors with a target of 50 over the next year.

There are 10 potential applicants awaiting assessment. There has been a delay in starting these assessments due to restrictions in place due to Covid 19. Recruitment of male independent visitors continues to be a challenge nationally, but the service is working hard to try to increase numbers, by both targeted and general promotion of the scheme. During this period, we have recruited 5 males, some of our current male independent visitors have agreed to take on an additional child to support the waiting list of young males needing to be matched.

Between April 20 and March 21, the scheme has matched 8 young people. There are currently 31 young people matched to an independent visitor. There are currently 16 children waiting, of those, a match has been identified for 9 young people, matching visits are in the process of being arranged.

During 2020/2021 the scheme has had to adapt to the pandemic with restrictions placed on face to face visiting and network/group supervision. A WhatsApp group has been set up to share ideas and to keep connected IV's have engaged with the app and there has been positive feedback about its usefulness.

IV's have continued to support children/young people during lockdown through virtual contact. Some of the activities they have done are.

- Online Escape room
- Movie nights
- Post cards and letters
- Quizzes
- Talent shows
- Word searches and puzzles
- Parcels through the post
- Scrap books of trips out pre Covid restrictions to keep young people engaged for when visits resume
- Online Kid's comedy in Leicester
- Texts/Facetime

The scheme has linked young people and independent visitors into events run by the National IV Network

- Workshops on Frog Life & Reptiles. This workshop was for children aged 8 – 12
- Halloween Competition
- Animation production – 1 young person from Leicestershire is enrolled on this project

All newly approved independent visitors are required to complete, prior to matching, LCC 40-minute online course – Essential awareness in safeguarding for children and adults, and LCC 1 – day Essential awareness in safeguarding for children and adults within 6 months of starting the role, alongside additional training through LCC fostering service. Independent visitors are invited to events run by the fostering service and have been invited and attended the yearly celebration event and have previously been part of/contributed to the national volunteer week.

The coordinator is promoting the scheme internally through attending team meetings and has started working alongside the children in care council to promote the scheme with children and young people. There is collaborative working with the fostering recruitment team to generate enquiries and to promote the scheme through social media advertising.

The independent visitor coordinator is embedded in the regional network events for independent visitor coordinators and has been a representative on national working parties. The coordinator has access to national information and resources through the on-line Huddle platform, all of which informs local practice. The Coordinator has contributed to the national evaluation with case studies and an interview to ensure LCC's voice is heard and captured in their findings.

Developments for 2021/22

- Roll out a robust training plan
- Consider options for out of county placements, children with disabilities alongside national discussions/developments
- Recruit more male independent visitors, those who can support children with additional needs and out of county placements
- Continue to promote the scheme internally and externally
- Continue to review processes for feedback and review of the scheme
- Embed independent visitors in the fostering service community

DEFINING CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME

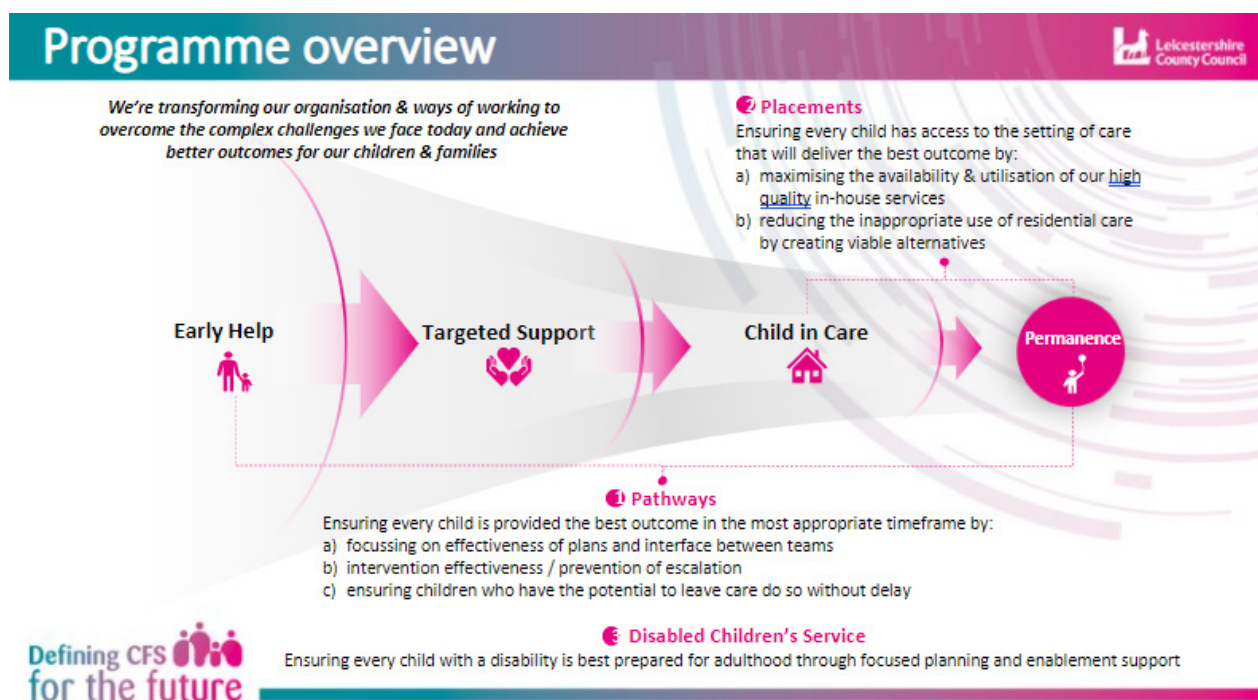
The Children and Family Services Department faces significant challenges due to increased growth and demand on its services, this is reflected in the growth approved within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by full Council on 7 February 2020. To address this the Department commissioned a partner and the Transformation Unit to support us in exploring how we can position our Children and Family Wellbeing and Social Work services, to make sure that our budgets and resources are best placed to meet the needs of vulnerable children and families. The programme goal is to ensure assessed needs are met in a timely way that results in best outcomes for the child and helps to build family resilience, so preventing where possible, the escalation of children through the pathways to higher targeted services.

In August 2020, we started the diagnostic phase to explore and understand how we can progress this work. This included working with staff at all levels to review practice, service provision and cases, to explore what we do well and what blocks development. Some front-line staff from partner agencies joined these sessions. The diagnostic proposed some improvements across three key areas:

1. Pathways - How we manage our cases and prevent children and families escalating in need and cases from drifting
2. Placements – developing both our internal and external placement capacity
3. Independence – ensuring early planning for adulthood and independence.

These opportunities are currently being explored and developed within the department with Children and Families staff leading future designs for ways of working. These new ways of working will explore how best to achieve the right outcomes for our children and families, trialling and testing changes, leading to optimising practice, process, and systems in three areas of work. The new ways of working may also include the need for the introduction of new skills, culture and structural change.

The final set of designs will be developed by August 2021.



REPORT FROM THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

The number of Foster Carer Reviews continues to grow year on year, during 2020/21 we undertook 202 reviews, an increase of 35 from the previous year reflecting the growth of kinship carers. As a result of this growing demand an additional part-time Reviewing Officer was recruited in November 2020.

The Pandemic saw the switch from face to face visits to 'virtual' reviews. Overall, this has worked well and ensured that the review process continued. Whilst the majority of reviews will revert to face to face visits, we recognise there are times when holding 'virtual' reviews are a necessity.

With Supervising Social Worker's (SSW) visits reduced to a minimum for much of the year, the challenge of gaining the independent 'voice of the child' became more difficult, particularly with younger children, to gain their views and experiences.

An audit of the 'voice of the child' was completed, covering the period October 2019 to September 2020, the outcome of which confirmed:

- The impact of covid-19 has had a significant impact on SSW's being able to capture the children's voice.
- The overwhelming majority of children/young people rate their placement highly and this is true of both kinship and mainstream placements.
- A bedroom that is personalised and decorated to a child/young person's taste, where they feel comfortable and safe is highly regarded and will support the child's sense of belonging and sense of worth.
- Children's views of respite and out of hours placements are rarely gained.

As a result of this feedback the 'Your voice, Your Choice' booklets and 'Questions for Children/Young People that Foster' have been adapted so children and young people can complete these electronically. SSW have also become more creative in gaining children's views.

We continue to see an increase in feedback from Independent Reviewing Officers and Children's Social Worker, which helps provide a clearer picture of the lived experience of the child and a foster carer's strengths and vulnerabilities. Overall ensuring a more robust review process.

Many foster carers have struggled to fulfil the training requirements during the pandemic, mainly due to juggling responsibilities of caring, home schooling and seeing the switch from face to face training to online learning. It is hoped improvements will be seen in the forthcoming year as we adjust to the new 'normal.'

This has been a difficult year for many carers in terms of support, as they have understandably missed face to face visits by their SSW. This has been particularly difficult for carers who are newly approved or who have had changes in SSW. Building supportive working relationships 'virtually' is not easy. Be that as it may, carers generally feel the service values them as carers and they feel supported, they appreciate the support from the TAC team Manager and the availability of the Service Manager.

Issues with overpayments and delays in payments continue to be an issue particularly with foster carers who provide respite or emergency placements.

For some kinship carers, understanding their changing role from being a family member to foster carer and the expectations placed on them is hard. With the move of those carers to the Team Around the Child (fostering supervising social worker team for mainstream carers) there is more consistency and a gradual shift in understanding and overall kinship carers are meeting or working towards meeting the requirements.

Plans for 2021/22

- Ensure all reviews have feedback from all professionals to complete the feedback for the carers
- Gain feedback from children and young people who have experienced a placement breakdown.
- Gain feedback from children and young people who have been in respite care and/or Emergency Placements.
- Undertake annual audit on Voice Work
- Feedback findings / feedback via monthly managers meeting
- Attend quarterly Panel Business Meetings to identify themes, reflections and learning for the service.

LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTER PANEL CHAIR REPORT

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2019/2020. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 2011.

There are four Fostering teams that present work to the panel.

1. PANEL FUNCTIONING

It has been a challenging year for panel adapting to virtual meetings during the pandemic. Whilst members are now used to running panels virtually its can still come with technical issues which can lead / add to delays. The panel now presents via Teams which has addressed some of the technical difficulties we experienced via Skype.

The main worry for panel is the impact virtual panels can have on applicants, some who may have limited technical know-how, and can find the process distant and unsupportive. We address this by reassuring applicants and ensuring there are regular breaks.

Panel members receive the paperwork at least five working days in advance to enable them to read the paperwork and prepare for the discussion. This is seen by the questions asked and the general discussions that are had. Panel members have a good understanding of their role and remit, especially as it relates to panels Quality Assurance role. Panel members always open to developing their knowledge base and are keen to understand legislative and regulatory changes.

Panel members. All where that they need to declare any conflicts of interest where professional interest is declared this is recorded in the minutes, on the rare occasion that there is a personal conflict-of-interest panel members notify myself, the Panel Advisor and Panel Administrator in advance to ensure that the panel member is not sitting for the said item or that panel.

Panel: frequency

- On average the panel sits three times month. During the year 20/21, there have been 24, main panels and 10 extra panels. The need for extra panels during this year has been largely due to the increase in the number of connected persons assessments and court demand. All the extra panels have been chaired by the two vice chairs.

Membership

- The agency has a Central List of panel members, in accordance with Fostering Regulations, Guidance 2011. There has been a consistent panel membership for several years. We are looking for additional Social work representatives and ensuring that panel is inclusive and supporting of Equality and Diversity.
- The Panel Advisor role from the agency has been covered by a secondment of the Foster Independent Reviewing Officer on a temporary secondment which finished in January 2021. Due to the frequency of panels the agency reviewed the post and agreed this would now be increased to a FTE. Whilst in the recruitment process the Agency appointed a consultant PA, for consistency this will remain in place to ensure a smooth handover to the permanent role who commences her role in May 2021.
- We will be recruiting a new Panel Chair as we have received notice of her resignation. We thank her for the support and knowledge she has brought to the role. We will recruit two new Chairs and four Vice chairs to meet capacity and to bring new knowledge and diversity to the panel

2. PANEL DEVELOPMENT

Development of Practise Standards

Reviews of Panel Members

All panel members have shared that they have enjoyed being on panel and that they have learnt a lot about the processes of panel and see that they and to take a valuable

New Panel members have offered suggestions for improving the induction process for future new panel members, specifically many have talked about the need for more than just an observation and then starting their first panel - suggestions include, highlighting what sort of questions and areas that they should be looking for in the paperwork in this respect we have introduced a mentoring scheme where panel members can be paired up with experienced members.

Both new and existing panel members have also contributed to ideas for the annual panel training.

Panel Training

Panel training took place on 5 November 2020 and external trainer was provided, and the feedback was very positive, ideas for future training include:

- Therapeutic parenting
- The UASC Foster Scheme “A Place to Call Home “

Business Meetings

We have held quarterly business meetings and they have been well attended by the agency and have been productive in developing thinking about how we can meet the competing demands of kinship and Form F assessments. Moving from face to face meetings to virtual has impacted upon attendance at times.

The agency uses Practise Standards as part of their processes, and we thought this would be beneficial for the panel process. The Practise Standards were developed over several months and panel, the Agency Decision Maker and the service have been consulted in the development. The Standards were launched in October 2020. They set clear outcomes to be achieved, what are the timeframes for this and the outcomes to be achieved. We have also identified further areas to ensure consistency across kinship and mainstream assessments. This work is ongoing as we still experience inconsistency in the quantity of work being presented and the lack of analysis to support recommendations.

Prior to the meeting the Panel Chair and that Panel Advisor will ask panel members if they have anything that they would like raised at these meetings for discussion. The discussions held at these meetings is then shared with the wider panel, it usually at the meeting following the business meetings to assist panel in their quality assurance/critical friend role.



3. TASK OF PANEL

Panel makes recommendations on whether to approve prospective carers or whether they continue to be suitable to be Foster carers; these recommendations go to the Agency Decision Maker who then either ratifies or rejects panel's recommendations, thereby making a decision. This qualifying determination allows applicants the right of appeal to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM).

The panel work includes:

- Applications for prospective Foster carers.
- Application for family and friends (Connected Persons) carers child specific.
- First Annual Reviews (Home Reviews) and other reviews, which discussed continual approve or extension of approvals or standards of care.
- De-registrations/terminations of carers.
- Regulation 24 extensions
- Quality Assurance

4. OVERVIEW OF WORK PRESENTED TO PANEL

i Foster care approvals (mainstream, some with multiple TOA)

Type	New Carers
Long- term	
Short - term	13
Parent and child	0
Respite	8
Specialist carers	3

Under the Fostering Services Regulations 2011, the fostering panel considers applications related to Family and Friends (Connected Persons) carers for specific children who are about to be placed with them or are ready placed with them. In many cases Connected Persons Are temporarily approved as Foster carers by the Agency Decision Maker, so that a child is immediately placed with them. This temporary approval last for up to 16 weeks and can be extended for a further 8 weeks upon presentation to the fostering panel, prior to the full assessment being carried out.

ii Family and Friends (Connected Persons)

Family and Friends	63
Connected Persons	0
Support carer for Family and Friends/ Connected Person	0

Considering the approvals of Connected Persons applications continue to provoke thought and discussions about whether due to the complexities of give and families the identified carers can meet the National Minimum Fostering Standards and the needs of the children given the inherent risks factors associated with birth family. Panel continually must weigh up the legal processes that are underway of these applications, including the local authorities care plan, which often can mean consideration being given to Special Guardianship Orders/applications.

iii Reviews

Annual Reviews

34 First annual Foster Carers Reviews have been presented to panel with all carers being viewed as suitable to carry on being carers. 21 Mainstream approvals and 13 Family Friends/Connected Persons.

Standard of Care

None this review period.

iv Terminations of approval Resignation

During the year 2020/21, 22 Foster / kinship carers have submitted their resignations. Reasons given are as follows;

Reason	Number
Retirement	1
Change of circumstances	14
Moving to Independent Fostering Agency	1
Moving to another Local Authority	0
Dissatisfaction with agency/Local Authority	0
Other	0

Deregistration

Reason	Number
Standard of care	0
No contact	0
Child/ren no longer placed with the Family and friends/Connected Person (change of care plan)	0
Unwilling to take placements/unavailable	6

5. COMPLAINTS

Reason	Number
Complaints received from applicants	0
Complaints received from social workers	0
Complaints received from managers	0
Complaints received from others	0

6. FEEDBACK TO PANEL

Observers

The pool of observers to panel generally include social work students, new staff members as part of their induction or staff members recently recruited to the fostering teams. The aim largely being to demystify the process, particularly for those who have a pending case to present to panel for the first time.

As well as senior managers usually the Agency Decision Maker, specifically to observe the Chair as part of the chair's annual review.

Panel Evaluation

The panel/authority has a process of asking, social workers, and applicants/Foster carers to complete a short feedback form of their experience of attending panel. The questions relate to whether they found the experience from invite through to attending panel satisfactory. All parties are asked to rate/grade their response. These responses are correlated and presented to panel either, after each panel or quarterly. Overall, there is no adverse comments about the experience.

7. OBJECTIVES FOR 2021/22

1. Ensure the Practise Standards are embedded into the panel process and owned by the panel and the agency.
2. Review Practise Standards at quarterly business
3. Look at cases presented to panel in terms of number and types to ensure the balance is right to help panel members remain focussed for the duration of panel. This will require additional panels to meet the capacity demands of the service.
4. The Panel Chair has served notice and the agency will progress to recruitment of two Panel Chair and a further 2 Vice Chairs to meet capacity needs moving forward.
5. Commencement of permanent Panel Advisor

Mohammed Patel

Independent Panel Vice Chair

STATEMENT BY THE AGENCY DECISION MAKER (ADM), HELEN GRONHAUG

The substantive arrangements to fulfil the function of Agency Decision Maker in Leicestershire are for a dedicated standalone post. This provides a level of independent oversight of final decisions for both fostering and adoption. The Agency Decision Maker role can also be undertaken by the Assistant Director for Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care as well as Head of Service for Safeguarding, Improvement and Quality Assurance.

Assessments for mainstream fostering approvals continue to be of a good standard. There was only 1 application that ADM required substantial further work by way of a second opinion. This was due to complexities of background information. There has been just 1 approval for the specialist Pathway Scheme. Such applications come through so infrequently, it is necessary to ensure the assessments have adequately explored the needs of children who are placed on these schemes as well as applicants' capacity and preparation for meeting their needs.

Reviews of mainstream foster carers show carers and children are largely well supported. Clearly Covid social care restrictions have impacted some carers' access to training, full completion of the supervisory role, such as health assessments and unannounced visits. There were no mainstream carers who were de-registered for practice issues in this reporting period.

In comparison to mainstream assessments, the pace and volume of activity around connected person's assessments are much greater. This is a complex area of fostering with family considerations and tight court time scales adding to the challenges. A kinship action plan has been devised in response to the themes identified from the service, Panel, and ADM. In turn this is interrelated with the Defining Children and Family Services work in terms of the Permanence Pathway and in understanding internal fostering capacity and performance management. The latter is promoting a dialogue to identify themes that cause delayed presentation to Panel and/ or determination by ADM. There are a small portion of connected fostering applications where they have been presented to Panel on a number of occasions. It is hoped that Practice Standards that strengthen joint working and pinpoint stages for information exchange and evaluation between assessing worker and child's social worker will reduce the occasions where disconnect is seen. The work of Defining Children and Family Services Permanence Pathway should ensure the most appropriate placement type is identified according to the needs of the children being placed- this may mean directing away from connected fostering arrangements to alternative orders, such as Special Guardianship Orders. This will require clear guidance for the kinship and locality teams in considering thresholds for meeting fostering standards or where alternative arrangements are more suited. It will be useful to harvest the longer term perspective and learning from the post support team for connected person's carers.

While Fostering Panel Practice Standards had been put in place on October 2020, there is a need for refresh and to ensure they are applied in practice. This will help ensure Panel receive a comprehensive and complete set of papers. Areas for improvement in terms of assessment include consideration of carer capacity against the length of time the child is likely to need the placement with future proofing and contingency planning; the likely challenges for applicants in managing family relations and any safeguarding issues; applicants' understanding of the fostering role; the evidence base and analysis of assessments with robust consideration of historical information. Importantly, support planning needs to be case specific and proactive to address any identified vulnerabilities for the child and the fostering household, recognising the fostering agency's duties to support the meeting of fostering standards.

The need to strengthen the quality assurance function provided by the manager was highlighted in the previous annual report. ADM advocated for routine evidence of team manager oversight through use of a compliance tool. This needs to be consistently embedded and would also benefit from a qualitative element to accompany verification of compliance with the required checks. It is hoped that this will lead to fewer Panel deferrals and requests for further information. The kinship action plan has identified methods for practitioner self and peer reflection along with team manager oversight. Regular meetings between the kinship team manager, and ADM provide opportunity for learning and discussion. The inclusion of the manager for connected persons post approval support further strengthen the learning loop as this means connected foster carers' practice post approval can be considered too. Panel Advisor role has been covered by a number of people in this period. The introduction of formal Panel Advice from Panel Advisor appears to offer a clear focus to Panel. With the recruitment of new Panel Chairs and Panel Advisor, bi-monthly meetings have been set up to discuss learning from Panel activity and particularly should there have been cases where recommendations and decisions differ between the agency, Panel and ADM.

In terms of connected foster carers' reviews, it continued to be the case that requirements identified by ADM (at the point of approval or previous review) are not consistently referenced or actioned satisfactorily by the point of the carers' review. There were 2 reviews following concerns which led to Qualifying Determinations that the carers were no longer suitable to foster the children they were specifically approved for. This was due to safeguarding concerns.

There has been a considerable drive to tighten timescales for completion of the annual foster carer review cycle. This workflow passes through different parts of the fostering agency (supervising social worker, team manager, reviewing officer, business support and ADM). Throughput has not been steady which then has led to bottlenecks in the system. The Deputy Assistant Director has provided oversight and drive to ensure development of social care records support efficient running of this workstream. She has also acted as Agency Decision Maker for some of the foster carer reviews to help improve timeliness of decision making. There is clearer oversight and tracking of the review workflow through regular catch up meetings. In addition, communication has improved to ensure decision making following reviews is prioritised according to the needs of our children e.g. if long term fostering approval is to be considered in readiness for Permanence Panel where matches for children in long term care are presented.

The plan is for mainstream fostering applications to increase. The impact of Defining Children and Family Services for the Future programme on the numbers of connected foster carer approvals has yet to be seen. This has implications for ADM activity in terms of approval and subsequent fostering reviews as the number of fostering households increases. In terms of continual service improvement, it is positive that there are a number of arrangements in place for reciprocal feedback between Panel, ADM and different parts of the service.

THE FOSTER CARER ASSOCIATION

The Leicestershire Foster Carer Association (LFCA) has been running for several years. This followed the establishment of a committee who had determined the areas where foster carers and their families could be better supported.

Many of our LFCA have fostered for the service for several years and bring to the association a wealth of experience. The membership of the association remains low.

We have encouraged more membership but have seen carers using locality groups more regularly. LFCA will link into locality groups for additional support .

We advise our LFCA when there has been an allegation to ensure additional independent support is available.

Developments for 2020-21

- Regular attendance at the Foster Carer Forum
- LFCA to be invited to attend locality groups to seek new membership and promote their role.
- LFCA to work with LCC and be the neutral person to undertake exit interviews when carers leave our service.

OUR LOCALITY SUPPORT GROUPS

We are proud to report our locality groups have certainly risen to the challenge of Covid been re-vitalised. We now have 5 locality groups based across Leicestershire. They are very vibrant groups who are supportive of the service yet feel comfortable to challenge / raise any concerns.

Most meet monthly, they are very social groups and are facilitated by the carers. Details of the meeting times are advertised in our Newsletter. When a new career is approved their details are provided to the co-ordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group. Many of our co-ordinators are also mentors so new carers are quickly inducted into their local group.

We recognise the impact our locality groups have on our carers, they challenge the service when they feel we have not provided the best, they support carers through their first year and they provide ongoing support when placements are made.

Another valuable source of influence is their involvement in our staff recruitment. This year they have assisted in the recruitment of social workers, Team Managers and Assistant Service Manager.

COMPLAINTS AND ALLEGATIONS

We continue to provide many forums for carers to raise and resolve issues. Both the Team Managers from the Team Around the Child, and Kinship will meet with carers to discuss any concerns. The Service Manager is also available to meet with carers both as a group or an individual foster family. As a result of managing concerns quickly and efficiently last year we received no formal complaints.

During 20/21 we received no formal complaints.

During 2020/21 we had 14 allegations of those:

- All were referred to LADO
- Of those 10 had an outcome of no further action
- 2 Led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to Reviews following concerns
- 4 Fostering Households had a period of additional monitoring / support
- Of that 1 carer resigned

OUR QUALITY ASSURANCE

Within our Fostering Service we seek to ensure that all areas of our work achieve excellence, we have developed our review paperwork to gain further feedback and will continue to develop this.

As a service we constantly look for evidence to evidence the impact we make gaining feedback at every opportunity.

Twice yearly we hold Service Days where the whole team can reflect upon our achievements, develop our learning and where is the evidence of the impact we have made.

They are a very simple, clear way for teams to identify has enabled teams to identify learning, resources, and performance targets to improve the service.

The audits are then used to develop the key areas within the service.

The findings from the audits are then presented back to the team with a timeline of improvements.

The audits form part of the departmental Quality Assurance Strategy, to consistently raise practice using effective management oversight. A report is provided to our senior management team with actions to be followed to ensure improvement.

A FINAL WORD FROM THE SERVICE MANAGER, JOSS LONGMAN

The last year has certainly been challenging, but it has also afforded us some very proud moments. I have been impressed with tenacity of my Assistant Service Manager and Team Managers, when our first lockdown was announced they responded to meet the needs of our carers, looking for new opportunities to support them and maintain stability for the service.

In November we engaged with our colleagues at Newton Europe to develop our existing services and structures to increase our number of carers and consider how we could improve the utilisation of our placements. We have welcomed an independent consultancy service reviewing our work and for them to recognise through the feedback, workshops, and diagnostics that Leicestershire has excellent. As we travel through to piloting new developments we have the opportunity to xxx I have been in post for 4 years and when I reflect upon the journey of the service I am incredibly proud, as a service we have developed our “We are Family” and I see this reflected in the daily practice of the team, from the enquiries we receive, where we capture the availability of applicants from foster care to Independent Visitor, the timely response of visits and how we support our carers through the process of approval.

Placement stability has improved. The Dedicated Placement Support Team works to minimise disruption to placements. Having workers who are flexible and can provide the right support at the right time has been crucial to this.

Our Dedicated Placement Support Team has supported over 70 children where placement stability had been identified and at risk of disruption, and they have supported several children stepping down from high cost placements into supported lodgings placements. Our specialist carers have supported 5 young people in foster placements who either had stepped down from residential care or would have escalated to residential care.

The new review paperwork is strengthening our impact and expectations to other professional Our Team Around the Child has developed its support to carers, and we see the impact of this through our carers actively engaging in service days, staff interviews, participation events and our retention survey

Our recruitment team have benefited from engaging with recruitment consultants to ensure we have clear processes when inviting the right carers through to assessment.

Moving forward our assessment team will be focussed on supporting our foster carers through the assessment process, embedding our “We are Family” philosophy at those early stages.



For the forthcoming year:

- Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve stretch targets:
 - 35 mainstream carers (net 25)
 - 5 Specialist carers
 - 15 Supported lodgings
- We recognise that these are very ambitious targets but using the insight gained from our work within DCFS we can predict our Fostering Recruitment Pipeline to see where we need to take active steps when we are not achieving targets.
- Introduce Key Performance Indicators for each team to identify and track performance, implementing action logs to be reviewed within weekly performance meetings
- We will continue to look for further opportunities to develop our carers and introduce the therapeutic model to all our carers. At the time of compiling the Annual Report we have secured Membership to the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting for all our carers
- Develop a hybrid model of Foster Panels incorporating both virtual and face to face panels.
- Introduce face to face Foster Carer Forums, and meetings following government guidance
- Review Practise Standards across the service ensuring we recognise Equality, Diversity and Inclusivity
- Develop Reflective supervision across all service areas
- Evaluate “ A Place to Call Home” UASC recruitment of Foster Carer and Supported Lodgings Providers for the East Midlands Region
- Increase our Reviewing Officer capacity as a net growth of foster carers continues.
- Continue to develop our Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedding PODS.

We welcome the end of a very challenging year and look forward with new ways of working that have developed our virtual presence. We have recognised that we can be more effective with our time with meetings being held virtually. This has to be balanced against providing a service which prides itself on the relationships we build with others.

We have ensured we have captured this time for our families in our virtual memory boxes and will continue to recognise the tenacity of our carers.

I feel very proud of my carers, my staff who continue to go that extra mile and the support of my Team Managers both to their carers and their teams and the support offered to keep the service performing so well.



Joss Longman

Christmas card competition – 2020

Winners of our Christmas card competition



Christmas card design by B, aged 9



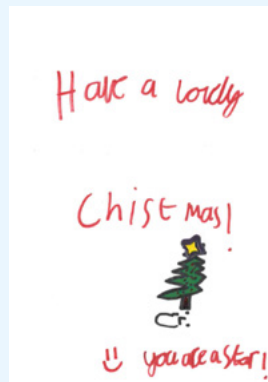
Christmas card design by H, aged 5



Christmas card design by J, aged 9



Christmas card design by M, aged 12



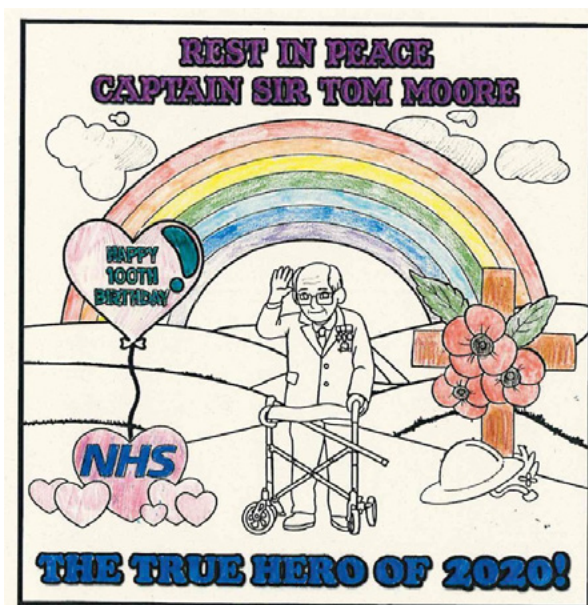
Christmas card design by D, aged 10



Christmas card design by T, aged 12

Remembering one of the true heroes of 2020

By our children



Easter competition

“ Thank you to all the children who took part in our Easter Competition. We loved seeing the pictures of the wonderful things you had made. A big well done to you all. ”

The winning entries are:

1st place

NHS Easter Fete – CT



Joint 2nd place

Easter story biscuits – BRJ



Easter biscuits - AM and LM



Joint 3rd place

Chocolate Easter cupcakes – ID



During half term Participation officers ran an ART WORKSHOP.

Eight children participated and produced some amazing paintings.

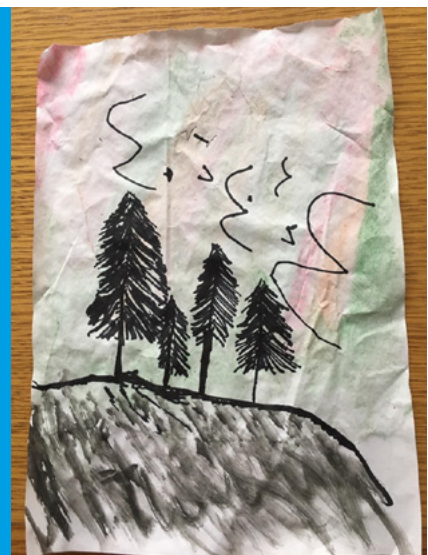


One child commented:

“ ‘I didn't want to do it but it was really good!’ ”

and another

“ ‘it was fun’ ”



What have you been getting up to during lockdown??

We've enjoyed seeing what our children have been getting up to while they've not been able to go to school.



“ Busy baking a yummy cake for VE Day street party! ”



“ A fun time baking ... and also an English lesson writing all the menus, invitations and recipe cards, now for afternoon tea ... yummy! ”



“ And now it's time for a trip to the hairdresser! Looking good ! ”



“ Time for your PE lesson!! ”



“ Happy 4th birthday ... hours and hours on fun on his waterfall table ”



“ Camouflaged as a bush ... might take us a while to find him! ”



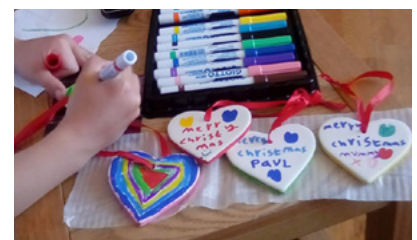
“ Stone age small world cave all finished ”



“ Hot tub day ... someone can't wait! ”



“ FC gets up this morning ... “Look what I built last night” ... Pretty sure he should have been sleeping! ”



“ Someone's started early for Christmas! ”

Thank you hampers for carers

The postman / lady has something on its way to all those carers looking after our children during this weird and wonderful time



“ Thank you so much for the lovely hamper that the children and I have just received. We cant wait to get cooking. And the children are already looking at the books x ”



“ Making cakes from the hamper yum yum 😊 ”



Thank you for the very posh hamper.
it's very much appreciated.

Just received our hamper, the children loved it as did we. Looking forward to the pizzas, thank you very much.
Peter and Hazel x

“ Thank you for our lovely hamper 😊 everything the girls need to make me dinner 😊 was such a lovely surprise after a very busy week and not much zzz 😊 ”

“ Thank you for our lovely hamper and thinking of us xx stay safe xx ”



“ Someone loved making and eating the cake. Thank you from us all 😊 ”

“ Little man made pizza for lunch using the pizza dough, salami and olives with a few home added extras ”



He's on a mission 😊



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 2
NOVEMBER 2021

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT

Purpose of Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Report of the Adoption Service, which evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2020 – 31 March 2021.

Background

2. Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6, all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel. To meet this requirement the Adoption Service submits a monthly report to the Lead Member for Children and Families and the Director of Children and Family Services and an annual report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
3. Leicestershire County Council had operated a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service since April 2015. In July 2019 the two functions were separated so that there were dedicated Fostering and Adoption Services.
4. Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to birth parents, prospective and approved adopters, children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services, children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire and adopted adults.
5. The service became part of the Regional Adoption Agency (known as Family Adoption Links) on 14th October 2020. Family Adoption Links' primary aim is to provide enough good quality adopters to meet the needs of children waiting for permanency across the five Local Authority areas of Leicestershire, Leicester City, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Rutland. Family Adoption Links manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.
6. The work of the Leicestershire County Council Adoption Service during the last year has inevitably been affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. The regulatory framework for adoption has been amended by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 and Leicestershire has been

able to make some use of the relaxed regulations, in relation to conducting assessments and panels remotely.

7. This report should be read alongside the [Care Placement Strategy](#) and Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017-2021. These are dynamic strategies, geared towards supporting the recruitment of a diverse and confident mix of adoptive families, ensure enduring relationships and high-quality adoption support services.

Summary of Report

Key Areas of Success

8. There have been no disruptions for Leicestershire children in this period. One disruption has occurred of Leicestershire adopters with children from another Local Authority. Adoption disruptions are when the placement ends prior to the Adoption Order being granted. Adoption social workers remain involved with the family through to the granting of the Order and the subsequent Celebration Hearing. In the case of adopters struggling with the emotional needs and as such, behaviour of their children, the Adoption Team is available to provide intense support based on therapeutic techniques. All the permanence family finding social workers have been trained in level 1 Theraplay; this is a therapy for children and families aimed at building and enhancing attachment, self-esteem, joyful engagement and trust in others and they also have access to a fully qualified play therapist who is based within the service.
9. The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 temporarily amended some of the regulatory requirements regarding adopter approvals, meaning that visits and panels could be undertaken remotely. Adopters have continued to access training, preparation and assessment in line with National Minimum Standards throughout the year despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.
10. The average number of days from placement to Adoption Order has decreased from the year before (387 days from 413 days). This remains above the national average.
11. Twenty-five children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, the same number as the previous year, evidencing a continued drive to progress children's plans. Early identification of potential links and matches is carried out in internal family finding meetings. Children may also have anonymous profiles created to facilitate early linking with Leicestershire adopters as well as adopters across the Regional Adoption Agency. Regional family finding activity is in process, with regular matching meetings taking place. This is a developing area of practice but has already been successful in identifying matches for three Leicestershire children; the family finding work will continue to grow in the year ahead.
12. Positive developments are being made to mirror the Post Adoption support offer to those family members and children subject to a Special Guardianship Order; this is being progressed through the department's transformation programme, *Defining Children and Family Services for the Future*.

Key Areas for development

13. The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for Local Authorities over a three year and one-year trend. The three main key performance indicators are:
 - i) A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
 - ii) A2 – The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
 - iii) A20 – The average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child.
14. The three-year trend data remains more positive with A20 highlighting a slight decrease in the length of time. However, A10 and A2 are both indicating an increase in time. The figures from statistical neighbours are not yet available for comparison.
15. The one-year trend data for 2020/21 is highlighting an increase in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore a decrease in the timeliness to achieve permanence. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children was completed by managers. This analysis reflects outliers in the data set – a small number of children who have waited longer to achieve permanence due to the complexity of their needs and matching requirements, as well as delays related to court proceedings.
16. The variance for the data has been explored and this has highlighted that there were seven children who presented as being significant outliers in terms of increased number of days. The service is satisfied that for these children, any delay was due to the complexity of need and how this impacted on ensuring the right match, such as significant disabilities of the children and ensuring that the children received the right therapeutic intervention prior to placing to support the success of the placement.
17. The seven children comprised of two sibling groups and have started to make progress through the adoption process. The sibling group of three males have an adoptive family identified who are ready to start introductions as soon as the court proceedings are complete. The oldest child in the female sibling group is now in placement with her adoptive family and the youngest two have a match identified.
18. The service will continue to have robust monitoring and oversight of the progression of children whose permanence plan is adoption and recognise that matching for children with additional complex needs may require more time, consideration and intervention.

2020-21 performance overview

Adopter Recruitment

19. Thirty-six Initial Visits were completed, 28 of which resulted in a Registration of Interest. During this period 23 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, six of which were deferred for further work.

Permanency Planning for children

20. In this period 40 children were subject to Best Interest Decisions (BID). 20 of those children are waiting for final court hearings where Placement Orders (PO) may be made to allow their placement with adoptive families. Two children with a BID from a previous year continue to wait for a PO, making a total of 22 children with a BID and no PO. Four children with a BID made in the year were also placed with their adoptive families within the reporting period.
21. Twenty-five children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, the same number as the previous year.
22. Fifteen Adoption Orders were finalised in the year 2020/21, a decrease from the previous year when 31 orders were made.

Adoption Support Fund

23. To 31 March 2021, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,494,524.94 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is a significant increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£499,478,28) and represents support to 251 families, up from 164 in 2019-20.

Overview of targets and priorities for 2021/22:

- Continue working and developing alongside colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board.
- Focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to improvement and learn from areas of good practice.
- Focus on timeliness for children by developing the understanding of children's journey through care to point of Best Interest Decision; developing early linking and matching processes; increasing the use of Fostering for Adoption where appropriate to meet children's needs.
- Develop the panel, ensuring that the central list meets the needs of the service and panels continue to provide robust scrutiny of the agency.
- Develop a service-wide action plan to ensure that operational managers invest in mutually beneficial activity to improve outcomes for children and adopters.
- Develop processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development.
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members.

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2020-21.

Officers to Contact

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Childrens Social Care

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Leicestershire Adoption Service Annual Report 2020-2021



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Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Adoption Service sets out the performance for the service in 2020/21 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year 2021/22.

Key messages within this report are:

Achieving permanence for children

The impact of coronavirus

Regionalisation

Timeliness of adopter assessments

The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for authorities over a 3 year trend and 1 year trend. The three main key performance indicators are:

- A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
- A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child

The 3-year trend data remains more positive with A20 highlighting a slight decrease in the length of time. However A10 and A2 are both indicating an increase in time. We do not yet have figures from our statistical neighbours for comparison.

The 1-year trend data for 2020/21 is highlighting an increase in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore a decrease in the timeliness to achieve permanence. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children was completed by managers. This analysis reflects outliers in the data set – a small number of children who have waited longer to achieve permanence due to the complexity of their needs and matching requirements, as well as delays related to court proceedings. The situation of seven children comprising of two sibling groups of

three and one single male child have had a significant impact on timeliness in achieving permanency. The first sibling group of three male children mother has applied twice to have the Placement Order revoked, the second sibling group of three female children consisted of an older child of 8 years whose emerging needs during placement meant that an original care plan of placing the children together had be altered to looking for separate placements for the oldest child alone and the youngest two together. The single male child has recently had his Placement Order revoked despite the fact that he was well into introductions with his adopters. Despite the delays within the court process the Permanence Team continued to strive to find adoptive homes for all of the children including commissioning nationwide Facebook campaigns and paying for specialist therapeutic training for identified adopters. The sibling group of males have an adoptive family identified and ready to start introductions as soon as the court proceedings are complete. The oldest child in the female sibling group is now in placement with her adoptive family and the youngest two have a match identified. We will continue to have robust monitoring and oversight of the progression of children whose permanence plan is adoption and recognise that matching for children with additional complex needs may require more time, consideration and intervention.

Adoption Score Card	2019	2020	Statistical Neighbours
A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	425 days	489 days	TBC from scorecard
A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family	167 days	311 days	
A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child	316 days	352 days	

Regional Arrangements

Leicestershire County Council is part of the Family Adoption Links (FAL), a regional partnership of Adoption Services. The government's agenda for adoption was set out in a paper, "Regionalising Adoption", published by the Department of Education (DfE) in June 2015 setting out arrangements for the formation of Regional Adoption Agencies (RAA's) by 2020.

This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council and North Lincolnshire Council. It has been agreed that Lincolnshire County Council will act as host for the arrangement.

The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14th October 2020 and describes how FAL manages the provision of all core adoption functions on behalf of the local authority. Agency decision making for adults and children are maintained within the local authority in line with corporate parenting responsibilities.

Through working in partnership, we will benefit from the regional sharing of best practice, pooling of resources and developing a strategic approach to the development of a range of services from the marketing of adoption across the region through to the commissioning of post adoption support services.

The vision of the RAA is that:

- Children have the widest range of adopters trained to meet the needs of children placed with them
- Matching delivers the best quality outcomes for all children
- Adopters receive a consistent, high quality and professional service at all stages of the process
- The same high standard of adoption support for all adoptive families across the region
- Family Adoption Links, local authorities and VAAs work together to promote and maximize choice for children and adopters

Governance and Management

The RAA will be accountable to the Family Adoption Links (FAL) Management Board which is aligned to the agreed vision and will enable partners to have a continuing demonstrable focus on achieving permanence through adoption for Looked After Children. The FAL Management Board is accountable for delivery of services within scope and will continue to provide strategic leadership as the service develops. The Board includes representatives of each partner and takes decision by consensus. The Board is chaired by a Director of Children's Services (on behalf of the respective Local Authorities) and includes Assistant Directors responsible for permanency. The FAL Management Board will ensure there are clear strategic plans in place to manage future demand, develop quality services, deliver value for money and achieve appropriate efficiencies and cost savings. The board has appointed a

Head of Service for the Regional Adoption Agency who oversees the work of the adoption service in each local authority. The Head of Service reports to the board and is responsible for the delivery of adoption services within each LA. Each partner LA retains its own adoption service manager who is the Registered Manager.

The FAL Management Board will keep members fully informed regarding the progress and performance of the RAA.

1. Introduction

OUR VISION Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families

This means that we will describe the outcomes we want to achieve for children, young people and their families and identify measures that can tell us how well we are achieving against them. We will aim to be the best performing local authority in the country against these measures, and where we are not yet there we will set stretching targets for annual improvement.

OUR MISSION

Children and young people in Leicestershire are safe and living in families where they can achieve their potential and have their health, wellbeing and life chances improved within thriving communities.

Under the 2011 National Minimum Standards 25.6, all Adoption Agencies are required to provide one six month and one annual report to the Executive regarding the activity and work of the Adoption Agency and Adoption Panel. To meet this standard the Adoption Service submits a monthly report to the Lead Member and Director and an annual report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Panel.

1.1 Our Service

Leicestershire County Council had operated a joint Fostering, Adoption and Placements Service since April 2015. In July 2019 we separated the two functions to have our own dedicated Fostering and Adoption Services. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Adoption Agency. It undertakes statutory and regulated responsibilities relating to adoption. The main roles of the Adoption and Permanence Service is to provide high quality adoptive placements, a range of adoption and special guardianship support and other permanency options, including profiling for long term placements for children who are looked after by Leicestershire County Council and are unable to live with their birth families.

Adoption and Permanence Services are provided to:

- Children who are to be adopted
- Birth parents
- Prospective and approved adopters
- Children and adoptive parents who require adoption support services

- Children and Special Guardians who require therapeutic support and advice, where the child lives permanently in Leicestershire
- Adopted adults

The Adoption Service is led by the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care and the Virtual School and managed through a Service Manager who has responsibility for the three teams that make up the adoption service, Assessment and Support, Permanence and Post-Order Support.

Name	Designation
Jane Moore	Director Children and Families Service
Sharon Cooke	Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Childrens Social Care
Nicci Collins	Deputy Assistant Director, Transformation
Kelda Claire	Interim Head of Service
Michelle Robinson	Service Manager
Helen Gronhaug	Agency Decision Maker
Gemma Barber	Manager, Post-Order Support Team
Emma Bulgin/Ellie Taylor	Managers, Permanence Team
Caramjit Supra	Manager, Assessment and Support Team
Katie Bancroft	Senior Practitioner, Post Adoption and SGO Support
Lauren Nichols	Senior Practitioner, Permanence
Claire Pepper, Sophie Cotterill, Emma Kamgue, Julie Bilton- Dowell, Judith Collins, Wendy Marsh, Angela Saduera	Permanence Team Social Workers
Bethany Fox	Long-term Fostering Family Finding Social Worker
Michelle Smith	Life Story Worker
Natasha Aaron, Harriet Pearson- Cole, Rachel Knox-Barrett, Debbie Bevan	Adoption Assessment and Support Social workers
Sameerah Makda, Charlotte Fanshawe, Zeena Shepherd	Post Adoption Support Social Workers
Sarah Greaves, Anne Barton	Birth Records Counsellors

Sheryl Peberdy	Special Guardianship Support Worker
Lianne Graham-Halford	Post Adoption Support Worker
Leesha Irwin	Art Therapist
Philippa Read	Permanence coordinator
Lorraine Daniels	Panel Advisor

In September 2019 Leicestershire's Children and Family Service was inspected by Ofsted. Whilst the Adoption Service was not subject to its own inspection the feedback for the service was exceptional. The overall judgement for services for children in care, was **Good**.

This report should be read alongside the Care Placement Strategy and Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017-2021. These are dynamic strategies, geared towards supporting the recruitment of a diverse and confident mix of adoptive families, ensure enduring relationships and high-quality adoption support services. They are integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- Children and Family Departmental Plan 2017 – 2021
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to excellence 2017 - 2020
- Adoption Service, Statement of Purpose

1.2 National/local Political Implications

Adoption has been a key part of the Government Agenda since 2012 and has seen significant change, including the publication of various key documents such as the 2013 *Statutory Guidance on Adoption*, the 2013 Amendments to the *Adoption Agencies Regulations 2005* and *Regionalising Adoption* in 2015.

In 2018 the Adoption Leadership Board became the Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), with a remit to cover previously looked after children subject to adoption or special guardianship orders. This reflects a recognition of the increasing numbers of children leaving care on Special Guardianship Orders, and the need for these children to be able to access support akin to that of their peers who are adopted. Leicestershire County Council Post-Order Support Team already contains provision for the support of families with children on SGOs, with a dedicated support worker located in the team. There is further work being progressed to develop the support offer available to these families as part of the *Defining Children and Family Services for the Future* programme.

The Department for Education (DfE) has been clear that all local authorities should form Regional Adoption Agencies by 2020. Leicestershire County Council has worked with Leicester City, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and Rutland to form Family Adoption Links (FAL). The Regional Adoption Agency went 'live' in October 2020, with the Local Authorities agreeing to a partnership arrangement.

The work of Leicestershire County Council adoption service during the last year has inevitably been affected by the Covid-19 coronavirus pandemic. The regulatory framework for adoption has been amended by the Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 and Leicestershire has been able to make some use of the relaxed regulations, in relation to conducting assessments and panels remotely. However, we have been able in many ways to limit our use of the amendments, instead adapting our practice in line with restrictions and continuing to conduct robust assessments.

Like all other services, the adoption service has had to make considerable concessions in the way the day-to-day business is carried out. All staff have worked primarily from home, enabled by flexible working arrangements and equipment grants. Home visits have been severely limited during some parts of the year, with workers creatively utilising technology to complete virtual 'visits', meetings and direct work. Adopter assessment and preparation has been conducted almost exclusively online, and in-person visits to children limited to those where it is necessary. Post-order support has been delivered flexibly, again utilising online tools and virtual platforms but completing in-person visits where this has been necessary. Despite the huge challenges present during the year, staff have continued to work safely and effectively to support children and families across Leicestershire and move children to their adoptive families where this has been possible and appropriate.

1.3 Progress against last year

Recommendation from previous annual report	Progress
2020 will see the launch of the RAA and there will be a period of time that is needed to ensure that services are aligned with Leicester City, Lincolnshire and North Lincolnshire. This is an exciting time where each authority can learn from the other and strive to provide an excellent	The launch of the Regional Adoption Agency was achieved in October 2020. 'Family Adoption Links' is a partnership agreement between Leicestershire, Leicester City, Lincolnshire, North Lincolnshire and

and consistent service to adopters and children.	Rutland.
Although Leicestershire continues to perform well against Department of Education score cards for the 3 year trend data. The decreasing timeliness identified for 1 year trend data 2019 requires an in-depth analysis to be completed to understand the increase in the time that children are waiting before being placed in their adoptive homes. This will be presented to SMT by the end of February 2021.	<p>Work continues to take place in monitoring timeliness for children on a local and national level in conjunction with the RAA.</p> <p>Given the challenges of the last year, workload priorities were readjusted in line with coronavirus and resource issues, so this work will need further development in the year to come.</p>
The service will explore the possibility of mirroring our Post Adoption support offer to those family members and children subject to a Special Guardianship Order	<p>This is being progressed through the department's transformation programme, <i>Defining Children and Family Services for the Future</i>.</p> <p>Decisions about future models will be made by August 2021.</p>
We will also focus on ensuring that adopters' journey is timely and efficient to ensure that we have the right adopters for our children. This work will be completed by March 2021	<p>This is an area which continues to be challenging. There is ongoing work to undertake to improve our resource offer, ensuring that adopter recruitment, assessment and preparation are timely, and that the adopters we recruit are well matched to the needs of our children.</p> <p>A business case has been submitted to bring adopter assessment 'in-house'.</p> <p>The year ahead will also see further collaboration with our partners in the RAA.</p>
Further consideration needs to be given to whether Leicestershire dually approves adopters as part of the Family Adoption Links arrangement to keep in line with our partners.	Leicestershire County Council does not currently have any plans to dually approve adopters i.e. to approve them as both prospective adopters and foster carers at the same time.

2. Our service – roles and responsibilities

2.2 Permanence Team

The role of the Permanence Team is to work alongside colleagues in locality teams to progress plans for children where adoption may be required. Permanence team social workers also undertake all family finding activity for children who need permanence via adoption.

Permanence social workers are co-allocated to work with children where a decision has been made to twin or triple-track their care plan, meaning that multiple options are being considered for the child, usually remaining with their birth parent(s), moving to live with a wider family member, or adoption if neither of the other options is possible. Permanence social workers complete Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) which draw together all the assessments that have been completed and provide a comprehensive assessment of the child's needs. These reports are presented to the Agency Decision Maker where the recommendation is that adoption is in the best interests of the child.

When children have a plan of adoption which is agreed in court by way of a Care Order and Placement Order, permanence team social workers become the allocated worker for the child. They are responsible for statutory social work visits and reviews as well as all family finding and matching activity for the child or children.

Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker, a secure online platform, to create and upload bespoke profiles for children. Permanence team workers collaborate with colleagues using Linkmaker to search for potential adoptive matches, communicate with adopters locally and nationally and share information securely to progress placements for children. Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker for all our children, whether they are matched 'in-house', with adopters approved by LCC, 'regionally' with our partners in Family Adoption Links, or in 'interagency' matches with other Regional or Voluntary Adoption Agencies.

Permanence team social workers present identified matches to the Adoption Panel, prepare transition plans and support agreements to help the child move to their adoptive family, and support the placement until the point of Adoption Order.

The team's workforce additionally includes a dedicated Life Story Support Worker and a Family Finding social worker for long-term fostering placements. Our Life Story Support Worker provides

extensive specialist work for children in their transition to adoption; this includes completing direct work with children, drafting Life Story books and offering 'telling and explaining' sessions to adopters to prepare them for the ongoing life story work they will do with their children. The Family Finding social worker for long-term fostering works closely with other members of the team to track children who may need a permanent fostering placement and identify placements when this becomes required. The objective is to ensure that children with a plan of long-term fostering are able to access the same levels of life story work, transition planning and careful matching that is available to children moving to adoption.

In addition to day-to-day operations, the team continues to be committed to ongoing developmental projects such as the introduction of Life Appreciation Days, processes for the permanence planning of children in long-term foster care and, further embedding of the Signs of Safety methodology in our practice. Team members have participated in workshops to develop trauma-informed practice, offered training in Virtual Practice Forums and offered training to foster carers.

This team have continued to see children through the coronavirus pandemic, where it has been necessary and in accordance with risk assessments. Where possible, visits have been virtual. When children have been placed with adopters, face-to-face meetings have been essential and each transition is risk-assessed to consider all affected parties.

2.3 Recruitment, assessment and preparation of adopters

The Adoption Service works closely with professional colleagues to provide a full recruitment, assessment and preparation service to adopter applicants in Leicestershire.

People who are interested in adoption can find information on the Leicestershire County Council website and are also directed to the Family Adoption Links website. Any enquiries about becoming an adopter are handled by the Recruitment and Marketing team initially, which is a shared resource with the Fostering Service. Potential adopters are then able to access adoption information events run by the Assessment and Support Team (AST) and, following this, request a social work visit before completing a formal Registration of Interest (ROI).

The AST complete all Initial Visits to help potential adopters begin their two-stage journey to becoming prospective adopters. Stage One of the process is managed by the AST, with support workers completing statutory checks. At this point social workers begin delivering preparation work directly to applicants, and this work continues throughout stage 2. During the year 2020/21, all preparation work

has been delivered virtually, with adopters accessing online training and virtual discussions with social workers. When adopters progress to Stage Two, a social worker from our partner agency Carter Brown is allocated to complete the home study and present their recommendations to the adoption panel in a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). Social workers in the Assessment and Support Team maintain contact with adopters as 'Engagement Workers' during this assessment.

In 2020/21, 36 Initial Visits were completed, 28 of which resulted in an ROI. During this period 23 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, 6 of which were deferred for further work. Some, but not all, of the deferred cases were returned to panel within the period, meaning a total of 19 adopter households were approved. Two 'brief reports' were presented to panel, meaning that the agency presented panel with a negative recommendation, one of which resulted in a negative recommendation and one which required the agency to prepare a full report. One de-registration was presented to panel during the year.

After adopters are recommended for approval at panel and formally approved by the Agency Decision Maker, all case responsibility is allocated to a social worker in the Assessment and Support Team. This is usually the Engagement Worker who will have been in contact with the adopter throughout their assessment. AST social workers go on to support prospective adopters through matching and placement, continuing to work alongside the family until the point of Adoption Order.

As with our children, Leicestershire County Council uses Linkmaker to support our adopters to identify potential matches. All of our adopters are encouraged to create a profile on Linkmaker. The team is developing work around matching agreements to ensure that all adopters have clearly defined expectations about matching processes and the support available to them.

The coronavirus pandemic has had a considerable impact on the in-person activity for this team, as it has not been possible to complete the same level of home visits or run preparation groups in which adopter applicants can develop informal support networks. However, the AST has been able to adapt many of its functions around the restrictions and have been successful in ensuring adopters have continued to be assessed and approved during the year.

2.4 Adoption Panels

Adoption panels are chaired by an Independent Chair in line with regulatory requirements, supported by a vice-chair, independent members, social work representatives and an agency adviser.

Leicestershire has a stand-alone Agency Decision Maker who is responsible for ensuring that they have considered all the information presented to them before making a final decision.

Adoption panels make recommendations to the Agency Decision Maker regarding the suitability of prospective adopter applicants, adoption matching and adoption plans for children who are relinquished for adoption. All matches for Leicestershire children are considered at this panel.

Leicestershire County Council hold adoption panels once or twice per month in response to service requirements. In 2020/21, eighteen adoption panels were held, which is less than the preceding year when 21 adoption panels were held.

Adoption panels have responded to the pandemic by moving all activity online. Panel members share and discuss papers electronically and panels are coordinated virtually on Microsoft Teams to enable adopters and social workers to participate in the meetings. In this way, panels have been able to continue providing independent scrutiny to the adoption service and enabling the continued placement of children with adoptive families despite the considerable challenges of the last year.

Across the eighteen panels held, 23 adopter households were considered for approval, of which 6 were deferred for further work. Three approvals were made where adopters wished to adopt a specific child. One brief report was considered.

23 matches for children were considered and all received a positive recommendation followed by a positive Agency Decision.

Two adoption plans for relinquished children were considered.

2.5 Post Order support

Support Offer

Pre and post adoption support is provided in a number of ways within Leicestershire. An adoption social worker offers support up to three years post adoption order, especially in cases where adoption breakdown or disruption is a threat. This is set out in legislation (Adoption and Children Act 2002/Adoption Support Services Regulations 2005) as all placing authorities are required to provide support to a child they have placed for adoption for the first three years. We also have a dedicated support worker who makes first contact with any adopter approved by Leicestershire at the point of 6 weeks post placement. This is the point when research suggests that post placement depression can

become evident. During this visit the support worker will spend a significant amount of time discussing any concerns or issues, they will inform the adopters about our post adoption support offer and email a pack of useful contacts and information.

The support worker is Theraplay (level 1) trained, if necessary, she can remain involved to support managing behaviour and completing direct work with children. She can also escalate any worries to the allocated social worker, who can then utilise the expertise of the post adoption service to inform their support package. There are four Post Adoption Support social workers within the team with a variety of expertise, from DDP (level 2) to Person centred therapy. All are trauma and attachment trained and specialist training is provided as part of their continuous development. Once a case is allocated for Post Adoption Support the social worker completes a Post Adoption Assessment of Need, which enables a thorough assessment of support needs and recommendations for therapeutic and non-therapeutic interventions. Therapeutic provisions and specialist assessments are commissioned through the Adoption Support Fund (ASF), providing that eligibility criteria is met.

The Post Order Support Team, which incorporates Post Adoption and Post SGO support have access to an in house Art Psychotherapist and Play Therapist. Both work individually with adopted children, plus facilitate an Art Therapy group for teenagers needing to therapeutically deal with issues around identity. They also create a support call model named 'Parent Support 6' as a result of the covid crisis. This was funded through the ASF and was used to support parents in acute stress over the phone. It's success has meant that we are continuing this offer despite covid developments.

A quarterly newsletter is distributed and receives a high level of positive feedback from adopters and professionals. Pre covid there were also two events per year, in the summer and at Christmas, which we are hoping will run again from this summer.

Despite only being required by legislation to provide support for the first three years post granting of an Adoption Order, Leicestershire now offers lifelong support so after the three-year period, adopters can contact the team directly if they require specific adoption support. For those cases where there is a chance of a child being placed back into care or there are child protection concerns it remains that support is provided via First Response Children's Duty and fieldwork locality teams. The post support team will continue to work as part of a team around the family, offering support to the child and parents relating to the therapeutic needs of the adopted child.

Birth Parents are routinely offered support prior to the adoption of their children. This support is offered through a leaflet provided at the point of ADM ratifying a care plan of adoption. The Permanence Team has a protocol of any such request for support to birth parents who are facing the knowledge that the Local Authority is not supporting a return of their child to their care. being presented to Permanence Panel where an application for an independent person to undertake this service will be

considered. The Authority are currently reviewing how to facilitate this service so that the offer to Birth Parents is meaningful.

The Post Adoption Support Team liaises with the Virtual School and training is offered to schools particularly around attachment issues for adopted children and how to successfully manage these in the school setting. The training is highly valued by schools who report a change in staff behaviour and interaction with children which in turn impacts on the children's ability to engage in education. Collaborations with the Peer Adoption Support group LAFS is also valuable and enables a connection with the wider adopter network. A monthly CAMHS consultation is held for any adopted child where a clinical nurse can offer advice and services provided by CAMHS.

The demand for Post Adoption Support continues to grow in all areas. Leicestershire has a Therapeutic Support Budget that can be accessed to support children emotionally prior to adoption. Each child can have an initial payment of up to £450 with a further £450 being available if required. The Service Manager for Children in Care has a role in monitoring applications and the progress of any therapy commissioned.

Adoption Support Fund

To 31st March 2021, Leicestershire has drawn down £1,494,524.94 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is a significant increase in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£499,478,28) and represents support to 251 families, up from 164 in 2019-20. It should be noted that the art therapist post has been funded through this ASF funding at no cost to the Local Authority and Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services. Any money accumulated from the ASF also ensures that workers receive clinical supervision alongside regular supervision to ensure that their therapeutic practice is ethical and appropriate. Some of the most complex cases may be co-worked by the Locality Team with support from the Post Adoption Support Worker. In such cases an assessment will be conducted and an application may be made for appropriate therapeutic services through the Adoption Support Fund.

Birth Records Counselling

Birth Records Counselling is a service provided to adults who have been adopted and wish to access their records and understand their life story prior to being adopted. A social worker reads the records and provides a detailed account to the adoptee alongside therapeutic emotional support that enables the adult to process their journey. This service continues to be highly successful and adoptees regularly provide positive feedback. Intermediary services where adult adoptees are supported to find and meet their birth parents is not carried out by Leicestershire. Some initial advice may be given but

as with other Local Authorities we signpost adoptees who request this service to third sector agencies.

3. Performance

3.1 Adoption Score Card – Key Performance Indicators

The Adoption Score card presents the performance data for authorities over a 3-year trend and 1-year trend. The 3 main key performance indicators are:

- A10 – Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family
- A2 - The average time between a local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family
- A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child

• 3 year trend	2016-19	2018-21
A10	334 days	426 days
A2	143 days	235 days
A20	255 days	242 days

1 year trend	2019	2020
A10	425 days	489 days
A2	167 days	311 days
A20	316 days	352 days

As shown in the tables above, Leicestershire Adoption Agency's average time between a child entering care and moving in with their adoptive family increased, the 3-year trend performance data with 2018-21 (426) being 92 days longer than in 2016-19 (334 days). The 1-year trend increased by 64 days, from 425 days in 2019 to 489 in 2020.

The average time between the local authority receiving the court judgement and deciding on a match to an adoptive family has increased across the 3-year trend and the 1-year trend.

The average time between a child entering care and the local authority being granted a Placement Order for a child, has slightly decreased in the last year whilst increasing over the 3-year period.

The 1-year trend data highlights an increase across the three key performance indicators, meaning children are waiting longer, on average, to achieve permanence. It must be noted that the cohort of children who need adoption is small and the average easily distorted by outlying data; a few children who wait significantly longer mean that the average is increased even while most children are achieving permanency in a timely way. Cases where the children have waited longer for permanency

have been explored individually and we are satisfied that the delays for these children have been unavoidable. It can take longer to identify the right adoptive matches for children who have complex needs and who are in larger sibling groups; Leicestershire County Council nevertheless continues to pursue adoption for these children whilst it remains in their best interests.

The adoption service is keen to reduce the time taken to achieve permanence for children and a detailed action plan as well as a regional service delivery plan aim to address some of the key areas for development: increasing our use of Fostering for Adoption placements, identifying adopters earlier from across the region to meet our children's needs and building on our achievements regarding quality assurance to enable efficient, thorough decision-making.

3.2 Adoption Plans

Where the Local Authority proposes a plan of adoption for a child, this plan must be presented to the Agency Decision Maker (ADM) for a decision that adoption is in their best interests. In this period 40 children were subject to Best Interest Decisions. 20 of those children are waiting for final court hearings where Placement Orders (PO) may be made to allow their placement with adoptive families. Two children with a Best Interest Decision (BID) from a previous year continue to wait for a PO, making a total of 22 children with a BID and no PO. Four children with a BID made in the year were also placed with their adoptive families within the reporting period.

There has been an increase in the average days from BID to PO which partly reflects the difficulty in progressing proceedings to final hearings during the pandemic. Children who have a BID but no placement order are tracked by managers to understand delays. Such delays are most commonly attributable to court processes and to additional assessments being completed where family members come forward to be considered to care for the child/ren at a late stage in proceedings.

National minimum standards require Local Authorities to track the time between children coming into care and receiving a Best Interest Decision. National minimum standards also require tracking from the time the Local Authority proposes a plan of adoption to the point of a BID. Children wait longer than average in Leicestershire County Council from the point of coming into care to the point of BID and further work is needed to understand the reasons for this. However, BIDs are made in a timely way once the Local Authority has confirmed a plan of adoption.

Children are referred to the permanence team, as above, where a twin- or triple-tracking decision is made as part of childcare proceedings. Permanence Team managers meet regularly with colleagues

in locality teams to track the progress of children who are in proceedings or who may shortly enter proceedings. The Children's Decision-Making panel continues to be chaired by the Head of Service for Fieldwork and is the forum where decisions for pre-proceedings and issuing of care proceedings is made. This provides senior management oversight of cases that may progress to a permanence decision of adoption. These processes help the adoption service plan for children's expected needs and assist decision-making regarding the recruitment of adopters.

When children are relinquished for adoption by their birth parents, these plans must be presented to the Adoption Panel. In this period, two plans of adoption for relinquished children were presented, one of which was approved.

3.3 Children Waiting for Adoption

At the 31st March 2021 there were 43 children with a best interest decision of adoption, of which 21 had Placement Orders granted by the court. Three children have an ethnicity other than White British. 14 children are female and 29 are male. 16 are part of sibling groups who require adoption; this does not include children who have siblings with different care plans.

Prior to the making of a Placement Order, Permanence Team social workers ensure they are familiar with the needs of the child or children and complete early scoping to identify any potential adoptive links for the child. Formal family finding work is then initiated at the point of Placement Order but can be paused if there are additional court proceedings required.

Early identification of potential links and matches is carried out in internal family finding meetings. Children may also have anonymous profiles created to facilitate early linking with Leicestershire adopters as well as adopters across the Regional Adoption Agency. Leicestershire County Council seek to place children with our own approved adopters initially, then consider adopters within our region before looking to other interagency placements including Voluntary Adoption Agencies (VAAs). Children's profiles are uploaded to Linkmaker and shared securely with professionals and prospective adopters to allow potential links to be explored. Regional family finding activity is in process, with regular matching meetings taking place. This is a developing area of practice but has already been successful in identifying matches for three Leicestershire children; the family finding work will continue to grow in the year ahead.

Family finding activity has been impacted by the coronavirus pandemic as adoption activity days and exchange events have not been possible to conduct in person. Leicestershire County Council has not

used virtual exchange events during the course of the year but has used other creative online marketing campaigns to support recruitment of specific adopters for some 'harder to place' children, categorised by the DfE as children in sibling groups, with disabilities or aged 5 and over.

No children were placed under Fostering for Adoption protocols during this period. This continues to be tracked through attendance at CDM and is considered upon the referral being received.

3.4 Children Placed and Adopted

25 children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, the same number as the previous year, evidencing a continued drive to progress children's plans. Leicestershire children, on average, wait longer than the national average between entering care and moving in with their adoptive family.

We have been successful in matching children with our own adopters – of the 25 children placed during the year, 18 were placed with adopters approved by Leicestershire County Council. A further three children were placed within the region. 2 children with an ethnicity other than White British were placed with adopters during 2020/21. 31 children are now in placement with their adoptive families but awaiting an Adoption Order.

15 Adoption Orders were finalised in the year 2020/21, a decrease from the previous year when 31 orders were made. This reflects the challenges in court timetabling as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, meaning that urgent and emergency hearings were prioritised. Nevertheless, the average number of days from placement to Adoption Order has decreased from the year before (387 days from 413 days). This remains above the national average.

3.4 Adoption Approvals

19 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 21 the previous year. This includes 4 households who attended panel prior to this reporting period but received their agency decision of approval in the year 2020/21. There were a further 16 households in assessment at 31st March 2021.

23 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. 15 applications had resulted in approval by the end of this reporting period. Eight applications presented to panel had different outcomes – deferrals, requests for additional information from ADM and unsuccessful/withdrawn applications. Of the 15 adopter households who attended panel and were approved, this was made up

of 14 couples and 1 single female adopter. 13 of the couples were heterosexual. 11 out of the 15 households were white British. No adopters are recorded as having a registered disability.

The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) (Regulations) 2020 temporarily amended some of the regulatory requirements regarding adopter approvals, meaning that visits and panels could be undertaken remotely. Adopters have continued to access training, preparation and assessment in line with National Minimum Standards throughout the year despite the challenges presented by the pandemic.

The timeliness of adopters' assessment and preparation is a key area for development during the coming year, whilst also ensuring that work is of a high standard.

Timeliness in completing adopter assessments has been a challenge for the service during the last year, with adopters approved in this period waiting an average of 441 days between entering stage 1 and completing stage 2 – a process which is intended to take 6 months (~180 days) in total. Key performance measures and monthly performance meetings are planned for the forthcoming year to ensure that these challenges are robustly addressed.

Clear matching expectations and planning for adoptive families from the point of their approval to the point of their match will also improve the service we offer to families and, ultimately, to the children they can offer a home to. We plan to collate further data to better understand the adopter journey from approval to match, with particular consideration of any adaptations we may need to make for adopters who have protected characteristics. We are in the process of aligning our practice in this area with our regional partners.

3.5 Adoption Disruptions

There have been no disruptions for Leicestershire children in this period. One disruption has occurred of Leicestershire adopters with children from another Local Authority.

4. Statement by the Agency Decision Maker, Helen Gronhaug

The substantive arrangements to fulfil the function of Agency Decision Maker in Leicestershire are for a dedicated standalone post. This provides a level of independent oversight of final decisions for both fostering and adoption. The Agency Decision Maker role can also be undertaken by the Assistant Director for Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care as well as Head of Service for Safeguarding, Improvement and Quality Assurance.

Children's Adoption plans

40 children have had adoption plans agreed by ADM this year. Of those children, there were 8 sets of siblings coming forward, all were sibling groups of 2 with an adoption plan except a 1 sibling group of 4. The children in 1 sibling group had separate court proceedings and a plan of separate adoptive placements. Another child was to be matched together with their older sibling whose adoption plan had been agreed before this reporting period. There was an additional child considered for an adoption plan. Further information was requested before making a decision. In light of further assessment, the child's care plan changed.

Child Permanence Reports (CPRs) are now routinely prepared by the Adoption Service. The locality social work teams complete assessment and care planning processes and the permanence social worker is therefore responsible for providing a narrative of this work within the CPR. sibling assessment. This year has seen regular inclusion in the CPR of a 'words and pictures' explanation of the child's story to adoption. This is a really positive development as it provides the basis for the child's understanding of their plans and is a basis from which adopters can ultimately start their support of the children's story.

Permanence social workers continue to seek to engage birth families in the preparation of CPRs. Their degree of independence from court care planning processes appears to enable this participation and gives the opportunity to gain important family-based knowledge for the child. Workers draw on their experience of family finding and post placement support to provide analyses of children's likely future needs based on their lived experiences so far, and family background factors. This working model of CPRs and sibling assessments being written by the permanence teams has enabled practitioners to develop practice wisdom around placement planning. A feedback meeting was held with Permanence Team Managers and ADM to promote consistency and concision amongst the teams, minimise unnecessary duplication and importantly further develop the writing style of 'writing to the child.'

ADM is required to apply the welfare checklist of Adoption and Children Act 2002 in considering how a plan of adoption would affect the child's welfare on a lifelong basis. There have been occasions when ADM has been presented with different proposals which fall under the overarching decision whether

adoption is in the child's best interests. The locality team devise the care plan and yet proposals for contact arising from sibling assessment or the analysis of child's needs from within the CPR are provided by the Permanence social worker. There have been different proposed plans for post adoption contact; sibling placement plans and the nature of contingency planning should an adoption match for siblings not be found in children's timescales. E.g. keeping siblings together on a fostering basis or searching for separate adoptive families. These important considerations need to be explored collaboratively at the earliest stage before plans are submitted for ADM consideration.

Similarly, regular communication is needed between the teams to ensure all assessments and processes are completed before ADM considers the proposed adoption plan. In order for an adoption plan to be considered, all assessments must have been completed and available; a Key Decision Discussion held evidencing service manager oversight; receipt of Adoption Medical Advisor's report and endorsement of the plan through the Review of Arrangements process.

There have been occasions when a proposed adoption plan has been submitted to ADM without all these requirements. Timescales are tight to fit with court deadlines. Paperwork can be received late which presents a challenge. Strengthening administrative support for this workstream is an area for development. The completion of ADM recording has been revised in conjunction with a permanence team manager to improve timeliness of decision records which can often be required by court.

Adoption planning for siblings continues to be a complex and challenging area of work. Requests by ADM for further information and clarification are more likely to be seen when making such decisions. Further development work is planned to consider whether revised CoramBAAF guidance on assessing sibling relations should be introduced.

There are a small number of children whose original permanence plan at the conclusion of court proceedings has not materialised or sustained. Robust tracking by IROs and oversight of managers for Permanence needs to ensure that if appropriate, adoption planning is progressed in timescales that serve the children's best interests. Work is planned for Head of Service for Fostering and Adoption, Children in Care and Virtual School, Service manager for Safeguarding and Improvement and ADM to ensure early identification and tracking systems are sufficiently robust.

There have been a growing number of occasions when ADM has been approached to review the decision of an adoption plan on the basis of further assessments agreed through court. The reduced number of Placement Orders granted this year is noted. It would be useful to understand the reasons relating to those circumstances where a plan of adoption has been agreed and yet Placement Orders do not follow.

Overall the transfer of adoption planning work from locality to permanence teams has been successful with improved performance. The information provided to ADM has more consistently enabled a decision to be reached rather than further information requests being made.

Fostering for Adoption

The local authority has a statutory duty to consider a placement with dually approved carers whenever it is considering adoption or where the decision has been made that the child ought to be placed for adoption, but where the agency does not yet have authority to place the child for adoption through either a placement order or parental consent. (Children and Families Act 2014)

No fostering for adoption arrangements have been passed to ADM to consider this year. There remains a lack of adopters coming forward who are wanting to be considered for such arrangements. Likewise, there is work needed to understand the frequency fostering for adoption is raised as an option as a child's care plan evolves. The reduced number of Placement Orders may be reducing confidence in pursuing this plan for early permanence. Profile raising regarding this statutory as well as in recruitment and assessment processes is required. This year saw a sibling group of 2 placed under Reg 24 of fostering regulations with adoptive parents of their older birth siblings.

Adopter approvals.

23 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. 15 applications had resulted in approval by the end of this reporting period. Stage 2 of the assessment of prospective adopters has continued to be entirely commissioned externally. There were 5 deferrals on adoption approval applications by Panel. out of the 5 deferrals, by the end of this reporting year, 1 couple had withdrawn from the process and 3 other deferred applications had not returned to Panel for consideration. The 5th deferred application had returned to Panel and resulted in a determination that the couple were not suitable to adopt.

ADM has remained concerned about the robustness of the assessments even after Panel's scrutiny and has therefore required further work before making a determination on 9 applications. Of those 9 cases, 1 decision remained outstanding at the end of this year, pending a second opinion visit. In addition, 2 further determinations were made which came to Panel outside of this reporting period and where further work was required, one approval and the other that the couple were not suitable to adopt.

There have been gaps in the assessment around expectations and adoptive parenting capacity, understanding of Foster to Adopt and the needs of adopted siblings as well as providing a clear evidence base. There is a need to strengthen the connection between Stage 1 checks and Stage 2

lines of enquiry. These issues are not new in this commissioning arrangement. Although a meeting was held and on assurances were given in May 2020, improvements have not been forthcoming. It has been proposed that Stage 2 of assessments return for in-house completion.

The delay to applicants is acknowledged. There has been a push to tighten up the timescales for the completion of the additional work whilst recognising these requests are often due to the presence of complicating factors. There is also a need to ensure diversity issues are considered at the outset as applicants from black and ethnic minority communities and people with mental ill health and /or learning needs make up a number of the applications where assessments have not led to an immediate recommendation by Panel and decision by ADM. It is important any potential complexities to an assessment are captured at the point managers decision meeting when progressing through to assessment. It has been identified that practice standards will assist for child specific assessments (subsequent siblings of children who have already been adopted by adopters or foster carers already caring for a child).

ADM continues to provide challenge to strengthen quality assurance at each and every stage of the assessment and planning process. The quarterly reflective meetings with Panel Advisor, Panel Chair, Vice Chairs, ADM and Service Manager need to be fully embedded as they offer an opportunity to understand any differences between Panel and ADM deliberations to drive practice development and appropriate scrutiny.

Adoption Matches

19 adopter households were presented for matching with a total of 22 children which include 3 sibling sets of 2. Minutes of matching meetings are submitted to Panel and ADM as part of the material to be considered. They generally provide good evidence of how strengths and potential vulnerabilities of a match have been weighed up. A welcome addition to panel papers is the report of the dedicated Life Story Worker who completes 'telling and explaining sessions' with adopters specifically around their child's circumstances. This evidences adopters' understanding of the support their adopted child is likely need in terms of their life story and identity. It also rehearses the narrative for them to use with their child. Use of family network meetings for adopters prior to matching panel help to evidence the preparation as well as seeking to harness adopters' informal supporting from the outset.

Panel made no deferrals on matches. There were 7 occasions when ADM requested further information before making a decision, 2 of these were substantial pieces of work and 1 of which was outstanding at the end of this reporting period. These issues related to process issues around an adopter review and clarity around continued suitability of adopters to adopt, questions around the actual match of adopter capacity and child's needs; preparation of the child to be placed as well as adopters' birth child and managing expectations. Other requests related to clarification regarding child

and adopters' health; preparation of children being placed at an older age; how proposed adoption leave meets the children's needs & adopters' vulnerabilities not covered clearly in support plan. It is acknowledged that it is a national standard for an ADM decision to be completed within 7 working days from receipt of panel minutes and that the required further work takes timescales beyond this on occasion. Feedback has been shared with the agency and Panel about pre panel quality assurance and panel rigour in terms of applying adoption regulations and guidance so that timescales can be more consistently met. Tracking systems are needed to give clear oversight of any potential delays at the different stages of cases coming to panel and ADM and measure any time impact for children.

Support plans are individualised to the child's circumstances, however, the support plan format asks for consideration of both child and adopters' needs (this should include the needs of children who are already part of the adoptive family, by birth or through adoption). Given the wealth of detailed information that has gone into the preparation for children's placement with adoptive families in acknowledging the child and adopters' circumstances, it is really important that the support planning that has been presented as part of matching processes feeds through the child's journey to the point of Adoption Order and beyond. Where ADM has made requirements for additions to the Adoption Support Plan, this is shared with the child's Independent Reviewing Officer for their oversight and monitoring. Further work for the adoption service and the Safeguarding and Improvement Unit to develop practice regarding children's Adoption Reviews in line with regulations.

It has been recognised that Adoption Panel has not had access to a legal advisor for some time. However, to date no regular service is available but Panel Advisor has made use of the duty solicitor.

Disruptions

Following a disruption with a child placed by another authority, 1 set of adopters were issued with a determination they were no suitable. Learning from disruptions is vital to inform Panel and ADM practice and future decision making. While the process for learning has been established, there remains a need to extend this learning to Panel and ADM.

5. Statement by the Adoption Panel Chair

It has been a challenging year for panel adapting to virtual sessions during the pandemic. Whilst members are now use to running panels online it still comes with technical issues which can add to delays. The main concerns for applicants is sometime limited technical know-how but also finding the process somewhat distant and unsupportive.

The number of cases coming to panel remain stable. We have a minimum of two panels a month. The challenge has been ensuring each panel is not overloaded with cases so that we can do justice to all cases presented. The quality of paperwork is an ongoing issue. This has been raised at the Quarterly Business Meeting and also the direct feedback at panel. The main issues have been the amount of paperwork being presented for a case, missing paperwork, late submission of paperwork and lack of analysis to support a recommendation.

We recruited an additional 16 new panel members to add to the pool of panel members. They bring a wide range of experience from education, law and social work. To ensure the new members can play an effective role we have introduced a mentoring system where panel members can be paired up with experienced members.

The resignation of both the Chair & Panel Adviser in May added additional pressures to the running of panel. We have now recruited two chairs to share the workload, Fran Thompson, who has many years' experience as a Chair and myself. Hopefully between the two of us we can continue to ensure panel remain effective but also help the service address the quality issues.

Mohamed Patel

Chair of Adoption Panel

6. Developments

6.1 Regional service delivery

The Regional Adoption Agency, Family Adoption Links, was newly formed as a partnership agreement during the year 2020/21. Operational managers across the region have developed and revised a Service Delivery Plan with clearly defined workstreams in order to promote regional collaboration and create workable cross-authority protocols.

Staff who work for Family Adoption Links are beginning to build relationships with their counterparts across the region and a whole staff event is planned for July to support and enhance a regional identity.

6.2 First family support

The Local Authority has a duty to provide support for birth parents whose children are adopted. Previously Leicestershire adoption service ran a peer-support group as well as offering individual counselling sessions.

During the last year, group work has not been possible but parents continue to be offered individual sessions which have been commissioned through an independent counsellor. This counsellor offers a

series of six counselling sessions to birth parents. In the year 2020/21, she received four such referrals for parents wishing to access this service; two of these parents have completed all six sessions so far. The majority of these sessions have been provided remotely via Zoom.

Further work is now required reinvigorate this area of work and ensure we provide an excellent service to children's first families. Consideration will be given to whether this is a commissioned service or is directly provided by LCC staff.

Birth family members and wider family members are currently offered an information sharing meeting with our life story support worker, which allows them to share positive and significant information about themselves for their children in later life. This service has been significantly limited by Covid-19 but three families were able to take up this service virtually. Informal feedback from this is extremely positive, with birth families members explaining that they were grateful to have the opportunity to share memories and keepsakes and thanking the worker for kindness at a difficult point in their lives.

6.3 Feedback

The adoption service gathers feedback from various people, including adult adoptees, adopters, foster carers, birth family members and other professionals. Development work is needed to ensure that:

- Children's voices are included in the feedback
- Feedback is sought routinely and sensitively at appropriate points in the process
- Feedback is used to develop and co-produce service improvement.

"J's emotional resilience is the best it has been . He will start to talk about his feelings and his worries."

"Thank you so much Sheryl for all your advice and support. We are extremely grateful."

"She is beginning to stand up to her friends. And to tell an adult if she is hurt or been wronged - as it were. This is huge!!!"

'have more faith in our ability to manage situations'

The above are just a few of the positive comments that the team have received in respect of the therapeutic support that adopters have received.

7. Complaints

Two complaints have been received during the year, both relating to the assessment process and decisions made about applicants' suitability to adopt. Complaints are initially directed to the relevant team manager for a response and can be escalated where the individual remains unsatisfied.

Adopters who receive negative decision about their suitability to adopt (a 'qualifying determination') are also able to appeal this decision by referral to the Independent Review Mechanism (IRM). In this year, no adopters have accessed the IRM to appeal a negative decision.

It is understandable that adopters are more likely to complain in situations where the Local Authority must make negative recommendations or requires time to complete additional assessments. When adopter applicants and prospective adopters raise issues with the service, both through formal complaints and informal discussion, these issues are always overseen by managers.

We are committed to being a learning organisation and ensure that we respond to queries as fully as possible. A key area of learning from the comments made by adopters during this year is that we must continue to strive for ever-greater transparency – families are better able to understand and accept difficult recommendations and challenges when we have a clear rationale and share this with them in a timely way.

8. Achievements

Leicestershire Adoption Agency continues to strive to deliver excellent services to our children. The permanence team now complete all Child Permanence Reports for Leicestershire children following the roll-out of this service due to the success of the pilot programme. Reports are of a consistently high quality and social workers collaborate well with colleagues across the children's service to progress plans for children.

The recruitment and assessment of adopters who are able to meet the needs of our children continues to be an area for development, but this reflects a national picture of the challenges in identifying adopters for children with complex needs. Nevertheless, the service is committed to improving the adopter journey and has developed a detailed action plan which will be enhanced by partnership working across the region.

Despite the challenges presented by the pandemic, the adoption service has continued to support children and adopters, in the early stages of matching and moving in as well as later, when the families are able to access support from the Post-Order team.

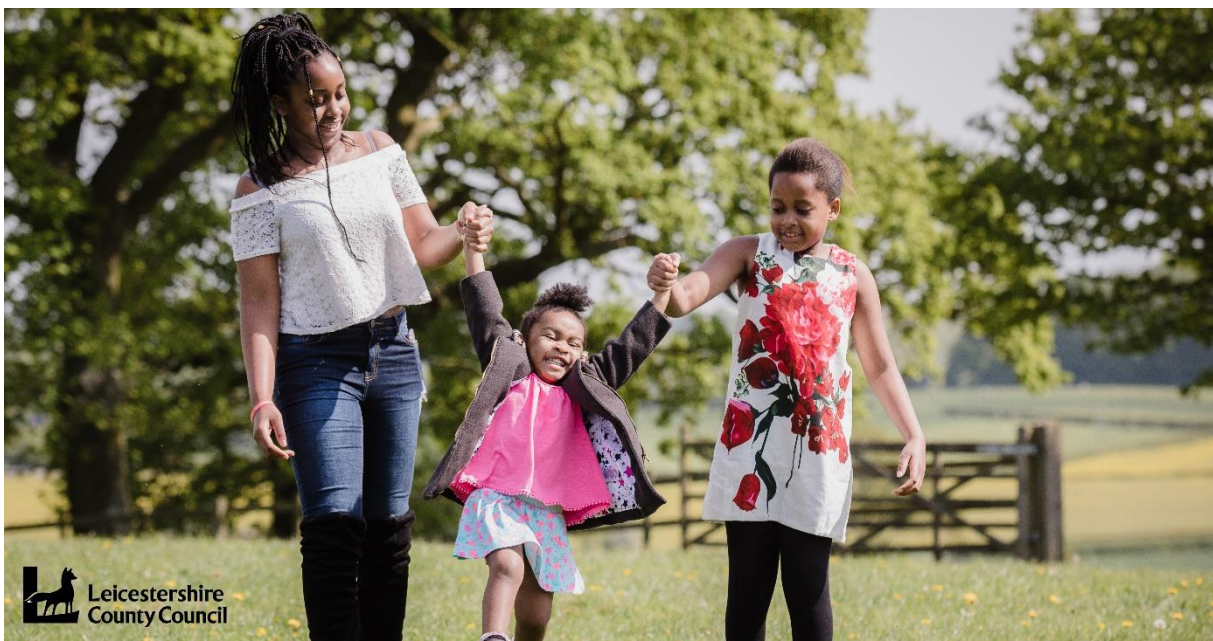
The Post-Order team has developed its specialist work with a view to ensuring as many families as possible are able to access the help and resources they need. The team provide direct help and advice as well as facilitating access to therapeutic services via the Adoption Support Fund.

Social workers in the adoption service have access to specialist training and are supported to develop their skills. We are ambitious for our service, for our children and for our staff.

The adoption panel is adapting and developing, having recently recruited 16 new panel members and two panel chairs. The panel service is building on existing positive relationships and building stronger links with service leads.

9. Recommendations for 2020/2021

- Continue working and developing alongside our colleagues in the Regional Adoption Agency, with specific and effective action plans agreed by operational leads and overseen by the Board.
- Focus on the key performance indicators related to the assessment and recruitment of adopters, identify barriers to improvement and learn from areas of good practice.
- Focus on timeliness for children by developing our understanding of children's journey through care to point of Best Interest Decision; developing early linking and matching processes; increasing our use of Fostering for Adoption where appropriate to meet children's needs.
- Develop our panel, ensuring that the central list meets the needs of the service and panels continue to provide robust scrutiny of the agency.
- Develop a service-wide action plan to ensure that operational managers invest in mutually beneficial activity to improve outcomes for children and adopters.
- Develop processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members.



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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 2 NOVEMBER 2021

LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL
EXPLOITATION

REPORT OF THE
DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the work and progress of the Child Criminal Exploitation, Missing and Modern Slavery Hub.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) remains a strategic priority for the County. The Local Safeguarding Children's Board (LSCB) Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Missing and Trafficking Strategy and subsequent action plan was launched in 2013, and was driven by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) CSE, Missing and Trafficking Operations Group, which continued to build on established strengths to ensure an effective multi-agency response in respect of government recommendations "to combat the national threat of all forms of CCE and respond to the local prominence of incidents of CCE and Missing children and young people." As the understanding of the national threat of sexual and labour exploitation has been developed, other forms of criminal exploitation driven by drug gangs are recognised, including the county lines model of distribution, and selling illegal narcotics. The response is to continue to prioritise this form of child abuse.
3. In November 2019 Leicestershire County Council launched the Child Criminal Exploitation Framework 2019-2021. This has now been adopted as the East Midlands Child Criminal Exploitation framework. On 28 September 2021, the County Council learnt that it had have been successful in a regional application to the Department for Education Recovery fund. Leicestershire will lead the development of a Practice Framework to enable the partnership to develop strength-based practice to protect adolescents from harm outside the home. The County Council will also host a regional seminar to ensure dissemination of learning and good practice exchange across the nine regions.
4. The Child Criminal Exploitation Operations Group reports to the Vulnerability Executive Board, a subgroup of the Strategic Partnership Board. Members of the Operations Group are at Assistant Director, Head of Service and Strategic levels. Members of the Executive Board are at Director and Deputy Chief Constable Level.

Background

5. Leicestershire County Council Social Care staff became co-located with the Police in September 2014. Leicestershire Police had already brought together several safeguarding functions within the force to consolidate its response to CSE and Missing Children. Due to the subsequent growth of the multi-agency team it relocated to South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Child Abuse Investigation Unit.
6. Leicestershire County Council Social Care staff are represented within the unit replicating the enhanced response to CCE and Missing for cases of Domestic Abuse. The County Council's Out of Hours service is also embedded within the hub. This approach provides an environment that encourages collaborative information sharing and combined risk assessment, resulting in live time activity currently led jointly by Social Care and the Police.
7. The CSE and Missing team received funding from a growth bid in June 2015 which enabled the appointment of a CSE Co-ordinator. In October 2015, funding from a joint LSCB partnership bid was secured from the LLR Strategic Partnership Development Fund (SPDF).
8. The SPDF project had concluded in March 2018 and the remaining components were supported by the Office of Police Crime Commissioner until March 2021 and the work was overseen by the CSE and Missing Operations Group.
9. In response to the withdrawal of resources by the Police, the County Council has continued to strategically prioritise this area of safeguarding:

LCC have continued to recognise the ongoing impact of all forms of exploitation and have successfully recruited a CCE Team that replicates the already established CSE offer. This team recognising the cross collaboration between CSC and Youth Justice and has also recruited youth workers to work alongside social workers this has created a dynamic of diverse experience and a flexible approach to build and invest in trusted professional relationships with our most vulnerable children.

10. The multi-agency hub has operated throughout the pandemic. Initially across the three authorities there was a drop in the number of reported missing children. As restrictions continued, non-frequent missing children emerged due to the impact of being restricted from seeing family members and friends. Regarding CSE, the party model reduced due to lack of environmental opportunity; however, opportunist sexual abuse instigated on social media platforms has continued to be an introduction to abuse.
11. The hidden harm of online grooming and recruitment remains active and the level of serious youth violence, including stabbings and aggravated street robbery, has increased.

12. There were significant convictions for some young adults, who were arrested during Operation Lionheart. This inevitably left gaps within the drugs manufacturing and distribution model, although intelligence suggests that younger family members have plugged these gaps. There has been an increase in the level of violence as some of the initial instigators have been released from custody. Contact continued with these young adults whilst in prison, and it was known that the network of communication from both remand centres and prisons facilitated the continuation of established County Lines. The service has continued to monitor and share information collaboratively with neighbourhood police, the Force Intelligence Bureau, community safety and the Youth Justice Team.
13. At the beginning of October 2021, Leicestershire Police began Operation Impose. 73 Warrants were executed; all the addresses were checked by the Children's Social Care Safeguarding Single Point of Contact for the County Council to identify any safeguarding and vulnerability needs. This not only at times identified the whereabouts of some individuals post enforcement but created opportunities for safeguarding and intervention work. The community drugs team, Turning Point provided outreach sessions and individual support and the exploitation team provided support to children and families who required support and intervention.
14. There is a strong indication that due to Operation Impose, 90% of all drug supply chains into the Hinkley area have been removed and twenty individuals were charged with significant drug offences. Three business premises were enforced against, and a licensing team created an opportunity to spot illicit enterprise in the night-time economy. The Police recognise that this enforcement activity will inevitably create a gap in the drugs supply chain and a further six-week plan is in place to develop the intelligence to try and prevent the market void being filled by waiting organised criminals.
15. On 11th October a 4'P intensification plan was deployed by Leicestershire Police and the hub alongside the Violence Reduction Network (VRN). The components are:
 - Prepare – to reduce the ongoing threat and impact
 - Prevent – disrupt and engage
 - Pursue – prosecution and conviction of perpetrators
 - Protect – increase the protection of the vulnerable and the local community.
16. Nationally the volume of supply from county lines across the UK suggests significant amounts of money are flowing from street demand back into the points of distribution via a variety of transactions including bank accounts. Rail and bus tickets, rental agreements, and apps including Deliveroo and Uber all become relevant in the identification of location and distribution links. Coordinated activity across the whole partnership, including Youth Justice, housing providers, education, inclusion, health care and the third sector, will assist in raising awareness.

17. Corporate Communications will raise awareness across Facebook, Snapchat, and Instagram and will specifically target hot spot locations such as Coalville, Hinkley, Charnwood and Leicester East.
18. Education packs to enhance the Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) curriculum will be distributed by the hub. These focus on strengthening knowledge and skills to keep children healthy, safe, and aware of exploitative adults and situations. Joint visits will also be undertaken by the “trusted” professional working with high-risk vulnerable children alongside a CCE detective from the hub to discuss concerns, capture their voice, increase protection, and disrupt engagement with criminality. The Youth Service, in conjunction with the Violence Reduction Network (VRN), will deliver a parent’s E POD, which will include the screening of “Are You Listening”. It is hoped that this will enhance public confidence, encourage the use of the community partnership portal, safeguard the vulnerable and increase public safety.

Performance and Activity: Quarter 4 2020/21

19. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CCE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council’s Business Intelligence Service. As more integrated approach to tackle CE and Missing has been developed during 2020/21, the service has jointly facilitated the expansion of reporting to include data on criminal exploitation, police, and community health data. This includes:
 - Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) referrals and outcomes
 - Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) referrals and outcomes
 - Risky Adults/peer profiles
 - Missing Children

Summary

20. The number of referrals received across LLR during Q4 was the lowest of the past six years. A review of the CSE risk ratings, however, suggests that the profile of cases during Q3 and Q4 is complex and therefore riskier than in previous quarters. This is also reflected in the referral outcomes. Sadly, due to the covert nature of the lockdown period, predatory perpetrators have taken advantage of isolation to abuse. During Q3 and Q4, a higher percentage of referrals were from BME backgrounds than the long-term average. Emotional health was more pronounced as a health concern, with COVID 19 restrictions also believed to have impacted on children’s mental health. In terms of the model of CSE there were no “party Model” cases in Leicestershire during quarter 4, which is usually the second largest model after “online.” However, there was a relatively high percentage of “boyfriend/girlfriend” cases.

Analysis of Data

CSE Referrals and Outcomes

21. The number of CSE referrals to the three local authorities in LLR was 71 during Q4 which is the lowest number of the past six years. In Leicestershire the number of referrals dropped from 48 to 38.
22. Risk assessment tools (RATs) were completed for all referrals across LLR during Q4. Over the past four years the highest category has been at risk; however, this has changed by offering early intervention opportunities in Q3 and Q4, and now medium risk is the largest category. This would suggest that the last two quarter's cases are of a higher risk nature than previously. This also appears to coincide with the lifting of restrictions, and it is assumed children are now being supported by universal services.

Children and Young People Profile

23. The age bands used for the data collection has been changed for 2020/21 to allow analysis linked to the age of criminal responsibility (age 10) and the age of majority (age 18). During Q4 the local authority data shows the age group with by far the largest number of young people was 14-15 years, reflecting the pattern during 2020/21.
24. Over the past four years, 71% of referrals have been female across LLR (1,271 of 1,792). Looking at ethnicity in Q4 in Leicestershire 16% are from BME backgrounds (6 of 38) which is more than double the long-term average of 7% for the County (72 of 1,016). The most common areas of residence in this quarter broadly follows long term patterns, namely Charnwood, North West Leicestershire and Hinkley and Bosworth.
25. The long-term referral data identifies "Emotional Health" as the largest category of health concerns and during Q4 this pattern was slightly more pronounced. This again could be due to enforced isolation and lack of universal face to face contact due to COVID 19.
26. The long-term data regarding residential status of those referred shows that 79% live at home (821 of 1,034). During Q4 a greater proportion of children were living at home (37 out of 38 referrals). Only 3 of the 38 were not known to services and relatively few were Looked After Children. However, 30 of the 38 cases were Child in Need or open to the Children and Family Wellbeing Service. This indicates a predisposition to vulnerability, and includes Domestic Abuse, family dysfunction, bereavement, and exclusion from education.
27. The disability status recorded suggests that over the long term, a significant percentage of CSE referrals have some form of disability (learning disability is the most commonly identified), with 23% of Leicestershire referrals having a disability over the long term (242 of 1,034 over the past four years). Also, a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) or Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD inattentive type ADHD) is now becoming more common. Liaison with CAMHS and access to the Adverse Childhood Experiences Project has been invaluable.
28. Looking at education status over the long term across LLR, 87% of children referred are on roll at a mainstream school or college (899 of 1,034 over the

past four years). It is known that many of the children supported are on alternative timetables and attend alternative provision. Over the long term many of those referred had been recorded as missing, with 44% of Leicestershire referrals having missing episodes (442 of 1,015 over the past four years). This again suggests that the most vulnerable children are exposed to CSE, with the high level of predictors including exclusion from school and missing from home.

Risky Adults or Peers Profile

29. The number of risky adults varies significantly on a quarterly basis. Over the past four years a total of 346 people were identified across LLR. An area of residence was identified for 298 of these individuals with the majority being resident outside LLR. In Q4, nine risky adults were identified in Leicestershire, of which eight were resident outside LLR.
30. This information would again suggest the opportunities that online grooming present to perpetrators. Over the past four years the gender profile shows that 89% are male (309 of 346). The ethnicity of risky adults varies across the three authorities as might be expected given their differing population profiles.

Child Criminal Exploitation

31. Looking at the rate of referrals over the past twelve months per 10,000 population, the rates are similar in the County and City. In Leicestershire there has been 145 referrals and during Q4 there were 36 referrals. An association map was completed for 10 out of the 36 referrals which suggests cross border links to different associates and locations.
32. In terms of gender, 90% are male (260 of 285) and the most common age group is 14-15 closely followed by 16-17 years. Over the past two years in Leicestershire 13% of referrals were from BME backgrounds (36 of 285). In Q4, 11 out of 36 referrals were from BME backgrounds.
33. Regarding area of residence, in Leicestershire over the longer term, Charnwood has generated the most referrals. During Q4, Charnwood had the highest number at ten closely followed by Oadby and Wigston with eight referrals, which is relatively high for a small population.
34. In terms of legal status, over the past two years over 80% of those referred were living with family (249 of 285), and this remained the case in Q4.
35. In terms of missing status over the past two years, 50% of Leicestershire referrals have this status (142 of 285), and during Q4 this pattern was maintained. In terms of Youth Justice involvement over the past two years 27% of children have this support (76 of 285).
36. In Leicestershire 1 out of 36 referrals in Q4 achieved National Referral Mechanism (NRM) status. This is the framework to identify potential victims of modern slavery to ensure they receive appropriate support.

Missing Children

Non-LAC

37. As expected, the number of missing children and missing episodes attributed to non-LAC children was relatively low during 2020/21 compared to the previous two years.

LAC

38. In Leicestershire the number of LAC missing was 49 in Q4. This is the lowest recorded in two years. The children involved were evenly split between County and out of area children. For Leicestershire LAC placed outside the County, 11 were reported missing (attributing to 30 episodes)

Missing Return Interviews

39. In Leicestershire during Q4, 168 missing interviews were completed, of which 74% (125) were completed in 72 hours.

Activity and updates

40. The hub works in full collaboration with the VRN to maximise the impact of the response to serious youth violence and this has created joint opportunities including the “Are You Listening” film and resources.
41. Five Contextual Safeguarding Champions from across LLR had been identified. The Champions are tasked with identifying key indicators and objectives to measure the impact of harm outside the home. The restructuring of the Youth Justice and Early Help offer has created not only alignment but joint triage of complex cases and an offer of coproduction of intervention and resources within the home, education, and local communities.
42. The County Council has a unique action plan but works within the parameters of the overall LLR priority areas
- Consultation with children and families
 - Develop a wider reach to underrepresented groups.
 - Corporate Communications lead impact and promotion.
 - Framework to enable collaboration of universal services and regional seminars.

Good News Stories

43. During the last year six children saw their perpetrators convicted and receive substantial sentences across LLR. For County children, successful criminal compensation claims have been made. This has created opportunities to play to the child’s strengths and fulfil their aspirations.
44. A CSE worker has been nominated for a Chief Constable Commendation alongside the CSE detective in relation to supporting a young autistic girl to tell her story.

45. Association mapping takes place on a regular basis which identifies the cross-border links, themes, and emerging groups of children. Partnership trigger plans are in place and operate across Out of Hours. This has resulted in the recovery and engagement of long term missing children.
46. Leicestershire, alongside the Youth Justice offer, has extended its remit during national intensification weeks and large County Lines Investigations. The Reception Centre is manned with both social workers and youth workers to debrief children and assist in the identification of victims, witnesses, and suspects.

Next Steps

1. Development of regional standards into KPI's.
2. Adoption of the 5P standards to formulate the action plan.
3. Areas of priority: Analysis of data to identify risk and drive outcomes.
4. Await the outcome /impact of the police missing review.
5. Development of the Protecting of Adolescents Framework: pathway.
6. Identification of a LLR Comm's coordinator.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

47. None

Equalities and Human Rights Implications

48. The CSE Hub is committed to equality and ensuring the human rights of all users and, in delivering the service, adheres to the Equality and Human Rights Act. The Hub receives quality and up to date data which is analysed to determine any areas that are underrepresented and may need a stronger focus. As such, in 2018, the Hub has a targeted plan to respond to this by raising awareness of and supporting males who are experiencing CSE, as evidence suggests that they are less likely to seek help. Leicestershire partners will join with regional colleagues in this work.

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