



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

**Date/Time:** Tuesday, 7 November 2023 at 2.00 pm

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

**Contact:** Damien Buckley (Tel: 0116 305 0183)

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### **Membership**

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC (Chairman)

Mr. M. Frisby CC	Mr. Max Hunt CC
Mr. K. Ghattoraya CC	Mrs. C. Lewis
Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC	Mr. R. Martin
Mr. R. Hills CC	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**

#### **Item**

#### **Report by**

Webcast.

A webcast of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

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|----|--|----------------|
| 1. | Minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2023.   | (Pages 5 - 16) |
| 2. | Question Time.   |                |
| 3. | Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).   |                |
| 4. | To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda. |                |



5. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.
6. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.
7. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.
8. Leicestershire's Response to Tackling Children Criminal Exploitation. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 17 - 22)
9. Update on Admissions Service. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 23 - 48)
10. Quarter 2 2023/24 Performance Report. Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 49 - 56)
11. The Role of the Local Authority Regarding Multi Academy Trusts. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 57 - 70)
12. Leicestershire Fostering Agency Statutory Report. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 71 - 116)
13. Leicestershire Adoption Agency Statutory Report. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 117 - 166)
14. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2022/23. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 167 - 210)
15. Annual Report of the Virtual School 2022/23. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 211 - 248)
16. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 23 January 2024 at 14:00.

17. 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, 5 September 2023.

PRESENT

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

Mr. M. Frisby CC

Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC

Mr. R. Hills CC

Mr. Max Hunt CC

Mrs. C. Lewis

Mr. R. Martin

Mr. G. Welsh CC

In Attendance:

Mrs. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Families

Webcast.

A webcast of the meeting can be viewed [here](#).

16. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023.

The minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

17. Question Time.

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

**Question asked by Mrs Sue Whiting:**

“Please could the chair advise which plans are being made for Dyslexia Awareness week in October, as part of the International awareness month for Dyslexia globally?”

**Response by the Chairman:**

“The Learning Support Team will be sending out a ‘Dyslexia Awareness Week’ flyer, which highlights this year’s theme, support strategies and signposting links. This will be shared directly with schools, via the Headteachers’ briefing and via SEND news in preparation for the week.

As part of ongoing dyslexia support, training and awareness raising, the following approaches are embedded in the Learning Support Team’s year-round offer:

- The Learning Support Team attend the Local Offer Roadshows and provide information about Dyslexia and support available to parents, carers and other agencies.

- Leicestershire County Council schools are able to book consultations and access a comprehensive range of training to support learning difficulties and dyslexia.
- The Council's Learning Platform provides schools with the opportunity to sign up to a range of training, includes Dyslexia Awareness training designed at a universal level.
- The recently launched Inclusive Practice Toolkit on the Leicestershire County Council's SEND website and includes advice and support for Cognition and Learning needs. This was created in conjunction with schools and education services including educational psychology and the Learning Support Team.

In addition, Leicestershire's Learning and Development Team are hosting a 'Dyslexia & Neurodiversity – Lunch & Learn' for all Leicestershire County Council staff on 9th October. This is offered as part of Dyslexia Awareness month and is a one-hour, virtual session exploring what Neurodiversity is and how we can develop an approach that encourages a sense of belonging at work."

#### **Supplementary question asked by Mrs Sue Whiting:**

Mrs Whiting asked a supplementary question in relation to whether the Inclusive Practice Toolkit on the Leicestershire County Council website was available for parents to access to support children who were being home-schooled. In addition, Mrs whiting asked whether the Dyslexia & Neurodiversity Lunch & Learn virtual event on 9th October would be available for Councillors as well as Leicestershire County Council staff?

#### **Response by the Chairman:**

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded that the Inclusive Practice Toolkit was available for parents to access widely. It did set out the expectation of school support to meet the needs of children with SEND, so it may have been of limited use for those who were home schooled, but it was available for access by parents. In addition, the Director confirm that the Dyslexia & Neurodiversity - Lunch & Learn virtual event could be made available to councillors and suggested that information would be shared with councillors as to how they can access the event.

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

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

#### **Questions asked by Mr. M. Hunt CC:**

1. "On 23 June 2023 the Cabinet approved an extension to the contract with consultants Newton Europe (NE) as variations under the procurement exercise authorised in April 2022. This was described as "necessary for the move to the next phase of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme". When was it apparent that NE were essential to the second phase and will there be further phases requiring their participation and, if so, over what period?
2. The Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) only included a figure of £939,000 for the remainder of the medium term financial period. What is current projection?

3. What specific measures are being put in place to meet the projected savings under the TSIL project of £3.12m in this financial year?
4. The report to Cabinet stated that it is likely that there will be a 20-40% reduction in children starting in a specialist school, and this would be confirmed before September 2023 as placements are finalised. Can the Chairman confirm the figures and how it was achieved? (eg which mainstream schools taking children who would otherwise have special education in which settings)

#### Other Children and Families Projects included

5. I understand from the Children's Social Care Panel Performance Update that the Mosaic Case Recording System Project is going well with any risks escalated to senior management as necessary between January and July 2023. Could you tell me what risks, if any have been escalated to senior management for this project, and for the TSIL Project.
6. Our Strategic Partner, Newton Europe (NE), is contracted to help deliver the next phase of the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future Programme including 100 hours of support to Looked After Children of Leicestershire. The number of Looked after Children has apparently dropped this year breaking a long term year on year rise. What new interventions that might have helped to reverse this trend and is it expected to continue in reverse?"

#### **Reply by the Chairman:**

1. "Continuation of the arrangement with the Children and Family Service's strategic partner, Newton Europe, was required to enable the Authority to capitalise on the required expertise and skills required to deliver the identified improvements and savings needed in the complex national and regional Special Educational Needs (SEN) landscape. The continuation of the relationship ensures that there is a fully contingent model under which £10m of annualised recurrent savings will be delivered, along with key other non-financial benefits.

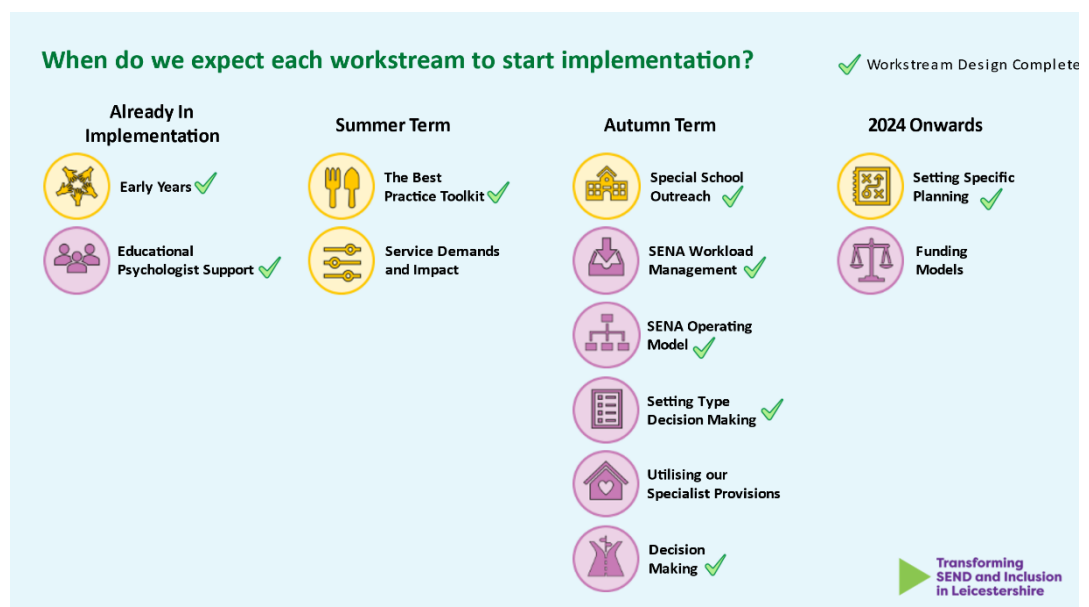
The progress of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire Programme has been monitored from the outset of the programme against the benefits set out to be achieved, as well as the scale of work to be included and lead through the programme. In March 2023 it was clear that in order to fully realise the benefits set out in the initial diagnostic the Council would need to extend its arrangement with Newton Europe. A paper was presented to Cabinet in June 2023 to set out the financial and non-financial benefits of the continuation of the relationship with the strategic partner:-

- Achieve greater depth and scale of benefits than would otherwise be achieved;
- Ensure that all workstreams reach the point of sustainably, and have all changes embedded with the business as usual service structure;
- Complete the data quality workstream, as currently defined, with a solid foundation of financial, operational and case management data. This workstream will ensure that the service's data quality improves, and the service is left with a solid foundation of financial, operational and case management data on which it is able to make fully informed decisions; 152

- Deliver a stable set of performance dashboards, which will be operational and embedded in improvement cycle meetings at all levels;
- Establish a robust forecasting of financial performance, fully entrenched into business as usual activity;
- Identify further benefits and opportunities for delivery beyond this phase of the TSIL programme;
- Provide longer and closer support to the Children and Family Services leadership team both on programme delivery and wider challenges and opportunities;

The contract with the strategic partner does not allow for a further extension.

2. The £939k included in the MTFS relates to the 'invest to save costs', within the Children and Family Services Department to support the delivery of the TSIL Programme. This amount is currently only built into the first year of the current MTFS (23/24). The Department is currently looking at what needs to be in place to sustain the delivery of the programme and to continue to make improvements going forward.
3. There are a number of workstreams within the programme that will contribute to the achievement of the financial benefits set out in the MTFS. There include supporting children in Early Years to ensure their needs are assessed and they are supported in the right place at the right time, developing the capacity within the educational Psychology Service, a best practice toolkit for inclusion, developing special school outreach support and remodelling the SENA service to ensure it is able to meet the demands of the education, Health and Care Plan process. The timescales for the delivery of each element of the workstreams is set out below:



4. The report to Cabinet set out that the diagnostic review undertaken in early 2022 identified that if something had been different earlier in their educational journey, there were a number of opportunities including for up to: 68% of children and young people in specialist settings to have their needs met in mainstream schools or resource bases. This opportunity was identified through reviewing a large number of children's cases and identifying that if support had been provided at an earlier stage children's needs could have been met in a mainstream setting rather than specialist setting. This finding has led to a range of work being undertaken to both support

children in mainstream schools as well as ensure assessments are undertaken that identify a child's needs so that support can be provided in the right place, at the right time and at the right level. The two work streams of the programme that are specifically supporting this work are Early Years and Setting-Type Decision Making.

5. There have been no risks escalated from the Children and Families systems Board or the Transforming SEND and Inclusion Board to senior managers.
6. The stabilisation of the number of children in the care of the local authority is as a result of both preventative and direct work, including building family networks and strengthening parenting, as well as rigorous work on permanence planning which means that children leave care, where appropriate, earlier, for example under special guardianship plans. In addition to this, the service has developed its support for domestic violence and its approach to working with adults causing harm.

The Department is projecting that the number of children coming into care will continue to rise, albeit at a slower rate."

19. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

20. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

22. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

23. Recruitment and Retention.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which presented provided an overview of the Department's recruitment and retention activity, current position and future objectives for the service. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. The Department continued to face increased competition with other authorities for qualified social workers, both those at the start of their career and those with experience. Members noted that recruitment and retention within social work continued to be increasingly challenging with the greater prevalence of agency

opportunities alongside the existing complexity of child protection work. Members suggested that negative public and media perceptions and low morale in the sector could have led to a decrease in those choosing a career in social work. It was also suggested that tuition fees could place a barrier for studying to become a social worker and a member proposed that the Department should raise this issue with the Government.

- ii. In response to a question regarding routes into social work outside of the traditional degree route, the Director explained that there were other ways in which people could change careers to become a Social Worker. The Social Worker Level 6 Degree Apprenticeship, which would take around three years, had been undertaken by staff from elsewhere within the service and the first cohort had completed the course. Another option available was the Step up to Social Work programme, which was an intensive 14-month full-time programme for those who want to become a social worker but did not have a degree in social work. The Director explained that a number of staff, who had a degree in another field, had joined from other frontline services. These staff members would be trained within the service to gain hands on experience. A Member suggested that these opportunities could be shared more widely by members and the Director agreed to provide members with details of all options available for entering a career in social work.
- iii. In response to concern regarding internationally recruited social workers having relevant knowledge on UK social work practice and legislation, the Director assured members that thorough checks were always carried out by the Department to ensure that the necessary knowledge was in place. A support package had been developed to cover the initial three months of the programme which would teach legislative requirements of UK social work practice. Newly qualified staff would work alongside a delivery mentor and work with a reduced number of cases, together with additional supervision and training days. The programme was assessed nationally and the Department had received good feedback on its delivery.
- iv. Exit interviews would continue to be conducted when staff were leaving the service, to either within or outside of the organisation, in an attempt to understand their reasons for leaving. The results of the interviews were shared with the senior management team so that issues could be addressed and so that themes could be identified in order to create an action plan for improvement. Exit interviews had indicated that staff were largely positive about the Council as an employer. Some staff had indicated that they had left to move to a higher paid role, but it was noted that the Department would not support an approach for offering high rates of pay seen at some local authorities. A large proportion of staff had left to move into the agency market which was an issue being experienced nationally due to rates of pay and flexibility being offered by agencies. Some staff had indicated that they had left due to workload pressures. Members noted the Department had introduced a process of monthly reporting on workloads.
- v. A member asked for clarity regarding the Early Career Framework (ECF) which would be proposed to replace the Assessed Year in Practice. However, the Director explained that it was uncertain how the framework would be delivered as it was part of a national consultation, *Stable Homes, Built on Love*, which was focused on addressing the challenges Local Authorities were facing in the recruitment and retention of social workers. It was anticipated that ECF would offer

additional investments in supporting social workers and to grow their expertise. The Director attended national forums which focussed on the issue and agreed to update members at a future meeting, once the outcome of the consultation was known.

- vi. Members noted that although the service continued to operate with a relatively high number of agency staff and had a number of vacancies across teams. Members were assured that the Department would continue to ensure that all agency staff had a mentor in place.
- vii. The Lead Member for Children and Families highlighted that despite the challenges with, and perceptions regarding, social work, there were many staff who had made a life choice to enter the vocation and were passionate about supporting and working with children.

#### RESOLVED:

- a) That the overview of the Department's recruitment and retention activity, current position, and future objective for the service, be noted.
- b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide Members of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with details of the Step up to Social Work programme, the Social Work Apprenticeship, and the Social Work Graduate Training scheme.
- c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide Member of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the outcome of the national consultation Stable Homes, Built on Love, at a future meeting of the Committee.

#### 24. Leicestershire School Buildings.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Leicestershire school buildings, including the roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority and Academy Trusts. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 9' is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director provided an update to the Committee on an issue relating to the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete (RAAC) in some school buildings nationally, an issue which had been covered extensively in the media:

"On 31 August 2023, the Department for Education (DfE) published updated guidance for responsible bodies of state funded education estates in England that had confirmed or suspected RAAC in their buildings.

The guidance advised responsible bodies to vacate and restrict access to the spaces with confirmed RAAC. Spaces should remain out of use until appropriate mitigations were in place, even where they would have been deemed 'non-critical' previously.

On 31 August, it was reported in the media that there were 156 settings in England with confirmed RAAC, according to DfE data. Of those, 52 already had safety mitigations in place, and 104 were being contacted week about getting them in place.

As the responsible body for maintained schools, Leicestershire County Council had not had any approach from the Government to identify a school (maintained or academy) which should have been closed.

In December 2018, the DfE made building owners aware of a recent building component failure in a property constructed using RAAC. In May 2019, the Standing Committee on Structural Safety (SCOSS) raised an alert to emphasise the potential risks from such construction, highlighting the failure of a RAAC panel roof construction within an operational school. This collapse was sudden with no apparent warning.

Since then, the DfE had been made aware of further sudden collapses of RAAC panels in roofs that appeared to be in good condition.

In March 2022, the DfE asked all responsible bodies to undertake a survey questionnaire to identify any RAAC in their estate. The survey was extended to further education colleges and nurseries in December 2022. The DfE required responses to the questionnaire setting out actions being taken by Responsible Bodies. The responsible body for maintained schools would be the Local Authority. Academies and Multi-Academy Trusts would be the responsible bodies for their schools.

Previous RAAC information published from 2019 onwards was safety alert and guidance only, recommending that responsible bodies check their school buildings. All maintained schools within the specified date range, at that time, were checked in 2019 by operational Property services. Academy schools were also written to in 2019.

Leicestershire County Council undertook a review of its school buildings by filtering data from condition surveys within the new date range of construction identified by the DfE, 1930-1990. This returned 95 maintained schools with buildings within the date range.

To date, all relevant maintained school building had been assessed and RAAC had not discovered within any maintained schools."

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. A member raised concern that the report had not covered voluntary aided schools such as church schools, which were not under the responsibility of the Council. Members noted that maintained church schools were under responsibility of the relevant diocese and the relevant governing body. Voluntary controlled schools would usually be under the ownership of the diocese who worked in partnership with the local authority, which remained the responsible body. The DfE made a grant available to the diocese in respect of its voluntary aided schools and maintained church schools which converted to academies were leased through a church supplemental agreement. Members were assured that the Diocese of Leicester Board of Education had completed all surveys requested by the DfE and was working closely with church academies which had been identified. The Director agreed to discuss the safety of church schools and academies in Leicestershire with the member.
- ii. Members noted that responsibility for building safety and maintenance of faith schools which were independently run would sit with the relevant building owner.
- iii. In response to concern that the closure of schools would prevent sufficient special educational provision to meet the needs outlined in Education, Health and Care



Plans (EHCP's), the Director assured members that there were no Leicestershire schools with RAAC which have had to put measures in place. In the event that a school did have to close due to safety concerns, the Department would enact contingency arrangements, such as locating another building to ensure continuation of education for children.

- iv. The DfE had not published the number of academies which were overdue in completing a survey questionnaire to identify any RAAC in their estate. To date, all those academies in Leicestershire which had responded to the survey had not identified and issue with RAAC. Members noted that the Council and the Diocese of Leicester Board of Education had found it difficult to receive clarity from DfE on RAAC in academies. The Department was confident that all Local Authority maintained schools in Leicestershire had no RAAC within their building.
- v. In response to concern regarding the risk of safety in public buildings, such as schools, the Director of Corporate Resources assured members that the Council undertook compliance improvement works on an annual basis and that this included asbestos removal work, improvements to fire compartmentation, and legionella control projects. Assurance was given that where a risk to life was identified, contingency arrangements would be enacted, and the issue would be addressed immediately.
- vi. Members noted that the Director had discussed the issue of RAAC in Leicester City schools with the Strategic Director Social Care and Education at Leicester City Council and had offered support if it would be required. However, it was understood by the Department that Leicester City Council had put contingency arrangements in place for the continuation of education for children in affected schools.
- vii. An error in the report was highlighted within the table outlining schools under the School Priority Rebuilding Scheme. Members noted that the responsible body for Rawlins Academy should be the Embrace Multi Academy Trust.

#### RESOLVED:

- a) That the overview of Leicestershire school buildings, including the roles and responsibilities of the Local Authority and Academy Trusts in terms of building safety and maintenance, and the update provided on the presence of Reinforced Autoclaved Aerated Concrete in schools and academies, be noted.
- b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to contact the Church of England Schools Representative on the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the safety of church schools and academies in Leicestershire.

#### 25. Quarter 1 2023/24 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint 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 to June 2023 (Quarter 1). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. In response to concern that the number of children receiving at least one fixed term suspension had risen by 50 percent since the last academic year, it was acknowledged that the effect on excluded children could be profound, particularly where children have issues at home. Members were assured that the Department would continue to communicate with schools to ensure that statutory guidance on suspension would be applied correctly. In addition to this, the Department would continue to support children and families affected by a fixed term suspension. It was suggested that more robust multi-agency working could strengthen the support offered to children at risk of suspension and for those who had been suspended.
- ii. In response to a question regarding a decrease in the number of eligible two-year-olds took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE), the Director acknowledged that there had been a trend and it was anticipated that this was due to parents making alternative arrangements during COVID-19 restrictions. Members were assured that the Department would monitor this trend to fully understand the reason for the decrease.
- iii. Members noted that the 101.2 per cent increase in the number of three-year-olds who took up their FEEE cited in the report could have been an error and that this would be investigated. The Director agreed to provide members with the correct figure if the figure cited in the report had been an error.
- iv. Members requested that future performance reports include figures alongside percentages when reporting data so that the data could be fully interpreted. The Director agreed that all future performance reports presented to the Committee would include figures alongside percentages.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period to June 2023 (Quarter 1), be noted.
- b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the correct percentage of the increase in number of three-year-olds who took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) in Quarter 1 of 2023/24, if the 101.2 per cent cited in the report had been incorrect.
- c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to include figures alongside percentages when reporting data within future Performance Reports presented to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

26. Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2022/23.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided a summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2022/23. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director highlighted that there had been a particularly significant number of complaints regarding the length of time it had taken to carry out

Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments, as well as relating to issues with the admissions cycle for the 2022-23 academic year. The Director assured members that the Department was confident that service improvements had addressed the issues which had led to significant complaints across the two areas.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. A member expressed thanks to the Council regarding its process for processing complaints, particularly relating to SENA. The Member suggested that complaints were always taken seriously, addressed in a timely manner, and that the next course of action was always fully explained.
- ii. The Chairman was pleased to note that a notification had been issued announcing that applications for admissions for the 2024 academic year had been opened. Members noted that applications for secondary school admissions would close on 31 October 2023 and that the deadline for applications for primary school admissions would be 15 January 2024. The Director highlighted that parents would continue to be encouraged to include three schools within their application to ensure that children would have the best possible chance of attending a local school.
- iii. The Lead Member for Children and Family Services suggested that parents should always include a catchment school within admissions applications as there had been an increase in the number of families not doing so. Members noted that parents could visit a school's website to reveal its catchment area.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the summary provided on, and the contents of, the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2022/23, and the Corporate Complaints & Compliments Annual Report 2022 – 2023, be noted.

27. Leicestershire and Rutland Local Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2022/23.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought the views of the Committee on the draft Annual Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2022/23. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman asked that any comments from Members on the draft Annual Report be submitted to the Director of Children and Family Services by no later than 15 September 2023.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the draft annual report assessing the impact of the work undertaken in 2022/23 on safeguarding outcomes for children in Leicestershire and Rutland be noted.
- b) That Members of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to submit their views on the draft annual report to the Director of Children and Family Services by no later than 15 September 2023.

28. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held on 7 November 2023 at 2:00pm.

14:00 – 15:47  
05 September 2023

CHAIRMAN



**CHILDREN AND FAMILY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**LEICESTERSHIRE'S RESPONSE TO TACKLING CHILD CRIMINAL  
EXPLOITATION**

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

**Purpose of report**

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

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) remains a strategic priority for Leicestershire County Council, and the county council remains an active member of the Child Exploitation Regional Leads group. In 2019, Leicestershire County Council launched the Child Criminal Exploitation Framework 2019-2021, and this was adopted as the East Midlands Child Criminal Exploitation Framework. Leicestershire County Council are in the process of updating this framework so that it continues to underpin the commitment and response to young people who are victims of any form of Child Criminal Exploitation.

**Background**

3. Leicestershire County Council's Child Exploitation (CE) Service are located at South Wigston Police Station, which also houses the Police Child Abuse Investigation Unit, Child Exploitation Team and Missing Team. The Vulnerability Hub, as it is called, enables the succinct response to child exploitation by all agencies, creating a multi-agency response in line with the government's 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.
4. The multi-agency approach within the Hub continues to benefit children within Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland (LLR) at risk of exploitation on a daily basis. The Terms of Reference for the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) partnership is currently being updated and provides a guide detailing the operating procedures for all multi-agency meetings held within the Hub (please see paragraphs 6 and 7 for further details). Audits of the meetings and child exploitation cases held within the Hub take place on a monthly basis to assess compliance and provide assurance of

improved outcomes for children and young people. The outcome of the audits is shared with the CE Operations Group and informs learning within the Hub.

5. A Daily Risk Management Meeting (DRMM) attended by representatives from LLR, the Police and Health partners is held at the Hub where all incidents of suspected exploitation or children going missing in the prior 24 hours are reviewed. If assessed as being high risk, the Hub assigns the child to a detective and a social worker.
6. To review the multi-agency and safeguarding response to high risk exploited children, a fortnightly Operational Review Meeting (FORM) is held. The same agencies involved in the DRMM's attend these meetings to provide updates on the safeguarding intervention that is taking place for children identified as being at high risk of exploitation, and to also provide multi-agency oversight and agreement if a child is downgraded to medium or low risk.

### **Activity and Updates**

7. In May 2023, Sam Stone became the new Service Manager for the Child Exploitation Service and now represents the County Council in attendance at the regional meetings and CE Operations group.
8. Building on from the Harm outside the Home funding, the County Council are due to introduce a new child protection pathway for those children where it is clear the primary harm, they are experiencing is not attributed to the family home. The Community Safety Plan is a multi-agency approach to keep the child safe and address the issues of harm outside of the home.
9. The findings of the Peer Study (girls' group) have assisted the County Council's learning of supporting vulnerable children in friendship groups that are at risk of exploitation. Preventative intervention with young people and working closely with schools to provide early identification of these children is beginning to develop. Schools within North West Leicestershire and the Melton borough have engaged well with the CE Service.
10. The development of the child exploitation website, which draws together information on all aspects of child exploitation and extra familial harm is a project legacy from the Harm outside the Home funding. The website is updated regularly by the Team Managers within CE Service and is a useful resource for professionals and parents to gain further knowledge and access support if they have a concern about a child being exploited.
11. The development of the edge of care service is now complete and the team, now named Families Together, will begin working with children and families from 6 November 2023. The Families Together Team will be working intensively with children and their families to rebuild family relationships and provide stability for children whilst also ensuring their safety. The team will work closely with the Hub due to the links in family breakdowns and children going missing from home.

## Performance and Activity

12. A range of data is collected on behalf of the multi-agency CE team on a quarterly basis and analysed by Leicestershire County Council's Business Intelligence Service. The data includes:
  - i. Child Sexual Exploitation referrals and outcomes
  - ii. Child Criminal Exploitation referrals and outcomes
  - iii. Risky Adults/Peer profiles
  - iv. Missing children
13. CSE data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 32 referrals. The Child Exploitation Screening tool, previously known as a Risk Assessment tool (RAT) was completed for all 32 referrals. The data from this screening tool indicates that online exploitation remains the biggest concern within CSE, with the largest number of children falling into the 14-15 years age group. For the past three years data collated across LLR and the Police indicates CSE is prevalent within the 14-15 year age group.
14. CCE data for Leicestershire in Quarter 1 recorded 35 referrals. As with CSE the most common age group for this cohort of children is aged 14-15 years. The data collated using the Child Exploitation Screening tool, previously known as the Gang Assessment tool (GAT) reports that 31 children referred are living at home. In terms of area of residence Harborough has generated the most referrals with nine children and Blaby having the next highest referrals with six children. In respect of gender, 84% of referrals were for males.
15. The number of risky adults/peers profile reported in Quarter 1 was eight adults across LLR. Over the last year gender profiles have changed with an escalation of females being recorded in this area. In Quarter 1, three females were recorded as being risky adults/peers profile.
16. Missing data for non-looked after children (non-LAC), shows a slight increase since the last quarter with Quarter 1 recording 107 children going missing from home with 160 missing episodes recorded in total.
17. Missing data for looked after children (LAC) during Quarter 1 was 41 children, slightly lower than the last quarter. Looking at the detail 23 of these children were Leicestershire LAC with 111 missing episodes, whilst 18 children were out of area LAC with 51 missing episodes.
18. A total number of 268 missing return interviews were completed for Leicestershire children, with 257 of these interviews being completed within 72 hours.

## Next steps

19. Preparation is underway for the eventuality that the service will receive a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTai) for Serious Youth Violence. Leicestershire County Council are working collaboratively with Health, Police and the Violence Reduction Network (VRN) to prepare for this possible inspection.

20. Leicestershire County Council is committed to accessing live data on those experiencing CSE and CCE. In partnership with the Violence Reduction Network, the County Council's Business Intelligence Service will link in to the VRN's dashboard to provide a system that highlights hotspots within Leicestershire, which will enable the CE Service to provide a targeted and timely response to those experiencing or at risk of child exploitation.
21. Improvements in adolescent services are being considered within an 11+ Transformation work stream. The focus is on ensuring that the policies, guidance and response that are in place reflect the changing nature of children's social care. The CE Service are involved in this planning with the aim to improve services for children who go missing.

### **Conclusions**

22. The report highlights the positive partnership work that has continued to take place within the Hub and the ongoing work built on the Harm outside the Home projects. Moving forward the CE Service is focused on adapting to the changing landscape of child exploitation by improving data collection, so that live information can be used to target intervention where it is needed at the right time.

### **Background papers**

23. Child Exploitation East Midlands:  
[www.childexploitationeastmidlands.org.uk](http://www.childexploitationeastmidlands.org.uk)

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

24. None.

### **Equality Implications**

25. The Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Equality Act 2010 and aligns the practice with the Children and Family Services core values and behaviours that underpin everything that the service does do with children, young people and their families such as being aspirational, being curious, being collaborative, listening to what children and families are telling us, building relationships and improving outcomes for the children and families worked with.

### **Human Rights Implications**

26. As with Equality, Diversity and Inclusion, the Child Exploitation Service adheres to the Human Rights Act (1998) and ensures those using and delivering services are supported and respected under the principles of Fairness, Respect, Equality, Dignity and Autonomy. As such, the service is focused on ensuring that all agencies supporting a child being exploited, first and foremost see the child behind the behaviour and to move away from a "blaming" culture.

### **Officer(s) to Contact**



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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –**  
**7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**UPDATE ON ADMISSIONS SERVICE**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee that:
  - (a) for autumn 2023 the School Admissions Service secured nine out of ten children a place at their first preference school for both First Time Admissions and secondary transfers and for all children transferring from Infant to Junior schools. Appendix A shows a full performance breakdown of this year's outcomes.
  - (b) the Service experienced a challenging 2022/23 academic year, resulting in delays in processing mid-term applications. Service improvements have addressed this, and mid-term applications are now processed more efficiently.
  - (c) as part of this improvement journey, the Council is consulting on its admissions policy and associated arrangements this year to improve the parent journey and the process.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Education Act 1996 places a statutory duty on the Local Authority to;
  - (a) Ensure a sufficient supply of school places with a view to securing diversity of provision and increasing opportunities for parental choice;
  - (b) Exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards;
3. More specifically, the School Standards and Framework Act 1998 (SSFA 1998), outlines through the associated School Admissions Code the statutory responsibilities on local authorities in terms of admissions and appeals.

**Background**

4. Mid-term challenges experienced last year included embedding the new Synergy database system and recruiting and training new staff, whilst at the same time prioritising a significant backlog of mid-term school applications.
5. A plan for Service improvement, supported by the Transformation Unit (TU), over the course of the 2022/23 academic year was successful in managing, stabilising and

eliminating the backlog of overdue applications. In addition, recruitment of permanent admissions officers and a focus on resource management to meet key performance indicators has helped better target priority demands, further improving the parent journey and significantly reducing the volume of incoming queries.

6. There is a proposal to amend the Leicestershire School Admissions Policy and associated admission co-ordinated schemes as part of this improvement journey. To make these changes, there is a mandatory requirement as detailed in the School Admissions Code 2021 to run a formal public consultation for six calendar weeks between 1 October 2023 to the end of January 2024. There is also a requirement to seek approval of the changes from the Cabinet by 28 February, following which the policy must be published on the County Council's website by 15 March.
7. Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes is published on the County Council's website.

### **Local Authority Admissions Statutory Requirements**

8. School places are not automatically allocated in England, even when children are attending an attached pre-school or feeder school or have older siblings already attending. Parents or carers must apply for a school place.
9. The LA's statutory responsibilities are for the following phased rounds:
  - First time Admissions (FTA) – this is when 4+ children apply for a place in reception class;
  - Infant to Junior Transfers;
  - Year-7 Secondary Transfers
10. Key dates for these application rounds and further below links to the Schemes:

<b>Primary (Reception class)</b>	<b>Infant to Junior (Year 3 Entry)</b>	<b>Secondary (Year 7 Entry)</b>
Closing date 15 January LA exchange dates with other LAs late February Provisional allocation list March Final allocation list late March <b>16<sup>th</sup> April National Offer Date</b>	Closing date 15 January LA exchange dates with other LAs late February Provisional allocation list March Final allocation list late March <b>16<sup>th</sup> April National Offer Date</b>	Closing date 31 October LA exchange dates with other LAs late November Provisional allocation list January Final allocation list late February <b>1<sup>st</sup> March National Offer Date</b>

11. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for Primary and Infant to Junior, and Secondary Transfers are published on the County Council's Website.

### **Local Authority Admissions Non-Statutory Requirements**

12. Applications to other year groups not part of the phased rounds do not form part of the statutory obligation on the LA to deliver. However, Leicestershire continues to offer a co-ordinated scheme on a traded basis to support parents seeking a school place outside the normal admissions round or part-way through an academic year.
13. Most schools in Leicestershire co-ordinate their admissions processes through the LA because the LA offers a 24/7 online application system, a helpful website, a Service that operates throughout the school holidays that ensures parents' rights are upheld, and, where applicable, access to the appeals process.
14. This offers a seamless process for parents in securing a school place. To the LA it ensures early identification of children who are refused a school place and allows it to make the parent aware of where vacancies exist at other local schools. The mid-term co-ordination scheme also plays a vital role in ensuring Children Missing Education (CME) are identified and supported back into education. See Appendix A for the number of applications processed in 2022/23 academic year.
15. It is significantly more challenging to identify and safeguard children who have applied to academies that have not bought into the co-ordinated scheme as, although there is an obligation to do so, information received about applications by these academies is of poorer quality and timeliness.
16. The Co-ordinated Admissions Scheme for Mid-term Transfers are published on the County Council's Website.

### **Proposals/Options**

17. The LA will be seeking to consult on its Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes, to improve choice and diversity, Code compliance and more transparency:

#### **Proposal 1:**

A catchment school change at Little Bowden Primary School as detailed at Appendix B.

Rationale: To improve diversity of choice by increasing the school's catchment area with two schools sharing a single catchment area.

#### **Proposal 2:**

To reduce the Admission Number at four primary schools:

- Foxton Primary School from 17 to 15
- Hallaton Primary School from 18 to 15
- Newbold Verdon Primary School from 45 to 30 (temporary reduction)
- St Bartholomew's C of E Primary School from 75 to 60 (temporary reduction)

Rationale: This will eliminate the risk of the school breaching the requirements of the Infant Class Size rules for Foxton PS and Newbold Verdon PS, and of the remaining two both have experienced very low birth rates impacting funding.

Therefore, a temporary reduction will assist with finances, and once births increase the Admissions Number will be restored.

Proposal 3:

To adopt a simpler model of highest single criterion plus distance when determining school places Appendix C.

Rationale: To make understanding how criteria are applied simpler for parents to understand and for the LA to operate.

Proposal 4:

To increase the number of school preferences from 3 to 5 on Leicestershire school application form.

Rationale: Leicestershire now has some catchment areas with 5 schools within a single a catchment area, therefore, to improve likelihood of securing a catchment school the form need needs to allow parents to 5 preferences to optimise their success of securing a catchment school.

Proposal 5:

To clarify several points in the admissions policy and in the coordinated schemes concerning the mid-term applications processes including late applications and from what point the waiting list will operate from, see Appendix D.

Rationale: Currently some aspects of the policy remain too ambiguous, and the policies would benefit from improved clarity concerning mid-term applications.

## **Consultation**

18. The consultation process is already underway. The School Admissions Code states that where changes are proposed a public consultation must be undertaken to engage and gain feedback from: schools; governors; parents of children between 2 and 18; neighbouring LAs; if relevant religious bodies; other interested parties. It must run for six calendar weeks in the period between 1<sup>st</sup> October and the end of January.
19. The consultation will be publicised widely through the LA public media channels, headteachers' briefings, Leicestershire Matters, and local press.
20. Once the consultation is complete and responses are considered recommendations will be offered for approval to Cabinet by the 28 February, following which it must be published by 15 March. Objectors will then have up to 15 May to lodge their disagreement with the Office of the Schools Adjudicator (OSA). Where no objection is received by 15 May the revised policy will come into force for school application entry 2025.

## **Resource Implications**

21. The changes being proposed will not impact on human resources within the School Admissions Service, ICT or other Council areas. Advice from Legal Services has been included in the consultation.

### **Financial Implications**

22. It was taken into consideration that moving from three preferences to five may increase the time Admissions Officers would have to process five preferences. However, it was concluded that a small amount of additional time at the start of the application process would be more than mitigated by a reduction in the processing of repeat applications. Therefore, it is not envisaged that the changes will have a negative financial impact whilst improving outcomes for parents.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

23. Views expressed by Scrutiny will be reported to Cabinet within the final Cabinet Paper that must be presented to Cabinet by 28 February.

### **Conclusions**

24. In summary Scrutiny are made aware of the positive and high outcomes to Leicestershire children in this year's admissions rounds for first time admissions and secondary transfers where 9 out of 10 children secured their first preference school for entry 2023. Whilst for Infant to Junior transfers all children secured their first preference school.
25. Scrutiny is offered reassurances that the issues experienced last year regarding mid-term application backlogs have been addressed and cleared.
26. Finally, that additional performance improvement strategies have been employed, that are having a positive impact to the parent journey when seeking to secure a school place part-way through an academic year; and that the consultation has sought to make further improvements to ensure future outcomes for Leicestershire remain high.

### **Background papers**

27. Leicestershire County Council's School Policies:  
<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools-colleges-and-academies/school-admissions/school-policies>
28. The School Admissions Code 2021:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>
29. School Admissions consultation for entry 2025 and beyond link:  
<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/have-your-say/current-engagement>

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

30. Mr Barry Champion CC, division Market Harborough East.
31. Mr Phil King CC, division Market Harborough West and Foxton.

### **Equality Implications**

32. The Council must show how it has paid due regard to equality, diversity and community cohesion in its decision-making, and an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed at Appendix E.
33. It is noteworthy that the EIA reinforced the positive impacts of the policy changes being proposed, and that no protected characteristic would be negatively impacted.

### **Human Rights Implications**

34. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Other Relevant Impact Assessments**

35. There are no other relevant impact assessments implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Performance breakdown

Appendix B – Proposed School Catchment change for Little Bowden Primary School

Appendix C – Leicestershire's oversubscription criteria

Appendix D – Proposed policy paragraphs

Appendix E – Equality Impact Assessment

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

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**For first-time admissions to infant and primary school:**

7,169 on-time applications

94.9% secured their first choice

98.9% secured one of their top 3 choices

**For Infant to Junior transfers:**

459 on-time applications

100% secured the first preference

**For Year 7 secondary school transfers:**

7,748 on-time applications

90.6% secured their first choice

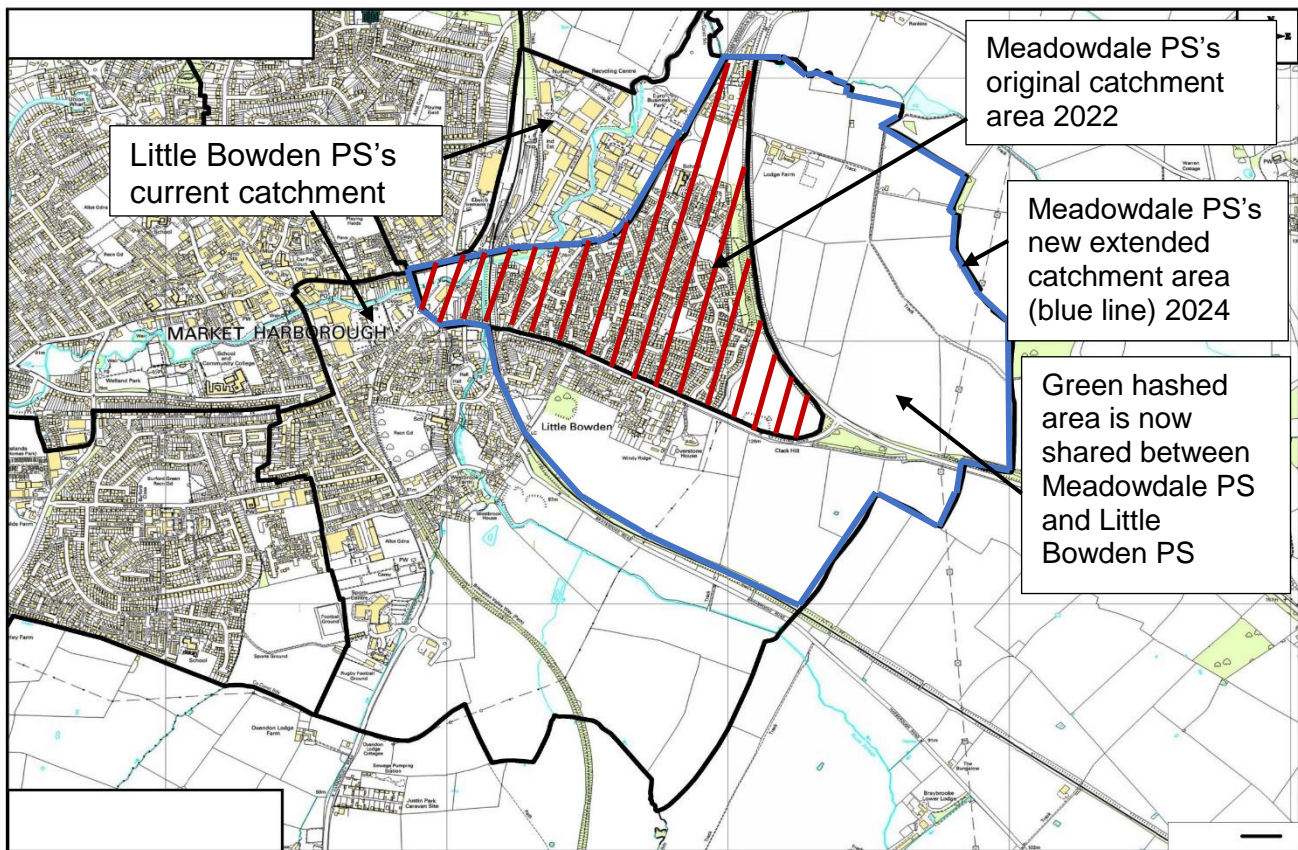
97.6% secured one of their top 3 choices

**Mid-term Application received in 2022/23 and processed:**

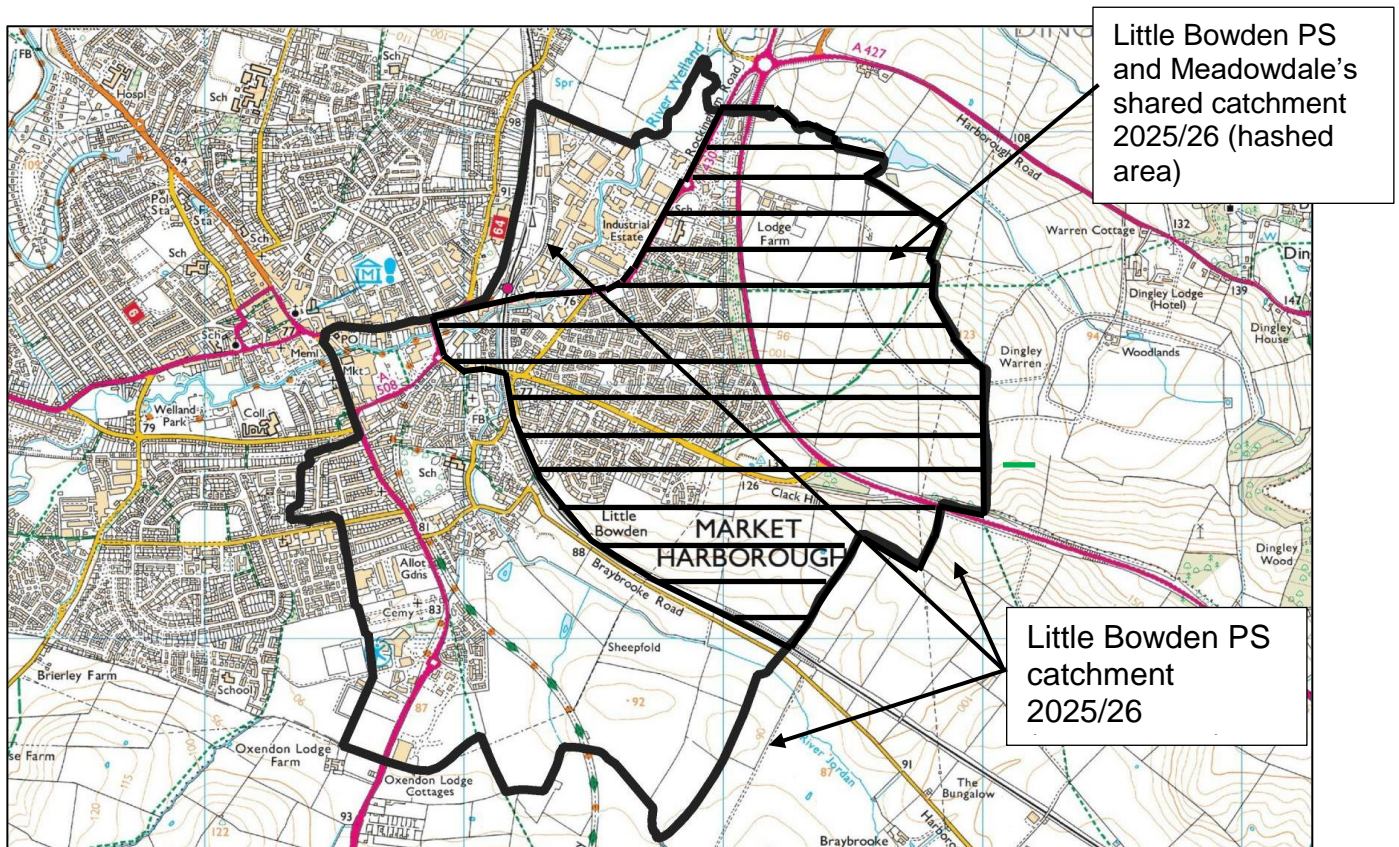
	Allocated	Refusals	Totals
Primary	2706	4496	7202
Secondary	1021	3144	4165
			11367

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Map 1: Historic, Current and Shared catchment areas 2024.

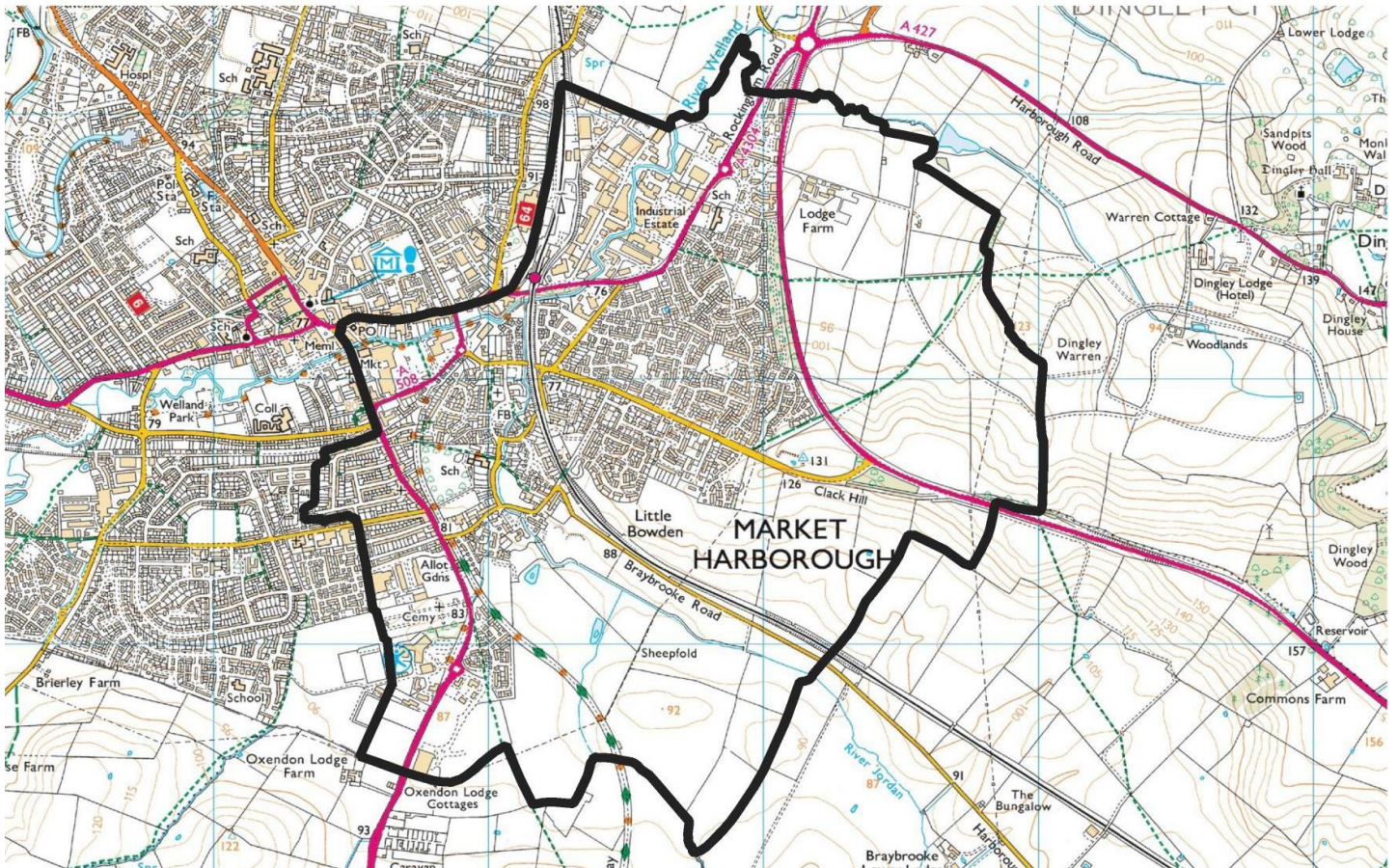


Map 2: Proposed Little Bowden PS catchment area 2025.





Map 3: New Proposed School Catchment Map: Little Bowden  
School for proposed entry from 2025/26 onwards



**Priority Oversubscription Criteria for Entry Autumn 2025 Admissions and Mid-term Applications during 2025/2026 Academic Year**

- 8.1 Where there are more applications than places available, the oversubscription criteria are used to decide the priority of applications for school places. Priority will be given to children whose parents applied on time and ranked in accordance with the priority criteria set out below. The first criterion represents the group of children most likely to get a place at the school. The last criterion represents the group of children least likely to get a place.
- 8.2 A combination of the oversubscription criteria will be used if required where there are more applications than places, for example where there are 120 places and 125 applications are submitted, 0 under the first category children in care, 125 for children who reside in catchment, a combination of criteria will be used under catchment – catchment + sibling, catchment + serious medical condition, catchment + distance, until 120 places are allocated.
- 8.3 Where there is a tie, the next relevant criteria will be used to determine which application should be offered the place, if they still have identical ranking then lots will be drawn.
- 8.4 The Priority criteria for Leicestershire ‘maintained schools’ is set out in the table below:

<b>1<sup>st</sup></b>	Children who are looked after and those children who were previously looked after children. <i>(See note i.)</i>
<b>2<sup>nd</sup></b>	Pupils who live in the catchment area at point of application. <i>(See note ii.)</i>
<b>3<sup>rd</sup></b>	Sibling, where there is sibling attending the requested school and will still be attending the requested school at point of entry. <i>(See note iii.)</i>
<b>4<sup>th</sup></b>	Pupils who have a serious medical condition or exceptional social or domestic needs that make it essential they attend the school requested. (Professional documentation confirming the situation must be submitted with the application.) <i>(See note iv.)</i>
<b>5<sup>th</sup></b>	Pupils with a sibling attending the Linked Junior School. <i>(See note v.)</i>
<b>6<sup>th</sup></b>	Pupils living nearest to the school measured in a straight-line distance (home to school front gate). <i>(See note vi.)</i>

**Notes:**

- i. The School Admissions Code 2021 states that all admission authorities must give highest priority to this group of children and provides the following definitions:  
A 'looked after child' is a child who is (a) in the care of a local authority, or (b) being provided with accommodation by a local authority in the exercise of their social services functions (see the definition in Section 22(1) of the Children Act 1989) at the time of making an application to a school.

‘Previously looked after children’ are children who were looked after but ceased to be so because they were adopted (or became subject to a child arrangements order or

special guardianship order). Further references to previously looked after children means such children who were adopted (or subject to child arrangements orders or special guardianship orders) immediately following having been looked after and those children who appear (to the admission authority) to have been in state care outside of England and ceased to be in state care as a result of being adopted.

- A child is regarded as having been in state care outside of England if they were in the care of or were accommodated by a public authority, a religious organisation, or any other provider of care whose sole or main purpose is to benefit society.
  - Children who were adopted under the Adoption Act 1976 and children who were adopted under section 46 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002.
  - Child arrangements orders are defined in section 8 of the Children Act 1989, as amended by section 12 of the Children and Families Act 2014. Child arrangements orders replace residence orders and any residence order in force prior to 22 April 2014 is deemed to be a child arrangements order. Section 14A of the Children Act 1989 defines a 'special guardianship order' as an order appointing one or more individuals to be a child's special guardian (or special guardians).
- ii. All schools for which the Council is the admission authority have catchment areas these can be seen at the following link: [catchment areas](#). For the purpose of processing a school application a single home address must be used. The child's place of residence is taken to be the parental home at which they normally reside. Where parents claim equal or dual residency the home address is the address where the child permanently spends at least three 'school' nights (that is, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday or Thursday) will be taken to be the place of residence.

For children of UK service personnel with a confirmed posting to the area or crown servants returning from overseas to live in the area, the Council will use the address at which the child will live when applying the oversubscription criteria, as long as the parent provides some evidence of their intended address. A unit or quartering address will be used as the child's home address where a parent requests this and evidence, such as an official letter declaring the relocation, is received.

For families of service personnel with a confirmed posting, or crown servants returning from overseas, the admission authority will:

- a) allocate a place in advance of the family arriving in the area (as long as one is available), provided the application is accompanied by an official letter that declares a relocation date. This must be an official government letter issued by a government department e.g. FCDO, UKVI, DIT. We will not refuse to process an application or refuse a place solely because the family do not yet have an intended address, or do not yet live in the area.
  - b) use the address at which the child will live when applying their oversubscription criteria, as long as the parents provide some evidence of their intended address. For example, we will use a Unit or quartering address as the child's home address where a parent requests this.
- iii. The term sibling relates to:
- brothers and/or sisters who share the same parent(s)
  - a half-brother, half-sister or legally adopted child living at the same address
  - a child looked after by a local authority placed in a foster family with other school age children

- a stepchild or children who are not related but live as a family unit, where parents both live at the same address as the child.
- iv. If criterion 4 is used, when making an application parents should send evidence from an independent professional person who knows about the child and supports the application to the school. It must clearly show why the school is the most suitable and any difficulties if alternate schools were offered. An independent professional person, for example a health professional, social worker, teacher/early years professional or support worker or such other appropriate person. The evidence must be supplied and must be submitted with the application for a school place.

The following list are the areas that are considered exceptional:-

- (a) Children with a serious medical condition - showing that the needs of the child can only be met at the specific school and why other schools would not be able to meet this need, or a child has an exceptional illness or disability (for example, limited mobility) which means that, the child can only reasonably attend one school.
- (b) Children subject to Child Protection Plans and Child in Need Plans and the child can only reasonably attend one school.
- (c) Parents suffering domestic violence (This is dependent on documentary evidence by a lead professional for example a health professional, social worker, teacher/early years professional or support worker or such other appropriate person)

The Service Manager along with the Admissions Manager will make the decision during the processing period in consideration with relevant professional documentation.

- v. A younger sibling will be considered under this criterion where they have an older sibling attending the linked junior school and will still be attending the linked junior when the younger sibling starts school.
- vi. For criterion 6, measurement of distance of up to three decimal places will be in a straight line from the centre point of the home property to the school's main designated front gate, using a computerised mapping system (*Routefinder*). Where there is equal distance then lots will be drawn. The drawing of lots will be undertaken by a senior officer in the Children and Families Department, supervised by an officer of the Council from another department that is independent of the Council's School Admissions Service.

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	Current	Proposed change
Admissions Policy Page 23, Sec 8, Para 8.2	8.2 A combination of the oversubscription criteria will be used if required where there are more applications than places, for example where there are 120 places and 125 applications are submitted, 0 under the first category look after child, 125 for children who reside in catchment, a combination of criteria will be used under catchment – catchment +sibling, catchment + serious medical condition, catchment + distance, until 120 places are allocated.	8.2 A combination of the highest criterion plus distance will be used where there are more applications than places available within a single criterion. For example, where there are 120 places available and 125 catchment applications are submitted, and once all looked after children and previously looked after children have been allocated a place. The remaining children will be considered by single criterion and distance until the school is filled.
Admissions Policy Page 25, Sec 8, Note vi	vi. For criterion 6, measurement of distance of up to three decimal places will be in a straight line from the centre point of the home property to the school's main designated front gate, using a computerised mapping system ( <i>Routefinder</i> ). Where there is equal distance then lots will be drawn. The drawing of lots will be undertaken by a senior officer in the Children and Families Department, supervised by an officer of the Council from another department that is independent of the Council's School Admissions Service.	vi. For criterion 6, measurement of distance of up to three decimal places will be in a straight line from the centre point of the home property to the school's main designated front gate, using a computerised mapping system ( <i>Synergy Mapping Tool</i> ). Where there is equal distance then lots will be drawn. The drawing of lots will be undertaken by a senior officer in the Children and Families Department, supervised by an officer of the Council from another department that is independent of the Council's School Admissions Service.
Primary Co-ordinated Scheme	3.10 Late applications and requests for changes to list of preferences will be dealt with as follows: <u>Received after 15<sup>th</sup> January closing date but on or before 31<sup>st</sup> January</u> When Leicestershire LA considers that applications are received late for a good reason but by 1 <sup>st</sup> February it may be possible to considered special cases as on-time, e.g. when a single parent has been hospitalised, or a family are returning from abroad. These will be considered along with the applications received before the closing date of 15 <sup>th</sup> January, providing documentary evidence of the reason for lateness is also received and it is no later than end of February.	3.10 Late applications and requests for changes to list of preferences will be dealt with as follows: <u>Received after 15th January closing date but on or before 31st January.</u>  When Leicestershire LA considers applications that are received late for a good reason it may be possible in exceptional circumstances to accept the application as on time, e.g. when a single parent has been hospitalised, or a family are returning from abroad, supported by documentary evidence of the reason for lateness which must be provided with the late application.

	<p>Any other applications will be considered to be late and will not be dealt with until after places have been allocated to those who met the closing date (15<sup>th</sup> January).</p> <p>Late applications will include requests to amend previously submitted applications, (where for example a new school has been added to the original preferences).</p> <p><u>Received after 16<sup>th</sup> April</u></p> <p>Applications received after 1<sup>st</sup> March will be batched and considered approximately three weeks after the offer date. Applications received after this time will be dealt with as and when they arrive.</p>	<p>Late applications (received after 15<sup>th</sup> January but by 31<sup>st</sup> January) for Leicestershire schools will be processed once all on time applications have been processed and we will issue the decision on National Offer date.</p> <p><u>Late applications received post 31<sup>st</sup> January.</u></p> <p>Late applications also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests to amend previously submitted applications, (where for example a new school has been added to the original preferences) only the new school will be considered as a late preference;</li> <li>• applications received after 16<sup>th</sup> April. These late applications will then be processed post offer date.</li> </ul>
		<p>New paragraph:</p> <p>3.13 Waiting lists although will be live to view from 16<sup>th</sup> April (or next working day). Allocations to school vacancies will be immediately after the offer date. Waiting lists cannot discriminate between an on-time or late applications.</p>
	<p>4.3 For those applications seeking a transfer from an infant school to a primary school, these will be considered as in-year (mid-term) transfers. Parents and guardians will be asked whether they wish their child to move immediately or be considered for mid-term transfer at the end of the summer term for a September start. Where a September start is requested the application will be held on file until nearer the close of the current academic year (early to mid June), and processed then.</p>	<p>4.3 For those applications seeking a transfer from an infant school to a primary school rather than to a junior school as part of the infant to junior transfer round, these will be considered as an in-year (mid-term) transfers and processed within 15 school days. Where parents and guardians wish to take up the place in the following September at a primary school, parents and guardians will be asked to make their application from 1<sup>st</sup> June for the following September.</p>
Secondary Co-ordinated Scheme	<p>3.10 Late applications and requests for changes to list of preferences will be dealt with as follows:</p>	<p>3.10 Late applications and requests for changes to list of preferences will be dealt with as follows:</p>

	<p><b><u>Received after 31<sup>st</sup> October closing date but on or before 16<sup>th</sup> November</u></b></p> <p>When Leicestershire LA considers that applications are received late for a good reason and is by 16<sup>th</sup> November it may be possible to considered special cases as on-time, e.g. when a single parent has been hospitalised, or a family are returning from abroad. These will be considered along with the applications received before the closing date of 31<sup>st</sup> October, providing documentary evidence of the reason for lateness is also received.</p> <p>Any other applications will be considered to be late and will not be dealt with until after places have been allocated to those who met the closing date 31<sup>st</sup> October. Late applications will include requests to amend previously submitted applications, (where for example a new school has been added to the original preferences).</p>	<p><b><u>Received after 31<sup>st</sup> October closing date but on or before 16<sup>th</sup> November.</u></b></p> <p>When Leicestershire LA considers applications that are received late for a good reason it may be possible in exceptional circumstances to accept the application as on time, e.g. when a single parent has been hospitalised, or a family are returning from abroad, supported by documentary evidence of the reason for lateness which must be provided with the late application.</p> <p>Late applications (received after 31<sup>st</sup> October but by 16<sup>th</sup> November) for Leicestershire schools will be processed once all on time applications have been processed and we will issue the decision on National Offer date.</p> <p><b><u>Late applications received post 31st January.</u></b></p> <p>Late applications also include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• requests to amend previously submitted applications, (where for example a new school has been added to the original preferences) only the new school will considered as a late preference;</li> <li>• applications received after 1<sup>st</sup> March. These late applications will then be processed post offer date.</li> </ul>
	<p>New paragraph:</p>	<p>3.15 Waiting lists although will be live to view from 1<sup>st</sup> March (or next working day). Allocations to school vacancies will be immediately after the offer date. Waiting lists cannot discriminate between an on-time or late applications.</p>

Mid-Term co-ordinated scheme	2.3. Where an application arrives via the LA for an OAA that does not participate in the LA's co-ordinated scheme the LA will forward the application the OAA to swiftly process. For maintained and OAAs participating in the LA's arrangement it will be the LA that will process the application form.	2.3. For all OAA schools that do not participate in the LA's co-ordinated scheme parents must apply directly to the school (see appendix 2). For maintained and OAAs participating in the LA's arrangement it will be the LA that will process the application form.
	2.4. The common application form must allow parents to express a preference for at least 3 School, which may be for schools within or beyond their home local authority area, and the reasons for their preferences. The best way to apply for school list in appendixes 1 and 2, is through the LA's <a href="#">online application form</a> .	2.4. Leicestershire's common application form will allow parents to express up to 5 school preferences, which may be for schools within or beyond their home local authority area, and the reasons for their preferences. The best way to apply for a school is through the LA's <a href="#">online application form</a> (see appendices 1 and 2).
	2.7. Parents who cannot be offered one of their preferred schools must, if there are places available, be informed of where places exist at other school(s).	<b>2.7</b> Parents who cannot be offered one of their preferred schools will on request to the School Admissions Service be informed of places available at other local schools participating in Leicestershire's mid-term co-ordinated scheme. Or, where the parent or guardian insists for a school place and there are at least 15 school days before the end of the summer term.

## **Equality & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA)**

This Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) will enable you to assess the **new, proposed or significantly changed** policy/ practice/ procedure/ function/ service\*\* for equality and human rights implications.

Undertaking this assessment will help you to identify whether or not this policy/ practice/ procedure/ function/ service\*\* may have an adverse impact on a particular community or group of people. It will ultimately ensure that, as an Authority, we do not discriminate and we are able to promote equality, diversity and human rights.

Please refer to the EHRIA guidance before completing this form. If you need any further information about undertaking and completing the assessment, contact your Departmental Equalities Group [mailto:or\\_equality@leics.gov.uk](mailto:or_equality@leics.gov.uk)




*\*\*Please note: The term 'policy' will be used throughout this assessment as shorthand for policy, practice, procedure, function or service.*

<b>Key Details</b>	
<b>Name of policy being assessed:</b>	LA's School Admissions Policy
<b>Department and section:</b>	Childrens and Families Dept
<b>Name of lead officer/ job title and others completing this assessment:</b>	Gurjit Singh Bahra Service Manager of School Admissions and Pupil Services
<b>Contact telephone numbers:</b>	0116 305 6324
<b>Name of officer/s responsible for implementing this policy:</b>	Gurjit Singh Bahra
<b>Date EHRIA assessment started:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2023
<b>Date EHRIA assessment completed:</b>	8 <sup>th</sup> September 2023

## **Section 1: Defining the policy**

**Section 1: Defining the policy**

You should begin this assessment by defining and outlining the scope of the policy. You should consider the impact or likely impact of the policy in relation to all areas of equality, diversity and human rights as outlined in Leicestershire County Council's Equality Strategy.

<b>1</b>	What is new or changed in the policy? <i>What has changed and why?</i>  Key changes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>to extend Little Bowden PS's catchment</li> <li>to reduce the PAN at Foxton PS to 15</li> <li>to change how Leicestershire will apply its criteria when determining places</li> <li>in increase the number of preferences from 3 to 5</li> <li>to amend Leicestershire's Admissions Policy in specific areas to offer better clarity and avoid confusion</li> </ul>			
<b>2</b>	Does this relate to any other policy within your department, the Council or with other partner organisations? If yes, please reference the relevant policy or EHRIA. If unknown, further investigation may be required. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>LA's Fair Access Protocol</li> </ul>			
<b>3</b>	Who are the people/ groups (target groups) affected and what is the intended change or outcome for them? <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statutory school age children</li> </ul>			
<b>4</b>	Will the policy meet the Equality Act 2010 requirements to have due regard to the need to meet any of the following aspects? <b>(Please tick and explain how)</b>			
		<b>Yes</b>	<b>No</b>	<b>How?</b>
	Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation			All the proposals will have a positive and impact to all children equally, decisions will made using a set of criteria that are fair, transparent and compliant.
	Advance equality of opportunity between different groups			Policy does not discriminate and treats all children equally however provides support to most vulnerable.
	Foster good relations between different groups			Criteria are applied equally to all applicants that apply on time in the phased rounds. Those applying part-way through the year, and we receive more applications than places available our criteria is applied and the highest ranking child will secure the place.

## Section 2: Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) Screening






### Section 2: Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment Screening

The purpose of this section of the assessment is to help you decide if a full EHRIA is required.

If you have already identified that a full EHRIA is needed for a policy/ practice/ procedure/ function/ service, either via service planning processes or other means, then please go straight to Section 3 on Page 7 of this document.


### Section 2













#### A: Research and Consultation

5.	Have the target groups been consulted about the following?	Yes	No*
	a) their current needs and aspirations and what is important to them;		
	b) any potential impact of this change on them (positive and negative, intended and unintended);		
	c) potential barriers they may face		
6.	If the target groups have not been consulted directly, have representatives been consulted or research explored (e.g. Equality Mapping)?		
7.	Have other stakeholder groups/ secondary groups (e.g. carers of service users) been explored in terms of potential unintended impacts?		
8.	*If you answered 'no' to the questions above, please use the space below to outline either what consultation you are planning to undertake or why you do not consider it to be necessary.		

### Section 2

#### B: Monitoring Impact

9.	Are there systems set up to:	Yes	No
	a) monitor impact (positive and negative, intended and unintended) for different groups;		

	b) enable open feedback and suggestions from different communities		
<b>Note: If no to Question 9, you will need to ensure that monitoring systems are established to check for impact on the protected characteristics.</b>			
<b>Section 2</b> <b>C: Potential Impact</b>			
10.	Use the table below to specify if any individuals or community groups who identify with any of the ' <u>protected characteristics</u> ' may <b>potentially</b> be affected by the policy and describe any positive and negative impacts, including any barriers.		
		Yes	No
	Age		
	Disability		
	Gender Reassignment		
	Marriage and Civil Partnership		
	Pregnancy and Maternity		
	Race		
	Religion or Belief		
	Sex		
	Sexual Orientation		
	Other groups e.g. rural isolation, deprivation, health inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities		
	Community Cohesion		
11.	Are the human rights of individuals <b>potentially</b> affected by this proposal? Could there be an impact on human rights for any of the protected characteristics? <b>(Please tick)</b>  Explain why you consider that any particular <u>article in the Human Rights Act</u> may apply to the policy/ practice/ function or procedure and how the human rights of individuals are likely to be affected below: [NB: include positive and negative impacts as well as barriers in benefiting from the above proposal]		



		Yes	No	Comments
Part 1: The Convention- Rights and Freedoms				
Article 2: Right to life				<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>It is important to note the context of the policy under consideration, it affects children of statutory school aged children and their parent's / carer's right to apply for a school place.</li><li>The criteria used for this purpose are fair, transparent, open, remain equal and</li><li>Where an application is unsuccessful parents and children have a right of appeal to an independent appeal panel</li></ul>
Article 3: Right not to be tortured or treated in an inhuman or degrading way	✓			
Article 4: Right not to be subjected to slavery/ forced labour	✓			
Article 5: Right to liberty and security	✓			
Article 6: Right to a fair trial	✓			
Article 7: No punishment without law	✓			
Article 8: Right to respect for private and family life	✓			
Article 9: Right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion	✓			
Article 10: Right to freedom of expression	✓			
Article 11: Right to freedom of assembly and association				
Article 12: Right to marry		✓		
Article 14: Right not to be discriminated against	✓			
Part 2: The First Protocol				
Article 1: Protection of property/ peaceful enjoyment	✓			
Article 2: Right to education	✓			
Article 3: Right to free elections				
Section 2				
D: Decision				
13.	Is there evidence or any other reason to suggest that:	Yes	No	Unknown

	a) the policy could have a different affect or adverse impact on any section of the community;		✓	
	b) any section of the community may face barriers in benefiting from the proposal		✓	
13.	Based on the answers to the questions above, what is the likely impact of the policy			
	No Impact <input type="checkbox"/>	Positive Impact <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Neutral Impact <input type="checkbox"/>	Negative Impact or Impact Unknown <input type="checkbox"/>
<b>Note: If the decision is 'Negative Impact' or 'Impact Not Known', an EHRIA Report is required.</b>				
14.	Is an EHRIA report required?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

## Section 2: Completion of EHRIA Screening

Upon completion of the screening section of this assessment, you should have identified whether an EHRIA Report is required for further investigation of the impacts of this policy.

**Option 1:** If you identified that an EHRIA Report *is required*, continue to Section 3 on Page 7 of this document.

**Option 2:** If there are no equality, diversity or human rights impacts identified and an EHRIA report *is not required*, continue to Section 4 on Page 14 of this document.

## Section 3: Equality and Section 4: Sign off and scrutiny

Upon completion, the Lead Officer completing this assessment is required to sign the document in the section below.

It is required that this Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) is scrutinised by your Departmental Equalities Group and signed off by the Chair of the Group.

Once scrutiny and sign off has taken place, a depersonalised version of this EHRIA should be published on Leicestershire County Council's website. Please send a copy of this form to the Digital Services Team via [web@leics.gov.uk](mailto:web@leics.gov.uk) for publishing.

#### Section 4

##### A: Sign Off and Scrutiny

Confirm, as appropriate, which elements of the EHRIA have been completed and are required for sign off and scrutiny.

**Equality and Human Rights Assessment Screening** ☒

**Equality and Human Rights Assessment Report** ☐

1<sup>st</sup> Authorised Signature (EHRIA Lead Officer):



Date: 8<sup>th</sup> September 2023

2<sup>nd</sup> Authorised Signature (DEG Chair):



Date: 8<sup>th</sup> October 2023

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

**7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**QUARTER 2 2023/24 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 2023 (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 and Overview**

3. The following report and accompanying data aim to report on the priority areas identified by the Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2020-2023. The plan identifies ambitions and measures to monitor progress. The current performance data is appended and has been refreshed to concentrate on indicators where updated data is available for quarter 2.
4. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.
5. From ten measures reported that have a national benchmark, two are in the top quartile, three are in the second quartile, two are in the third quartile and three are in the bottom quartile.

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

6. Local Authority comparisons used are most recent figures published by the government for end of year benchmarking.

7. As a result of improvements made to the Mosaic case management system in December 2022, the number of social care performance indicators available continues to be temporarily reduced while reporting systems are updated.
8. The percentage of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time increased to 26.1% at the end of quarter 2 compared to 22.8% at the end of quarter 1. In this period 38 children began a second or subsequent child protection plan, an increase from 28 reported in the preceding quarter. Leicestershire is now placed in the third quartile of local authorities compared to most recent national results published for 2021/22. This continues to be an area of focus for the service and regular audits are completed to understand any themes around the circumstances leading to repeat periods of child protection planning.
9. The percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within twelve months was 23.5% at the end of quarter 1 compared to 23.2% at the end of the previous quarter, with 317 children being 're-referred' within quarter 2. Leicestershire continues to be placed in the fourth quartile of local authorities.
10. The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days to the end of quarter 2 was 88.2%, an increase from quarter 1 (84.4%). Within quarter 2, 892 of 973 assessments were completed within timescale. Leicestershire is now placed in the second quartile of local authorities using most recent comparisons.
11. Six Child Protection plans lasting two years or more were open at the end of quarter 2, representing 1.3% of cases. This is a decrease compared with the end of quarter 1 (13 children, 2.8%), and now places Leicestershire in the top quartile of local authorities.
12. The percentage of Care Leavers in Suitable Accommodation was 94.7% at the end of quarter 2 (161 out of 170 young people). This is an increase from the end of quarter 1 (92.0%), and now places Leicestershire in the top quartile of local authorities using available comparisons.
13. The percentage of Care Leavers in Education, Employment or Training was 58.8% at the end of quarter 2 (100 out of 170 young people). This is an increase from the end of quarter 1, 56.0%, and continues to place Leicestershire in the second quartile by comparison with other local authorities. The service continues to provide careful oversight to the care leaver indicators and is driven by a corporate commitment for creating mentoring and apprenticeship opportunities for care leavers.
14. The percentage of Children in Care who have had a dental check at the end of Quarter 2 was 66.5% (470 children), an increase from 54.2% reported for the same quarter last year.
15. The percentage of Children in Care who have had an annual health assessment within the last twelve months at the end of quarter 2 was 66.5% (470 children). This is a decrease compared to the same quarter last year (75.9%).

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

16. Due to ongoing system changes, specifically relating to Capita/ Synergy, it is not possible to report a total CFWS worked with figure for q2 2023/24 at this time. During quarter 3 2022/23 (the last available reporting period), the Children and Family Wellbeing Service (CFWS) worked with 3,489 individuals and 1,435 families across Leicestershire.
17. The Children and Families Services Departmental Plan states the intention to ensure that the needs of young people are identified as early as possible so that timely and appropriate support is provided in the right setting, therefore reducing the risk of needs escalating at the same time as ensuring children and young people's best outcomes are achieved.

### **People are safe in their daily lives**

18. Local Youth Justice statistics are regularly reported to the Youth and Justice Management Board. The latest report was presented at the June 2023 board. However, due to ongoing system changes, only national indicators could be reported.

### **Help every child to get the best possible start in life**

#### **Early years**

19. The last available FEEE data was for the Summer Term 2023. Data for Autumn 2023 will be available in early 2024. In the Summer Term 2023, 74.6% of eligible two-year-olds took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE). This is a decrease from the Spring Term (90.1%). For three-year-olds, the figure was 101.2%, an increase over the previous term (91.9). Overall, 97.2% of eligible two- and three-year-olds took up their FEEE in high-quality provision, an increase on the Spring Term (96.3%).

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

20. The percentage of primary schools rated Good or Outstanding was 90.2% (203 out of 225 inspected schools) at the end of quarter 2. This represents a decline of 1.4% from quarter 1. This figure is within the third quartile of local authorities, and is equal to the England average, 90.2%, which is at its highest level in six years.
21. The percentage of secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding was 73.3% (33 out of 45 inspected schools) at the end of quarter 2. This represents no change from quarter 1 and continues to be the lowest proportion of schools reported for this measure since 2015. This figure is now within the fourth quartile of local authorities nationally, a decline from the third quartile at the end of the last quarter. Leicestershire's performance is 8.4% lower than the average for England, which at 81.7% is the highest national level performance in history, and 9.1% lower than the average for Statistical Neighbours. Since 2011 when Ofsted began the regular publication of each school's latest inspection outcome as a

statistical dataset the size of Leicestershire's negative gap to the average for England has never been wider, and it is the first time that Leicestershire's performance in relation to this measure has been within the bottom quartile.

22. The percentage of pupils educated in Good or Outstanding schools was 84.1% at the end of quarter 2 (approx. 84.2k out of 100.1k pupils). This is 1.2% lower than quarter 1 (85.3%) and is the lowest performance in three years. This figure is within the fourth quartile of local authorities nationally, a decline from the third quartile last quarter, and is 4.3% lower than the average for England, and 4.4% lower than the average for Statistical Neighbours. The England average which is currently at 88.4% is the highest national level performance in history. Since 2011 when Ofsted began the regular publication of each school's latest inspection outcome as a statistical dataset the size of Leicestershire's negative gap to the average for England has never been wider, and it is the first time that performance in relation to this measure has been with the bottom quartile nationally.
23. The Department for Education (DfE) has begun to release the assessment outcomes for Primary and Secondary schools in 2023. Beginning with Key Stage Two (eleven year olds) at the all pupils level, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard or higher in Reading, Writing and Mathematics is provisionally 61.8% (4,990 out of 8,072 pupils). This is currently a slight decline on the previous year, 62.1%, and places Leicestershire in the second quartile nationally, a decline from the top quartile last year.
24. Leicestershire's performance is 2.4% higher than the national performance, provisionally 59.4% (0.7% higher than the previous year), and 3.9% higher than the average for Statistical Neighbours, 58.2% (a decline of 0.2% on the previous year).
25. The provisional 2023 performance for Leicestershire is above the performance of 2017, but still 5.3% lower than the performance achieved in 2019. Nationally the provisional 2023 performance is lower than in 2017, and 5.5% below that achieved in 2019.
26. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 999 at the end of quarter 2 2023/24. This is an increase of 145 students (16.9%) compared to the end of quarter 2 2022/23 (854 students).
27. The trend has been driven by two factors: firstly, having experienced a period of enforced home schooling during the pandemic, some parents have opted for EHE as a lifestyle choice and have chosen to continue this even when schools reopened. The second factor has been ongoing health concerns which could be for the child, vulnerable parents, or general safety concerns. The numbers will continue to be monitored closely.
28. End of quarter data (September 2023) for the percentage of young people (16-17) in Leicestershire not in education, employment or training (NEET) is not currently available. Furthermore, given the early point in the school year, the September data would not be considered an accurate reflection of the NEET position, as the destination of a high proportion of students would still be



unknown. End of q3 data (December 2023) will provide a more reliable picture and will be reported in January 2024. Going forward, it is proposed that the NEET indicator is omitted from the q2 reporting for this reason.

### **Conclusion**

29. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of quarter 2 2023/24, covering the period July to September 2023.
30. Details of all metrics (reflecting any changes in indicators for 2023/24) will continue to be monitored on a regular basis throughout the year and any subsequent changes will be notified in future reports.

### **Background Papers**

None.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

None.

### **Appendix**

Quarter 2 2023/24 CFS Performance Data (Excel Spreadsheet)

### **Officers to Contact**

Jane Moore, Director – Children and Families Service

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Topic	Theme	Indicator	Value Type	Polarity	Reporting Frequency	Previous Period	Previous Value	Latest Period	Latest Value	Trend	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	Social Care	Children becoming subject to a CPP for second or subsequent time	Percent	Low = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	22.8%	Q2 2023/24	26.1%	Increase	<20.8%	Amber	3	22.3%
		Re-referrals to CSC within 12 mths	Percent	Low = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	23.2%	Q2 2023/24	23.5%	No Change	<18.7%	Red	4	20.2%
		Assessments completed within 45 days	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	84.4%	Q2 2023/24	88.2%	Increase	>90.3%	Amber	2	85.6%
		CPP lasting 2 yrs or more open at the end of the quarter	Percent	Low = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	2.8%	Q2 2023/24	1.3%	Decrease	<3.0%	Green	1	1.3%
		Care leavers in suitable accommodation	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	92.0%	Q2 2023/24	94.7%	Increase	>92.0%	Green	1	87.8%
		Care leavers EET	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	56.0%	Q2 2023/24	58.8%	Increase	>54.0%	Green	2	54.0%
		Children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q2 2022/23	54.2%	Q2 2023/24	66.5%	Increase	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Help every child to have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential	Education	Children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (at end of period)	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q2 2022/23	75.9%	Q2 2023/24	66.5%	Decrease	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
		Primary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	91.6%	Q2 2023/24	90.2%	Decrease	N/A	Amber	3	90.2%
		Secondary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	73.3%	Q2 2023/24	73.3%	No change	N/A	Red	4	82.4%
		Pupils in Good or Outstanding schools	Percent	High = Good	Quarter	Q1 2023/24	85.3%	Q2 2023/24	84.1%	Decrease	N/A	Red	4	88.5%
		KS2 - pupils achieving expected standard in Reading, Writing and Mathematics	Percent	High = Good	Annual	2021/22 Final	62.1%	2022/23 Provisional	61.8%	Decrease	N/A	Amber	2	58.2%
		Children Electively Educated at Home	Number	N/A	Quarter	Q2 2022/23	854	Q2 2023/24	999	Increase	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –  
7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**THE ROLE OF THE LOCAL AUTHORITY REGARDING MULTI ACADEMY  
TRUSTS**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the legislative role of local authorities in education, specifically with Academies. The report will set out how these duties are discharged by the Children and Family Services Department.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. This paper is based on a recommendation within the Final Report of the Scrutiny Review Panel on Multi Academy Trusts which recommended that where it was recommended that the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives an annual progress report from the School Effectiveness Team.
3. As a Local Authority, Leicestershire County Council has statutory responsibilities across education, including Multi Academy Trusts.

**Background**

4. The County Council has a strategic role, to lead for education of children and young people and duties to ensure every child fulfils their potential. The County Council's roles and responsibilities under education law are set out in several statutes and statutory instruments, as well as central government guidance. They include responsibilities in relation to:
  - a) **School standards and improvement** – The Council must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards.
  - b) **Safeguarding** - Children's services have a legal responsibility to promote the wellbeing of all local children. The Council has an overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in its area, regardless of the types of educational settings they attend.
  - c) **Pupil planning** - ensuring a sufficient supply of school places for all children and young people in Leicestershire.
  - d) **School admissions** – co-ordinating all school admissions in its areas during the normal rounds at the start of primary and secondary school. Although the

statutory duty on the Council to coordinate in-year admissions outside the normal rounds has been removed, many schools request the county Council to undertake this role.

- e) **Home to school transport** – Councils are required to offer free school transport for those children who meet certain criteria. The Council is also required to offer an appeals process independently of the decision maker.
- f) **School attendance** - improving attendance for the whole area, track local attendance data to prioritise support, including to children who are /or who are at risk of becoming persistent absentees,
- g) **School funding** - The Council's role is to agree a local formula with schools for the distribution of funds received from the Government through Designated Schools Grant (DSG).
- h) **Special educational needs provision** and children with health needs who cannot attend school. The Council is subject to a range of duties and responsibilities to support children and young people with SEND and health needs, including making sure that they can access a suitable education.

### **Education Legislation**

5. The following legislation is relevant to the role of local authorities within Education. The 1996 Education Act, Section 4 sets out the definition of a school as 'an educational institution which is outside the further education sector and the higher education sector and is an institution for providing—
  - a) primary education,
  - b) secondary education, or
  - c) both primary and secondary education, whether or not the institution also provides part-time education suitable to the requirements of junior pupils or further education.
 (1C) An alternative provision Academy.'
6. A local authority must exercise its education functions with a view to promoting high standards as defined in Section 13A of the Education Act 1996, the duty to promote high standards and fulfilment of potential. S.13A A local education authority in England must ensure that their relevant education functions and their relevant training functions are (as far as they are capable of being so exercised) exercised by the authority with a view to -
  - a) promoting high standards,
  - b) ensuring fair access to opportunity for education and training, and
  - c) promoting the fulfilment of learning potential by every person to whom this subsection applies.
7. The local authority's statutory responsibilities for educational excellence are set out in the School Standards and Framework Act 1998.
8. The duty of LEAs to promote high standards in primary and secondary education was repealed and replaced by The Education and Inspections Act 2006 which defines the strategic role of the local authority.
9. Key points within this act 2006) identify the role of the LA as champion of the needs of children and young people and their families; in the planning, commissioning and quality assurance of educational services; in challenging schools and, where

appropriate, to commission support and, if necessary, intervene in the management and governance of schools and where a local authority has concerns about academy performance it must raise them directly with the DfE.

10. The Education and Adoption Act 2016 amends The Education and Inspections Act 2006 Act and lays out further information regarding intervention powers where maintained or academy schools are causing concern. These can be summarised as follows: -
  11. Maintained schools: Every school judged inadequate by Ofsted will become a sponsored academy. New powers were given to the Secretary of State to intervene in schools considered to be underperforming.
  12. The legal definition of the 'eligible for intervention category' was expanded to enable the Secretary of State to turn such schools into academies or intervene in them in other ways by placing new duties on schools.
  13. Schools can be required, in specified cases to work with an identified sponsor towards the making of academy arrangements with a sponsor. The requirement for a general consultation to be held where a school is being converted to a sponsored academy, was removed.
  14. Academy schools: In circumstances where special measures are required to be taken in relation to the Academy, or the Academy requires significant improvement, or the Academy is coasting, and the Secretary of State has notified the proprietor that it is coasting, power to intervene are with the Secretary of State (and not the local authority).
12. Schools causing concern. Special measures are required to be taken in relation to a school if:
  - a) the school is failing to give its pupils an acceptable standard of education, and
  - b) the persons responsible for leading, managing or governing the school are not demonstrating the capacity to secure the necessary improvement in the school.
13. Schools Causing Concern is a crucial statutory document for local authorities on holding to account. The document defines the criteria for 'Schools that are not making necessary improvements: the school's overall effectiveness at its most recent Ofsted inspection under section 5 of the Education Act 2005 was Requires Improvement (RI), and the school's overall effectiveness was also below Good at the inspection under Section 5 immediately prior to the most recent such inspection
14. From 1 September 2022, the Secretary of State has the powers to intervene in these schools, by virtue of the legislation on 'coasting' schools. The definition of 'coasting' in regulations has been amended to match the definition of 'schools that are not making necessary improvements' given above.
15. The Coasting Schools (England) Regulations 2022 came into force on 1 September 2022 and changed the definition of coasting so that Ofsted judgements rather than performance data is used to determine whether a school is coasting.

16. Under the updated regulations a school will fall within the coasting definition if it was judged as 'requires improvement' at their most recent Section 5 Ofsted inspection and were also judged as 'requires improvement', 'satisfactory' or 'inadequate' at the previous inspection including judgements given to its predecessor schools. Schools with two consecutive 'requires improvement' or less inspection judgements are defined as coasting and therefore eligible for intervention.
17. A school judged as 'requires improvement' or 'inadequate' will usually be inspected within two and a half years. However, post pandemic the picture is more complicated. A school with a 'requires improvement' judgement could be waiting up to five years for an inspection; a school currently grade as good more than five years ago could be waiting at least six years before being inspected again. This is outlined by Ofsted in 'When will my school be inspected?'.
18. Responsibilities for challenging underperformance in academies sit with the Regional Director, DfE. Schools Causing Concern states: *'Where a local authority has concerns about standards, management or governance, or safety in an academy, it should alert the relevant Regional Director.'*

### **Role and responsibilities of the Regional Director**

19. Regional Directors act on behalf of the Secretary of State for Education. Regional Directors work closely with local authorities promoting financial health in the academy trusts leading on ensuring strong governance in academy trusts – this does not include financial governance issues as they are overseen by the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA).
20. From 1 September 2022, the Secretary of State may use the discretionary power to intervene in academies that are coasting (not making necessary improvements).

### **Role and responsibility of Ofsted in education**

21. Ofsted are responsible for inspecting Maintained schools and academies, independent schools, colleges, apprenticeship providers, prison education and many other educational institutions and programmes outside of higher education. Ofsted are also responsible for publishing reports of their findings so they can be used to improve the overall quality of education and training.
22. Duties of the Chief Inspector as described in Education Act 2005 section 13 Duties of Chief Inspector where school causes or has caused concern. This is when the outcome of a section 5 inspection judgement is that special measures are required to be taken, or that the school requires significant improvement. In these circumstances the Chief Inspector must write to the Secretary of State, in the case of a maintained school, to the local authority or in the case of any other school, to the proprietor of the school.

### **Safeguarding**

#### **Academies**

23. Local authorities have overarching responsibility for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of all children and young people in their area, regardless of the types of



educational settings they attend. In order to fulfil these duties effectively, local authorities need to work in partnership with all schools (including independent schools), appropriate religious bodies and further education and sixth form colleges in their area.

24. Where a local authority has concerns about an academy or free school's safeguarding arrangements or procedures (arising as a result of investigations about individual children or otherwise), these concerns should be raised to the DfE as the body with responsibility for ensuring that academy trusts comply with their Funding Agreements.
25. When safeguarding concerns are identified as part of the Ofsted inspection process, Ofsted will notify local authority. It is the role of Ofsted to monitor the progress of improvements to safeguarding arrangements through monitoring visits.
26. Where an academy is judged Inadequate for Leadership and Management, solely due to safeguarding (but judged Good or Outstanding in other key areas), Ofsted will carry out an early monitoring visit within three months of publication of the Inadequate judgement to determine whether improvements have been made. The monitoring visit will either confirm the academy remains Inadequate or if inspectors are satisfied that safeguarding is now effective and there has been no decline in the academy's performance in other areas, regrade the academy.

#### Independent schools

27. Where a local authority has a concern about an independent school's safeguarding arrangements or procedures (arising as a result of investigations about individual children or otherwise), these concerns are reported to the Independent Education Division at the DfE, who have responsibility for enforcing the independent school standards and taking regulatory action where necessary.

#### **Leicestershire County Council's work with Academies**

28. The Education Effectiveness Team have positive relationships with Multi Academy Trusts as they have a shared interest in the best outcomes for children and young people across Leicestershire. The role of the Education Effectiveness Team is to be the single point of contact for Multi Academy Trusts across Leicestershire to signpost and support and to work with Regional Director and Ofsted where there are concerns based on statutory legislation.
29. As referenced to in Appendix B, the Education Effectiveness Team includes Governor Development Services, Anti Bullying, Education Effectiveness Partners, and Safeguarding in Education. All teams have a responsibility for delivering the statutory requirements as identified in this paper. The involves regular visits on site and remote to quality assure provision across Leicestershire and signpost where further support or services may be required. The Education Effectiveness Team works across a range of departments within the Local Authority to ensure service users are provided with an efficient service.
30. There are currently 286 schools in Leicestershire. 123 of these schools are part of one of the 16 Multi Academy Trusts operating across Leicestershire. Appendix C provides an overview of schools and the organisational status of schools.

## **Conclusions**

31. The Local Authority has statutory functions with Multi Academy Trusts as outlined in this report that support the safeguarding and improving outcomes for children and young people across Leicestershire. The role of the Education Effectiveness Team supports this statutory requirement for all schools including Multi Academy Trusts and is the single point of contact for education settings across Leicestershire.
32. Without the function of the Education Effectiveness Team this would increase demand across other service areas within the Children and Families Service.

## **Background papers**

Education Act 1996

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1996/56/section/13A>

School Standard and Framework Act 1998

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1998/31/contents>

The Education and Inspections Act 2006

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2006/40/contents>

The Education and Adoption Act 2016

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2016/6/contents>

Schools Causing Concern Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities July 2023

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/1168367/Schools\\_causing\\_concern\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1168367/Schools_causing_concern_guidance.pdf)

The Coasting School (England) Regulations 2022

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2022/720/contents/made?view=plain>

Education Act 2005

<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2005/18/section/13>

Ofsted: When will my school be inspected?

<https://educationinspection.blog.gov.uk/2023/06/12/when-will-my-school-be-inspected/>

## **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

33. None

## **Equality Implications**

34. There are no equality implications arising from this report

## **Human Rights Implications**

35. There are no human rights implications arising from this report

## **Other Relevant Impact Assessments**

36. There are no health implications, crime and disorder implications, environmental implications, partnership working, and associated issues and risk assessment identified in this report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Oversight and accountability for the state funded school, SEND and Children's Social Care System in England

Appendix B - Education Effectiveness Team Overview and Role

Appendix C - Number of Schools in Leicestershire including Multi Academy Trusts

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

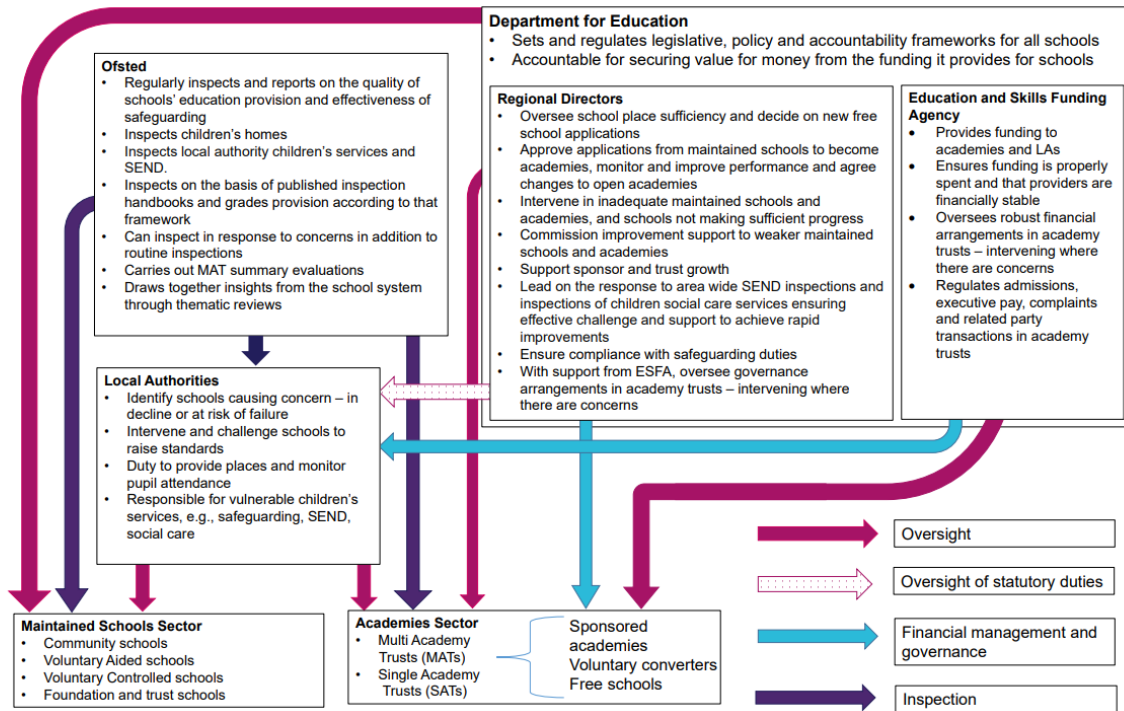
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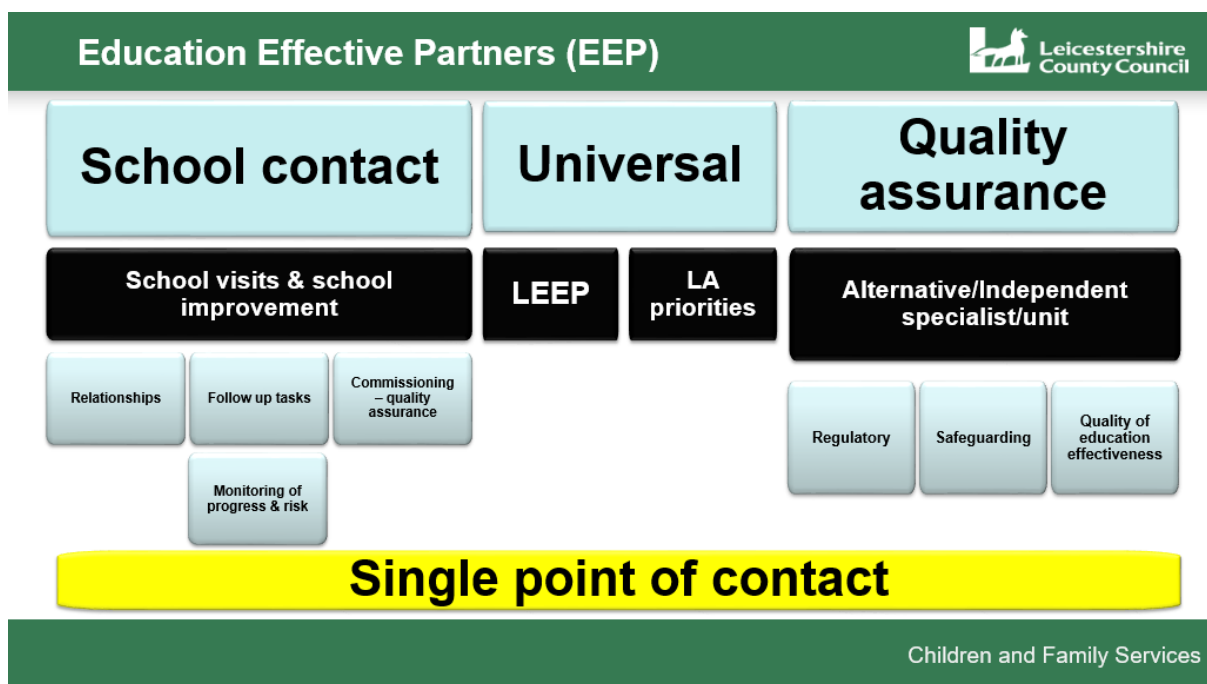
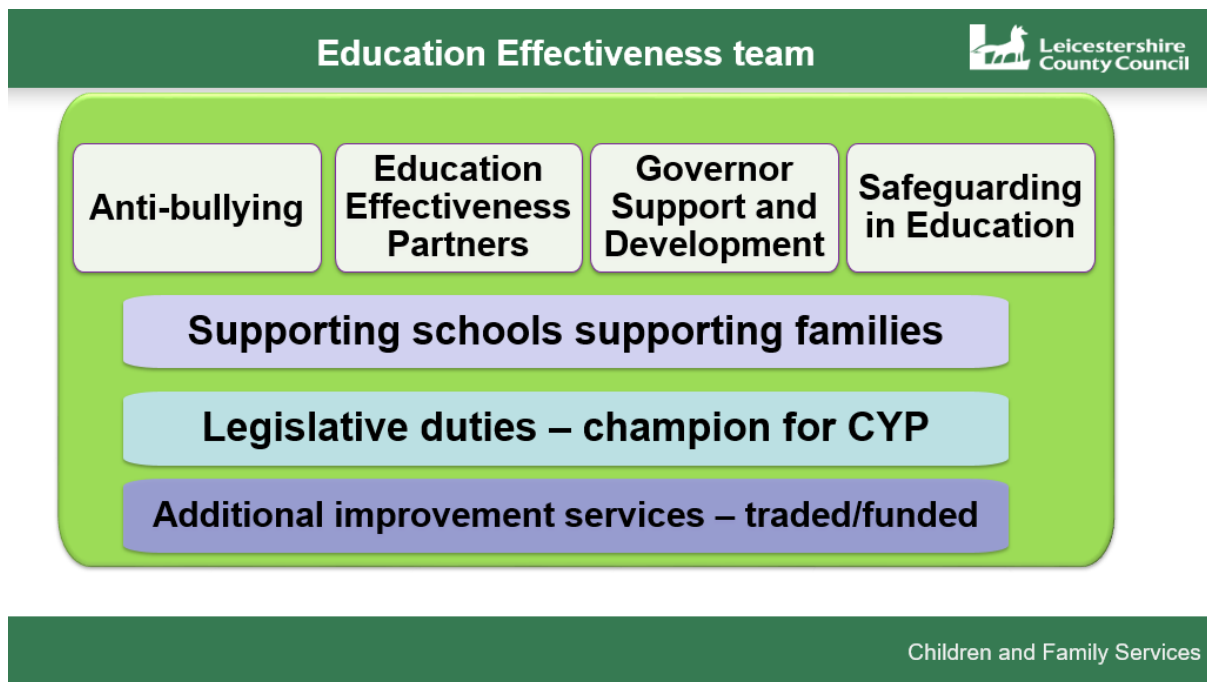
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## Oversight and accountability for the state funded school, SEND and Children's Social Care system in England



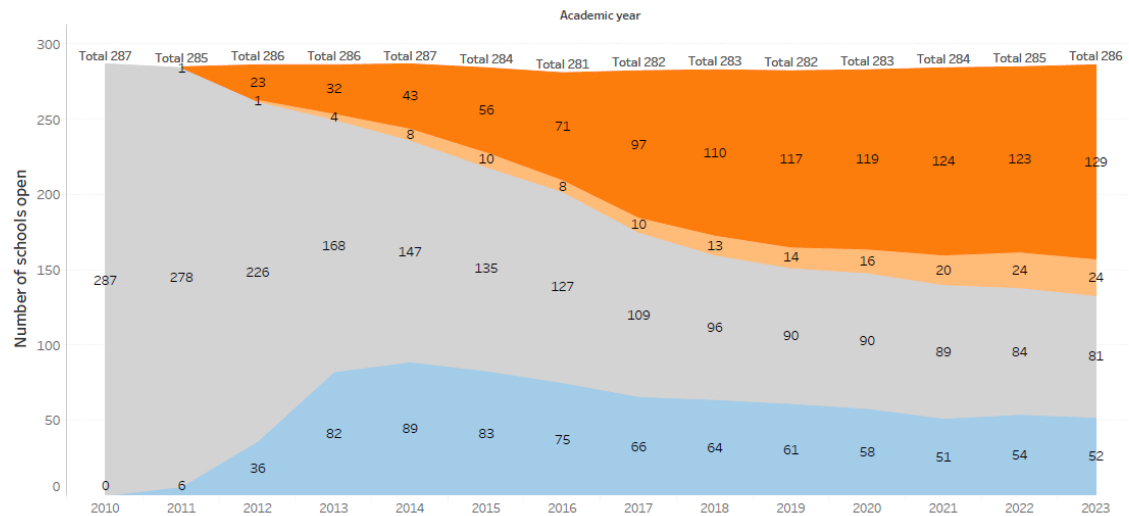
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### Number of Leicestershire schools, at the beginning of an academic year, by school organisational status



#### School organisational arrangement

- Academies and Free Schools members of Leicestershire registered MATs
- Academies and Free Schools members of non-Leicestershire registered MATs
- Maintained schools
- Academies and Free Schools standalone

## Leicestershire context - maintained

Type of establishment	Number of schools
Church of England	34
Maintained primary	41
Special schools	3
PRU	1
Maintained special nursery	2
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>81</b>

Type of Establishment	Sum of Number of Pupils	Sum of School Capacity
Church of England	5765	6527
Maintained Primary	10064	10988
PRU	3	30
Special nursery	95	0
Special school	683	380
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>16610</b>	<b>17925</b>

Name	Count
RISE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST	20
BRADGATE EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP	14
LEARN ACADEMIES TRUST	14
ST THOMAS AQUINAS CATHOLIC MULTI ACADEMY TRUST	12
SYMPHONY LEARNING TRUST	10
DISCOVERY SCHOOLS ACADEMIES TRUST LTD	9
INSPIRING PRIMARIES ACADEMY TRUST	9
EMBRACE MULTI ACADEMY TRUST	7
OADB, WIGSTON AND LEICESTERSHIRE SCHOOLS ACADEMY TRUST	6
MOWBRAY EDUCATION TRUST LIMITED	5
LIONHEART EDUCATIONAL TRUST	4
LIFE MULTI-ACADEMY TRUST	3
SUCCESS ACADEMY TRUST	3
THE VINES ACADEMY TRUST	3
OAK MULTI ACADEMY TRUST	2
SCHOLARS ACADEMY TRUST	2
Standalone or only MAT in county	26
<b>Total number of academies (excludes 5 free schools)</b>	<b>149</b>

4 maintained schools actively on academisation pathway

1 x cat 4; 1 x double RI; 2 x CoE

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -**

**7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT 2022-23**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an overview of the activity of the Fostering Service for the period 2022 -2023.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

1. Under the Fostering Regulations 2015 Fostering Agencies are required to provide an annual report to the Executive to note the activity and work of the Fostering Agency (Leicestershire County Council Fostering Service). To meet this standard, the Fostering Service submits a monthly report to the Lead Member and Director and an annual report to the Children's Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
2. The full report can be found in the Appendix.

**Background**

3. Leicestershire County Council is responsible for a Local Authority Fostering Service, involving undertaking all statutory duties for the recruitment and retention of foster carers.
4. The Fostering Service is led by the Head of Service for Fostering, Adoption, Children in Care, and the Virtual School, and is managed by a Service Manager.
5. Within the service six key areas are supported:
  - The recruitment of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts and Independent Visitors
  - The assessment of Foster Carers, Private Fostering, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Independent Visitors and Non-Agency Adoptions
  - The post approval Support and training of Foster Carers, Supported Lodgings Hosts, Private Foster Carers, and Independent Visitors.
  - The Fostering and Special Guardian Assessments of Kinship Carer
  - The post approval support of kinship care
  - The additional support to families through a Dedicated Placement Support Team.

## **Summary of Report**

6. The report outlines the activity from each service area. The key achievements over the year have included:
  - Approved: 16 Mainstream Foster Carers
  - Approved four Supported Lodgings Providers
  - Approved 18 Independent Visitors
  - Implemented a dedicated duty system to support carers, place more children in house and maintain 75% utilisation
  - Increased the utilisation of in-house placements compared to use of independent fostering agencies
  - Increased the capacity to assess and support independent visitors by appointing an additional worker
  - Maintained placement stability via the Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) working with over 71 families
  - Supported three carers to achieve a Diploma in Therapeutic parenting
  - Continued to develop the Mentoring Scheme for new and inexperienced carers. The service offered mentors to 14 carers in assessment, of which 12 accepted and will support through the assessment process and their first year of approval.
  - Continued to offer carers the right support at the right time to support placement stability for children
  - Increased numbers of Independent Visitors to provide support to children and young people - approving 18 new Independent Visitors. The total number of Independent Visitors is 68, matched to 73 young people.
  - Developed the Fostering Newsletter for potential applicants who are considering fostering now or in the future
  - Maintained excellent staff retention
  - The development of the kinship assessment team and IVA work has seen the numbers of children achieving permanency through Special Guardianship Orders (SGO) increase (total SGO achieved: 50)
7. The Fostering Service is managed by a Service Manager and Assistant Service Manager. These roles ensure that both recruitment and retention receive the same high-quality management oversight and service development.
8. Efficient ways to communicate are established, ensuring carers are given the most up to date information from the service, one of these being via a private Facebook group, which is still used to disseminate information and to share good news stories, links to key research, good practice guidance and general wellbeing.
9. Where appropriate, outdoor events for carers were held. The service organised two picnics which had very good attendance from all carers and the staff team, the weather stayed warm and dry, and all enjoyed the opportunities from seeing each other in person again.
10. Placement stability remained high and where the service recognized there were stability issues. The Service was able to quickly build a team around the child to maintain the foster home using the Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST), Independent Visitors and working in partnership with other services such as Children in Care, Virtual School and the Assessment and Resource Team (ART) for example.

11. Older children and larger sibling groups continue to be the largest number of children requiring care.
12. Through the implementation of the Defining Children and Families for the Future (DCFSF) programme, the service has been able to look at this cohort of older young people to identify resources to maintain their living arrangements either at home or within a foster home to prevent unnecessary residential starts.
13. A number of carers skilled in caring for teenagers were taking a break from fostering due to ill health or other personal circumstances which presented additional challenges with matching.
14. Focus on achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity has seen a decrease in Court Ordered Placements (38.6) and an increase in the number of Viability Assessments for Kinship Care. With revised, clear processes in place, there has been a reduction in Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and subsequently approvals in Kinship Care.
15. There has been significant developmental work within Kinship Assessments including an increase in staffing to undertake more specific targeted work. This includes SGO only assessments and private SGO applications.
16. The Annual Report provides feedback from the whole service, highlighting how the service has progressed plans from last year and new targets for the forthcoming year.
17. Nationally, the recruitment of foster carers has declined with the number of potential carers progressing into assessment and approval. In addition to this, local authorities and agencies are struggling to meet the numbers coming through pre-Covid.
18. Within Leicestershire, there has also been a decline in potential applicants coming forward. Agreed approval targets had been felt to be realistic, but as the year progressed, it became apparent that numbers for approval would not meet the set targets. The target number of households was 25 but the number of households approved was 16.
19. The service has reviewed applications and can recognise challenges arising as a result of strain on the economy, Covid recovery period, investment needed in supporting Ukrainian refugees, and a national recruitment shortage. The service will continue to review all applications to identify where there have been any missed opportunities but feels confident that quality assurance processes have bought the right applications through to assessment.
20. It is anticipated that some of these challenges will continue but the fostering service is focussed on building carers to focus on the support, training available. The service will continue to set itself ambitious targets.
21. The beginning of the year commenced with a delayed foster carers recognition event, held at the King Power Stadium in May. This was an opportunity for the service to thank all mainstream foster carers, kinship foster carers and Independent Visitors. Over 150 people attended and enjoyed the evening, speeches and being treated.

22. Activities to engage are important to be visible and available for carers. Throughout the summer picnics were held for carers and staff to meet. Retention is as important as recruitment in ensuring that are carers remain within the service and feel supported after approval.
23. The service held consultation events so that carers could meet with managers to learn of service updates and for voice to be heard.
24. An area of development for the service will be working with colleagues in the Adoption Service to produce Practise Standards for children moving onto adoption and understand the crucial role that foster carers have in preparing babies for their forever homes.
25. With increased support from colleagues within the media and communications team the service will continue to drive recruitment campaigns, with a focus on finding households for siblings, teenagers, and children with additional needs.
26. The stability of placements remains strong, and the support offered to households is embedded within the service. Feedback is regularly sought from foster carer reviews.
27. Achieving Permanency at the earliest opportunity for children placed in Kinship Care, coming through for connected assessments, at the point of viability the service can process whether this needs to be a full Kinship Assessment or can progress straight through as a Special Guardian Assessment.
28. The service is pleased with placement stability and there has been evidence of the effective use of stability meetings to prevent placement disruption involving a team approach. approach involving the carers and their support too. The Approach involves all key individuals discussing how stability can be promoted.
29. The management team continues to expand. A new part time Team Manager joining the service to manage the Supported Lodgings Scheme.

### **Overview of targets and priorities for 2023/24**

30. The service has key targets and priorities for 2023/24:
  - Continue to use all forms of media in intensive recruitment campaigns to achieve stretch targets: 25 Mainstream Carers (net 16).
  - Two Specialist Carers
  - Five Supported Lodgings
  - It has been recognised that these targets are lower than in previous years recognising the current downward trend nationally in recruitment. The service has targets for enquiries, Stage one starts and approvals which are monitored monthly within performance meetings.
  - Focussed audits on voice – monitoring the quality of feedback from children, social workers, and IRO`s for carers in reviews, and using this in service design and development
  - Continuing to develop the trauma informed practice to both workers and carers
  - Strengthening the reflective practice in supervision of workers and carers
  - Registering a Supported Lodgings scheme with Ofsted to enable its practice from October 28th, 2023.

- Implement automated performance reporting post approval using Tableau reporting and dashboards. The service has 50% currently in operation.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

31. None

### **Equality Implications**

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

### **Human Rights Implications**

34. There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Leicestershire Fostering Service Annual Report 2022/23

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

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# LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023





## OUR SERVICE

The Fostering Service is a regulated service and subject to inspection under the Care Standards Act, 2000. The Service's priority is providing children with confident and supportive carers.

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 2022/23 have included:**

Approved: 16 Mainstream Foster Carers, 4 Supported Lodgings Providers, 18 Independent Visitors

- Implemented a dedicated duty system to support our carers, place more children in house and maintain 75% utilisation
- Increased the utilisation of in-house placements compared to use of independent fostering agencies
- Increased our capacity to assess and support independent visitors by appointing an additional worker
- Maintained placement stability via the Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST) working with over 71 families
- Supported 3 carers to achieve a Diploma in Therapeutic parenting
- Continued to develop our Mentoring Scheme for new and inexperienced carers. We offered mentors to 14 carers in assessment, of which 12 accepted and will support through the assessment process and their first year of approval.
- Continued to offer our carers the right support at the right time to support stability.
- Increased numbers of Independent Visitors to provide support to our children and young people - approving 18 new IVs. Total number of IV is 68, matched to 73 young people.
- Developed our Fostering Newsletter for potential applicants who are considering fostering now or in the future
- Excellent staff retention
- The development of the kinship assessment team and IVA work has seen the numbers of children achieving permanency through SGO increase (total SGO achieved: 50)

The Fostering Service is managed by a Service Manager and Assistant Service Manager. These roles ensure that both recruitment and retention receive the same high-quality management oversight and service development.

Efficient ways to communicate are established, ensuring carers are given the most up to date information from the service, one of these being our private Facebook group, which is still used to disseminate information and to share good news stories, links to key research, good practice guidance and general wellbeing.

Where appropriate, outdoor events for our carers were held – we organized two picnics which had very good attendance from all our carers and our staff team, the weather stayed warm and dry, and all enjoyed the opportunities from seeing each other in person again.

Placement stability remained high and where we recognized there were stability issues, we were quickly able to build a team around the child to maintain the foster home using our Dedicated Placement Support Team (DPST), our Independent Visitors and working in partnership with other services – Children in Care, Virtual School and the Assessment and Resource Team (ART) for example.

Older children and larger sibling groups continue to be the largest number of children requiring care. Through the implementation of the Defining Children and Families for the Future (DCFSF) programme, we have been able to look at this cohort of older young people to identify resources to maintain their living arrangements either at home or within a foster home to prevent unnecessary residential starts. A number of our carers skilled in caring for teenagers were taking a break from fostering due to ill health or other personal circumstances which presented additional challenges with matching.

Focus on achieving permanency at the earliest opportunity has seen a decrease in Court Ordered Placements (38.6) and an increase in the number of Viability Assessments for Kinship Care. With revised, clear processes in place, we have seen a reduction in Regulation 24 Fostering Arrangements and subsequently approvals in Kinship Care. There has been significant developmental work within Kinship Assessments including an increase in staffing to undertake more specific targeted work – SGO only assessments and private SGO applications.

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 chances 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 2020-2023
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to Excellence 2021-2023
- Workforce Development Plan 2020-2023
- LCF Partnership Plan 2021-2023
- Voice Strategy 2020-2023
- CFS Equality and Diversity Guidance
- Ofsted Report 2019 (Inspection of children's social care services) and Focused Visit 11 May 2023

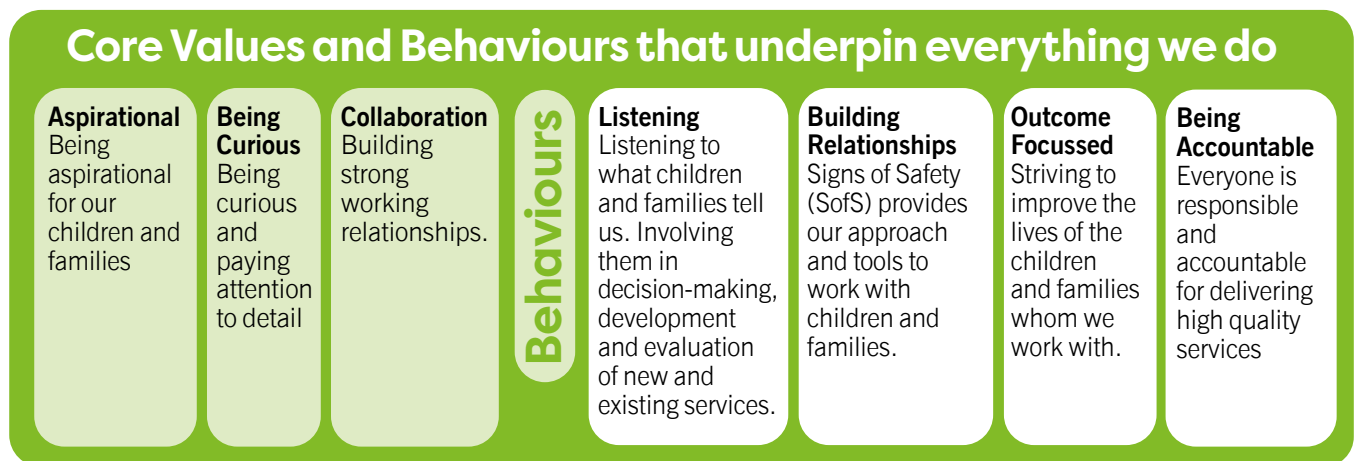
## Ambitions

**As a department we are passionate about improving the lives of our children and young people. The CFS Departmental Plan sets out four clear ambitions:**

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

## Core Values

We believe that our core values and behaviours will ensure we take the right action at the right time so that Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people, and families:



## 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.
- 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 implementation, we had just secured funding to provide training and support from the National Association of Therapeutic Parenting.
- Develop hybrid model of foster panels incorporating both virtual and in person panels.
- Introduce face to face foster carers forums and meetings following local and government guidance.
- Review our Practice Standards across the service ensuring we recognize diversity, equality, and inclusivity.
- Evaluate “A Place to Call Home”, the regional USAC recruitment for foster carers and Supported Lodgings Providers.
- Increase Reviewing Officer capacity as a net growth of foster carers continue.
- Continue to develop a Signs of Safety Approach to all areas of our service, including reflective supervision and embedded into practice.

**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.

## **What we did to achieve this**

- We welcomed the end of any restrictions due to Covid and, where possible, held meetings in person, including summer activities and our annual celebration event for carers. It was a fantastic event with all enjoying the opportunity to put on their glad rags and join us for an evening of entertainment, it was fantastic seeing everyone and we received very positive feedback.
- Some carers identified they don't want an adult only event, so next year we are looking to hold a family event.
- We approved 16 foster carers (including 3 IFA carer transfers who had made an active choice to be part of our fostering family, recognising the level of support our carers receive).
- In terms of foster carers leaving the service we lost (25) Mainstream Foster Families. They resigned due to having the time to reflect on their personal circumstance. None expressed dissatisfaction with the service and support they had received.
- For Supported Lodgings we saw a significant reduction of approvals. 4 households were approved, compared to 12 the previous year.
- Hybrid of recruitment activity was developed, using Facebook and the dedicated Fostering Leicestershire County Council website, Instagram, adverts played on Spotify.
- A WhatsApp account was set up so that carers could text us when making requests for information.
- Virtual and in person Information evenings were held.
- Fasttrack system for applicants who were already carers within an agency (IFA Transfers) or fostering with another local authority (OLA) was used.
- Skills to foster, mentoring meetings and assessments returned to face.
- The DPST, the Fostering Service's unique selling point, has continued to develop and has continued to support placement. The team supported 71 placements during the year, helping families to stay together, supporting 5 young people into family-based care or into independence from residential placements, and supporting 2 young people to return to their birth families.
- A full time Assistant Service Manager was appointed to support the development and utilisation of our Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP) with Barnardo's to run children's homes on behalf of Leicestershire. The role will also provide strategic oversight to the management of the homes.



## Identified Targets from 2021/22 Annual Report

The Fostering Service works to an intensive recruitment strategy with the aim of achieving the following targets:

### Recruitment Targets:

<b>25</b> <b>Mainstream</b> <b>Foster Carers</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Specialist Carer</b>	<b>7</b> <b>Supported Lodgings</b> <b>Providers</b>	<b>(Total 34)</b>
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### Approvals:

<b>16</b> <b>Mainstream</b> <b>Foster Carers</b>	<b>0</b> <b>Specialist Carer</b>	<b>4</b> <b>Supported Lodgings</b> <b>Providers</b>	<b>(Total 20)</b>
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## Summary of Recruitment:

Nationally the recruitment of foster carers has been a decline with the number of potential carers progressing into assessment and approval, local authorities and agencies struggling to meet the numbers coming through pre-Covid. Within Leicestershire we also experienced a decline in potential applicants coming forward. Our approval targets we felt were realistic, but as the year progressed, we could predict our numbers for approval would not meet the set targets. We have reviewed applications and can recognise the themes of the strain on the economy, Covid recovery period, investment needed in supporting Ukrainian refugees and a national recruitment shortage.

We will review all applications to identify if there have been any missed opportunities but feel confident our quality assurance processes have brought the right applications through to assessment

We anticipate some of these themes will continue but as a fostering service we want to build our carers will focus on the support, training, and team around the child we have within Leicestershire. We will continue to set ourselves ambitious targets.



## FUNCTIONS OF THE FOSTERING SERVICE

### Our Fostering Service consists of five 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

# THE RECRUITMENT TEAM

**Welcoming – Informative – Efficient – Innovative – Flexible**

**Meet the Fostering Recruitment Team:**

**Denise**  
Recruitment Manager



**Janyce**  
Enquiry Co-Ordinator



**Emma**  
Initial Visit Assessment Worker



**Katie**  
Recruitment Support Coordinator



**Marie**  
Initial Visit Assessment Worker



**Alice**  
Initial Visit Assessment Worker







**Allison**  
Foster Carer





**Fostering**  
Leicestershire.com

## The Recruitment Team consists of:

1 Team Manager
1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator ( <a href="#">Fostering</a> )
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator ( <a href="#">Fostering</a> )
2 Initial Assessment Workers ( <a href="#">Fostering</a> ) plus 1 casual part-time
1 Recruitment Enquiry Co-Ordinator ( <a href="#">Adoption</a> )
1 Recruitment Support Co-Ordinator ( <a href="#">Adoption</a> )

Our Fostering & Adoption Recruitment Team are the forefront of our service. This team's objective is to engage with members of the public who are interested in becoming foster carers or 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 and 'pop-up' events around the county are held to welcome members of the public to find out more about fostering and adoption which are also the responsibility of this team.

<b>Virtual &amp; physical</b> <b>'Find out about fostering' events</b> <b>held during 2022/23:</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>Total</b> <b>households</b> <b>attended:</b>	<b>64</b>
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The team provide a comprehensive 'filtering' process at the 'front door' of the service, ensuring that we are transparent, open, and honest with enquirers as well as maintaining the highest level of quality, to be progressed to the Assessment Team.

The team manager works closely with colleagues in the Communications Team to create appropriate and cost-effective recruitment campaigns, based on projected demand and need, using various social media platforms including Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, and LinkedIn. More traditional methods are also used, such as posters, postcards, and banners, radio campaigns, adverts in local publications and local business and staff intranets.

This team strives to provide a welcoming, friendly, swift, efficient, informative, and honest service. Every enquiry is dealt with in a fair and non-discriminatory manner, representative of the key values and behaviours of Leicestershire County Council.

### During 2022 – 2023 we:

<p>Received</p> <p><b>259</b></p> <p>Requests for Information</p>	<p>Completed</p> <p><b>61</b></p> <p>Initial Visits in applicants' homes</p>	<p>Progressed</p> <p><b>39</b></p> <p>applications to Stage 1 assessment</p>
<p>Approved</p> <p><b>16</b></p> <p>mainstream carers</p>	<p>Approved</p> <p><b>4</b></p> <p>supported lodgings carers</p>	<p>Approved</p> <p><b>18</b></p> <p>independent visitors</p>



This year has been one of adaptation, flexibility, and determination for the Recruitment Team. The country's recovery from Covid-19, the subsequent impact on the 'cost of living' and a general sense of financial instability, has meant that we have had to adapt, reflect, and consider different approaches to recruitment to engage with potential applicants.

An evaluation of what is working was completed, including identifying the potential 'barriers to fostering', points of delay and frustration for potential applicants, for example, between recruitment and the beginning of assessment, and identified ways to reduce this and improve the user experience.

Working with our colleagues in the Communications Team, the website was reviewed. Our webpages were updated, refreshed and our new images added, particularly focusing on the page's most frequently visited and points of disengagement.

We even appeared on the back of a bus.

Leicestershire County Council hosts the Fostering Network's East Midlands Fostering Recruiter's Forum, which see representatives from neighbouring local authorities coming together on a quarterly basis. This forum has reflected on recruitment methods, results, and techniques with a shared purpose of supporting regional local authority fostering recruitment. During a time of great uncertainty for fostering recruitment, the forum has provided insight into the East Midlands and UK wide activity, allowing each member agency to compare their performance at a more local level.





'Find out about Fostering' slides were refreshed to provide a fresh and bright image:



Pop-up events across the County:



Pop-up events are promoted on social media in advance and are an opportunity for people to say hello and have a chat about fostering. 13 Pop-up events at locations across Leicestershire have taken place through the year, including Fosse Park shopping centre, LCC Jobs fair, Bradgate Park, Leicester PRIDE, Leicester Racecourse Family Fun Day & Beacon Hill country park.

## We launched our 'Thinking of fostering' newsletter: now at 120 subscribers!

An innovative way to engage with people who are thinking about fostering but are not ready to take their enquiry any further at this time. Our 'Thinking about fostering' newsletter features detail about the application process, case studies from foster carers and focuses on the benefits of fostering with LCC. This is emailed directly to subscribers' inbox each month. This keeps applicants engaged and when they are ready to progress further, they come to us.



The Communications and Media Team regularly release stories to the media and features regularly in Leicestershire matters (delivered to every home in Leicestershire).

### Over 2022/23 some of these have been:

- Ami's story (Ami was previously a child in care with us) focusing on the benefits of Specialist One2One carers. This was also created into a social media campaign:
- Carer case studies, caring for children and young people with varying needs
- Articles about 'Find out about fostering' and 'pop-up' events



- Radio campaigns
- Geographically targeted campaigns. Using the words from Ami, one of our previous children in care who is now an adult, we created a campaign to be shared with people living in Leicestershire when they were listening to music.
- Leicestershire Matters



## Sponsorships: A new way to engage with the public – and support healthy choices for children in Leicestershire



During this 'reflective' year, it has been necessary to consider new methods to engage with members of the public. This year, we introduced 'sponsorship' of children's football & rugby clubs across the county.

This has enabled us to support and empower local children to take part in healthy activities. In return for our investment, the clubs wear their new kits with 'fosteringleicestershire.com' displayed on their journeys around the county to different clubs for their games. Part of our target audience is families, and we know this is an excellent place to find them! Advertising boards are set up around pitches and the services attends their open days and events.

An example of pitch advertising boards:



Each club shares the service's posts on social media too, particularly details of our 'Find out about fostering' event. The engagement has been positive and provides a new way to reach people, whilst supporting children too. Following an evaluation of this, we hope to extend this scheme to other activities across Leicestershire.

We were proud to sponsor Leicestershire first girls football team:



## Myth busting social media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter) campaigns:

### Foster care Fridays – social media campaigns:

Our myth busting Monday's and Fostering Friday have proven a valuable way to engage on social media, on a regular basis. We focus on myth busting and 'did you know?' points.



### To be more flexible to people's lives we started 'Late night Tuesday evening' and 'Fostering Saturday' mornings:

In our busy world, we are working towards providing more flexibility and always making it 'easier' for people who may be interested, to get in touch in a way, or at a time, which fits with their lifestyle. This year, our 'Tuesday evenings' and 'Saturday mornings', have proven valuable. Even if people are not getting in touch with us on these days, it is useful to offer people an alternative for us to call them back then.





## We held a photo shoot:

To ensure our photographs used in campaigns are current and relevant, photoshoots are held. Volunteers who work for LCC joined us with their families and friends – creating some fantastic new images for our campaigns. Here are some of the images used in new campaigns and material:



## Creating 'Tik-Tok' videos:

Venturing into Tik-Tok – this year saw the creation of a video about attending our 'find out about fostering' events to ensure people feel welcome and know where to go. We have seen a steady increase in people attending our events.

## Creating information to share (based on what we know can be barriers or worries about fostering):

During our conversations with people thinking about fostering, we have noted some of the common aspects that we are asked about and created some simple PDF's that can be shared by email with our applicants. These have also been added to our website as downloads for people to access.

**Renting and Fostering**

Information for Applicants

Information for Landlords

WE ARE family

**Your Fostering Journey**

Step 1 Initial Enquiry

Step 2 Home Visit

Step 3 Application

Step 4 Approval and matching

WE ARE family

**Different ways to foster**

1 Short-term fostering

2 Respite carers

3 Short break foster carers

4 Long-term and permanent fostering

5 Supported Lodgings Provider

6 Supported Lodgings Plus

7 Specialist carers

WE ARE family

**fostering Allowances**

How much is the fostering allowance?

Do you pay tax on fostering pay?

What other benefits are there?

Are there additional payments available?

WE ARE family

## Looking back – looking forward:

2022/23 was very much a year of recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. We reflected on what had worked in terms of gaining enquiries from members of the public, what was working currently and what could work in the current climate and created fresh, innovative campaigns.

Working alongside other teams within the Service closely has been invaluable and provides us with clarity in what we were striving for, in terms of recruitment of foster carers to meet the needs of Leicestershire's looked after children and young people.

We have continued to provide honest and clear information to members of the public who are thinking about fostering in a fair, inclusive, and positive manner. Our team keep morale high, to ensure we remain happy and positive in our work and share this with all enquirers.



## We are ready to go again!

“ FC Gemma: ‘Communication from both social workers has been fabulous. Our social worker, Jade, is very dedicated’ ”

“ FC Sarah: ‘Beth has been superb in supporting us throughout the year, in suggesting different ways to overcome challenges that we have faced’ ”

### Kids on foster carers:

“ Bella (12): ‘They are kind, caring and funny’. I love my bed ... it is so comfortable! ”

“ Maia (5) ‘I like my foster mummy making good pancakes ... going swimming with her ... having my friends over. I want to stay with her forever and ever!’ ”

“ Baily (6) likes it when ‘Sheila takes me out to the woods ... how she loves me and my sister and when she gives me hugs’ ”

“ Kimmy (15) says that she loves the placement, says that she feels safe. She said that she feels like part of the family. ”

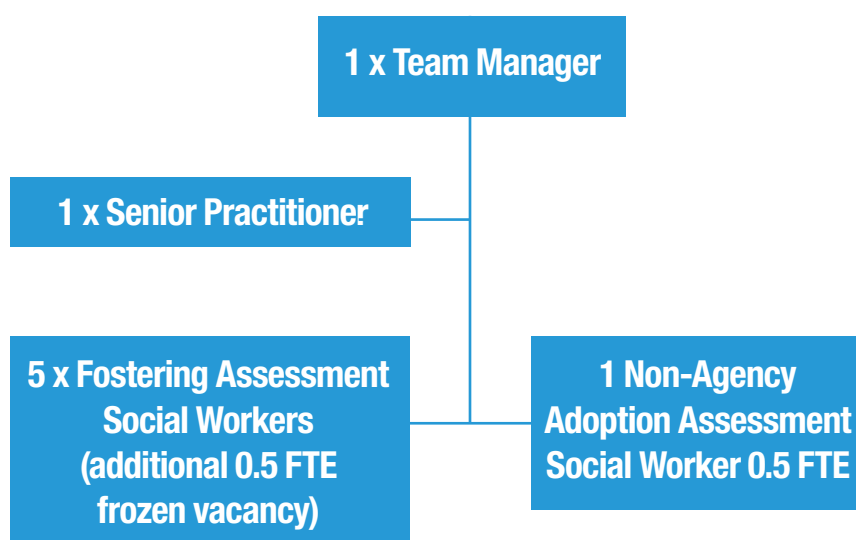
“ Poppy (12) Poppy looks forward to day trips with Jackie and Mick in the school holidays. Poppy has talked to me about Jackie and Mick’s grandchildren and how she loves spending time with them, she is always bursting with pride when talking about Jackie and Mick’s grandchildren. Poppy has told me that she is looking forward to her holiday in the summer and visiting Pompeii. ”

# THE FOSTERING AND ADOPTION ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Fostering and Adoption Assessment Team are responsible for:

- Mainstream Fostering Assessments.
- Leading on the delivery of Skills to Foster Training, which is jointly delivered with colleagues from the Team around the Child (TAC) team, and from the Dedicated Placement Support Team.
- Jointly overseeing the Mentoring Scheme (for new Foster Carers) with the TAC Team.
- Private Fostering Assessments.
- Leading on the requirement for the local authority to raise public awareness of private fostering, which has included offering training to all CFS staff, ASYEs and Social Work students.
- Non-Agency Adoption Assessments and submitting these to court.

## Assessment Team Staff Structure:



## Staff Satisfaction and Stability of the team:

The Assessment Team are a stable and experienced staff group; no staff have left the service area in the last year. The Assessment Team have welcomed a student into their service in the last year and with several members of staff keen to support the development of students, we expect that this will be an experience which is repeated in coming months. A fixed term, part time officer will join the team to support the non-agency adoption assessing social worker. This social worker will continue to work with families on the waiting list for this service; this worker is likely to join us in the first quarter of the 2023-24 financial year. We maintain high level of communication with families on the waiting list. In terms of support to staff, assessing social workers receive regular monthly supervision with these taking place 85% of the time. Monthly team meetings are held, and there is dedicated time for development e.g., monthly POD meetings and joint CPD Day. There is a strong thread which runs through all our work as a team, and this is the idea of development, for example, work with Coram BAAF regarding private fostering. Work with partners continues including within health, external agencies such as Fostering Network and Coram BAAF, and colleagues in neighbouring local authorities, in our endeavours to drive development and performance in this service area. Development is enhanced (both as a team and individually) by team members having 'Champion' roles for different areas of work such as Signs of Safety, Private Fostering, and Equality and Diversity.

Another thread which runs through all that we do is being available to support and share ideas and good practice. This is reflected in feedback from team members about their experience of working for the Fostering Service and the Assessment Team ~

### **What do you like about working for the fostering service and the Assessment Team more specifically?**

“ ‘I really like how supportive the service... I have never felt like I can't ask for advice or support from staff in the service.’ ”

“ ‘I like working for the fostering service as there is a sense of all teams working for the same aim – safe care and stability for vulnerable children, the whole service feels a cohesive and supportive service.’ ”

“ ‘This is a very supportive team who make time for each other, willing to give advice and assist where we can.’ ”

“ ‘I like we are a small team, but we all get on and are supportive of each other and I never feel out of place.’ ”

### **Is there anything else you would like to add about the stability of the team and your satisfaction in your role?**

“ ‘Between us, we have knowledge, skills and experience we are able to share, and we are available to support each other.’ ”

“ ‘I have felt listened to throughout and that's really made a difference to my role. Overall, I feel very satisfied in the team and my role and like that we have things to look forward to as a team such as team days, fuddles etc.’ ”

“ ‘The fostering assessment team has a great group of workers in it who are always there to help each other and are keen to continually learn and develop their skills, and a supportive and approachable manager.’ ”



## Overall Assessment Team Performance

### Targets and Performance

Data is included below for private fostering and non-agency adoption, as well as for mainstream fostering, to highlight the other work completed by the Assessment Team, however, this additional data will not be considered in depth within this report but serves to highlight the additional functions completed by the team.

#### MAINSTREAM FOSTERING ASSESSMENTS 2022-23

	Target / KPI	Actual
Approved Carers	25	16

The service had set targets for the recruitment of mainstream carers and even though numbers entering the assessment period were lower than expected conversion from assessment start to finish is above average - conversion rate is 64%. For those prospective carers who withdrew, reasons include significant life events that have impacted upon them like health and change of family circumstance. For some this has meant we have put their assessment on hold and then re-commenced, for others we have had to agree to ending the process.

In total, the Assessment Team have worked on 27 private fostering assessments over the course of the 2022-23 financial year. We have provided a breakdown of the extent to which we have worked with these private fostering households below:

- 8 assessments during this financial year have ended in a positive recommendation. Of these,
  - 4 carer households were transferred to TAC
  - With 2 carer households, the children left and returned home to close family members at the point where the assessment was concluding
  - With 2 carer households, the child turned 16 as the assessment was concluding
- 3 negative assessments
- 7 carer's cases were closed after an assessment started but before it finished (because the private fostering arrangement ceased)
- 6 private fostering households were being assessed on 31.03.23
- 3 carer assessments closed after the referral for assessment was received, but before the assessment had commenced.

#### NON-AGENCY ADOPTION ASSESSMENTS 2022-23

Adoption Orders Granted	10
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## Our Aims for 2022-2023:

1. Although nationally there are more approved places than children in foster care, 'this does not mean that there are sufficient appropriate placements for children' Ofsted (2021). In 2022-23 – as well as achieving our target - we want a greater focus on identifying strategies for the recruitment and assessment of the right type of carers, to meet the demand for required placement type in Leicestershire.
2. We will continue to set ambitious recruitment targets with a continued drive to place more of our children with our in-house carers. We have set targets of:

<b>25</b> <b>Mainstream Carers</b> <b>(to achieve at least 16)</b>	<b>5</b> <b>Supported lodgings</b> <b>host families</b>	<b>2</b> <b>Specialist Carers</b>
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The DfE plan, within the next six months, to launch a national foster carer recruitment campaign to recruit 9,000 additional foster carers over the next 3 years (McAlister, 2022) and part of our recruitment and assessment work over coming months and years, will be to respond to these proposals. Leicestershire will benefit from the national research and its findings.

4. We need to start recording the recent difficulties which we are experiencing with GP surgeries and delays with their progression of adult health assessments (4 x assessments delayed so far since January 2022 because of delayed health assessments), so that we can report these concerns to our colleagues at the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust.

The Assessment team has a positive working relationship with the office who process adult health assessments, and this issue resolved.

5. Work with our MOSAIC Team to ensure the new dashboards report accurately.
6. Mentoring – We operate a mentoring scheme for our prospective carers, our aim is that 100% of our carers be take up the opportunity to have a mentor during assessment and the first 12 mths of approval.



# TEAM AROUND THE CHILD (FOSTER CARE & KINSHIP CARERS)

In Leicestershire, statutory support is delivered to carers through the Team Around the Child (TAC). We have one team who focus on supporting mainstream fostering households and another focusing on supporting kinship fostering households. Both team managers work closely together to ensure that all foster carers offer the same standard of care. However, we recognize the unique challenges faced by different carers and therefore by having the two teams we can offer that specialism. We are very proud of the work carried out post approval ensuring we work with foster carers to achieve the very best for the children we care for.

The Team Around the Child consists of:
Team Manager
1 x FTE Senior Practitioner (covering duty) 1 x PT Senior Practitioner (3 days per week)
8 x Supervising Social Workers
Duty team: 1x FTE Senior Practitioner (as cited above) 2 x Support Workers

Retention is the responsibility of the TAC team, and we continue to work hard to ensure that all carers feel supported, valued, and respected by the service. Currently we have 124 approved fostering households, which includes the approval of 16 new households, the resignation of 25 households (which is a reduction of 11 fostering households reported in the 21/22 annual report).

One of the main focuses of TAC is to ensure optimum utilisation of fostering households, and that Leicestershire's children are placed with Leicestershire foster carers, provide the right care at the right time. Our utilisation target for the year is 75% and this has been achieved and exceeded on a regular basis with 80% of our placements in use. Our team will continue to support the duty team to achieve this target and offer the required levels of support to our carers.

Whilst 22/23 has been another positive year for the Fostering Service, there continues to be a shortage of foster carers especially those who are able to offer care to siblings, teenagers and out of hours provision. The shortage faced by Leicestershire is in line with the national statistics and fostering network have cited:

“With record numbers of children in care and around 12 per cent of the foster carer workforce retiring or leaving every year, The Fostering Network estimates that fostering services across the UK need to recruit at least a further 7,200 foster families in the next 12 months alone. There is a particular need for foster carers to look after teenagers and sibling groups”.

This year has seen an increase in the number of resignations received by the service, there have been 25 resignations compared to previous years of approximately 10-13. A number of these resignations were expected and the vast majority due to a change in the personal circumstances of our carers. It has been noted that the aftermath of Covid 19 Pandemic had an impact upon several people in many ways. This as well as the financial crisis we believe (evidenced in exit interviews) has led to an increase in resignations. Exit interviews are offered to all carers and are an essential part of our learning and understanding of how carers experience the service, and we encourage people to engage in this process. Any comments are considered by management and help to shape the future service.

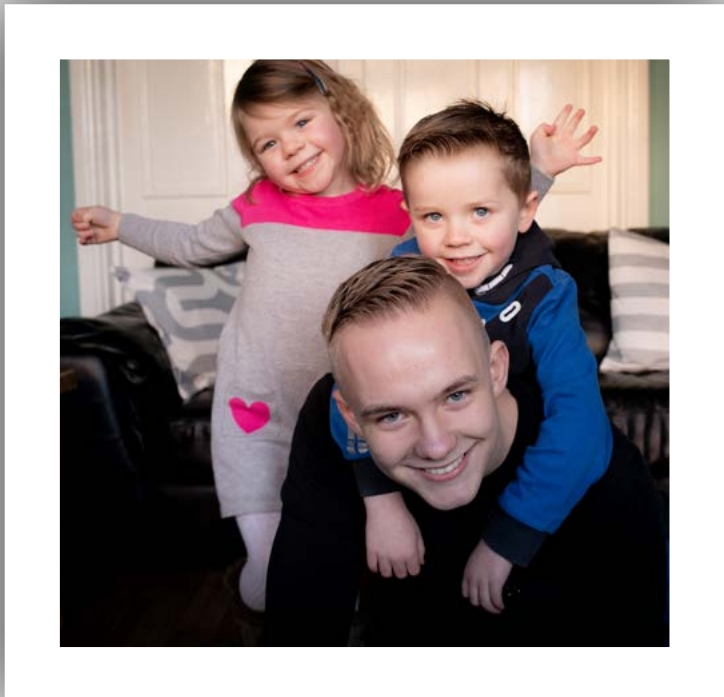
## What we did well in 2022/2023

- We continued to care about our carers and their families and offered them a good level of support and supervision through a minimum of 6 weekly supervisions and regular contact. This helped us to identify where there were additional areas of need for any member of the fostering household.
- We have a good understanding of our carers; their families and we remain committed to supporting them to achieve our children's full potential.
- We continued to offer consistent SSW allocations and for many carers and children this has been the most stable working relationship within the team surrounding them.
- We continued to work well with the assessment team and ensured that there was a good handover at the point of approval, SSWs were allocated prior to panel in order to support this process and we have good working relationship with the assessment team.
- Most of our carer's report that they feel well supported and have a positive relationship with their SSW.
- We have started to work towards implementing well-being plans so we can better understand our carers support needs and how as a service we can support the fostering family more effectively. In doing this we are able to pre-empt instability and prevent compassion fatigue.
- We recognize the important role that our birth children play and the importance of providing them with support and showing that we value their involvement and care. Birthday cards are being sent out to all children and a 'children who foster council' is being established. We have offered children who foster events with one of the sessions targeting the older children.
- Training and support plans are being implemented for all carers following annual reviews and ratification from ADM. These plans identify the areas of support, work and training for the forthcoming year and the plan that will be reviewed at each formal supervision.
- The duty team continue to work hard to ensure that matches are well made, carers are being kept informed about potential children matched to them and there is more consistency in the matching process and feedback from carers is positive.
- We continue to meet our utilisation target of 75% and we work hard to ensure that carers are matched with children within their terms of approval.
- We respond swiftly to crisis 'and offer support where it is needed, stability meetings are arranged as soon as possible, and support plans reviewed in a timely manner.
- We continue to work well with other professionals and relationships with CIC and locality are overall positive.
- We recognize the importance of supporting out male carers and hearing their voices, we have established a 'Men who foster' group which is running monthly.
- We have supported 3 carers to complete the diploma in therapeutic parenting and remain committed to supporting other carers to become therapeutic caregivers, improve their learning and develop their skills.
- Leicestershire Fostering have contributed to a piece of large- scale research developed by the Ann Freud Centre and Hereford University. Several carers completed a 10-week reflective programme. This was well received, and carers reported that it was informative and helped them consider implementing new caring strategies. Carers reported it facilitated strategies to help them pause and reflect to consider situations from a different perspective.
- We continued to offer annual events to celebrate our carers and acknowledge the important role they play in caring for our children. The celebration evening was well attended and enjoyed by all.
- Regular events are offered throughout the year by DPST, and these are attended by some of the SSW.
- Senior managers have attended the locality groups and meet regularly with locality leaders to share service information and hear what our carers are telling us.
- We have secured a 12.5% payment increase for all of our carers.

## What we Plan to do in 2023/2024

- Performance meetings will be data driven and effectively led ensuring learning is taken back into practice. Systems continuing to be refined from this learning.
- Senior Practitioners will be developed to both contribute, present in the absence of the manager and share learning with the team.
- We will hold Quarterly Consultation Evenings to share information about the service and listen to responses to any proposed changes to service delivery. This will also present an opportunity to gain carers input in any policy changes.
- We wish to reduce the number of carers that are currently on hold to utilize all the placements available to the service.
- Payments - carers are often paid incorrectly, and this causes a lot of additional work and upset for the carers and staff. We will continue to work with finance to address any issues and liaise with senior management regarding the importance of prioritizing amendments to Mosaic to change to the system ensuring correct payments are made and on time.
- All carers will have a meaningful well-being plan which clearly outlines what support we need to provide to ensure that all carers feel supported to meet their own needs and those of the children in their care.
- All SSW and carers will be trained in Compassion Fatigue, what are the signs and how to avoid the impact.
- We will develop and launch a Well Being Strategy or our fostering And Supported Lodgings hosts.
- Carers will be offered a Well Being Day focusing on self-care strategies
- All carers will have a training and support plan which will be reviewed every 4 months to enable a review of the support being provided by the service.
- We will establish the children who foster council and ensure that the voices of our birth children are heard, respected, and valued. We will run regular events to thank them for all that they contribute to fostering.
- We will continue to show that we value our carers through all the work that we do but in particular the provision of thank you events such as the annual celebration evenings.
- Continued work with our carers to ensure that they feel supported and are proud to work for LCC





### The Kinship TAC consists of:

0.8 Team Manager
2 x 0.5 Senior Practitioners
4.2 x Supervising Social Workers
3 x FTE
2 x 0.6

Kinship TAC and Mainstream TAC work closely together offering the same level of support and intervention. Supervising Social Workers (SSW) working with kinship carers, often face the difficult task in helping a carer adjust to the role of being carers, in addition to being grandparents, sisters, aunts, uncles, and support carers in managing the often-complex dynamics within their birth families, whilst ensuring the needs of the children are met. Our kinship carers are based primarily in Leicestershire, but some are much further afield. When and where necessary our SSW's work alongside children's social workers to ensure children receive the care, they need to keep them safe and achieve the best possible outcomes. A key support to the stability and effectiveness of kinship care is the Dedicated Placement Support Team, who work with carers in developing their understanding and responses but also providing one to one support to children and young people. A challenge for the team has been staff sickness which has meant we haven't always been able to provide the consistency of support that we strive to do.

We have seen a continued downward trajectory of kinship carers being approved and this is primarily due to the focus on securing permanency at the earliest opportunity via SGO's and to a lesser extent Care Arrangement Orders (CAO), as part of care proceedings. In March 23 we had 68 Kinship fostering households, compared to 83 in March 22, with 8 Kinship Carers progressing to a Special Guardianship Order (SGO), supporting the long-term permanency for those children with family members. During the year, 4 kinship caring households have been de-registered following concerns, 2 of whom appealed to the Independent Reviewing Mechanism (IRM). In both cases the IRM upheld the Agency Decision Maker's (ADM) decision. 3 kinship fostering households progressed to Staying Put.



# THE KINSHIP ASSESSMENT TEAM

The Kinship Assessment Team consists of:	
1 Team Manager	
1 Senior Practitioner	
4 Full time assessing social workers (Currently 3 - 1 beginning with team July 23)	
1 Full time SGO specific assessing social worker	
1 part time social worker – private fostering focus	
1 Full Time assessing IVA social worker	
2 Part time assessing IVA social worker	
1 Full time stage one support worker	
1 part-time SGO support worker (Beginning Feb 24)	
x1 Vacancies (Full time assessing social worker)	

The Kinship Team has undergone significant change and growth as part of the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future program and over the course of the following 12 months.

The Kinship Team work jointly across locality service areas at the point of the initial viability assessment (IVA) being required – this provides a robust and balanced overview of the current circumstances for the children, and early assessment of the carers factoring the National Minimum Standards, alongside the exploration of all other options for Connected assessments, including Special Guardianship Orders and Child Arrangement Orders. We have developed this area of the service to incorporate a continued program of training for locality teams and includes a monthly “surgery” based within each locality office, to strengthen the partnership and cohesion across the service. We have a dedicated pod of social workers from within the team whose sole focus is on the completion of the IVA – with an aspiration to be completing 100%.

Alongside the enhanced support package for our SGO carers, we have continued to expand 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 focused learning and development training, this not only strengthens the assessment and confidence of our 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 who have experienced trauma and loss.

We have an appointed and SGO assessing social worker, solely to complete those assessments that have been identified for Special Guardianship Care, this provides consistency across the assessment area of all Connected assessments with comprehensive, thorough, and detailed assessments completed – individualized understand and support the specific needs of each family but standardized in quality and expectation. As per our aim from 2022/2023 we have now expanded this offer to include the completion of Private Law Special Guardianship assessments – these currently are completed as/when capacity allows.

The Kinship Team has seen the requests for full assessments double over the past 12 months with a clear drive from care planning and the court for children to find permanence and belonging within their birth families and connected networks where-ever possible. We currently average between 45-50 open and active assessments at any one time. Working collaboratively with our partners across the local authority to effectively support carers within the process and ensure the right outcomes for our children. We have been working alongside both the fostering panel and ADM to strengthen the assessments that are completed, learning both from emerging themes and audits, but also incorporating current research and guidance into our work with families.

## Of 132 assessments (including active cases up until end of April 2023)

<b>48</b> SGO only assessments have been completed		
<b>34</b> Positive recommendations	<b>11</b> Negative recommendations	<b>3</b> undetermined (in early-stage assessment)
<b>51</b> All options assessments		
<b>17</b> positive recommendations	<b>18</b> negative recommendations (Of these 18 – x2 elected to progress to panel the remaining 16 withdrew)	<b>14</b> Undetermined (in early stage of assessment)
<b>10</b> Fostering only		
<b>6</b> positive recommendations	<b>4</b> negative recommendations	<b>0</b> Undetermined (in early stage of assessment)
<b>23</b> Did not progress through the full assessment following IVA		
<b>6</b> were jointly completed – in five cases assessment progressed through majority of assessment prior to withdrawing with only one of the six withdrawing in early stages		<b>15</b> singular IVA - Majority were not clear about what they were agreeing too or long-term assessment for care/ minimal info covered in IVA

From April to March, we have had 17 SGO's made for 23 children (including sibling groups remaining together) – these are all from SGO only assessments and all options assessments where they have withdrawn from fostering.



**The strength of this provision includes:**

- 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 2023/24 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
- Develop our Equality, Diversity, and Inclusivity model into all our assessments recognizing the diversity of our kinship carers.
- Continue to develop our training to other service areas regarding kinship care
- Continue to progress Special Guardianships where there is a pre-existing relationship.
- 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 (DPST) has been in operation since 2016. The aim of the team is to support placements to achieve stability, for any child in care, which includes working across the full range of placements that our children in care live in. The team works holistically with everyone in the home, recognising the importance of giving everyone a voice, and helping them to reach their own resolutions and outcomes. The support workers in the team carry their own case load, so can be creative in their engagement, as well as flexible. Support can be offered at weekends and evenings, this can involve working with children and young people directly, or indirectly, by supporting the people looking after them. The team is also an additional listening ear, which is available to support carers when times become difficult. Practice within the team is trauma informed and relationship based. Ofsted recognised this service as one of Leicestershire's "Unique Selling Points" in our 2019 inspection and we are very proud that another Local Authority in the East Midlands is planning to set up a similar service.

**The team consists of:**

1 x Assistant Service Manager
1 x Team Manager
4 x Supervising Social Workers
7 x Support Workers
1 x Independent Visitor Co-Ordinator
1 x Independent Visitor Support Worker

## The team is responsible for:

- Supporting and promoting placement stability for young people living in our specialist foster care provision for young people at risk of residential care or stepping down into family-based care as part of their transition to adulthood.
- Supporting our Mainstream Foster Carers and young people where there have been placement stability concerns.
- Preparing return home trajectories and offering support at evenings and weekends to maintain the arrangement.
- Recruiting 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.

## Placement Support

- Over the last year the team have worked with:
- 84 children, who are living in 71 families, along with their carers.
- We have supported 4 young people to return home.
- We have supported 1 young person to step down from residential.
- We recruited two full time support workers for the team.
- The team primarily works with families who need to achieve stability.

## Supported Lodgings

- We currently have 34 SLP carers, 79% of whom can offer a full-time placement, others are able to offer respite.
- There are currently 28 young people in an SLP placement, and 8 vacancies.
- We have 1 potential carer in assessment.
- We have ensured our Supported Lodgings Providers have access to all training and support forums including portal, online training, and support groups.
- Within the SLP cohort there are 5 specialist UASC carers who are providing 3 young people with a placement.
- Over the last year we have gained 4 Supported Lodgings Providers, and another is due at panel in April.

## Staying Put

- We currently have 40 young people remaining in their placement beyond the age of 18.

## Specialist Foster Carers

- We currently have 5 carers under this scheme offering 7 places.
- We currently have 7 young people in placement.
- Caseloads remain low in recognition of the support Leicestershire's specialist carers provide.
- Our Supported Lodgings Team run support groups for carers bimonthly and other events during the year.

### Developments on Plans for 2022/2023

- We had a recruitment target of 5 SLP, we approved 4, and have 1 about to come to panel.
- We had a recruitment target of 6 Specialist Carers and approved 0, we have 1 coming to panel in May.
- We recruited one further Pathway carer and re-approved our current Pathway carer as a couple

# THE INDEPENDENT VISITOR SCHEME

The scheme supports children in care. Children aged 7-21 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:

“ I trust her with my whole life... I am surprised by her generosity, and she never forgets my birthday... she helped me with my self-confidence, and she gave me lots of emotional support ”

“ My IV took me fishing and it was good. I would never have done this without him ”

“ My IV is easy to talk to and fun to be with... he has helped me get into football ”

## What our Independent Visitors say:

“ Helping a young person grow in confidence and self-esteem is very rewarding ”

“ I'm proud to be an independent visitor and proud to be part of their lives ”

“ We have great fun together, a beautiful bond, lots of adventures, and I get to unleash my inner child ”

The scheme is responsible for the recruitment, assessment, approval, and ongoing support of the independent visitors (IV) and the matching of young people referred to the scheme.

## During this period the scheme has:

- Recruited a full- time support worker to support the Independent Visitor Coordinator, this appointment has allowed the scheme to enhance current practice and develop new areas of the scheme.
- Raised the profile of the scheme both internally through attending staff team meetings, and externally through leaflet drops and attendance at events for LCC
- Continued to provide positive matches for children, and to provide positive endings for those relationships that are no longer wanted/needed. The children matched in Leicestershire exceeds the national picture per head of CIC as referenced by the NIVN National Data report
- Created opportunities for IVs to meet through network events and social events, we did our first event with IVs and the young people they visit in January of this year (bowling) approximately 50 people attended, the feedback from all was positive, and we have a Tennis event scheduled for the summer.
- Invited IVs to fostering events, summer picnics, Christmas party, craft events
- Provided 2 stand-alone 1st Aid Training courses for IVs
- Evaluated the scheme through feedback forms and listened and acted on IVs and young people's voices
- Created opportunities to shine a spotlight on the amazing work IVs do. We now have a regular feature in the fostering newsletter, created a suite of videos of IVs talking about the role and its rewards to use for promotional purposes and to share with those enquiring and being assessed, and gathered testimonials from IV's and young people to use to promote the role
- Connection with LCC strategic volunteering department enabling connections with other volunteering schemes and an opportunity to share ideas, areas of good practice and develop the scheme further
- Been an active member of the NIVN and had a regular and consistent presence at regional meetings and attended the National conference in Birmingham
- Strengthened links with the recruitment team and comms team
- Consistent weekly POD meetings with staff on the scheme
- Created information sheets to enable IVs to develop their awareness/knowledge on specific topics including internet safety, mental health, and young people to name a few.
- Continued to use the WhatsApp group that was started during the pandemic this is regularly used by staff on the scheme and IVs to share information and keep connected
- Invited guest speakers at IV Network Meetings
- Sent birthday cards to all IV's

## Current numbers on the scheme:

### Independent Visitors

- We have 72 IVs however 4 ceased being visitors in this period due to personal circumstances
- We have approved 18 new IVs in this period, up by 7 in the last period
- We have 8 in assessment and 1 waiting to be assessed
- The service currently has 68 approved IVs

### Young people

- 73 young people are matched with an IV
- 23 have been matched in this period (5 in res, 2 in supported accommodation, 16 in mainstream/kinship placements) up by 15 in the last period
- 23 are waiting to be matched of which 5 are in OOC placements (18 males, 5 females) this is up by 7 from the last period although this is in part due to raising the profile of the scheme further and receiving more referrals.

## Challenges in delivery

- Recruiter of male IVs and the number of male young people wanting a positive male role model continues to be an issue and is a national challenge. We are targeting recruitment to try and increase interest from this group,
- Recruitment of IVs for children in Out of County (OOC) placements remains a local and national issue. We are striving to address this through regional and national discussions. The Care Review highlights the needs of YP to identify significant others in their lives – IVs fit well into this review, and we have used this message to collaborate with children's social workers to explore matches for young people in OOC placements who have links with adults in their wider network
- Recruitment of IVs for children with disabilities and additional needs remains a local and national issue. We are striving to address this through regional and national discussions and looking to strengthen links with LCC disability teams and special needs schools to explore options for recruitment.

## Our Plans for 2023/24

- Utilising the help of existing IVs for recruitment, particularly males and those with skills/ knowledge of disability.
- Strengthen links with comms team to promote the scheme through other forums, such as next door, LinkedIn, and Facebook advertising
- Develop further our training offer to IVs through guest speakers at network events and providing additional written resources alongside existing training opportunities
- Develop offer to care leavers, this is available but is currently on an ad hoc basis
- Develop offer to OOC and disabled children
- Produce new leaflets, posters, and promotional resources



# REPORT FROM THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

Our fostering reviews are completed by two part-time Fostering Reviewing Officers. Reviews take place at minimum every twelve months and can be held more frequently if there is a change in circumstances in the foster home, or if extra help is needed to ensure that fostering standards are met. Staffing issues have meant that over the last year not as many of our review meetings have been face-to-face as we would have liked.

Overall, our looked after children continue to express satisfaction with their foster carers. Their voice and views are a key part of the review process, and they regularly share that they see their placement as their home, and that they are encouraged to play a full part in family life.

Understanding the views of the foster carers' own children continues to be a priority. As well as supervising social workers glean their views as part of review meeting preparation, there is an emphasis on supervising social workers speaking to them on an ongoing basis throughout the fostering year about their experiences of being part of a fostering family.

Our foster carers are largely satisfied with the support offered by their SSWs. This support remains especially crucial given the high turnover of children's social workers within the Council. There is an acknowledgement amongst management that communication with foster carers around aspects such as delays in permanence planning and court decisions can be timelier from the permanence and children's social work teams.

Our foster carers value the visibility and availability of management; Team Managers Rachael Young, Fred Luneta and Assistant Service Manager Heather Hughes in particular. They are available to step-in and assist with issues or problems, when necessary, whether by chairing placement stability meetings, or more informally.

Foster carer training remains largely online. The response of our foster carers to this is mixed. Many value the flexibility of our online courses, especially being able to arrange their learning around their childcare commitments. Others miss the group learning aspect and chance to 'bounce ideas' off their foster carer colleagues.

## Priorities for 2023/24

- All foster carer reviews to be held face-to-face, rather than virtually
- Foster carers need to be paid the right allowance, on time
- Children's social work and permanence teams to update foster promptly on permanence planning and court decisions/timescales
- Training offer to include a mixture of in-person, and virtual courses and learning

Ben Marchant

Fostering Reviewing Officer

# LEICESTERSHIRE FOSTER PANEL CHAIR REPORT

This report refers to the functioning of Leicestershire County Council Fostering panel for the year 2022/23. The Fostering panel is constituted under the Fostering Standards Regulations (England) 011.

## Independent Panel Chair's Comments:

### Sue Tribe

Since over the past year at panel, we have increased our membership to reflect a more inclusive team, and this is a strength we would wish to continue to build on.

We have undertaken training that looks at the purpose of panel and the questions we ask, to ensure we are relevant to current thinking and trends.

Alongside this we have undertaken 2 other trainings. One on working with the Travelling community and one that looked at some aspects of trauma.

Although panel is well informed generally, these trainings were helpful in giving us space to reflect on our practice.

Currently panel is a hybrid one. We meet face to face for some panels and online for others. This gives flexibility for Carers and Social Workers and seems to be a model that works well

We have sadly said goodbye to one Adviser, Julie Hall who was a great advocate for panel and welcomed another, Becky Edser. We have also had a change of ADM too!

I look forward to working closely with the new ADM and Becky to promote good practice at panel and to developing excellent working relationships to ensure the best outcomes at panel for all.

Panel continues to offer Independent, robust oversight of cases that come to panel, and we fulfil the role of critical friend to the Local Authority when needs be.

Over the next year I very much look forward to continuing to develop our independent work in Leicestershire to a high standard and one that protects and safeguards Leicestershire's children and supports their carers.

### Mohammed Patel

Panel have played a crucial role in the scrutiny of cases being presented. We increasingly notice the complexity of some of the cases coming to panel. The experience the panel members bring from a range of professional disciplines and personal background has meant we ensure any children placed for fostering is in the best interest of the child. We now have a young care leaver on panel who has provided some valuable insight into the experiences of looked after children.

We have continued with virtual panels but also now offer face to face / hybrid panels once a month. Panel members appreciate the benefit face to face panels can offer to applicants/carers and helps panel members to interact.

We continue to play a crucial role in identifying areas of improvement service can make in respect of the quality of the paperwork and practice.

It's been a pleasure the chair panel over the last year. We continue to explore widening our panel membership to include people from more diversified communities.

## 1. Summary

- The agency has a Central List of panel members, in accordance with Fostering Regulations, Guidance 2011.
- We have two Panel Chairs, four Vice Chairs and social work representatives
- Earlier in the year the decision was taken to move to a hybrid model: offering a mixture of face-to-face Panels and virtual Panels. This solution is working well, and feedback has been positive. This will continue to be monitored to ensure this model suits the needs of the service, applicants, carers, and social workers.
- Although Panels are scheduled four times a month, it is normally the case that 3 are held a month. Panels A and C are Chaired by Mohamed Patel and panels B and D by Sue Tribe.
- There has been a continued focus to develop the diversity within our Panels to reflect the communities we live and work in, thus providing a broad knowledge base and experience. This has included recruitment of a young adult who has experience of being in care, who has proven to be a real asset to our Panel. However, it's acknowledged that there is further work to do be done.
- The number of kinships foster carers seeking approval has continued to fall, this is primarily due to the focus on securing permanency via SGO's and a lesser extent Care Arrangement Orders (CAO), as part of care proceedings.
- There was a change in Panel Advisor in March 22.

## 2. Panel Development

- Panel members, Chairs and Vice Chairs continue to be subject to annual appraisals, identifying areas of strengths in practice as well as areas for development, including training needs.
- Panel members are expected to attend a least one training event per year. During the year panel members attended the following training:
- Gypsy Romany traveller awareness training. Facilitated by Jackie Duffy from Leicester GATE in July 22.
- Trauma awareness training. Facilitated by Practice Excellence team in October 22.
- Training specific for Panel members on assessments, panel's role, responsibilities, and questioning. Facilitated by LJP training and Consultancy on March 23
- The Panel Advisor is a member of the East Midlands Panel Advisers' Forum, which provides the opportunity to discuss and share good practice.

## 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 ratifies or rejects panel's recommendations thereby deciding. 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 and including changes to terms of approval, standards of care and significant changes within the fostering family.
- De-registrations/terminations of carers.
- Regulation 24 extensions.
- Quality Assurance.



## 4. Overview of work presented to panel

- During the year 22/23, 39 Panels were held (the same as in 21/22) and 9 Panels were cancelled, due to no cases being on the agenda.

### i Foster care approvals (mainstream, some with multiple T0A)

Type	New Carers
Long- term	0
Short – term/respite	5
Parent and child	0
Short-term only	8
Respite only	2
Specialist Carers	0
Deferred	1

### ii Family and Friends

Family/kinship	10
Support care for Family and Friends/Connected Person/ Respite Connected Carer	1
Not approved	5
Withdrew application	2
Deferred	4

### iii Reviews

#### Annual Reviews

33 First annual Foster Carers Reviews have been presented to panel with all carers being viewed as suitable to carry on being carers.

2 six months review following presentation at panel

2 reviews were deferred

#### Reviews following concerns

6 reviews following concerns were presented to panel this year. Panel recommended that 2 were deregistered.



## iv Terminations of approval

### Resignations

During the year 2022/23, 44 Foster/Kinship Carers have submitted their resignations.

Reasons given are as follows:

Reason	Number
Retirement	5
Change of circumstances including health/ Covid vulnerabilities	18
Moving to Independent Fostering Agency	0
Moving to another Local Authority	2
Dissatisfaction with agency/Local Authority	5
Connected Carer gained SGO/ child turned 18/ alternative care plan agreed - Adoption	13
Other – transfer to supported lodgings	1

### Deregistration

One decision was made that the carer was no longer suitable. This carer resigned prior to deregistration taking place

## 5. Complaints

No complaints were received

## 6. Feedback to panel

### Observers

Staff are given the opportunity to observe Panel. As part of their induction, staff new to the Fostering Service and/or social work students are encouraged to observe. The aim largely being to demystify the process, particularly for those who have a pending case to present to panel for the first time.

The Agency Decision Maker also observes each panel Chair once per year, specifically to observe the Chair as part of the chair's annual review.

### Panel Evaluation

We strive to ensure applicants, carers and social workers feel they are treated fairly and with respect, that panel members are clear in their questioning and in their recommendations. To monitor and evaluate Panel functioning we ask attendees to provide feedback regarding their experiences of Panel. These responses are correlated and presented back to Panel members. This provides the opportunity for discussion, reflection, and learning, as well as areas for development.

### Examples of positive feedback:

“ ‘The panel were very approachable, I felt that they really put the prospective carers at ease which really helped them to feel relaxed.’ (Supervising Social Worker) ”

“ ‘I appreciated panel chair - Sue explaining to the foster carers the outcome of panel and taking questions from the foster carers. As a worker, I felt supported.’ (Supervising Social Worker). ”

“ ‘Lots of positive recommendations to further our fostering journey. We felt well regarded and the show of appreciation for our efforts from the panel was encouraging. Thank you for a pleasant experience.’ (Mainstream foster carer). ”

“ ‘All the panel members were great; giving me time to reflect on my answers.’ (Mainstream foster carer). ”

“ ‘All a good experience, it nice to be able to thank our social worker via the panel for her support throughout the year.’ (Mainstream foster carer). ”

### Feedback with challenge:

“ ‘We feel the way the questions were asked were not clear and were ambiguous. We are not professionals and the way in which Panel presents itself appears very rigid and in no way took account that we are straightforward working people just trying to care for our grandchildren, we have not entered mainstream foster care, and it felt as if panel made no allowance for this. We were kept waiting for 45 minutes which we consider totally inappropriate and added to our anxiety. Not only being kept waiting but being in the presence of virtual panel did not help us feel at ease and increased our anxiety.’ (Prospective Kinship Carers). ”

“ ‘I was under the impression we would be able to discuss our experiences and truths to panel. Our opportunity for our voices to be heard were removed and a decision made without any input from ourselves. While I accept that panel can only react to information provided, as a carer we have been left with no support and nowhere to turn during this process, due to systemic and cultural behaviours. No one independently has listened to us or acted/investigated our concerns. I would implore panel in the future always spend time with carers regardless of if procedurally other action is required, to understand their experiences and treatment prior to panel.’ (Mainstream foster carer). ”

### Quarterly Panel Meetings

The service meets with Panel Chairs and the Agency Decision Maker on a quarterly basis to review feedback and how we can take this forward to improve the experience for all involved. Actions are agreed and reviewed in subsequent meetings. The discussions held at these meetings is then shared with the wider panel. As a learning authority we ensure that panel members are provided with training from Leicestershire to enable them to have awareness and knowledge of our working practices and aspirations for our children and families.

## 7. OBJECTIVES FOR 2022/23

1. Fostering Panel Practice Standards to be reviewed.
2. Ongoing work to ensure consistency across panels.
3. To continue developing diversity within our Panels to reflect the community we live in, including care experienced individuals and the inclusion of kinship carers.
4. To explore using Panel as a 'reflective tool' providing independent advice and guidance for Assessing Social Workers on complex cases that may be presented to Panel in the future.
5. Training for panel members to develop their understanding of the complexities surrounding Kinship care and training on LGBTQ+ community to better understand how carers can meet the specific needs of children and young people.
6. To include Panel members in the Fostering Service Day training.
7. To involve the Children in Care Council in developing a set of 'child focused' questions that Panel can draw upon when questioning prospective and approved carers.
8. To develop ways that ensure feedback from Panel attendees is measurable, thus helping identify themes, strengths and vulnerabilities and areas that need be improved upon.

## 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 as we have seen carers join locality groups based within their own localities.

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 2022-2023

- 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 continue to support carers if subject to an allegation / investigation.

## OUR LOCALITY SUPPORT GROUPS

Throughout the pandemic we saw the importance of our locality groups, they have continued to be a constant source of support to both their carers locally and the service, ensuring key messages are disseminated and the service receives feedback.

Our locality groups meet in person, either at a carer home or at a neutral venue,

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 carer is approved, their details are provided to the coordinator to make contact and welcome to the support group. Many of our coordinators are also mentors so new carers are quickly inducted into their local group.

We have also re-generated a monthly kinship care support group, which is continuing to grow its membership.

Our Locality Co-Ordinators play a vital role in the recruitment of staff within the service, they support us by sitting on interview panels, provide feedback for new policies and procedures and two have studied and have nearly completed the National Diploma in Therapeutic Parenting.

As a service we meet with them on a quarterly basis, we value the support and challenge they bring to the service.

## 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.

During 2021/22 we received formal 5 complaints.

The complaints that were upheld were in relation to communication and payments. Whilst we welcome challenge, we also need to listen to the concerns raised by our carers and take learning from them. In terms of ensuring we continue to improve our service we have reviewed our payments systems to ensure carers are paid without delay. We have also put in systems to ensure carers are made aware if their worker is absent for any period that our duty team will provide support and advice.

### **During 2021/22 we received 5 Complaints. Of those:**

- 2 were upheld in relation to support needs from child's worker / not agreeing with timeliness of plans.

### **During 2020/21 we had 11 allegations of those:**

- All were referred to LADO
- Of those 2 had an outcome of no further action
- 4 Led to Position of Trust Meetings which led to reviews following concerns
- 2 Fostering Households had a period of additional monitoring / support
- 3 were reviewed / returned to panel

### **During 2022/23 outcome of referrals to The Independent Review Mechanism:**

- 3 referrals were made to the IRM
- Of which the panel agreed with the recommendation
- None were issued with guidance to the local authority.

## 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. Our two events last year were focussed on being a trauma informed service and service reflection and development.

Across the service we undertake audits both for our service and across Childrens social care. 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. Our focus this year has been reflecting how Equality and Diversity and Voice is reflected in supervision of both staff and carers.

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 beginning of the year commenced with our delayed foster carers recognition event, held at the King Power Stadium in May. This is our opportunity as a service to say Thank You to our all of carers - mainstream foster carers, kinship foster carers and our Independent Visitors. Over 150 attended and enjoyed the evening, speeches and being treated. Activities to engage now we are able is important to us as a service, to be visible and available for our carers. Throughout the summer we held various picnics for our carers and staff to meet. Retention is as important as recruitment in ensuring that are carers remain with us and feel supported post approval.

We held consultation events so carers could meet with managers to learn of service updates and for us to hear their voice.

An area we will be development is working with our colleagues in adoption to produce Practise Standards for children moving onto adoption, understanding the crucial role our foster carers have in preparing our babies for their forever homes.

With increased support from our media and communications team we will continue to drive our recruitment campaigns, with a focus on siblings, teenagers, and children with additional needs.

Our placement stability remains strong, and the support we offer households is embedded within our service, we regularly gain this feedback from our foster carer reviews, QA alerts and emails of recognition sent from the Assistant Director.

Achieving Permanency at the earliest opportunity. For our children placed in Kinship Care coming through for connected assessments at the point viability we can process whether this needs to be a full Kinship Assessment or can progress straight through as a Special Guardian Assessment.

I am pleased with our placement stability, yet again we have seen evidence of the effective use of stability meetings to prevent placement disruption involving the POD approach – all the important people discussing how we can promote stability, the team around the child – involving the carers and their support too.

As a group of managers, we continue to expand, and we look forward to a new part time Team Manager joining the service to manage the Supported Lodgings Scheme.

Our motto of “We are family” continues to run strong within the service, where support is available when and where required.

**For the forthcoming year:**

- Continue to use all forms of media in our intensive recruitment campaign to achieve stretch targets:  
25 Mainstream Carers (net 16).  
2 Specialist Carers.  
5 Supported Lodgings.
- We recognise that these targets are lower than in previous years recognising the current downward trend nationally in recruitment. We have targets for enquiries, Stage one starts and approvals which we monitor monthly in our performance meetings.
- Focussed audits on voice – monitoring the quality of feedback from children, social workers, and IRO’s for our carers in reviews.
- Continuing to develop our trauma informed practice to both our workers and carers
- Strengthening our reflective practice in supervision of workers and carers.
- Registering our Supported Lodgings scheme with Ofsted to enable its practice from October 28th, 2023.
- Implement automated performance reporting post approval using Tableau reporting and dashboards. We have 50% currently in operation.

We recognise we have lost a number of carers this year, many of which had not provided a service to us pre-Covid, and have reflected upon their decision to continue fostering, it is with regret for the loss, but this has not significantly impacted upon our utilisation, which has been consistently high at 75-78%.

We are looking forward to our Festival, a Well-being festival for our foster families, supported lodgings providers and Independent Visitors, we have lots of wonderful activities planned for the whole family including a sleepover at a local campsite.

I feel so impressed with our service, that we have staff passionate to get the right outcomes for our families, who have enduring relationships with our foster families and children.

We look forward to the year ahead.



Joss Longman









**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE - 7 NOVEMBER 2023**

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

**LEICESTERSHIRE ADOPTION AGENCY STATUTORY REPORT**

**Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members with an overview of the activity of the Adoption Agency from March 2022 to March 2023.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

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 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 Committee.
3. The full report can be found at the appendix.

**Background**

4. 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
5. 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.

### **Summary of Report**

6. 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.
7. This partnership comprises of Lincolnshire County Council (who provide adoption services for Rutland Council), Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, North Lincolnshire Council. Northampton Children's Trust joined the partnership in January 2022. Lincolnshire County Council remains acting as host for the arrangement.
8. The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> 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.
9. Through working in partnership, the service is starting to 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.
10. 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
11. Leicestershire continues to perform well against Department of Education score cards for the one and three year trend data. Against all of three indicators, the one year trend data for 2022/23 is highlighting a decrease in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore, an increase in the timeliness to achieve permanence. The timeliness identified for one year trend data 2022/23 demonstrates that although timely matches are made for the majority of children, Leicestershire continues have a small cohort of children who wait longer for placements. This is in line with regional partners and statistical neighbours. The Service continues to be creative and ambitious in its permanency planning, including activity days, discovery events, specific social media campaigns, web site profiles, the increased use of video profiling. Further

development is being considered through the Family Adoption Links family finding workstream.

12. 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 Adopters
  - The Assessment and Support Team – to engage with prospective adopters through their assessment and once approved to support adopters in matching them with a child and supporting them through to the granting of an Adoption Order. Assessments continue to be completed in house. This has had a positive impact on relationships between Leicestershire and adopter applicants and the service have seen an increase in the number of adopters who receive a positive Qualifying Determination without the requirement of extra work.
  - The Permanence Team – 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. Staff sufficiency was a challenge during this period, resulting in the team being unable to take new referrals from the Locality Teams from November 2022, although Family Finding remained within the team. Recruitment has on the whole been successful with the team being able to fully operational from September 2023
  - The Post Adoption Support Team – 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 and those children subject to a Special Guardianship Order.
  - The Birth Records Counselling Team - providing services to adopted adults who wish to access their adoption information.

### **2022-23 Achievements highlights:**

13. The Department continues to be part of Family Adoption Links and to be involved in developing a high quality service to children and adopters
14. The service has received a positive response to newsletters. Staff have continued to work safely and effectively to support children and families across Leicestershire and move children to their adoptive families. The service have also Increased the support offer to adopters by using support workers creatively

### **2021-22 performance overview**

#### **Adopter Recruitment**

15. In 2022/23 37 Initial Visits were completed, 25 of which resulted in an ROI (Registration of interest). During this period 19 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, two of which were deferred for

further work. 18 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 25 the previous year.

16. 19 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. One application presented to panel had a different outcome. Of the 19 adopter households who were presented to panel, 17 were couples. Two of these couples were LGBTQ+. 17 out of the 19 households were White British. No adopters are recorded as having a registered disability, although one requested extra support due to dyslexia

### **Permanency Planning for children**

17. At the end of March 2023, there were a total of 30 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 16 male children and 14 females. Nine of these children have links with prospective adopters, five children are having links explored with their foster carers (this includes a sibling group of four whose carer was approved in January 2023, but the service has now been requested to reassess birth father) and a further single child is due to be placed with his sibling. and One further child is placed in long term foster care and the service is awaiting the revocation of the Placement Order.
18. The Service currently has 16 children which is actively family finding for. This includes nine children who are considered to be 'harder to place' as a result of their additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences), which also includes three sibling groups one of three children and two of two children. All children waiting are discussed at local and regional family finding meetings, are profiled at Discovery and Exchange Events and have also been invited or attended the Regional Activity Day.

### **Adoption Support Fund**

19. To 31 March 2023, Leicestershire has drawn down £852,432 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in Leicestershire. This is a slight decrease in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£862,468.48) and represents support to 414 families, up from 335 in 2021/22. The total amount of drawn down also includes top up applications where therapy is assessed as being needed to be continued once the initial therapeutic period has ended. Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services.

### **Overview of targets and priorities for 2023/24**

20. The service has key targets and priorities for 2023/24:
  - To 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 an 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. There will be a particular focus on those children who typically wait longer.
- To continue to develop the adoption panel, ensuring that that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the service provide robust scrutiny of the agency.
- To increase the offer of support to adoptive families
- Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

21. None

### **Equality Implications**

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

### **Human Rights Implications**

24. There are no Human Rights Implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Leicestershire Adoption Agency Annual Report 2022-23

### **Officers to Contact**

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Continuous Improvement Plan 2021 - 2023  
The Road to Excellence



# Leicestershire Adoption Service Annual Report 2022-2023





## Content

	Page
<b>Executive Summary</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>2. Our service – roles and responsibilities</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>3. Performance</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>4. Statement by the Agency Decision Maker</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>5. Statement by the Adoption Panel Chair</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>6. Developments</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>7. Complaints</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>8. Achievements</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>9. Recommendations</b>	<b>29</b>





## **Executive Summary**

The Annual Report for the Adoption Service sets out the performance for the service in 2022/23 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year 2023/24.

**Key messages within this report are:**

Achieving permanence for children

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

Against all three key performance indicators the 3-year trend data remains relatively stable. We do not yet have figures from our statistical neighbours for comparison.

Against all of three indicators, the 1-year trend data for 2022/23 is highlighting a decrease in the number of days in comparison to the previous year and therefore an

increase in the timeliness to achieve permanence. Detailed consideration of information regarding individual children is routinely completed by managers.

Adoption Score Card	2021-22	2022-23	Statistical Neighbours
A10 - Average time between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family	827.78 days	742.63 days (Reduction of 85.5 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	357.6 days	264.88 days (reduction of 92.2 days)	
A20 - The Average time between a child entering care and the Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child	480 days	457.19 days (reduction of 22.81 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, North Lincolnshire Council. Northampton Children's Trust joined the partnership in

January 2022. Lincolnshire County Council remains acting as host for the arrangement.

There are 4 workstreams comprising of members of staff from each partner , these workstreams meet monthly and focus on:-

Assessment and Approval

Family Finding

Post Adoption Support

Early Permanence

During 2022/23 77% of the region's children were placed within Family Adoption Links.

### **Timeliness of Adopter Assessments**

There has been significant improvement in the stage 1 and stage 2 processes. It should be noted that there were still several external assessments being completed by Carter Brown during the first half of 2022-23. The quality of the reports were often poor with a significant amount of rework required which was often completed by in house assessors which impacted on the ability to allocate new assessments. Our backlog of applicants in stage one has reduced significantly, and a more robust management oversight is in place regarding those applicants coming through the process and their suitability to adopt. More detailed information is contained within this report.

## **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

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 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	Head of Service
Michelle Robinson	Service Manager
Emma Bulgin	Agency Decision Maker
Gemma Barber	Manager, Post-Order Support Team
Julie Hall/ Emma Johnson	Managers, Permanence Team
Caramjit Supra/Ellie Taylor	Manager, Assessment and Support Team
Lisa Deakin/ Katie Bancroft	Senior Practitioner, Post Adoption and SGO Support
Rebecca Gibson	Senior Practitioner, Permanence
Lauren Nicholls	Senior Practitioner , Assessment and Support
Whitney Allen, Chloe Jordan Angela Saduera, Megan Bramley plus 1 vacancy	Permanence Team Social Workers
Katie Charter	Long-term Fostering Family Finding Social Worker
Michelle Smith	Life Story Worker
Sameerah Makda, Debbie Bevan, Bethany Fox, Leona Hubbard plus 1 vacancy	Adoption Assessment and Support Social workers
Scott Barrowcliffe, Stephanie Denham	Assessment support workers

Charlotte Fanshawe, Zeena Shepherd, Harriet Pearson Cole, Claire Nichols	Post Adoption and SGO Support Social Workers
Sarah Greaves	Birth Records Counsellors
Sheryl Peberdy, Robert Cotteril	Special Guardianship Support Workers
Naomi Day	Post Adoption Support Worker
Victoria Williams, Isabelle Coad	Permanence Support Workers
Yashma Koria	Permanence coordinator
Helen Daft	Interim 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 Departmental Plan CFS 2020-2023 and CFS Placement Market Position Statement 2021-2023. 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 2021-25
- Children & Families Partnership Plan
- Continuous Improvement Plan – The Road to excellence 2021-25
- 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 dedicated support workers located in the team. There is a life long offer of support to Special Guardians which mirrors our offer to adopters. Our focus for the up coming year is to provide bespoke opportunities to the carers and their children with a focus on proactive support rather than reactive involvement. For example setting up a teenagers group and therapeutic parenting training.

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.

### 1.3 Progress against last year

Recommendation from previous annual report	Progress
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.	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 Rutland. Northamptonshire Children's Trust joined FAL in January 2022.

	<p>The management team meet monthly and there are also monthly workstream meetings chaired by Service managers primarily focussing on training and assessment of prospective adopters, family finding and post adoption support. This has meant that adopters and children receive a more consistent approach across the region and our children have greater access to a wider range of adopters. 77% of our children were placed within FAL last year.</p>
<p>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. We will measure stage one and stage 2 timeliness with an aim of achieving assessments to be completed within 6 months. This will be achieved by ensuring that recruitment is transparent and that we are clear at the beginning of the process about suitability of applicants to adopt. Robust management oversight will ensure that delay is picked up quickly and addressed</p> <p>.</p>	<p>New systems are in place to minimise drift and delay for prospective adopters and our assessments are completed 'in house' Relationships between assessors and applicants are good and our timeliness figures have improved. We track performance through monthly internal performance meetings which are also attended by the FAL data analyst Benjamin Richards. This has meant that our adopters are seeing quicker assessment times resulting in quicker matches for children.</p>
<p>Focus on timeliness for children by developing our understanding of</p>	<p>Our collection of data is improving and is supported internally and externally via</p>



<p>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.</p>	<p>FAL. Permanence team managers have monthly meetings set up with locality managers to track and review children's journeys and where new children who may be in need of a Best Interest Decision can be identified. Due to recruitment challenges the permanence team had to 'close the door' to new referrals in November 2022 , Despite this there is robust oversight of children coming through for a best interest decision and quarterly reports to SMT provide detailed analysis about children waiting.</p>
<p>Develop our panel, ensuring that the central list meets the needs of the service and panels continue to provide robust scrutiny of the agency.</p>	<p>We have continued to struggle to appoint a permanent panel advisor and currently rely on the support of an independent worker. The training day in January 2022 was successful with a focus on learning from disruptions as well as Equality, Diversity and Identity. Quarterly panel business meetings take place between the service and panel chairs. The service manager also attends panel quarterly to give service updates to panel members. We have benefitted from the robust QA that the panel advisor provides, seeing a decrease in the number of deferrals from ADM after a positive recommendation.</p>
<p>Develop processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development</p>	<p>This is an area that we continue to develop. We liaise with LAFs (a local support group for adopters and foster carers across Leicester City and</p>

	<p>Leicestershire) and attend their meetings. FAL is provided feedback from Adopter Hub. FAL also has Collabor8 which is young person's group. The aim of both groups is to work in collaboration to develop services and hear the voice of those directly impacted by our services. We embrace the Lundy Model and strive to ensure that we hear the views of both adopters, adopted children and adults and birth parents are heard and that those views are carefully considered within our approach.</p>
Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members	<p>This area continues to be in the early stages of development. It is part of the role of the support workers who have started to look at the logistics of setting up a group. We continue to outsource support if required</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.	<p>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. This will be considered as part of the FAL workstream looking at Early Permanence.</p>

## **2. Family Adoption Links**

2.1 The interagency agreement creating the partnership commenced on 14<sup>th</sup> 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 are starting to 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.

2.2 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

### 2.3 Governance and Management

The RAA is 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 temporary 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.

2.4 Since its launch FAL has held monthly management meetings where updates are provided from each of the three dedicated workstreams and the planning of continued and improved service delivery is decided. The dedicated workstreams are focussed on the following areas – Assessment and support of prospective adopters, Family finding and post adoption support. A further workstream, focussing on Early Permanence commenced earlier this year and is headed up by Tracy Morton from Northampton Children's Trust.

2.5 The Assessment and Approval workstream is led by Georgina Oreffo from Leicester City. This workstream's aims are for all those who approach and are assessed by the RAA to receive a consistent baseline experience with regards to their initial enquiry, assessment and training; and following approval there is a core offer of post approval training to ensure consistency of approach and preparation across the RAA. An agreed modular approach to both pre and post approval training is in place. The content, slides, notes and supporting materials of the Information Evenings and preparation courses have been agreed, with stylish and professional rebranding, and joint delivery across the partnership.

2.6 The Family Finding workstream is led jointly by Sharon Clarke from Lincolnshire and Michelle Robinson from Leicestershire. Tracey Morton from Northamptonshire Children's Trust has more recently become more involved as a twin approach to the Early Permanence Workstream. The ambition of the partnership is to provide a consistent approach to family finding and ensure that the partnership can meet the needs of most children requiring adoption.

The workstream has continued to be creative in family finding for our children who have traditionally 'waited longer.' There have been two activity days where 9 children have been successfully linked and subsequently placed with their adoptive families.

We also hold Discovery Events on a quarterly basis, where approved adopters have access to a secure video link where they can watch bespoke videos from social workers and foster carers about the children who are waiting.

Regional monthly family finding meetings are in place and all children without an identified link are discussed and tracked through to either a match being ratified by the Agency Decision Maker or the care plan being changed from one of adoption. This meeting is supported by Benjamin Richardson (Data Analyst) and Alex McGuire (Marketing Lead). The support of both is crucial in ensuring that data is up to date and validated and that children have good quality photos and videos on Linkmaker. Alex also organises specific social media campaigns, ensures that children have anonymised profiles on our website and is also manages the activity days and Discovery Events.

The approach of the family finding meetings has been hugely successful in ensuring that more children are placed within the region. 77% of our children were placed within Family Adoption Links last year. This means that we know our adopters and children well and that there has been a regional financial saving in the cost of using interagency placements.

2.7 Adoption support is another key workstream and is led by Karen Everatt from North Lincolnshire. It builds on the practice delivered within the aforementioned workstreams. All partners have a different post adoption support offer and that is likely to remain the case. The ambition is for all adopters at the point of initial contact to have information about the support available with the website signposting the local details. The group is developing a core offer which establishes a starting point for both prospective and registered adopters and is informed by shared practice expertise from across the region. As part of this work and in addition, the workgroup has focused on the following areas;

- Post order training with direct access to the training hub offering a range of relevant training courses
- Establishment of the Adopter Hub which has co production at its heart and ensures that FAL engages actively with adopters

- Development of Collabor8 an on line community for young people in place to offer, both support and ensure that the child's voice is central to our service direction.
- Provision of Thrive a regular newsletter for Adopters
- Working with Virtual schools across the partnership to develop and deliver the Education Passport

2.8 The Early Permanence workstream is headed up by Tracy Morton from Northampton Children's Trust.

As with adoption support, this is an area of practice that has considerable Government focus and is frequently a key line of enquiry of OFSTED inspections. For a partnership RAA it is complex given the different court jurisdictions and established local practices.

The partnership reflects these differences and there is a variation in how well embedded it's in child care planning. Apart from some geographically compact areas, national work on Early Permanence has concentrated on establishing good practice models and developing consistent forms, assessments, training and support to carers.

That approach sits well within the structure of FAL and reflects what has been achieved within other workstreams. For FAL, this is our most recent area of focus. The workstream has established the following objectives and will develop practice in 23/24 in line with learning from the National commissioned work that is underway:

- Develop EP best practice pack based on the approach of each partner.  
Identify referral pathway and best practice guidance
- Workshop for practitioners to be developed to raise awareness of EP and promote a consistent practice approach across FAL partner agencies – plan for workshops to be delivered to staff across adoption, fostering child care teams and IRO services
- Workshop for ADMs (with AEM)
- Exploration of engagement with Cafcass and judiciary
- Review applicant training materials to develop a single training offer across the region

- Develop support groups for EP carers and staff

2.9 Data management is overseen by Benjamin Richardson and has been invaluable in supporting local and regional information and provision of ASGLB data.

### **3. Our service – roles and responsibilities**

#### **3.2 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.

*'Thank you so much for this. I actually cried when I read it, partly because of the story itself but also out of relief it has been done with so much thought and I know it will provide the children with much needed information when they're older. Thank you for all of the work you have put into it.'*



*‘this is the most beautiful story – it made quite tearful to see the progress George has made, to know that the life story work will help him understand that he is understood’*

*I just wanted to say how impressed I was with the absolutely fantastic work that has been completed for the match between H and R with L, the level of preparation for the family was outstanding and panel members were very complimentary and cited it as one of the best matches they had seen and felt that it was, without doubt, an example of ‘superb practice’*

### **3.3 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 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.

Our face to face preparation training is run in partnership with Leicester City and has been since Spring 2022. When adopters progress to Stage Two, a social worker from AST is allocated to complete the home study and present their recommendations to the adoption panel in a Prospective Adopter Report (PAR). On some occasions, due to worker capacity, an independent social worker is commissioned to complete this on our behalf.

In 2022/23 37 Initial Visits were completed, 25 of which resulted in an ROI. During this period 19 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, 2 of which were deferred for further work 18 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 25 the previous year. 19 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. One application presented to panel had different outcome – deferrals, requests for additional information from ADM and unsuccessful/withdrawn applications. Of the 19 adopter households who attended panel and were approved, this was made up of 17 couples. 2 of the couples were LGBTQ+. 17 out of the 19 households were white British. No adopters are recorded as having a registered disability, although one requested extra support due to dyslexia

.

After adopters are recommended for approval at panel and formally approved by the Agency Decision Maker, all case responsibility remains allocated to a social worker in the Assessment and Support Team who has assessed them. 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. FAL is part of a nationwide group who are looking at improving the quality of Linkmaker in supporting matches between children and adopters.

*‘Panel feedback - Very good PAR Assessment - C presented as the person Panel had read about. Leona had captured her well. It was thorough, yet concise. Panel liked the Ecomap and the useful updates at Panel. ADM/ PA – Leona links the narrative to analysis well – for example C’s learning from her father’s experiences. Leona makes connections and anticipates lines of enquiry , proactively addressing them in the assessment’*

*‘We wouldn’t have got here if it wasn’t for Leona’s support and hard work and we will be forever grateful that she was so integral in helping us to become parents to gorgeous little H!! ‘*

*'Thanks Beth.*

*I just wanted to say a great big thank you to you, Sandra, and Lauren. I was nervous the night before the 1st day, and you all put me at ease straight away. You presented the topics in a clear manner, and it has helped me no end with any questions and worries I initially had.*

*Thank you once again'*

*'Just to say Sameerah was exceptionally supportive and kind during the process. I appreciated her honesty and transparency even when having very difficult conversations. She gave me excellent advice throughout.'*

*'Thank you so much for the best phone call I have ever had the pleasure to take..... Emotions got the better of me!!!! It has been such a long emotional journey and we just can believe we have finally got the decision we all wanted.*

*Thank you to everyone that has been involved along the way*

*Beth, Sophie, we look forward to catching up with you both at some point next week.*

*Have an amazing weekend everyone, I know we sure will.....'*

### **3.4 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. During the period 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 panel met on 16 occasions hearing a total number of 33 cases. This is a significant

decrease on the previous year (1<sup>st</sup> April 2021 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022) when panel met on 19 occasions, hearing 54 cases.

This reduction in cases has been due to delays in obtaining Placement Orders for children and also due to a number of adopters either withdrawing or being counselled out of the process. We have also had a number of Leicestershire adopters who have been matched with a total of 17 children either Interagency or within FAL. This results in those matches being presented to the child's responsible Adoption Panel rather than Leicestershire.

### **3.5 Post Order support**

#### **Support Offer**

Pre and post adoption support is provided in several 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 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. During this financial year we have completed 41 Post Adoption Support assessments, submitted 258 applications to ASF (of which 156 were top up applications) . We have continued to provide play therapy to 12 children who have received a total of 196 sessions between them.

**PLAY THERAPY FEEDBACK:**

*'LM was talking about you and asked how long she would see you. I told her that i had asked for her to carry on seeing you into Year 5 if possible. She was so excited and DELIGHTED and **said that will make changing classes so much easier***

*We were then chatting about people being unkind and why that might be, lead to talking about how she used to find school really tricky and would hurt people*

*She said that school is still tricky but she knows to be kind and if you can be anything be kind.....and that " **having sheryl really helps me with my BIG feelings, i don't really know why, she just helps she is so kind and somehow i know that cos i get to see her everything will be ok**"*

The support worker is Theraplay (level 2) 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 had access to an in-house Play Therapist who works individually with adopted children. She also created 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. Its success has meant that we are continuing this offer. PS6 has continued to provide valuable short-term intervention, usually whilst ASF funding is awaited for more specific therapy to commence.

*Hi Claire and Sheryl*

*I hope you are both well.*

*I'm just sending this email on behalf of T and I to say thank you for all your support, advice and guidance during the last few months.*

*You both totally understood that we were at breaking point and needed immediate support to enable us to take time out for our own self care and sanity. Without your understanding and help, I dread to think where we would be now as a family unit.*

*We are hoping to build up a better and stronger relationship with our son and with your continued support I know we will get there.*

*Thank you once again and please accept our sincere thanks and gratitude for recognising that we were struggling and needed action rather than words.*

*Kindest regards*

*Again Thankyou for being there for us. Without you we would not be where we are today. Thank you.*

*'From day one Harriet made us both fell relaxed and at ease, she was very helpful on giving us advice and putting us in different scenarios so we could understand how to understand what B was going through and how to manage her feelings. I found Harriet like a breath of fresh air, very understanding and helpful and felt B learnt a lot from her. Harriet did a great job with Brooke and her Book of life really helped her to understand things better, so if any other child gets to meet Harriet they would be lucky children'*

A quarterly newsletter from FAL for adopters and internally for SGO carers is distributed and receives a high level of positive feedback from adopters and professionals. The team also runs two activity events per year, in the summer and at Christmas. These are well attended and receive positive feedback.

*'Very friendly and sociable'*

*'Great activities, such friendly people'*

*'All of the activities were brilliant, the children loved the bingo too'*

*'(loved) the singing and happiness'*

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 continuing to review 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 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, Leicestershire has drawn down £852,432 from the Adoption Support Fund (ASF) to pay for direct interventions with adoptees and their families in

Leicestershire. This is a slight decrease in the amount that was applied for in the previous financial year (£862,468.48) and represents support to 414 families, up from 335 in 2021/22. The total amount of drawn down also includes top up applications where therapy is assessed as being needed to be continued once the initial therapeutic period has ended. Leicestershire has successfully trained workers therapeutically to ensure a better provision of services. Any money accumulated from the ASF 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. 18 referrals were received for this service during 2022/23. This is a decrease from 36 during the previous year. To reflect the drop in demand Leicestershire has not replaced one of the part time workers who retired. 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.

'I just wanted to thank you for everything you did. Its been the best decision I could have made tracing her and I feel very close to her – I can't call her mum but she understands that, she said you only have one mum and that's the one that brought you up – which is so lovely of her to say. We think my Birth Father has died, but we are still trying to build that tree – she has found a picture of him that she is going to show me on Friday.

S is sooo excited I've found them too – she knew about me from the age of 8 so is used to the fact that she has a 'sister'. The youngest brother didn't know about me, but he has taken it very well – they all say he is very laid back.

Anyway, I just wanted to let you know that everything is going really and to thank you again for everything.'





## **4 . Performance**

The overall performance shows an increase in the amount of Best Interest Decisions being made from 23 in 2021-22 to 31 in 2022-23, but a decrease in the amount of Placement Orders being granted ( 30 in 2021-22 to 21 in 2022-23). There appears to be more emphasis and drive by the Family Justice Board to maintain children within their birth families or for them to remain in long term foster care. Adoption staff are now more regularly challenged during proceedings about the possibility of successfully finding adopters and we are seeing an increase in the numbers of birth parents being given leave to apply to have a Placement Order revoked. There was a decrease in the amount of children placed last year - 29 children in 2021-22 and 16 in 2022-23, this is reflective of the amount of Placement Orders being granted. 21 Adoption Orders were granted last year compared to 34 the year previously. Current data suggests that there are already 28 children booked in for a Best Interest Decision before the end of Quarter 2 of 2023. 77% of the children within Family Adoption Links have been placed within the Region resulting in a financial saving for Leicestershire County Council in the use of Interagency placements.

In relation to the Adopter performance, it should be acknowledged that during 2021-22, there was a large backlog of prospective adopters being held in Stage one of the process. A more robust approach to accepting applicants and exploring the suitability of those already in Stage one has resulted in a dramatic reduction in complaints and a timelier assessment period for prospective adopters

## FAL Children Overview

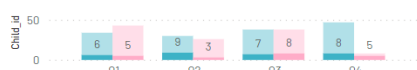
## ADM decision child should be placed for adoption

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



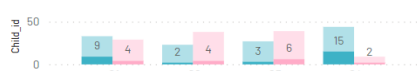
## PO/s Granted

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



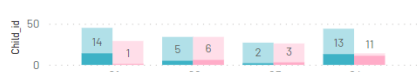
## Children Placed

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23

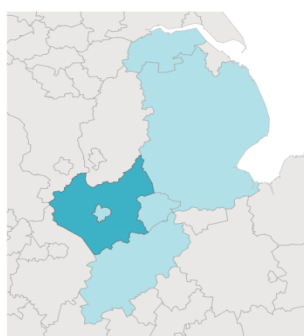


## Adoption orders Granted

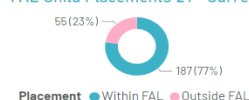
Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



This dashboard reports on the key stages in the Child and Adopter journey and is a direct representation of the data we have submitted via our ASGLB returns.



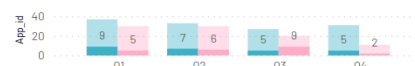
## FAL Child Placements 21- Current



## FAL Adopter Overview

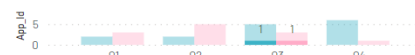
## Number of Registrations

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



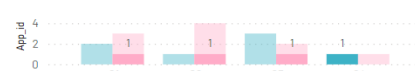
## Number of Fast Tracked Registrations (2nd Time Adopters)

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



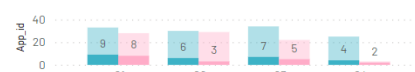
## Foster Carer Approved Adopters

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



## Number of Household Approvals

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



## FAL Internal Child Placements Comparison

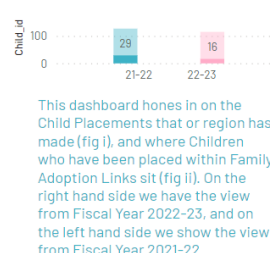
## Fiscal Year 2021-22

## Child Placements 21-22 Provision Type (fig i)

Provision Type	Children placed	% Placed	Fiscal Year
RAA	5	17.24%	21-22
RAA (Family Adoption Links)	19	65.52%	21-22
VAA	3	10.34%	21-22
VAA outside England	2	6.90%	21-22
<b>Total</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

## Children Placed

Fiscal Year ● 21-22 ● 22-23



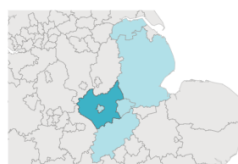
## Fiscal Year 2022-23

## Child Placements 22-23 Provision Type (fig i)

Provision Type	Children placed	% Placed	Fiscal Year
RAA	1	6.25%	22-23
RAA (Family Adoption Links)	15	93.75%	22-23
<b>Total</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

## Family Adoption Links Regional placement detail 21-22 (fig ii)

Childs LA	Placement Agency	Children placed	%	Fiscal Year
Leicestershire	Leicestershire	18	94.74%	21-22
Leicestershire	North Lincolnshire	1	5.26%	21-22
<b>Total</b>		<b>19</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	



## Family Adoption Links Regional placement detail 22-23 (fig ii)

Childs LA	Placement Agency	Children placed	%	Fiscal Year
Leicestershire	Leicestershire	10	66.67%	22-23
Leicestershire	North Lincolnshire	4	26.67%	22-23
Leicestershire	Northamptonshire	1	6.67%	22-23
<b>Total</b>		<b>15</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

This data demonstrates the increased use of FAL placements. Leicestershire has only used one external RAA placement this financial year. 10 of our children have been placed with Leicestershire adopters, 4 with North Lincolnshire and 1 with Northamptonshire. During the fiscal year 2021-22, 10 external interagency placements were required. The cost of Voluntary Adoption Agency placements is higher than those from other Reginal Adoption Agencies, by not having to have the need to use such placements during last financial year has resulted in a significant saving of £169,335.

## Children waiting

- At the end of March 2023, there were a total of 30 children with a Placement Order who have not yet been placed with their adoptive families. This is broken down into 16 male children and 14 females. 9 of these children have links with prospective adopters, 5 children are having links explored with their foster carers (this includes a sibling group of 4 whose carer was approved in January 2023, but we have now been requested to reassess birth father) a further single child is due to be placed with his sibling and 1 further child is placed in Long term foster care and we are awaiting the revocation of the Placement Order. We currently have 16 children who we are actively family finding for, this includes 9 children are considered to be 'harder to place' as a result of their additional needs (health and arising from trauma experiences), which also includes 3 sibling groups one of three children and two of two children. All children waiting are discussed at local and regional family finding meetings, are profiled at Discovery and Exchange Events and have also been invited or attended the Regional Activity Day.

### FAL Adopter Distribution Comparison

Fiscal Year 2021-22

Adopter Placements 21-22 (fig i)

Child Provision Type	Adopters linked	%	Fiscal Year
VAA	1	5.56%	21-22
LA	18	100.00%	21-22
<b>Total</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

Adopter Placement detail 21-22 (fig ii)

Adopter LA	Child LA	Households	Children Placed	Provision Type	%
Leicestershire	Derbyshire	1	2	LA	5.56%
Leicestershire	Leicestershire (FAL)	14	34	LA	77.78%
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire (FAL)	1	1	LA	5.56%
Leicestershire	Middlesbrough	1	4	LA	5.56%
Leicestershire	Parents and Children Together	1	2	VAA	5.56%
Leicestershire	Wolverhampton	1	2	LA	5.56%
<b>Total</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>45</b>		<b>100.00%</b>

This dashboard details the distribution of our adopters. Fig i details placements that were made with adopters from various sources, and Fig ii shows the line level detail behind fig i. On the right hand side we have the view from Fiscal Year 2022-23, and on the left hand side we show the view from Fiscal Year 2021-22.

Local Authority  
Leicestershire

Fiscal Year 2022-23

Adopter Placements 22-23 (fig i)

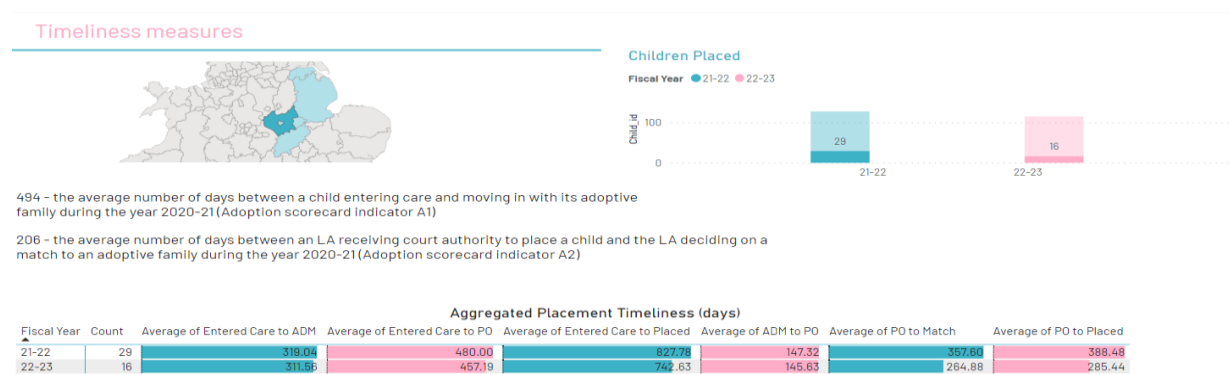
Child Provision Type	Adopters linked	%	Fiscal Year
LA outside England	1	4.55%	22-23
LA	21	95.45%	22-23
<b>Total</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>100.00%</b>	

Adoption Placement detail 22-23 (fig ii)

Adopter LA	Child LA	Provision Type	Households	Children Placed	%
Leicestershire	Bedford	LA	1	1	4.55%
Leicestershire	Leicester (FAL)	LA	3	4	13.64%
Leicestershire	Leicestershire (FAL)	LA	10	10	45.45%
Leicestershire	Lincolnshire (FAL)	LA	2	3	9.09%
Leicestershire	North Lincolnshire (FAL)	LA	1	1	4.55%
Leicestershire	Northamptonshire (FAL)	LA	3	5	13.64%
Leicestershire	Nottingham	LA	1	2	4.55%
Leicestershire	Wales	LA outside England	1	1	4.55%
<b>Total</b>			<b>22</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>100.00%</b>




This data gives information relating to Leicestershire Adopters who have had placements of children from both inside and outside of the Local Authority. Leicestershire adopters have provided placements for 10 Leicestershire children and 13 Family Adoption Links children.

## 22-23 Child placement timeliness:



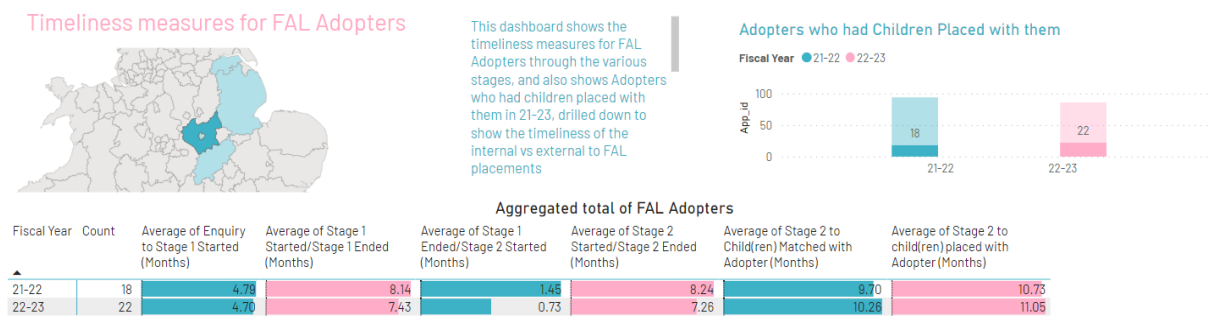
Despite the challenges that the service faces in family finding, the above chart demonstrates that we are improving in timeliness in all areas, with significant improvement in the areas which we have more control over e.g. Placement Order to Match and Placement Order to being placed.

## Line Level Detail of the 22-23 Child Placements:

Aggregated total (All ages)																	
Child ID	Count	Gender	Ethnicity	Sibling Group	Sibling Group Size	Entered Care	Average of Entered Care to PO	Placement Order	Average of A2, PO to Match	ADM Match	Average of PO to Placed	Placement	Average of A10, Entered care to Placed				
837084	1	Male	White British	No		11/08/20	<div><div></div></div>	223	22/03/21	<div><div></div></div>	619	01/12/22	<div><div></div></div>	842			
890796	1	Male	White British	No		03/06/20	<div><div></div></div>	301	31/03/21	<div><div></div></div>	541	23/09/22	<div><div></div></div>	842			
830254	1	Male	White British	No		28/07/20	<div><div></div></div>	379	11/08/21	<div><div></div></div>	407	22/09/22	<div><div></div></div>	808			
844717	1	Male	White British	No		21/05/20	<div><div></div></div>	407	02/07/21	<div><div></div></div>	280	08/04/22	<div><div></div></div>	755			
889487	1	Female	White British	No		08/01/20	<div><div></div></div>	517	08/06/21	<div><div></div></div>	269	04/03/22	<div><div></div></div>	817			
899214	1	Female	White British	No		13/08/20	<div><div></div></div>	454	10/11/21	<div><div></div></div>	288	05/08/22	<div><div></div></div>	761			
918700	1	Female	White British	No		21/05/21	<div><div></div></div>	277	22/02/22	<div><div></div></div>	267	16/11/22	<div><div></div></div>	557			
885589	1	Female	White British	No		18/03/20	<div><div></div></div>	532	01/09/21	<div><div></div></div>	260	19/05/22	<div><div></div></div>	803			
859153	1	Male	White British	No		16/12/20	<div><div></div></div>	442	03/03/22	<div><div></div></div>	214	03/10/22	<div><div></div></div>	685			
912884	1	Male	White British	No		19/04/21	<div><div></div></div>	322	07/03/22	<div><div></div></div>	212	05/10/22	<div><div></div></div>	563			
911583	1	Female	White and Asian	No		23/07/21	<div><div></div></div>	145	15/12/21	<div><div></div></div>	208	11/07/22	<div><div></div></div>	368			
832992	1	Female	White British	No		13/10/20	<div><div></div></div>	351	29/09/21	<div><div></div></div>	191	08/04/22	<div><div></div></div>	554			
917734	1	Male	White British	No		18/10/21	<div><div></div></div>	310	24/08/22	<div><div></div></div>	162	02/02/23	<div><div></div></div>	485			
907529	1	Male	White British	No		05/03/21	<div><div></div></div>	353	21/02/22	<div><div></div></div>	147	18/07/22	<div><div></div></div>	522			
909217	1	Male	White British	No		05/10/21	<div><div></div></div>	224	17/05/22	<div><div></div></div>	143	07/10/22	<div><div></div></div>	392			
777552	1	Female	White British	No		24/03/17	<div><div></div></div>	2078	01/12/22	<div><div></div></div>	50	20/01/23	<div><div></div></div>	2128			
16								457			265			285			743

This data gives a breakdown of the length of time the children who have been placed have been waiting. As can be seen there are some significant outliers.

- 5-year-old male, foster carer approved but this took longer than expected as further work was required by ADM.
- 2 year old male , foster carer approved with an increased amount of work required by ADM prior to approval. Child had been in placement since birth.
- 6-year-old male who required a lot of preparation work prior to and during transitions
- 5-year-old male
- 2 year female, some developmental delay – adoptive placement identified in August 2022, however birth mother moved into the same area as the adopters and a new search had to begin
- 13-year-old female in Long term foster care who requested that she be adopted by her carers.



This data demonstrates timeliness of our Adopter Journey. There has been significant improvement in the stage 1 and stage 2 processes. It should be noted that there were still several external assessments being completed by Carter Brown during the first half of 2022-23. The quality of the reports were often poor with a significant amount of rework required which was often completed by in house assessors which impacted on the ability to allocate new assessments. Our backlog of applicants in stage one has reduced significantly, and a more robust management oversight is in place regarding those applicants coming through the process and their suitability to adopt.

The 1-year trend data highlights a decrease across all three key performance indicators, meaning children are waiting less 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 31 children were subject to Best Interest Decisions. 14 of those children are waiting for final court hearings where Placement Orders (PO) may be made to allow their placement with adoptive families.

There has been an increase in the average days from BID to PO which partly reflects the difficulty in progressing proceedings to final hearings. 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.

### **4.3 Children Waiting for Adoption**

At the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 there were 44 children with a best interest decision of adoption, of which 30 had Placement Orders granted by the court. Four children have an ethnicity other than White British. 20 children are female and 24 are male. 19 are part of sibling groups who require adoption ( 1 sibling group of 4, 1 sibling group of 3 and 6 sibling groups of 2) 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 continues to be a positive area of practice and been successful in identifying matches for 10 Leicestershire children; the family finding work will continue to grow in the year ahead.

Leicestershire County Council has continued to attend exchange events during the course of the year and has also 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, although this continues to be tracked through attendance at CDM and is considered upon the referral being received.

#### **4.4 Children Placed and Adopted**

16 children have been placed with their adoptive families during the year, a decrease of 10 against the previous year, we have a small cohort of children who have been delayed in their formal matching as identified previously in this report. 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 16 children placed during the year, 15 were placed with adopters either approved by Leicestershire County Council or one of our FAL partners. One further child was placed within a VAA . 22 children are now in placement with their adoptive families but awaiting an Adoption Order.

20 Adoption Orders were finalised in the year 2022/23, a decrease from the previous year when 34 orders were made. This reflects the number of delays in achieving Placement Orders and alternative permanence plans being made.

#### **4.4 Adoption Approvals**

In 2022/23, 37 Initial Visits were completed, 26 of which resulted in a Registration of Interest (ROI). During this period 19 adopter households were presented to the adoption panel for approval, 2 of which were deferred for further work.

19 adopter households were approved in this period, compared to 25 the previous year. There were a further 16 households in assessment at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023.

19 applications have been presented to Adoption Panel for approval. One application presented to panel had different outcome – deferrals, requests for additional information from ADM and unsuccessful/withdrawn applications. Of the 19 adopter households who attended panel and were approved, 18 were couples of which 2 were same sex . 17 of the 19 households were white British. One adopters requested extra support due to dyslexia.

Timeliness in completing adopter assessments has improved during the last year, with adopters approved in this period waiting an average of 15.42 months (compared to 17.83 months in 21/22) 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, and the appointment of an experienced adoption manager has meant that this area has resulted in this progress and will continue to be 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 are now collating further data to better understand the adopter journey from approval to match, with consideration of any adaptations we may need to make for adopters who have protected characteristics. We are continuing to align our practice in this area with our regional partners.

#### **4.5 Adoption Disruptions**

There have been no disruptions for Leicestershire children in this period

## **5. Developments**

### **4.1 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 continuing to build relationships with their counterparts across the region and information sharing events for the whole staff group are run throughout the year.

### **5.2 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. This peer support group is in the process of being re-established.

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 2022/23, she received four such referrals for parents wishing to access this service; two of these parents have completed all six sessions so far.

Further work is in the process of reinvigorating this area of work and ensure we provide an excellent service to children's first families.

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. 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.

### **5.3 Feedback**

The adoption service gathers feedback from various people, including adult adoptees, adopters, foster carers, birth family members and other professionals. We continue to develop our work 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.

This will be a key area of development in the next year.

## **6. Complaints**

Ten complaints have been received during the year, 5 relating to the assessment process, 2 related to work carried out by other areas of CFS previously but were addressed by the Adoption Service; 1 related to the matching process and the last was in relation to post adoption. 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, prospective adopters and approved 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. As a service we strive to be transparent and open with adopters and will always respond initially to any complaints by convening a meeting to try and address any concerns as quickly as possible. Any learning is discussed reflectively within the team and if appropriate changes are made to processes. The 5 complaints in relation the assessment process were in relation to delay. We now have an extra worker to complete initial visits and management oversight if those adopters in both stages of the assessment process is now much more robust.

## **7. 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.

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. The Post Order Team commenced its lifelong service for SGO carers in January 2022.

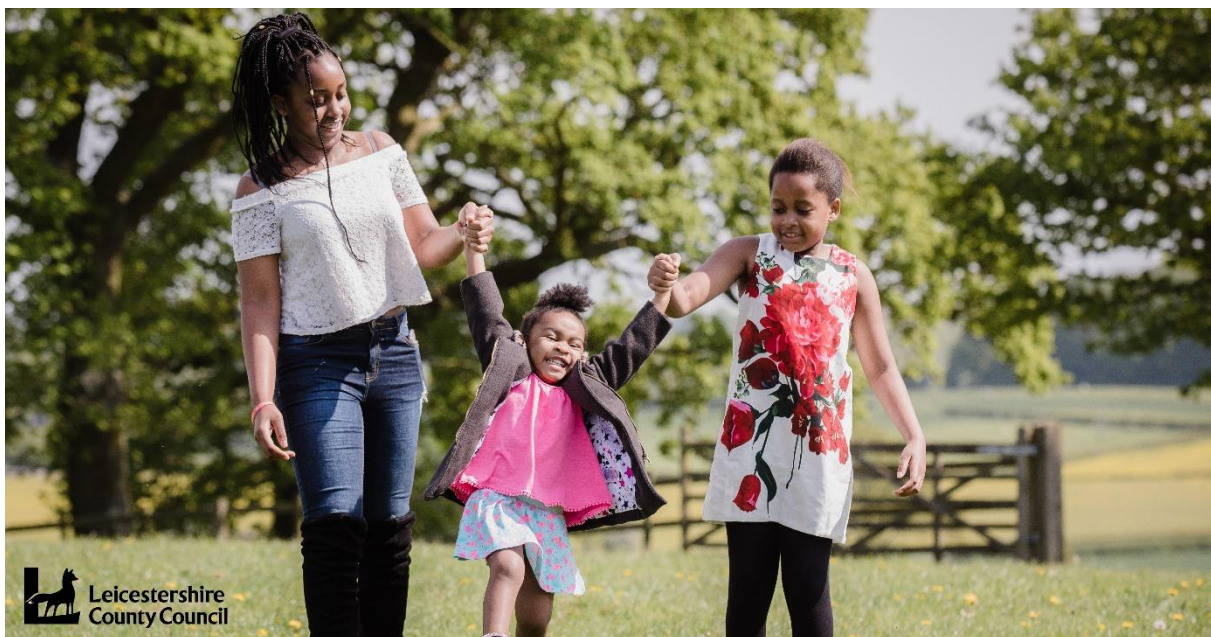
Social workers in the adoption service have access to specialist training and are supported to develop their skills. We are ambitious for our service, for our children and for our staff.

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.

## **8. Recommendations for 2023/2024**

- 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. We will measure stage one and stage 2 timeliness with an aim of achieving assessments to be completed within 6 months. This will be achieved by ensuring that recruitment is transparent and that we are clear at the beginning of the process about suitability of applicants to adopt. Robust management oversight will ensure that delay is picked up quickly and addressed
- 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. There will be a particular focus on those children who typically wait longer. We will utilise FAL activity days for are children who wait longer and ensure that these children are profiled on our FAL website. We are also driving forward the quality of our linkmaker profiles with support from the marketing officer.
- To continue to develop our panel, ensuring that that panel members are appropriately trained to continue to meet the needs of the service 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.
- Continue to invest in developing processes to strengthen feedback and how this influences change and development
- Reinvigorate the service offered to birth parents/first family members, through the appointment of a support worker who will develop a service in consultation with first family and other members of FAL to ensure the needs of first family members are appropriately met.
- To provide bespoke training and support opportunities to our Special Guardians and the children that they care for.
- To consider the impact of the national drive on promoting direct contact for children after adoption







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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE –  
7 NOVEMBER 2023**

**ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer with regard to children in care. The report evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2022 – 31 March 2023.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) has a statutory role to ensure effective and improved care planning for children and young people, securing better outcomes, with their wishes and feelings being central and given full and due consideration. (IRO Handbook March 2010).
3. This Annual Report is a requirement of 'The IRO Handbook - Statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities on their functions in relation to case management and review of looked after children' (March 2010). The content and format follow's the prescription set out in the guidance.
4. The report complies with the expectation that it will be available for scrutiny by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny committee, as well as accessible as a public document and most importantly, communicated to Leicestershire's children in care in a child and young person friendly version which is being finalised.

**Background**

5. The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.
6. There are a wide range of implications/impact assessments that should be considered as part of the decision-making process. These are as follows and any

positive or negative impact on these areas should be addressed in this section of the report: The IRO Service in Leicestershire is hosted within the Safeguarding and Performance Service, part of Children's Social Care (CSC), which sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS) department. Whilst part of CSC, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams with managerial accountability sitting with the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Improvement.

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

## **Proposals**

### **Headlines 22/23 period overview.**

10. The nature of the IRO role means that they have continued to work flexibly and from home throughout this period of review. This period is the first that can be considered post Covid and whilst generally the social work workforce has seen a shift to working more from an office base the nature of the IRO role has meant a move to a more home-based working pattern for the staff. The report does however identify the key pieces of work during the 2022/23 period focused on the quality of meetings and flexibly ways these are coordinated – increasingly shifting to face to face arrangements with children and their voice remaining a key focus.
11. The service has faced some new challenges with the shift of recording into a newer version of the recording system Mosaic from December 2022. The impact of this on day-to-day practice and staff should not be underestimated with extensive training and re-working of key processes and changes to recording templates that have required wholesale change for the workforce. In addition, this change to record has also meant significant gaps in reporting of performance in some areas although, as the roll out of the new system continued these reports have come back online. The service has however needed to adapt and manage information creatively to ensure it can maintain oversight of key processes including tracking work manually.
12. There has also been a change in management of the service. The Service Manager has taken a period of Maternity leave from December 2022 and an interim manager has been in post from that date. The careful handover meant that the work to drive

improvement has continued – this included a period of introduction and shadowing. The previous assistant Safeguarding Manager with responsibility for the IRO service left the service in February 2023 and recruiting to this post took longer than expected. This has caused some delay in actions being fully implemented in the 2022/23 period though these will be fully implemented over the 2023/2024 review period. An assistant Service manager was successfully appointed on a four-month secondment from an IRO post within the team in May 2023 and continues to drive the team forward to consolidate performance.

13. Key areas of development this year have focused on delivering the aspirations set out in the Departmental Road to Excellence Plan (21-23) which is at Appendix B. This alongside “Our Promise” to children in care provides the aspiration, vision, values and behaviours which embody the IRO service. The service has seen particularly emphasis on understanding the trauma that children in care are likely to have suffered both in their experiences before becoming looked after but also in their experiences in care when they are separated from their family networks. IROs have all accessed the necessary training to underpin trauma informed approaches to supporting children and in particular to inform how they coordinated and manage meetings and support the participation of children and their families.
14. Quality assurance and learning improvement activity continues to indicate how the service is performing and forms a key part of understanding the lived experience of children in care, the quality of social work services they have in place, arrangements for their day-to-day care, time with their families and achieving permanency. The service has continued to conduct regular audit of its own service but also to provide a key role as a crucial friend to operation colleagues by the implementation of the informal and formal QA process. There has been a focus on having a strong IRO footprint in records to capture how the IRO is actively supporting high quality services – the quality and timeliness of plans and ensuring that there is a focus on driving for best outcomes including where appropriate to achieve permanency.

### **What is the impact for children.**

#### Well managed meetings

15. Over this review period, the IRO's have been undertaking far more face to face reviews and getting out to see children. Whilst face to face reviews have started to be the norm again over this review period, there is a greater emphasis on the young person choosing how they would like their review meeting to take place.

#### Permanence

16. The focus on permanence and timing planning means that children experience less drift and delay in achieving outcomes – whether this is to return to their family network to achieve permanency in care or by adoption. The IRO Service places a high level of importance on children having permanence plans and will always raise concerns in relation to drift and delay in this area.

#### Celebrating success

17. The service continues to celebrate successes of children. This may be small individual messages of congratulations by individual IROs or more whole service wide gestures. In September 2022, a Celebration of Achievement Awards was held

which celebrated Children in Care and their successes, the first event of its kind post Covid19. This event was held over two evenings at the Leicester Space Centre and was well attended.

### **IRO Challenge and Escalation**

18. Child friendly Quality Assurance Alerts have been further enhanced in this review period and is now embedded in practice which will mean that service to children are good or outstanding. The Safeguarding Service has continued to work hard to embed Quality Assurance Alerts into practise and become part of Leicestershire's culture of continuous improvement. It has long been recognised that it is important that when an alert for concern is raised that these are written in a clear and objective manner that highlights any work that needs to be done whilst acknowledging positives and difficulties in achieving the right outcomes.
19. The year 2022/23 has been a period of transition and consolidation for the service. This has impacted on some of the pace of delivering some of its ambitions however an overview of the year gives the service confidence that it is in a strong position to further enhance services into 2023/24.

### **Consultation**

20. The plan moving forward is to consult with young people moving forward who are key stakeholders within the service.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

21. Over the next 12 months, the service will aim to continue to embed the areas of specialism and expertise within the IRO Looked After Children (LAC) Focus Team, ensuring a high-quality service is delivered to children and young people. Increasingly, the service is focused on the impact of trauma as key to understanding children's needs.
22. A service which is focused on ensuring their needs are met, represented and addressed within their Care Planning, along with promoting their individual sense of identity, belonging thus ensuring an inclusive service is provided. The IRO's advocate for and challenge where necessary to ensure the Local Authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities, but in addition staff are being proud Corporate Parents for the care being afforded to children, in line with Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025.
23. A major development for the IRO Service is to pilot the recording of Review of Arrangement's (ROA's), this started to be considered over 2022/2023. However, due to reservations of its compatibility with existing IT services provided, the development was paused. The service hopes that this can be considered again over this review period to consider whether it would have the intended benefits noted previously in the Annual Report 2022/2023.

### **Conclusions**

24. Key stakeholders for consultation include children in care through formal mechanisms in the Children in care counsel but also through the Corporate Parenting

Board, where this report will be shared with young people and professional stakeholders such as Health, Education, Housing and the Police.

### **Background Papers**

25. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025  
[https://www.proceduresonline.com/llr/childcare/leicestershire/user\\_controlled\\_lcms\\_area/uploaded\\_files/Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy%202022-2025compressed.pdf](https://www.proceduresonline.com/llr/childcare/leicestershire/user_controlled_lcms_area/uploaded_files/Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy%202022-2025compressed.pdf)
26. The Children and Social Work Act 2017  
<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2017/16/contents/enacted>
27. Statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/271429/directors\\_of\\_child\\_services\\_stat\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/271429/directors_of_child_services_stat_guidance.pdf)
28. Children Act 1989: care planning placement and case review  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/441643/Children\\_Act\\_Guidance\\_2015.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/441643/Children_Act_Guidance_2015.pdf)
29. Children Act 1989: planning transition to adulthood for care leavers  
[https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/397649/CA1989\\_Transitions\\_guidance.pdf](https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/397649/CA1989_Transitions_guidance.pdf)

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

30. None

### **Equalities Implications**

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

### **Human Rights Implications**

33. There are no Human Right's Implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2022/23  
 Appendix B - Departmental Road to Excellence Plan (21-23)

Appendix C – Independent Reviewing Officer Looked After Children Focus Team Annual Report

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# Safeguarding and Performance Independent Reviewing Officer Service LAC Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2022 - 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023



# Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Context
4. Profile of the IRO Service
5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children
6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO – Looked After Children’s Service?
7. What is the impact for our children and families?
8. What can we do better?
9. What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?
10. Independent Reviewing Officer – Service Delivery Plan 2022-2023

## 1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service (IRO) sets out the performance for the service in 2022-2023 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The IRO Handbook sets out the statutory requirement for an annual report on the delivery of service and the impact of the IRO service on the outcomes for children in care.

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

This reporting period has been the first in what can be considered - post Corona virus pandemic - a period when efforts have been made to return to more business as usual service delivery. This has involved trying to retain some of the flexibility of new ways of working developed during the pandemic whilst we continue to meet our ambition to deliver high quality services to our children in care.

In response to the pandemic the Safeguarding and Performance Service rapidly adapted and changed the way we delivered services to reflect the COVID19 circumstances, and our ability to meet these challenges grew during 2020 to become a new business as usual. During 2022/23 we have aimed to return to a model of delivery largely focused on face to face meetings though this has included listening to the child and using hybrid approaches to our meetings if this has allowed the child and other agencies to be present and heard.

This has meant that we have seen an increase in meetings held face to face and those mixing both online and face to face opportunities. For some children and young people, having the option to engage in meetings virtually continues to be more suited to them, as well as using video calls as a means of developing relationships.

The nature of the IRO role means that they have continued to work flexibly and from home though more generally the social work workforce has seen a shift to working more from an office base.

We have faced some new challenges with the shift of our recording into a newer version of the recording system Mosaic from December 2022. The impact of this on day-to-day practice and our staff should not be underestimated with extensive training and re-working of our key processes. This has created gaps in our reporting which has meant further work on tracking work manually.

There has also been a change in management of the service. The Service Manager has taken a period of Maternity leave from December 2022 and an interim manager has been in post from that date to continue the work to drive improvement following a period of introduction and shadowing. The Safeguarding Manager left the service in February 2023 and recruiting to this post took longer than expected. This has caused some delay in actions being fully implemented which will be fully implemented over the 2023/2024 review period. This post was successfully appointed to on a 4-month secondment from an IRO post within the team in May 2023.

Key areas of development this year have focused on delivering our aspirations as set out in our Departmental Road to Excellence Plan (21-23). This alongside our promise to our children in care provides the aspiration, vision, values and behaviours which embody the IRO service. We have seen particularly emphasis on understanding the trauma that children in care are likely to have suffered both in their experiences before becoming looked after but

also in their experiences in care when they are separated from their family networks. Our IROs have all accessed the necessary training to underpin trauma informed approaches to supporting children and in particular, to inform how they coordinated and manage meetings and support the participation of children and their families.

Quality assurance and learning improvement activity continues to tell us how we are doing as a service and forms a key part of understanding the lived experience of children in care, the quality of social work services they have in place, arrangements for their day-to-day care, time with their families and achieving permanency. The service has continued to conduct regular audit of its own service but also to provide a key role as a crucial friend to operation colleagues by the implementation of the informal and formal QA process. We have aimed to have a strong IRO footprint on children's records to capture how the IRO is actively supporting high quality services – the quality and timeliness of our plans and ensuring that we are driving for best outcomes including where appropriate to achieve permanency.

The year 22/23 has been a period of transition and consolidation for the service. This has impacted on the pace of delivering some of our ambitions however our overview of the year gives us confidence that we are in a strong position to further enhance our services into 23/24.



## 2. Introduction

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) sets out the performance for the service in 2022-2023 for IRO services, identifying our priorities for the forthcoming year.



The service provision of the Safeguarding and Performance Service is driven by our vision and mission statement and is underpinned by the shared values and behaviours of the Children and Family Services.

We recognise the role of the IRO service as being central to driving forward the Continuous Improvement Plan and promoting the key goals and behaviours set out in the Road to Excellence.

## Continuous Improvement Plan 2021 - 2023 The Road to Excellence



### Our Vision

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

#### Our Ambitions for 2021 - 2023

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



#### Core Values and Behaviours that underpin everything we do

**Aspirational**  
We value high aspirations for our Children and Families.

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

**Collaboration**  
We value collaboration based on building strong working relationships.

#### Behaviours

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

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

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

**Being Accountable**  
Everyone is responsible for delivering high quality services.

#### Our pledge for children

##### Each member of staff pledges that:

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

##### Our leaders and managers pledge to:

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

#### How we will do it

##### Embedding excellent practice

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

##### Taking the right action at the right time

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

##### Developing policy and performance

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

##### Being a learning organisation

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

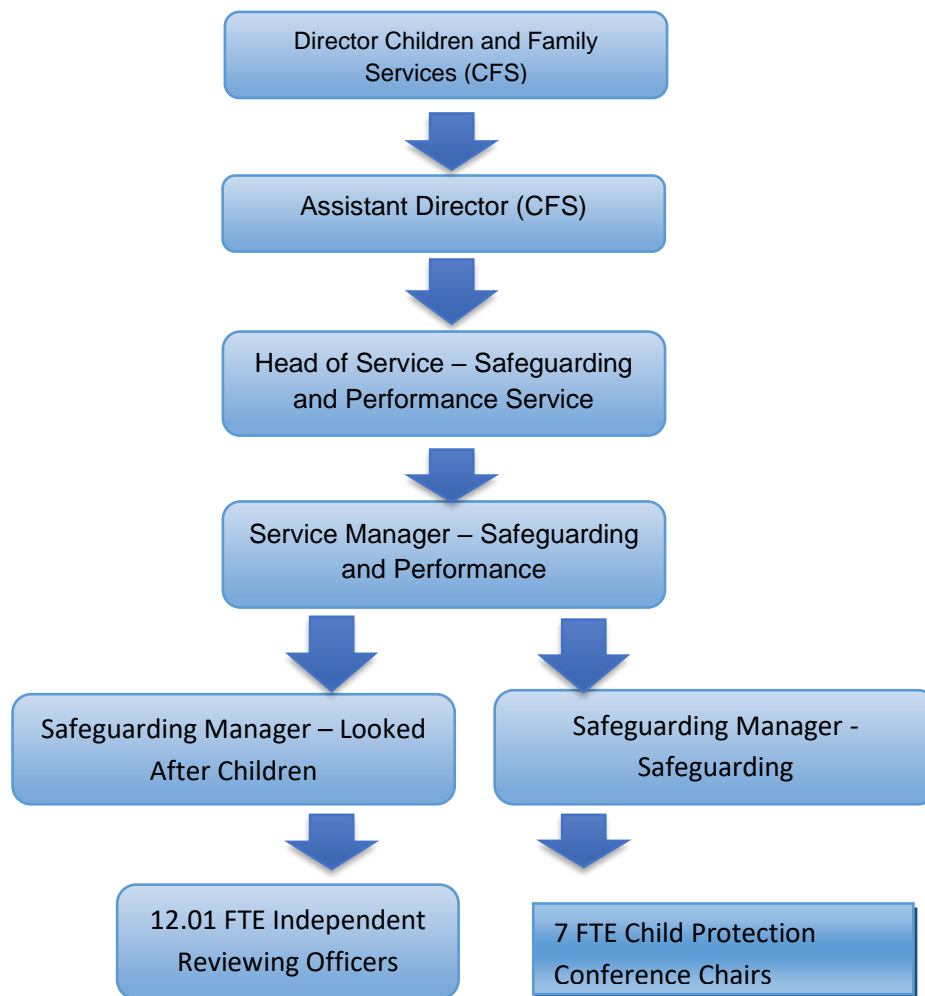
#### What success will look like

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



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



Since May 2021, we have continued within the service to have two Focus Teams. One for Child Protection Conference Chairs and one for IRO's chairing Review of Arrangement meetings. Thus, the teams have expertise in one area, CP or LAC and drive forward the development plan for that area. This has continued and the teams have become experts in their area of work, focusing on progressing their improvement plans and achieving positive outcomes for children. The two teams also lead on their individual development areas identified within our Service Delivery Plan, resulting in a robust, efficient Independent Reviewing Officer Service. With the focus teams and invested growth in the IRO service, this has enabled caseloads to be aligned with the IRO handbook recommendations.

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

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

holistic oversight of the child's case and ensures that the child's interests are protected throughout the care planning process.

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

This report outlines the contribution made by the IRO Service in Leicestershire, to quality assurance and the improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2022 to March 2023. It is an evaluative report considering how effectively the Safeguarding and Performance Service has fulfilled the responsibilities of its role and the impact that this has had on children and families of Leicestershire. It is an opportunity to identify areas of good practice – 'what is working well' and those in need of development and improvement – 'what needs to happen'. It highlights emerging themes and trends, providing information that contributes to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. The performance measures used to measure success are both qualitative and quantitative data from all areas of quality assurance undertaken throughout children's services.

### 3. Context

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

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

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

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

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

### 4. Profile of the IRO Service

#### **Safeguarding and Performance Service, IRO focus team**

1x FTE Service Manager (covers both focus teams)

1x FTE Safeguarding Manager- Looked After Children

12.01 x FTE IRO



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

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

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

The Safeguarding and Performance Service continues to be very well supported by senior leaders and this is evidenced by the continued effort to recruit and retain our workforce. This is recognition of the pivotal role the IRO's have in undertaking statutory duties such as chairing meetings and the broader quality assurance role which supports driving and improving practice and the increased number of young people seeking asylum who require care planning.

The quality assurance role of the IRO is central to strengthening the implementation of Signs of Safety. IRO's are Practice Leads role modelling and apply the Signs of Safety approach, our identified values and behaviours and being experts in planning and using networks to strength support and protection to our vulnerable children and enhance how we build the wellbeing for out LAC children. This is underpinned by our Signs of Safety practice framework which underpins our work to improve the lives of children and families living in Leicestershire. Therefore, it is critical that their Signs of Safety knowledge and skills remain comprehensive.

The IRO service received support to undertake a bespoke specialist three-day training course, which was delivered by two independent trainers from Birmingham University, completed over 3 days in March, May and June 2022. The course outline consisted of:

**Day 1: evaluating and assessing plans** –attention to chronologies, assessing plans and documentation against set criteria; biases and heuristics in decision making under conditions of uncertainty; risk; safe uncertainty; safety planning; and assessment from an attachment minded perspective.

**Day 2: individual and group processes** –chairing from a narrative perspective; thinking about and managing anxious systems; decision making and group processes; and shame within meetings.

**Day 3: participation and challenge** – a review of the major models of participation; Ofsted and challenge; styles of conflict management and conflict management strategies.

The course also looked at trauma informed systems and the impact of the pandemic, as well as applying learning to Leicestershire models of practice. The course was facilitated for each focus area, enabling the learning to be applied to their particular area of specialism, LAC or CP. This was an excellent opportunity for our IRO's to further develop their knowledge and skill base, as well as reflective opportunity to consider their roles independently but also within the leadership group of the Local Authority.

IRO's play a significant role in the development and delivery of high-quality interventions to children in care and in need of protection. The IRO Service in Leicestershire remains committed to this responsibility. This commitment is supported by the implementation of a service specific Learning Audit Framework (2023-23) which highlights areas of need and provides a framework of observation, peer audit and audit analysis to inform learning and drive forward best practice. The service in addition has monthly Improvement Cycle meetings to challenge and evaluate performance data to support rigorous responses to emerging performance trends and direct action for improvement. This is overseen by the Senior Management Team and monthly performance meetings.

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

The Service Manager for the Safeguarding and Performance Service and the Agency Decision Maker meet each month for a Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting, to discuss cases and themes of concern. It is then considered whether these cases / matters need to be taken to the Challenge Meeting with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, or if further actions can be taken in the first instance. A tracking spreadsheet is kept with a log of these discussions and the cases / themes are followed up with the allocated IRO during supervision or during Team Meetings if necessary.

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

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

### **Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS)**

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

It is positive that CAFCASS management has expressed a strong commitment to continuing to build productive working relationships between IRO's and Guardians. The Assistant Service

Manager who oversees the line management of the LAC IRO's attends meetings with the managers from CAFCASS to discuss any identified themes and to ensure the working together remains a strong partnership. Prior to COVID19, there would be 6 monthly meetings arranged between IRO's and Cafcass Guardians, including managers to review and support working relationships, share information and updates and ensure any matters arising were able to be dealt with. This is due to resume over the next review period 2023/2024.

### Family Justice Board

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

### Regional IRO Forums

The IRO Service has continued to engage in the East Midlands Regional IRO forums and has had the benefit of quarterly tailored training and networking days over 2022/23. Each IRO Regional Day has a key theme running through the day with a variety of speakers delivering presentations as well as there being opportunities to work in small groups with colleagues from other areas, to share good practice and reflect on ways to improve services for children and their families.



## 5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children

### Being a Corporate Parent

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

#### **Our Corporate Parenting Strategy states:**

We strive for children and young people of Leicestershire to be afforded positive, stable and safe care within their families, where they are well connected to their communities and supported to access support services where needed.

In circumstances where children are unable to live with their family, our priority is to ensure they are provided with safe, stable and secure care and permanence is secured within a timely way. We want children to be afforded with opportunities to ensure they inspire to have high aspirations which are supported, thus having successful childhood experiences, which are the foundations to their adulthood.

In Leicestershire we are committed to our Children in Care and Care Leavers and are determined to ensure that we carry out our duty and responsibilities as a Corporate Parent with genuine passion, ambition, enthusiasm and care. This is underpinned by Our Promise which sets out our commitment to Children in Care and Care Leavers.

We understand that all of our children have individual needs and goals and our care planning and planned support offered to all of our children reflects this. We advocate and champion for diversity and ensure our children and young people are provided with inclusive services which values and respects their individual identity needs.

We are committed to the voice of our children and young people informing all areas of decision making, underpinned by a "You Said, We Did" approach. Participation is central to all services delivered to our children and young people and is championed in effective children and young people led forums including our Children in Care Council, Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC), our Corporate Parenting Board and many more participation events.

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





## 6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO - Looked After Children's Service?

On 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, Leicestershire introduced a new Mosaic system which has changed the workflow, practice, and performance reporting. This has been introduced in a phased approach over the services. First Response started to use the new workflows from the 1<sup>st</sup> December 2022, and the Child in Care Service are due to be phased over to the new mosaic in May 2023. The team has worked really hard to ensure the data on Mosaic is as accurate as possible, and this was reflected in the year end performance figures. The change in our recording and reporting has meant that some of the data used to measure impact has been unavailable, during full implementation and therefore, the report has been adapted to ensure as much data as possible has been retained.

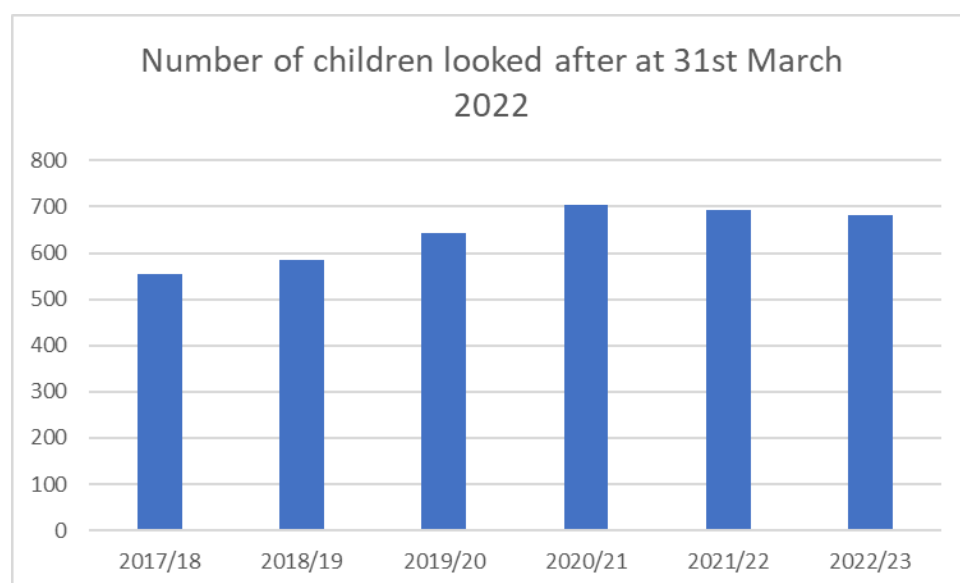
Where possible data has been collected from the previous Mosaic, and now the new Mosaic, however our data over this reporting year is from different sources including the IRO diary spreadsheet which holds the majority of information about review meetings, the amount held and timeliness. This need to use adapted data means it is difficult to compare like for like data to our previous reporting year. There has also been a separate log for Quality Assurance alerts sent and these were recorded on the previous version of Mosaic until December 2022, and the spreadsheet since whilst we wait for this Mosaic dashboard to be finalised. This has been a key area of development over the period of review.

### Children in Care

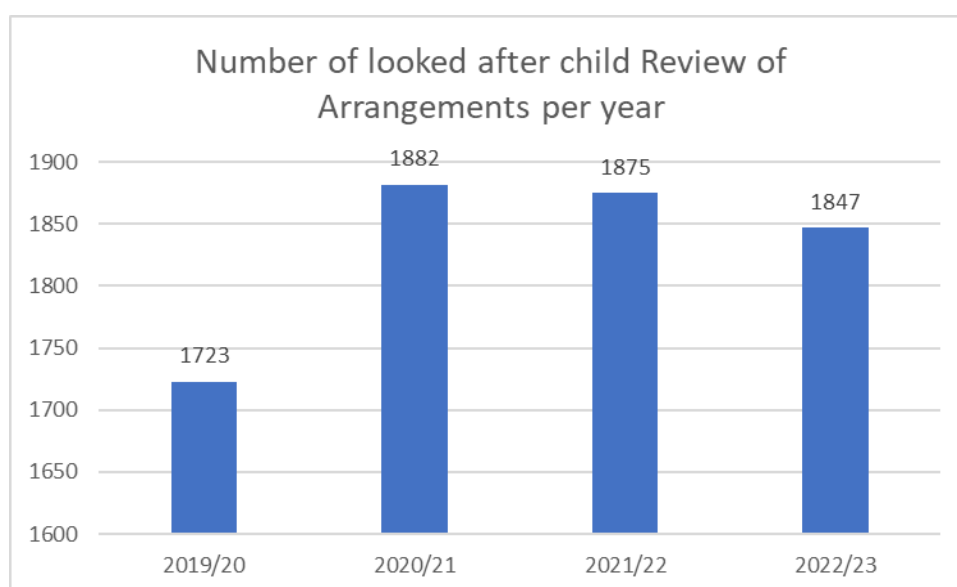
There were 681 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, a small decrease of 13 children from 694 children in care on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022. 681 children are equivalent to 48.4 children per 10,000 population aged 0 to 17 in Leicestershire. This compares to an average of 56.1 children in care per 10,000 children in Statistical Neighbour authorities, and 67.0 for England as of 31<sup>st</sup> March 2021. We implement robust review of our threshold decisions for children becoming looked

after and work hard to maintain and strengthen family networks including by seeking permanency to reduce the length of time a child may remain in care.

Of the 681 children in care on 31st March 2023, 419 (62%) were Male and 262 (38%) were Female. This represents a further increase to the proportion of Males compared to 31st March 2022, (410, 59% Male and 286, 41% Female) and 31st March 2021. The age profile of Males in care has increased overall in the last year; The number of Males aged 1 to 4 has decreased from 65 to 52 (-20%), whereas age groups 10 to 15 and 16 to 17 have increased by 6 (5%) and 17 (15%) respectively. Conversely, the age profile of Females has seen decreases in the age groups 10 to 15 and 16 to 17 by 15 (-12%) and 9 (-13%) respectively.



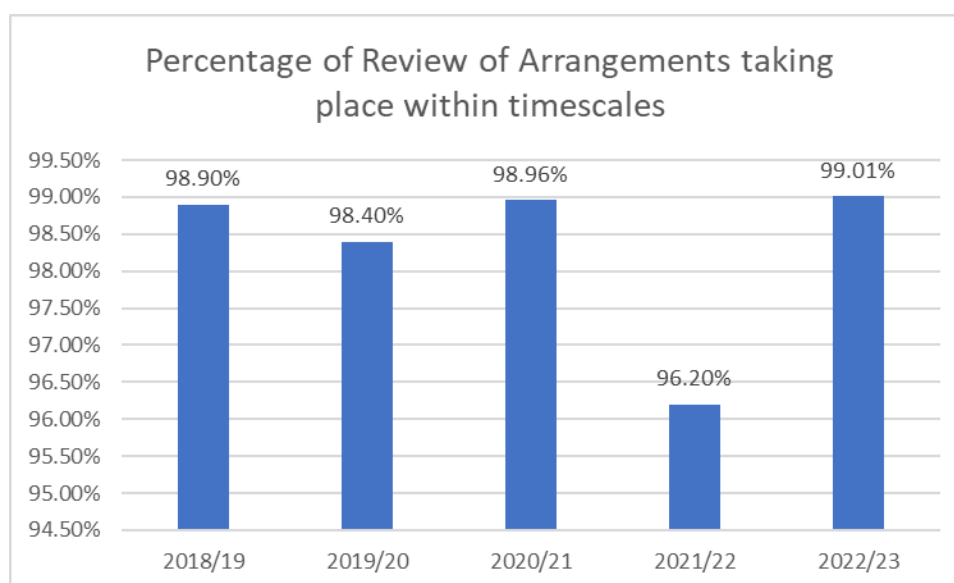
There were 1,847 Review of Arrangements meetings in the last year, this shows a small decrease in ROA's meetings over two consecutive years, from 1882 ROA's 2020/21 to 1875 in 2021/22.



The review meetings being completed have decreased by 28 over this last year, the number of children entering into care has remained stable at 251, compared to 250 over 2021/2022. There has also been a similar amount of children leave care over this review period, with 271 children discharged from care, compared to 275 in 2021/22.

All children that enter care must have a ROA within 28 days and a further review at three months, it is also important to have an additional review as a child leaves care, particularly if they have reached 18 to ensure that all the necessary services are in place to support them as an adult.

Over this review period there has been the successful introduction of the midway tracking form completed by the IRO's, meaning they are formally tracking each child in care between their 6 monthly reviews, and therefore not arranging review of arrangements meetings unnecessarily early. At the midway review any concerns regarding a child's care plan are raised and resolved and only when the IRO views there need to be an additional review of arrangements meeting will this be arranged, but generally all issues can be dealt with at the midway review. This aims to both improve quality and avoid drift and delay in planning permanency for children which has continued to be a focus for the service in this period.



At the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2022, the IRO Service had completed 1847 Review of Arrangement meetings of these 99.1% were completed within timescale. This is a significant improvement from 21/22.

Over December and January 2023 there was a higher number of reviews held in two parts, and following an audit of part one ROA's in January 2023 it was found that 27% of ROA were held between 12 December 2022 and 20th January 2023 were in two parts. This being a total of 41 review meetings.

Although the vast majority of decisions to hold the review in two parts were compliant with the IRO Handbook there is still concern that this was a high number. The impact of these being it is unsettling for children and families when planned meetings do not go ahead, difficulties to rearrange within timescales to ensure all relevant participants can attend as well as delays in care plans being updated. Recommendations were made and this started to reduce to the number of reviews held in two parts and our Annual Report for 2023/2024 will show our progress in this area as key service development action.

A significant improvement in the IRO Service during this year has been the introduction of the formal midway tracking process. IRO's have always tracked the progress of cases between reviews and recorded their views on care planning where it was seen as necessary. However,

previously it was found that there was some inconsistency in this approach in that whilst some cases were tracked closely others had little evidence of the IRO footprint.

The IRO Service has developed a mid-way case tracking template which is now completed on each case at the half-way point between reviews. This can be completed as a file review, case discussion with the social worker or both. The main areas the IRO looks at in these reviews include:

- Are all the recommendations from the most recent ROA being progressed in the agreed timescales.
- Are there any other concerns about drift and delay?
- Is there an up-to-date care plan/ pathway plan on the child or young person's file?
- Has the child been visited within statutory timescales?
- Is there evidence of the child's voice recorded in case notes since the last review?

This has had a significant impact if there has been drift and delay identified, the consistent approach to midway reviews being completed allows this to be identified at an earlier stage. IRO's will routinely complete Quality Assurance Alerts following a mid-way review to ensure the necessary remedial action is taken to get things back on track before the next review. This process is demonstrating rigorous IRO oversight and challenge between ROA meetings. This has been a major achievement for the service in this period.

## Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to care planning. As always IRO's continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. Whilst all reviews were held virtually during the COVID19 restrictions and this had an impact on children's participation, since Spring 2022 the IRO Service has aimed to hold face to face ROA's for all children that want their meetings to take place in person as well as all 28 day reviews.

Since Spring 2022, 34.4% of review meetings have been held face to face, 12.3% held in a hybrid style, with those attending the review meeting either in person or virtually and 53.3% held virtually. We can see our participation numbers have increased over this review period and for children aged over 4, 90.84% have engaged in their review this year either directly or indirectly. This is very positive as part of our drive to have the child at the center of their planning.

Since children's reviews are increasingly being held in person, we have seen a decrease in children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf, do not attend but communicate their views by another method and those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way. This shows us that by completing the review in the style which most works for the child encourages their participation in the most meaningful way.

It is acknowledged that not all children will want to attend their meeting and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways. Over this review year, the IRO's have been creative in how they gain their children and young people's views, for example one young person sends her IRO a series of voice note sharing her views to inform her review meeting.



We also encourage our children to chair their review meetings which supports them to feel empowered and in control of their care planning. In 2022/23 we have seen significant increases of children attending their reviews and speaking for themselves and children participating more in their review meetings and the IRO's strive for their children and young people to be part of their review meeting.

	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
<b>PN0:</b> <b>Children under the age of 4</b>	363	363	370	404	405	367	329
<b>PN1:</b> <b>Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves</b>	550	554	632	659	561	590	714
<b>PN2:</b> <b>Those who attend but communicate via an advocate</b>	13	4	10	7	18	23	48
<b>PN3:</b> <b>Those who attend and convey their views non-verbally</b>	3	2	3	0	4	3	4
<b>PN4:</b> <b>Those who attend but don't contribute</b>	4	11	10	11	7	4	14
<b>PN5:</b> <b>Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf</b>	70	52	98	87	81	118	104
<b>PN6:</b> <b>Do not attend but communicate their views by another method</b>	399	415	296	450	636	623	495
<b>PN7:</b> <b>Those who do not attend/convey their views in any other way</b>	50	87	163	103	118	147	139

Another important area within children and young people's participation is the use of the 'My Review' booklet. This is a document written and designed by the Children in Care council to help children and young people prepare for their review or be submitted to the IRO as a written record of their views. This continues to be sent out electronically to the social worker, who forwards the document to the foster carer. However, return rates have not been as we would have expected them to be, and more work is required to improve the visibility of this document.

As a result, the IRO's are now sharing this document in every review and raising the profile of this booklet for the children to complete their views in. As well as this, there is a link to the booklet which continues to be sent to each child and their carer in advance of the meeting, which they can complete either by themselves or with the support of their carer, social worker or Children's Rights Officer, it is hoped the completion will increase for the next reporting period.

In addition to the link being sent directly before the review it can also be found on the LCC Corporate Parenting page as per the link below:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/social-care-and-supporting-families/services-for-looked-after-children-and-young-people/corporate-parenting>

At the start of 2023, the Children in Care Council developed a survey regarding the language of care to be completed by their peers in care, seeking to gain their views on professional language used. The findings of this are due to be published and we look forward to how the IRO service can implement a more personal approach to the preferred language of our children in care as this work is brought to completion during 23/24 period.

## Permanence

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

<b>Permanence Plan (at second review)</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to Family	42	6.93%
Adoption	93	15.35%
SGO/CAO	25	4.13%
Supported living in the community	93	15.35%
Long-term residential placement	29	4.79%
Long-term fostering	278	45.87%
Twin Tracking (Other)	46	7.59%
<b>Total</b>	<b>606</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>560</b>	<b>92.41%</b>
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>7.59%</b>

<b>Plan agreed before second review</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3.25%</b>
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Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. There has been a significant improvement in children having their permanence confirmed at their second review of arrangements meeting with 92.41% having this. There has also been a significant reduction in no plan from 33% in 2021/22 to 7.59% this year which includes twin tracking. The IRO's are raising questions of permanence and longer term planning at the first 28 day review meeting and there has been a greater increase in children having permanence by their second review meeting. This focus reflect departmental ambitions.

<b>Permanence Plan (ALL LAC)</b>	<b>No.</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to Family	46	6.79%
Adoption	93	13.74%
SGO/CAO	25	3.69%
Supported living in the community	106	15.66%

Long-term residential placement	30	4.43%
Long-term fostering	282	41.65%
Twin Tracking (Other)	46	6.79%
No Plan	49	7.24%
<b>Total</b>	<b>677</b>	<b>100.00%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>582</b>	<b>85.97%</b>
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>14.03%</b>

In 2022/23, the data has been used from the full cohort of children in care and 85.97% children had a permanence plan agreed, with 14.03% without permanence agreed but out of those 7.2% hadn't had their second review and 6.79% had their care plan as twinned tracking. Therefore for all children who have had their second review, and whereby assessments to determine their permanence plan have been finalised have a permanence plan. There were 3.25% (22 children) who had their permanence plan agreed before their second review.

Due to the permanence planning data being taken from a different sources and different point in time to the LAC figures, we are unable to compare these children like for like. Although the difference in the two sets of data are not significant it cannot be easily compared. Therefore, we need to add a caveat that the permanence plans total (677) cannot be compared like for like to the total number of LAC (680) and therefore the totals will not balance.

### IRO Challenge & Escalation

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

Over this review period there has been a change to how our Quality Assurance Alerts are completed and the new Mosaic system implemented in December 2022 has given the opportunity to review how our challenge and escalation is recorded. This has meant our data sources for Quality Assurance alerts are being pulled from different sources at different points in time meaning we are unable to compare like for like. We continue to hold Data Quality meetings monthly to review our data. With oversight by the Head of Service. During 23/24 it is planned for all reporting to have stabilised within the new system.

Over this review period, the IRO service has continued to use a preparation for review template which informs what constitutes a challenge in practice to the social work team and through the procedures how this escalates until it is resolved. From November 2022 the IRO service has shifted focus to quality rather than compliance-based assurance on the basis that improved reporting for Local Authority Children and Family Service teams means greater visibility of key performance issues such as supervision and visits. Senior Management oversight to these key measures has taken place monthly.

As the new Mosaic system has been implemented over this review period, the management information system has continued to record our formal escalation alerts and responses, however whilst the new system is being implemented the data base for our positive challenges hasn't been finalised and our Safeguarding Administration team hold these on Excel.

From 1<sup>st</sup> April to 31<sup>st</sup> March there have been 279 Quality Assurance Alerts completed in respect of Children in Care, with 185 being of concern and 94 for good practice. A further 77 positive challenge alerts have been sent for compliance concerns.

The IRO Team has continued to regularly discuss and review the processes of QA's, working against an agreed set of bottom lines which has developed a far higher degree of consistency within the team, although there will inevitably remain some variance as the process has to involve a degree of professional discretion.

We are working to ensure the data management system within the new Mosaic implemented in December 2022 provides a similar standard of live data information to our previous one as the QA's system is highly valued by management.

This system also highlights positives and areas of concern to individual cases to help support the work of the local Authority to ensure we achieve the best outcomes for our children and young people.

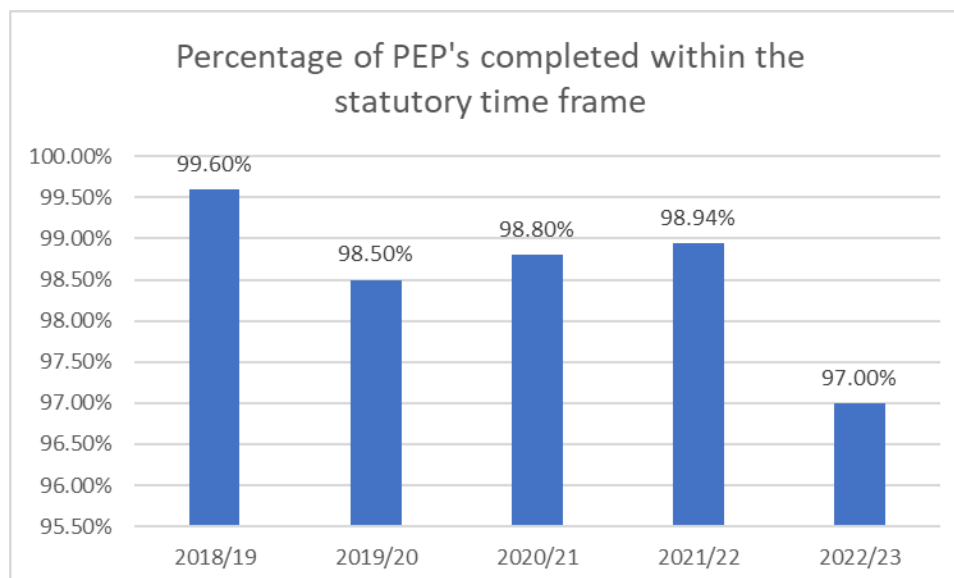
Whilst this is being developed, managers are working from their own dashboards of data which is reviewed monthly on compliance matters. It is expected that over the 2023/2024 review period the QA process will be further refined to allow managers to manage their compliance data and QA's would only be raised on these matters if drift and delay was identified. This will allow IRO's to focus on more qualitative matters relating to children's care planning rather than quantitative.

For the positive QA's there is no requirement for a manager to provide a response however for area's of concern it is necessary for a manager to respond and the IRO to be satisfied that the response before the QA is formally resolved. Stage one being with the Team Manager, Stage two with the Service Manager, Stage Three with the Head of Service and Stage four with the Assistant Director. A final stage would be with the Director of Children's social care, although no cases were required to be escalated to this level during the year 2022/23. The stages at which each case was resolved were as follows:

<b>QA's for good practice</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage One</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Two</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Three</b>	<b>QA for concern resolved at Stage Four</b>
94	176	18	5	1

Additionally, as part of the escalation process, if an IRO has sufficient concern in relation to a child or young person's care planning, they can refer the case to either Cafcass or request independent legal advice, neither of which was required during 2022/2023.

## Personal Education Plans

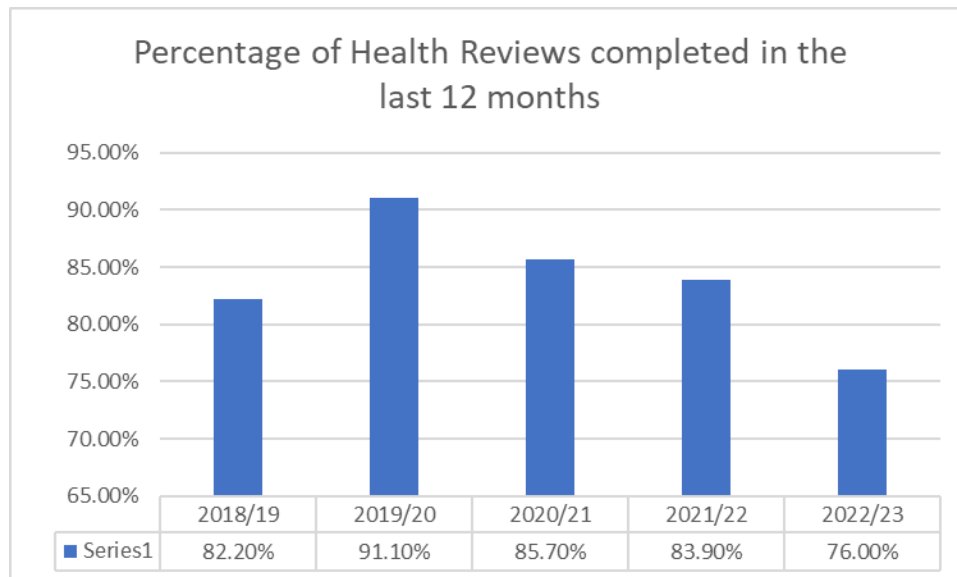


The above graph shows the average PEP completion rate over the academic year from September to July in each year with the final column representing the average completion rate. From September 2022 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023, 97% of children have had a PEP meeting.

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

Children and young people's education continues to take a high priority within the IRO service. In each IRO's supervision all cases are reviewed whereby the child has been identified as not in education, employment or training (NEET). This process was implemented some years ago due to concerns that as children moved placement there may be delays in identifying suitable education provision, however for those in mainstream statutory education this has not been identified as an area of concern for some time as the Virtual Schools are proactive in working with schools and colleges to ensure that young people's needs are met.

#### **Health Check's completed within twelve months**



In 2022/23, 76% of children had their annual health reviews completed within timescales, this is a dip of 7% compared to 2021/22 data.

Audit work continues in this area with our Designated Nurse for Looked After Children in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, with our last audit completed in February 2022 and commented on in our Annual Report 2021/22. Recommendations are still being progressed regarding the IRO's raising health assessments in children's review meetings, and there has been a focus on Strength's and Difficulties Questionnaires being spoken about in review meetings to ensure they are being completed.

The Looked After Children's Health Service has been working on a prioritisation model over 2022/23 due to the impact on their staffing and IRO's have been raising directly with the service where there are significant health concerns noted with no review health assessment completed in date. Improvement work is overseen by the Corporate parenting board where health colleagues are held to account for service delivery. Improvement in completion of health assessment will be key to track over 23/24.

### **Dental checks within a twelve-month period**

As with health reviews dental checks are viewed with high importance in contributing to children and young people's well-being. Over this reporting year, 85.5% of children had their teeth checked by a dentist. This compares to 58% in 2021/22, and 28.4% in 2020/2021 which was significantly impacted by the COVID19 restrictions.

## **7. What is the impact for our children and families?**

### **Well managed meetings**

Over this review period, the IRO's have been undertaking far more face to face reviews and getting out to see children. Whilst face to face reviews have started to be the norm again over this review period, there is a greater emphasis on the young person choosing how they would like their review meeting to take place. The IRO Service has continued to have clear guidelines that all initial ROA's should be face to face, as well as adoption reviews and where a child or young



person wishes for their review to be in person rather than virtually. For our initial ROA meetings there has been strong encouragement for the young person to be part of this meeting and the IRO to have spoken with the young person first. We aim for all families and children to experience positive focused and well managed meetings which are focused on the plan – have the child's voice heard and captured and for families to maintain an understanding of what the child needs to have best outcomes. We are confident that our move to face to face meetings alongside the evidence of better participation by children in their meetings has strengthened the experience of all participants and the effectiveness of our planning.

### **Permanence**

Our focus on permanence and timing planning means that children experience less drift and delay in achieving outcomes – whether this is to return to their family network to achieve permanency in care or by adoption. The IRO Service places a high level of importance on children having permanence plans and will always raise concerns in relation to drift and delay in this area. It is recognised that first and foremost it is essential that the right decisions are made in the best interests of children but delay in such cases is unacceptable. In the past twelve months it is pleasing to see that the number of permanence plans at second review has increased, as well as in some situation's permanence agreed at the young person's initial review, although there is no room for complacency.

### **Celebrating success**

We celebrate our children's successes. This may be small individual messages of congratulations by individual IROs or more whole service wide gestures. In September 2022, we held our Celebration of Achievement Awards celebrating our Children in Care and their successes, our first one post Covid19. This event was held over two evenings at the Leicester Space Centre and was well attended. Our Celebration of Achievement Awards has been greatly missed during the pandemic and it was a lovely opportunity for our children and young people to celebrate their successes together. There were performances from Beacon Choir, our Children in Care choir as well as the opportunity to go into the Rocket Tower. This event is planned to take place again this year in September 2023 and will continue to be held yearly.

### **IRO Challenge & Escalation**

Our child friendly quality assurance alerts have been further enhanced this review period and is now embedded in practice which will mean that service to children are good or outstanding. The Safeguarding Service has continued to work hard to embed Quality Assurance Alerts into practise and become part of Leicestershire's culture of continuous improvement. It has long been recognised that it is important that when an alert for concern is raised that these are written in a clear and objective manner that highlights any work that needs to be done whilst acknowledging positives and difficulties in achieving the right outcomes. IRO's are aware of the pressures colleagues in social care may be working in and aim to ensure that any QA is not written as a criticism of the worker but rather to highlight the importance of the local authority getting things right for the child or young person. To underline this the Safeguarding Service has been writing the alerts to the child for the last two years. This has been seen as a very positive step in that each QA not only sets out what the concern is but why it has been raised and what is the impact for the child. It has also been a positive step that the managers and service managers are reviewing their own data against performance on a monthly basis.

An example of this being Child A, whereby the IRO raised a concern that supervision had been missed. However, the alert was written in a way that not only brought this to the attention of the manager, but if the child were to look at their record, they would be able to understand why this was raised as a concern. The IRO explained that regular supervision should be in place to enable

the right level of support to the social worker. Furthermore, management oversight to provide reflective and thought through care planning to ensure the child's needs are adequately being met now and in the future. The Team Manager responded with a clear commitment that future supervision will be undertaken within timescales.

As indicated in the table on page 19 not all QA's are resolved at stage one by the team manager but some need to be escalated to Service Manager or beyond. One such case being Child B who has learning difficulties, and his placement broke down meaning he was residing with his grandparents on a temporary basis until another home could be found for him. This was classed as an unregulated placement.

The IRO raised concern that limited support had been provided to grandparents to support their grandson's needs given his additional needs and vulnerability, he had no school place and also his social worker had left the Local Authority. The IRO appropriately challenged this with his social worker and manager, but felt the concerns were serious enough to need service management oversight. The IRO allowed ample opportunity for the service manager to respond, but when this wasn't received, the alert escalated to the head of service. This also was not responded to, which meant it escalated to the assistant director who provided a positive response with clear management oversight to support this young person in his care planning.

Performance Cycle meetings chaired by our head of service have been introduced whereby themes that have been identified by the IRO's can be raised at the meeting and any strategic response can be fed back to the IRO's. There has also been the introduction of the Wellbeing Concern process which IRO's were instrumental in recommending this be put in place, and other staff members can use.

#### The key objectives are:

- To ensure workers feel they have a process in which concerns regarding staff welfare can be raised early and for support to be provided to link to existing processes or identify additional support.
- To provide an opportunity for independent support to be provided which assists staff raising concerns which may sit outside standard processes or to facilitate conversations with line managers so that support can be explored.
- To ensure that any emerging themes of welfare needs can be identified so that targeted support can be coordinated to individuals/ teams or groups of staff
- To provide oversight of emerging staff welfare issues to SMT so that any strategic responses can be coordinated.

Leicestershire County Council are committed to ensuring the wellbeing of their staff and ensuring concerns are identified and supported at the earliest opportunity.

#### **Feedback from children**

One of the main way's the IRO Service has had feedback from children, has been via the Children in Care Council (CICC). They have worked hard in developing a set of expectations for their review of arrangements, known as the ROA Expectations Document, which has now been widely shared within children's services and its use is regularly reviewed by Safeguarding. A key issue the young people have feedback is the importance of good communication, in particular to enable them to prepare adequately for their review.



This has really underlined the importance of the new online consultation document and the need for it to be provided to children and young people with sufficient time to make considered decisions about their review.

This document also affords them the opportunity to decide where and when they want it to be held, who they would like to attend and what key issues do they want to discuss. The children also feedback to their IRO their views which is important to ensure we capture this more formally in order to continue to improve our service.

More children are being involved in their care planning and their review meetings as indicated on the participation table and the IRO's continue to be positive about their children's involvement in review meetings.

In early 2023, our Children in Care Council created a survey 'Language of Care' which they asked to be completed across Leicestershire's children in care population. The Children in Care Council devised the questions themselves and wanted fellow children in care to help them identify how some of the words and professional language we use made them feel.

This has now been completed and the Quality Assurance Improvement Team (QAIT) along with the Child In Care Council are putting together the final findings. Initial feedback has shown positive and constructive comments about the language professionals use, including questioning why PEP meetings aren't called parents/carers evenings and regarding contact, a number of young people would prefer to name the person they are seeing such as 'mum time, dad time etc'.

This has been a really important survey completed by and for our children in care and it has generated more wider conversation about more personalised language for each of our children in care based on their preferences which would be seen throughout their social care file, reports and language used in visits.

### **Feedback from professionals**

The IRO Service values feedback from professionals and acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with colleagues to get the best outcomes for children.

Feedback received by the safeguarding manager on the IRO service from professionals is often linked to their experience of receiving quality assurance alerts. There is a very clear message that social workers value the positive QA's and appreciate when IRO's take the time to highlight and document when a good piece of work has been completed.

In relation the QA's for concern in many respects managers appreciate the feedback about concerns and welcome the opportunity to look at areas for improvement and take any necessary action. Managers generally feedback that they appreciate it when IRO's ring team managers and discuss issues and explain what their concerns are and what the IRO believes actions need to take place. However, it has to be acknowledged that as the IRO's have become more diligent in raising issues in relation to practice standards this has become increasingly challenging to managers and workers as the IRO Service has been looking in detail at the management of cases.

Recent feedback has led the IRO Service to review the relevant area whereby QA's are submitted and consider how best to use performance data to address some areas with the IRO.

The focus being specifically in relation to drift and delay and care planning issues as it is seen as essential that when QA's are raised social care or partnership agencies always give them the priority that they need. In response to this, IRO's use Positive Challenge to raise issues in relation to practice standards issues where initial drift or delay has started to be identified, and the respective managers and service manager with their heads of service have started to review their own data monthly to address any issues relating to practice standards.

## **8. What can we do better?**

Leicestershire IRO Service has for a long time been proud of its participation work and we have worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Team, both the Participation Officers and the Children's Rights Officers to this end. Good communication with our children and young people is essential and the IRO Service will be striving to improve this even further in the coming year.

The online consultation document needs to be further pushed and will be a vital component in this, ensuring it is sent out in good time. This will allow children to know when their reviews are and giving them the opportunity to have a say in how they want them to be managed including, where and when they want them to be held. In addition to this, they can share who they want present and what they want to talk about and what they don't want to be discussed.

It is disappointing that the use of the consultation documents hasn't been as widely used as expected. The IRO service has added the consultation document to the invites sent out for ROA meetings to support the increase in use. The IRO's will further push this to be used and we will continue to raise the profile of this consultation document with our young people and raise this within ROA meetings. This will be reviewed during 2023/24 and we will be working with the Children in Care Council to assess their impact.

Another area that the IRO Service is mindful to improve is that of ensuring all health needs are met in a timely manner. The main challenge being for social care to coordinate the completion of the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaires in line with when the looked after child health reviews are completed.

In health audits it has been noted IRO's are checking the SDQ's and health assessments are completed and actions followed up, however it has been raised that coordination of the two is essential to enable the looked after health nurses to get the best understanding of a child's emotional wellbeing at the time of their review.

Therefore, it has been agreed that all SDQ's must be completed within three months prior to the health assessment. For this to be successful it will be necessary for foster carers to complete this promptly once they are sent and any delays are followed up by the child's social worker and the foster carers supporting social worker.

As part of the wider approach to our Children in Care, the IRO service is committed in children's reviews to recommend and take into consideration the young person's cultural genogram and consider their network. We know how important a network is to our children and young people, particularly when they are going through a difficult time or moving into independence. We recognise that their family, friends and professional network are critical to supporting with this, and we need to continue to promote this more during our time with our children and young people.

We need to continue to enhance our access to data and use the new forms and workflow to support the development of additional or consolidated reports during the period 23/24 to further enhance our measure of impact of our service.

## 9. What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

Over the next 12 months, we wish to continue to embed the areas of specialism and expertise within the IRO LAC Focus Team, ensuring a high-quality service is delivered to our children and young people. Increasingly we are focused on the impact of trauma as key to understanding children's needs.

A service which is focused on ensuring their needs are met, represented and addressed within their Care Planning, along with promoting their individual sense of identity, belonging thus ensuring an inclusive service is provided. The IRO's advocate for and challenge where necessary to ensure the Local Authority is meeting its statutory responsibilities, but in addition we are being proud Corporate Parents for the care being afforded to our children, in line with our Corporate Parenting Strategy – 2022 – 2025.

A major development for the IRO Service is to pilot the recording of ROA's, this started to be considered over 2022/2023 however due to reservations of its compatibility with existing IT services provided. the development was paused. We hope this can be considered again over this review period to consider whether it would have the intended benefits noted previously in the Annual Report 2022/2023.

The IRO Service is fully committed to further embedding the principles of the Safeguarding and Improvement Service Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan. In part this is further developing our knowledge and understanding to be more culturally competent. This includes arranging training for the team, undertaking individual learning, having guest speakers attend team meetings and reflecting in team meetings and supervision about how we can best ensure that the needs of our children in care are being met.

One area of work which we are progressing is in working with identity issues for trans young people to ensure their identity is fully acknowledged, such as asking their chosen pronoun, and preferred name is used both in discussions and is reflected in documentation.

The IRO service is committed to the quality of ROA meetings, and there is a planned update of Mosaic framework from December 2022, with all Children in Care being bridged over from May 2023.

This will change the way social workers, managers and IRO's record care plans, reports to ROA meetings and the IRO report of the ROA meeting. In line with this planned change, there will be the introduction of the 'IRO Bottom Lines' which sets our clear standards to ensure the quality of ROA meetings are maintained.

The Mosaic workflow for Looked After Children needs to be embedded into practice now it has been introduced in May 2023 and for the IRO's to drive quality care planning for all of our children, and young people. For performance data to link from the new Mosaic to Tableau to ensure our data is accurate and reflective of our children in care population.

For the IRO focus team to continue to build on children and young people taking part in their review meetings, and consistently sharing their views to inform their care planning. For IRO's to keep in touch with children between their ROA meetings and to ensure they have a positive working relationship with the child that best meets their situation and needs.

A further area for development is continuing to work with the Children In Care Council in relation to the Language in Care. Now the survey has been completed and once findings are finalised we need to consider how this is implemented into our practice. In the coming year we will be looking at developing better systems to endure we get the language right for each child without them having to have the same discussions many times over.



## 10. Independent Reviewing Officer - Service Delivery Plan 2022-2023 HEADLINES

Action No.	Issue	Dept Plan/ CIP refs*	What’s working well?	What are we worried about?	What needs to happen? (Action)	By When	What difference will this make? (Impact)
					Please provide detailed actions and deadlines. Information from these columns will be copied into the quarterly report template for your service		
1 All Services	Mandatory  All staff are fully aware of the responsibilities they have, in their day-to-day roles in services and with colleagues at work, for advancing the council’s equality and diversity objectives	All	<p>There is good attendance at the Practice Lead sessions by IRO’s to further develop their skills and knowledge.</p> <p>Signs of Safety is fully embedded into the IRO service, both in CP and LAC.</p> <p>All IRO’s have been on the 5-day Sign of Safety Training. They are confident and competent in using and developing the framework.</p> <p>IRO’s have been supported to attend a 3-day specialist IRO training, one cohort on CP and another on LAC.</p> <p>There has been staffing additionality within the IRO service supporting managing the increasing CP and LAC population.</p>	Audit activity has identified the need for improvement in the application of safety networks and testing Safety Planning.	<p>Staff access mandatory and bespoke equality and diversity training</p> <p>Staff are supported to attend training events and opportunities to further enhance their skills, knowledge and experience.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p>	The safeguarding service provides a work environment where all staff can access support, build positive career pathways, thus enabling consistent, effective and meaningful engagement and progress for children and families.

201

201

			The Safeguarding Service is very well established with strong retention of staff.				
2 All Services	Mandatory  Work towards a stronger, evidence-based approach to understanding and tackling inequalities (including relevant research, data, QA activity and engagement with children, young people and families)	All	<p>The Equality and Diversity Guidance has been launched and shared with all staff for application in practice.</p> <p>EDI remains a standing item on all team meeting and supervision agendas, enabling staff with opportunity to discuss any matters relating to equality, diversity and inclusion.</p>	The EDI action plan is underrepresented with colleagues across the service, and we need to receive greater input into championing the action plan and accountability for actions, with representatives from all four service areas.	<p>Equality and Diversity remains as a standing team mtg agenda item and discussed within supervision.</p> <p>EDI action plan which covers all four services within Safeguarding and Performance.</p> <p>Equality, Diversity and Challenge week to be held in January across CSC services, with the review of the EDI guidance.</p> <p>Implement the new Welfare process.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>March 2023</p> <p>January 2023</p> <p>June 2022</p>	<p>Ensure equality, diversity and inclusion remains high on our agenda, with workers feeling empowered to have a voice and influence future ways of working, in addition to celebrating diversity and individually challenging ourselves as well our processes / structures to ensure they align with our We Care and EDI guidance. Thus, providing a fully inclusive working environment for all staff and an inclusive service for our children and families. Thus, enabling staff to feel safe and supported within the Safeguarding and Performance Service to challenge ADP and advocate on behalf of our children, families and</p>

202

							colleagues regarding any issues.
3 IRO Service	IRO's provide a specialist service, with expertise on Child Protection and Looked After Children, ensuring rigorous oversight of planning, practice and service delivery, whilst holding the LA to account for their statutory duties, providing challenge where appropriate.	All	<p>Quarterly report on repeat planning completed within the Safeguarding and Performance Service provides analysis to the impact of intervention both during Child Protection planning and previous/subsequent intervention. Aligned with this is clear processes for analysis of all repeat CP cases.</p> <p>Writing to the child is well embedded and consistently applied within the IRO service.</p> <p>There has been significant development in the intervention for Harmful Sexual Behaviour (HSB). Regular audit activity is completed to review the effectiveness of the processes and identify any areas of development.</p> <p>Clear structure in place for IRO's to endorse planning decisions.</p>	<p>% of children subject to repeat child protection plans continues to be above our target of 19%.</p> <p>QA alerts are not consistently being completed to raise concerns regarding drift, delay and / or good practice. This results in needs actions not being identified in a timely way, thus causing potential delay for children and their care planning. This also reduces the identification of development need and opportunity for learning across CFS.</p> <p>Audit activity identifies plans continue too not be "SMART".</p>	<p>Report on repeat planning completed within the Safeguarding and Performance Service provides analysis to the impact of intervention both during Child Protection planning and previous/subsequent intervention.</p> <p>Joint action plan to be completed across IRO service, FRCD and localities to address the concerns regarding the timeliness of ICPC's – aligned with findings from previous audit.</p> <p>IRO's to utilise QA Alert process in relation to the impact of supervision and management oversight. IRO individual supervision to provide additional challenge and oversight of the QA role of the IRO – aligned with Ofsted Focus Visit feedback.</p> <p>Focused development session to be held with IRO's</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p> <p>September 2022</p>	Children have timely targeted high-quality intervention to maximise their outcomes and services are provided appropriately to address the identified need. Strong evidence of IRO oversight and challenge is visible on children's files, demonstrating robust IRO service delivery.

			<p>Permanence is a critical element of the Review of Arrangement process, providing IRO oversight and ratification of the permanence plans.</p> <p>Strong advocacy support via the Children's Rights Officers is available for Looked After Children to ensure that their voice is represented and informs permanency decision making.</p> <p>Pre-challenge and challenge process are part of the quality assurance process and audit reporting against this element of the process is now in place</p> <p>Safeguarding Service Manager attendance at Family Justice Board Meetings.</p> <p>The connection of the Pre-challenge and Challenge process as part of the QA Alert process and the need to evidence impact has improved, with ADM also using the QA process.</p>		<p>regarding SMART planning – aligned with Ofsted Focus Visit feedback.</p> <p>Process for CP chairs chairing complex CIN meetings is developed and implemented, once capacity allows.</p> <p>Trauma Informed practice to be embedded into the IRO service. Explore the use of scaling within CP conferences and ROA's and how this linked to a trauma informed approach.</p> <p>IRO service to explore embedding "belonging" into practice and consider application in both CP conferences and ROA's.</p> <p>IRO Focus Teams to continue to develop team identity and vision as leaders and leading by example with practice excellence.</p>	<p>March 2023</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>June 2022</p> <p>July 2022</p>	204
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			Mid-way reviews are well evidenced on CP and LAC cases to ensure robust IRO oversight. Signs of Safety is fully embedded into the IRO service, both in CP and LAC.				
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**Authors:**

**Paul Dowd**

Service Manager, Safeguarding and Performance Service

**Rebecca Peters**

Assistant Service Manager: Performance and Corporate Parenting Lead

**Date: 13 October 2023**

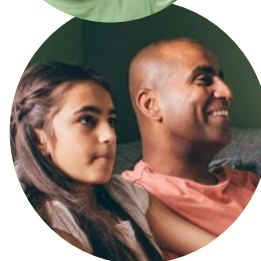
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# Our Vision

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

## Our Ambitions for 2021 - 2023

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



## Core Values and Behaviours that underpin everything we do



## Our pledge for children

### Each member of staff pledges that:

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

### Our leaders and managers pledge to:

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

## How we will do it

### Embedding excellent practice

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

### Taking the right action at the right time

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

### Developing policy and performance

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

### Being a learning organisation

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

## What success will look like

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



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# IRO LAC Focus Team Annual Report

## 1st April 2022 – 31st March 2023

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023 there were 681 children in the care of Leicestershire County Council, this was 13 less than in 2021.

This year the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service chaired 1847 Review of Arrangement Meetings (ROA's) for our children and young people in our care.

125 children - Early Years (Age 0-4)  
369 children of School Age (5 – 15)  
197 children aged 16 – 17

62% boys  
38% girls

We are really proud of the work that IROs do to have oversight of quality of the service you have. This year IROs did 185 alerts for worries to bring improvement and recognised 94 examples of good practice

We are pleased that 99.1% of your ROA meetings took place within timescale. This is a higher than last year, where 96.2% took place in time.



In early 2023, our Children in Care Council created a survey 'Language of Care' which they asked to be completed across Leicestershire's Children in Care. Feedback showed positive and your IROs are part of the team to use this to make our language in meetings and records clear and easy to understand

209

During 2022-23, 90.84% of children took part in their review meeting either in person or by sharing their views. This is important to keep your views at the centre of everything we do

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023  
92.41% of our children have a permanence plan agreed within 4 months which means they have a sense of belonging.

### What can we do better?

1. Our online consultation form to be used more so your are even more involved
2. Better oversight of how your health is managed
3. More use of our Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire
4. Make sure our data is up to date and drives improvement for children
5. Continue to explore Equality & Diversity needs and understanding of trauma for children in care

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****7 NOVEMBER 2023****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES****ANNUAL REPORT OF THE VIRTUAL SCHOOL 2022 - 2023****Purpose of Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of work and data of the Virtual School for the academic year 2022-2023. This report is statutory and requires publishing on the County Council's website.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. This annual report was previously presented to the Committee in April, after the official attainment data was published. However, this meant a long period of time passed for all the information needed to be shared within the previous academic year. The decision has been made to bring this date forward to November, so that it can be published in line with other Virtual Schools, and to submit the official updated data in April when available.
3. This report highlights the work of the Virtual School for Academic year 2022 – 2023.

**Background**

4. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them, wherever they live or are educated through the Virtual School Head (VSH). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 added the duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the February 2018 statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'.
5. In Leicestershire, the Service has a team of highly skilled professionals who work passionately to support this role, its duties and advocate for young people. The service brings together information about children and young people in care to Leicestershire and use this information to support schools, carers, and young people to achieve their best in their education. The Service is committed to putting young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life.
6. The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship.

7. The Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a social worker (in the last six years). This commenced from 1 September 2021. This role is undertaken within the Inclusion team who work closely with the Virtual School, however currently this role is not undertaken within the Virtual School and will not be included in this report. As of September 2023, this role has moved under the VS and will feature in future annual reports.

## **Summary of report**

### **Child Focused**

8. The report has been adapted this year to be a more visual representation of the work the service carries out. Included in the report are child focused and friendly summary pages to allow young people's voices to be seen. This will enable young people to access this report as well as professionals.

### **Data Presentation**

9. The report has been updated in relation to how the data is presented in the form of visual dashboard. This supports with analysis and scrutiny so that data can be used to drive work and target support. The data in the report covers the school aged cohort for whom there is a statutory duty to report on. The appendix include a wider analysis of all young people from Early years through to post 16.

### **Personal Education Plans (PEPs)**

10. PEPs continue to be held at a very high standard and completion rates are high (96% completed over the last academic year). This is due to a passionate, dedicated and knowledgeable team who advocate for children rigorously to ensure their education is at the forefront of discussions and decisions.

### **Pupil Premium Plus (PPP)**

11. PPP (Pupil Premium Plus) allocations are highlighted in the report alongside the impact it has had for young people. This has helped the work with schools around SMART targets in PEPS and how best to allocate funding to ensure significant impact is being made. Analysis shows that 80% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2022-23 were successfully achieved, compared to 77.5% the previous year.

### **Attainment**

12. It is important to note that the Attainment data contained in this report is provisional data and not officially confirmed until April 2024. This data will be updated once published and added to the report. Therefore, at this stage the official analysis of the data sets cannot be completed, however, some generic conclusions have been drawn.
13. There is still a significant gap in attainment for children and young people in care as well as an increase in temporary exclusions for persistent disruptive behaviour. There are also a number of challenges with children out of education and awaiting SEND assessments.



14. More robust systems have been put in place to track the SEND cohort of looked after children and young people and the Virtual School is working more closely with schools around their trauma informed practice and the training offer.

### **Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)**

15. The Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children cohort is rapidly increasing, and adjustments are being made to the Virtual Schools work to ensure the service keeps up with demand. This however is proving a challenge as college places are filling rapidly and provision is limited. Future aims are to support this cohort further and look at other educational options to partner with.
16. At the end of academic year 2022-23 there was 34 UASC students of statutory school age compared to 14 the previous year and 155 post-16 compared to 50 the previous year, making a total of 189 compared to 64 the previous year. This is a significant increase in the UASC cohort.

### **Achievements and Participation**

17. Over the last year the Virtual School has delivered a wider curriculum offer that has supported children and young people to be a part of. This offer has grown and the service is working hard towards an Artsmark award to ensure the Arts and wider curriculum is developed and is as important for young people as other areas of their education. The impact report from the Care to Dance programme, highlights the voice of young people and the impact this is having so far on their wellbeing.
18. Voice work has been part of the action plan to ensure more young people have a voice. Included in the report are snippets of voice from different aspects throughout the year, including participation events, the impact report and book clubs.
19. The plans for this academic year continue to advocate and strive for raising aspirations and attainment for young people, as well as partnering with those that can support and offer experiences for young people.

### **Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

20. None

### **Equality Implications**

21. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **Human Rights Implications**

22. There are no human rights implications arising this report.

### **Appendix**

Virtual School Annual Report for August 2022 – August 2023

### **Officer(s) to Contact**

Alison Bradley  
Assistant Director, Education, SEND and Commissioning  
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Virtual School Head  
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# Virtual School Annual Report for August 2022 -August 2023



## Annual Statement from the CIC council

*"I chair my own PEP Meetings. This is important, makes me feel happy and like I'm in control." Young Person aged 15yrs*

*"I was struggling with some of my core subjects. The Virtual School organised for extra support in Maths, English and Music. This has been a great help and my most recent grades have all improved. I now feel far more confident." Young Person aged 16yrs*

## Annual Statement from Director of Children's Services

Dear All, I am delighted to present our annual report on the Virtual school for Children in Care and previously looked after young people.

Access to good quality education and educational opportunities is key in helping our children to fulfil their potential and broaden their lived experience. This report highlights the work of the Virtual school and the part they play in supporting schools and educational settings, to provide the best possible educational experience for our children. I am immensely proud of the service and all that our children and young people achieve.

Jane Moore

## Annual statement from the Virtual School Head

As the new Virtual School Head for Leicestershire, it has been an absolute pleasure to join such an inspiring and passionate team who advocate tirelessly for the education and aspirations for our young people in care. This report reflects the hard work and dedication the Virtual School team have given, the hard work and successes of our young people and the vision and future opportunities we hope to support our young people with through their educational journey. Pupil voice is paramount as we seek to understand the support our young people need and therefore, I hope this report reflects some of the changes we are making at the Virtual school in supporting our schools to be trauma informed, advocating for the voice of our young people and also valuing the importance of a wide variety of opportunities to ensure lifelong success.

[Contents page](#)

	Page Number
Introduction	3
Our Vision	5
Child and Young person summary	6
Virtual School – Who we are	8
CIC and Contextual data	9
Personal Education Plan (PEP)	10
Pupil Premium Plus (PPP)	11
Additional funding	12
Summary of Children in Care Attainment (provisional)	14
Previously Looked After Children	15
Attendance and Suspensions	16
School Admissions	17
UASC	18
Early Years	18
Post 16 Young People and Care Leavers	19
Training	20
Achievements and Participation	21
Book Parcels	29
Plans for 23/24	31
CWSW	32
2023/2024 priorities and action plan	33

## Introduction

The purpose of this report is to outline the work of the Virtual School in Leicestershire for the academic year August 2022 – August 2023 and analyse the data for the academic year. It will also look at the key priorities for the following academic year 2023-2024. National benchmark data for 2021-22 was published in April 2023 and is considered in this report, however academic year 2022-2023 data will be added after publishing in April 2024. The Children Act 1989 places a duty on the Local Authority (LA) to promote the educational achievement of children looked after by them, wherever they live or are educated through the Virtual School Head (VSH). The Children and Social Work Act 2017 added the duty to promote the educational achievement of previously looked after children. These duties are set out in the February 2018 statutory guidance 'Promoting the education of looked-after children and previously looked-after children'.

In Leicestershire we have a team of highly skilled professionals who work passionately to support this role, its duties and advocate for our young people.

We bring together information about children and young people in care to Leicestershire and use this information to support schools, carers and young people to achieve their best in their education.

We are committed to putting our young people first and supporting them to achieve in all aspects of their education and life.

The Virtual School also provides support and advice for children previously in care and those who have been adopted and under special guardianship.

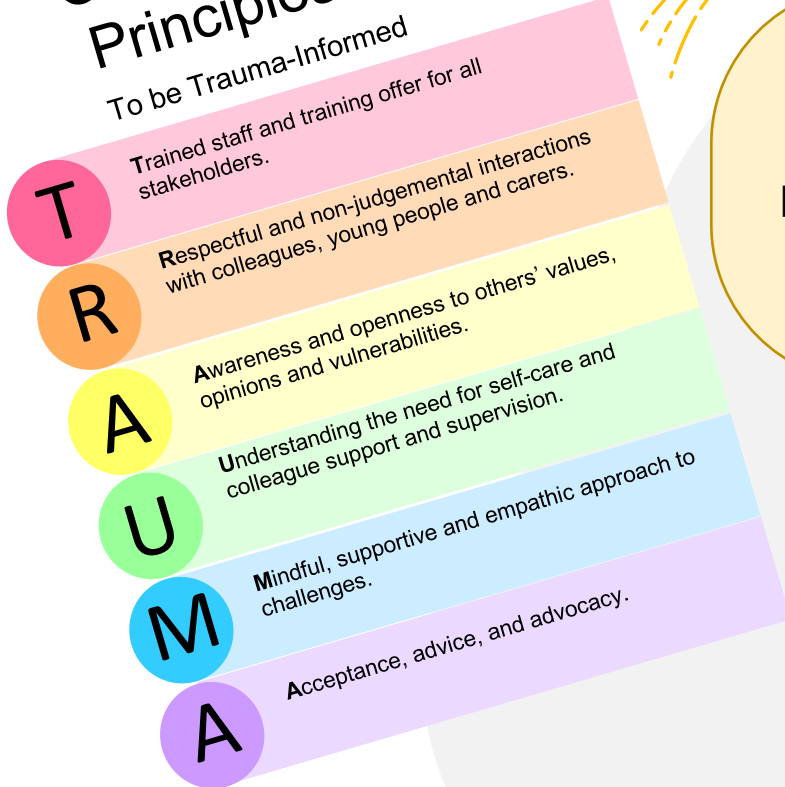
The Virtual School has a non-statutory strategic leadership role for children who have or have had a



social worker (in the last 6 years). This commenced from 1st September 2021. This role is undertaken within the Inclusion team who work closely with the Virtual School, however currently this role is not undertaken within the Virtual School and will not be included in this report.

The Virtual school sits within Social Care and has strong links with both social care and education staff.

# Our Guiding Principles

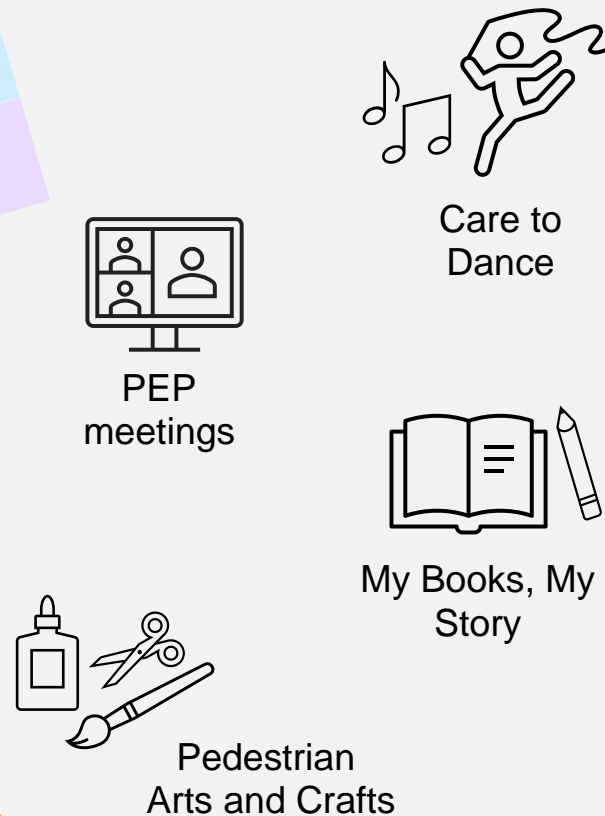
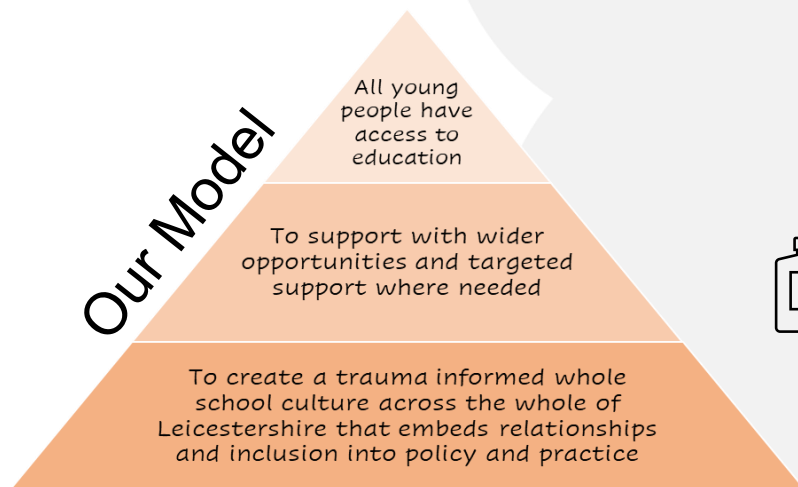


# Our Vision

We are here to work with you, your school, carers and social workers so you can reach your potential, be ambitious and aim high!



# Our Model



**Our School**  
And all the things we do together

## Early Years (ages 0-4)

### About you

**116** of you are on roll at the end of the year.

### Listening - Your Voice

we have worked together to adapt your voice pages on your PEPS so we can better hear your voice

### Building Relationships

we continued working with the Dollywood project so you each get a book every month until you are 5

Outcome focused - What you learnt You started your journey using the early years framework, learning lots of new things.

**1537** books have been sent out to you, supporting with your early reading.



**Our new  
logo  
designed  
by you!**

## School Age (age 5-16)

### About you

**438** of you are on roll at the end of the year.  
Your overall attendance was **86.5%**.

### Listening - Your Voice

You often tell us you do not know who your Virtual School officer is and want us to consider our language when you are being spoken to in meetings.

### Building Relationships - We did

We added pronouns to our PEP documents to ensure your identity and equality are listened to. We have created new Virtual School Officer passports to share with you in the next academic year, so you know who we are.

Outcome focused - What you learnt, **40.9%** achieved a 'Good Level of Development'.

**50%** of you achieved the expected standard in your phonics screening.

**37%** of you achieved the expected standard for reading in Year 2.

**27.6%** of you achieved the expected standard for Reading, Writing and maths in Year 6.

**30.2%** of you achieved a 9-4 grade in English and Maths

## Post 16 (age 16 to 18)

### About you

**414** young people are on roll at the end of the year. **64.5%** of you are in education, employment, and training at the end of academic year

### Listening - Your Voice

We listen at PEP meetings and follow up any issues raised ie support in changing courses/colleges, chasing up missing bursary payments and generally directing you to where you might get support.

### Building Relationships - We did

We held a careers event at the King Power stadium to showcase employers and different career paths.

### Outcome focused - What you learnt

Post 16 results – pending



## This Academic Year we have .....

## Next year our key priorities to support you are:

### Trauma Informed



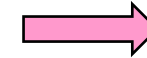
Trained **21** of your schools



Held **6** sessions of training for foster carers



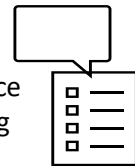
Held **4** sessions of training for social workers



- Support more of your schools to become Trauma informed so that they can support you better

### Pupil Voice

**88.5 %** of you expressed your voice in your PEP meeting



**8** of you chaired your own PEP meeting

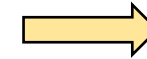


- Increase the number of you chairing your own PEPS and being more involved with your voice

### Equality, Diversity & Inclusion



Listened to your voice and adapted the voice section of your PEP to consider your pronoun preference

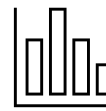


- Increase our staff knowledge around hidden disabilities so we can support you better in your PEP meetings

### Collaboration



Quality assured **91%** of your PEPS to a green or gold standard which means they are the best working documents to support you



Used data to create dashboards so we know who needs help when



- Work closely with all other teams you may work with to ensure you are receiving timely education and the right provision to meet your needs

### Participation



Launched Artsmark Award and lots of you have been filling in your Journey booklets.



My Books, My Story was nominated for 3 awards and we **won 1!!**



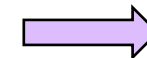
- Continue to partner with wider curriculum and participation activities to increase your opportunities in a variety of areas.

### Support to return to education

**19** of you attended University this year



**86** of you attended the careers events



- To develop our offer to support those of you who are Not in Education, Employment or Training

## Who we are

These are some of the people you may meet in your PEPS or at participation events

# Our Virtual School

# Virtual School Head

## Deputy Virtual School Head

## Senior Education Advisors

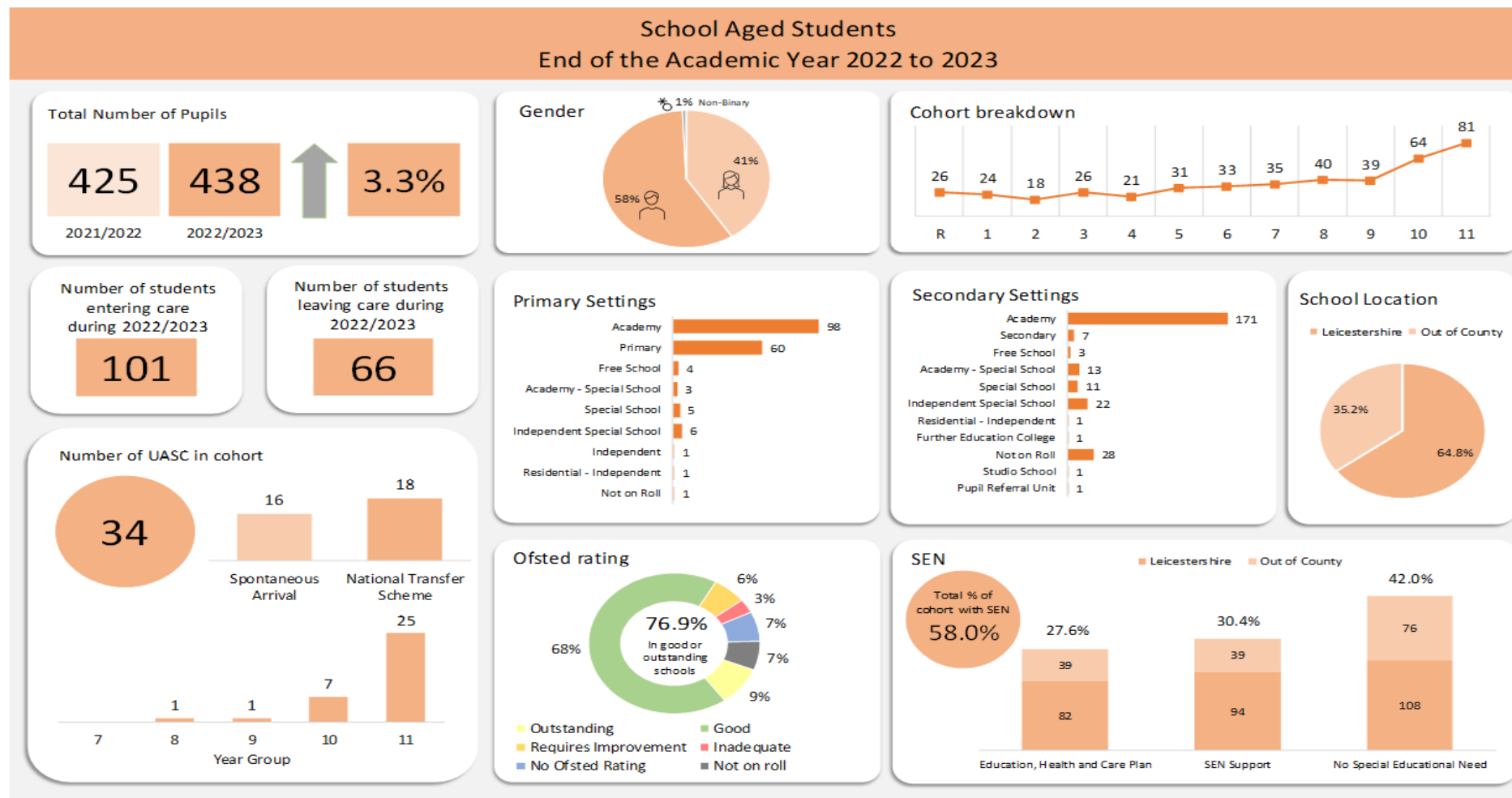
## Casework Officers

## Community Support Assistant

## Business Support



## Contextual Data



NB – 26 pupils at some point in the academic year were accessing some alternative provision

[Appendix 1: Virtual School Contextual Information 2022-2023](#)

  
Appendix 1 -  
Contextual Data - A

[Appendix 2: Alternative Education 2022-2023](#)

  
Appendix 2 -  
Alternative Educatio

## Personal Education Plan (PEP)

The Virtual school has a duty to ensure the quality of Personal Education Plan (PEP) and arranges PEP meetings for Early Years children attending a nursery or setting, in primary and secondary schools and in post-16 education. Leicestershire PEPs are led by the school, with attendance from the Virtual school, social worker, carer and engagement with the young person.

The Virtual School quality assure every PEP. Each section is rated (red, amber or green) and feedback provided.

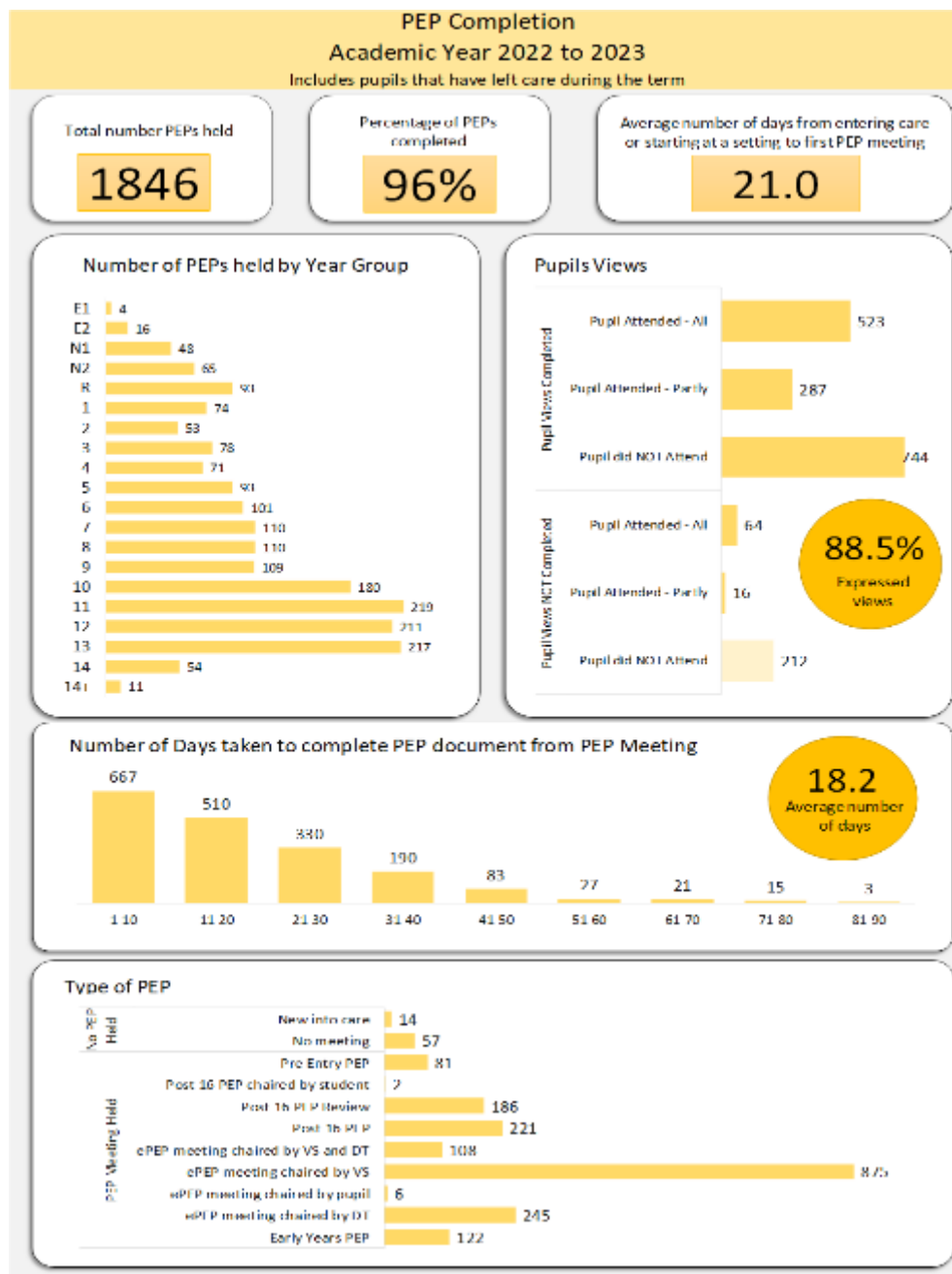
NB:

- Year 14 and 14+ PEPS are only held on request of the young person and therefore, not included in overall percentages.
- The young people included in the No Meeting figure, are those young people who have not had the required number of meetings in the academic year.
- New into Care - are those young people who came into care within the last month of the summer term.
- As well as the 1846 PEPs that were held, the officers of the Virtual School attended and recorded 157 additional educational meetings which are not included in the PEP report.



Appendix 3 - PEP  
Completion - Academic Year

## Appendix 3: PEP Completion 2022-2023

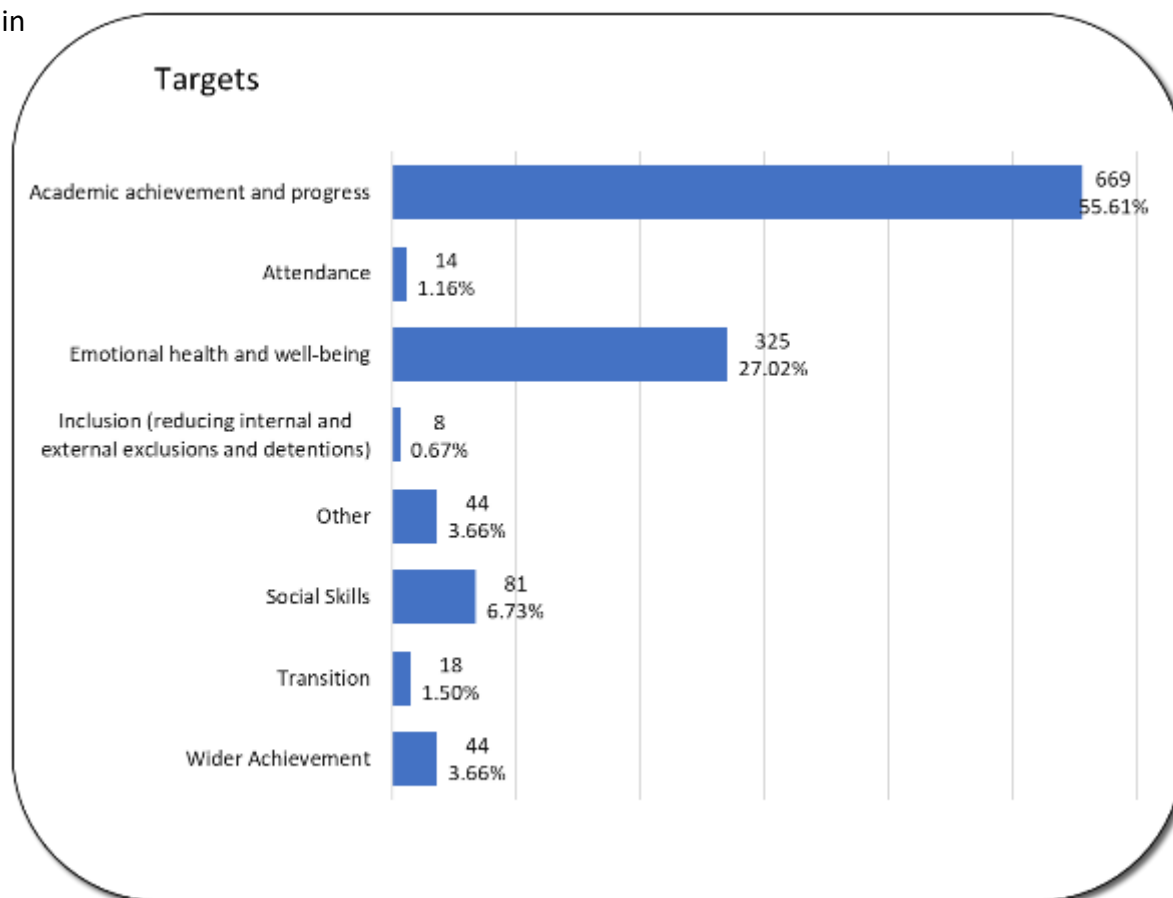


## Pupil Premium Plus (PPP) Allocation to Schools (2022-23)

The VSH manages the Pupil Premium for looked after children and monitors closely its use and impact, ensuring that schools allocate funding to interventions that support the individual needs of the child. Schools are held accountable for the results of children in care and for using the PPP grant appropriately and effectively to support and improve educational outcomes. Schools complete a PPP plan within the SMART Targets section of the PEP which is monitored by the VS, who support and challenge PPP decisions on an ongoing basis via termly progress review meetings and data returns.

The impact of PPP allocated to schools during one term is monitored at the PEP meeting in the following term, i.e., the impact of PPP allocated in the final term (summer) of 2022-23 will be reviewed in the autumn term of 2023 - 24.

Analysis shows that 80% of targets linked to PPP spend during 2022-23 were successfully achieved, compared to 77.5% the previous year. 66.7% of those targets made significant or moderate impact on the outcomes for our young people in a range of areas. We have been working within our team and with schools to make targets more SMART to ensure the impact increases moving forward.



### [Pupil Premium Plus \(PPP\) – Pooled Resource](#)

The PPP grant was set at £2,345 per eligible pupil and allocated for the Leicestershire VS to manage on behalf of its looked-after children. £400 top-slice is retained by the VSH to support pupils whose educational needs exceeded the per capita grant. When the termly PPP allocation is insufficient to meet a child's needs, additional funding can be applied for from this pooled PPP funding. The VS encourages schools to take on the responsibility for arranging any support required for pupils. This means that pooled funding is allocated to schools for them to commission provision for complex cases. This might typically be for higher-cost ongoing provision such as employing a Learning Support Assistant (LSA) to provide support for effective transitions, academic progress and emotional stability in class, ongoing 1:1 tuition or agreed therapeutic input where needs do not meet CAMHS thresholds. The VS continues to use the pooled resource to commission provision for pupils temporarily not on roll of a school e.g., 1:1 tuition and to fund VS book parcels, participation activities, incentives and rewards and to fund a bespoke service from Leicestershire Educational Psychology Service.



Appendix 4 - Use of  
Pupil Premium - Auti

### [Appendix 4: Use of Pupil Premium - Academic Year 2022-2023](#)

#### [Additional funding in support of Catch-up](#)

The government has provided additional grant funding to support a range of “Disadvantaged pupils”, amongst whom are looked-after children. In addition to the ‘regular’ Pupil Premium Plus (PPP), there have been the “LAC Recovery Premium” and the “School-Led Tutoring” for LAC grants.

### [Pupil Premium Plus \(PPP\) – LAC recovery premium 2022-2023](#)

ESFA allocated provisional amounts of £145 (primary) and £276 (secondary) per eligible child in a mainstream setting, and £290 (primary) and £552 (secondary) per LAC pupil in AP/special schools and special units to be used for the benefit of the looked-after child's educational needs as described in their personal education plan. As with PPP funding, it was to be managed by the designated virtual school head (VSH) in the local authority that looks after the child. This was in addition to the ‘regular’ PPP grant and offered additional support for schools to help LAC children catch up on education missed during the pandemic. The needs of each child were identified during termly PEPs and funding allocated accordingly, ensuring all the funding was distributed by the end of the academic year.

### School-Led Tutoring 2022-2023

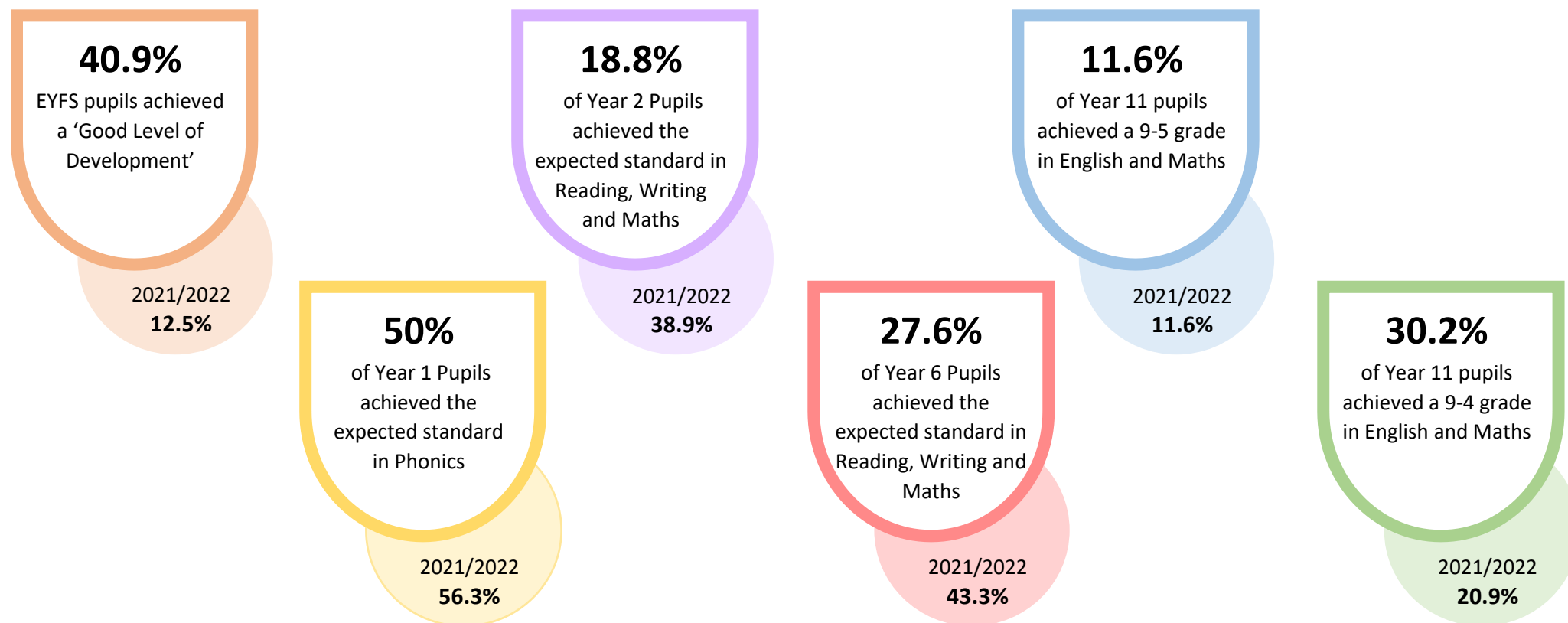
School-led tutoring (SLT) grant is part of the tuition offer from the National Tutoring Programme (NTP) and is intended to help close the education gap between vulnerable children and their peers which widened during COVID-19. The VS was provided with SLT funding specifically for their LAC pupils with the requirement that schools contribute 40% of the cost of tuition from the Pupil Premium Plus grant, adding up to a total of £270 per pupil in a mainstream school or £705 per child in AP/special schools and special units for a 15-hour block of tuition. Funding was released to schools based on need identified in the termly PEP meetings with tuition being arranged directly by schools or, in the case of children not currently able to attend school, arranged by the Virtual School. The VS can signpost tutoring providers from their standing list should schools require.

Tuition support can include interventions which support improving educational attainment, for example, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL) where subjects such as maths and English may not be appropriate. The interventions had to have been completed by the end of the summer holidays 2023 and the VSH is required to report back to the DfE on:

- the total amount spent on school-led tutoring for LAC pupils in the academic year 2022 to 2023 (by mainstream funded pupils and specialist provision funded pupils)
- the total number of LAC pupils who have received tuition through the school-led tutoring grant in the academic year 2022 to 2023
- the total number of hours of funded tuition through the school-led tutoring grant funding in the academic year 2022 to 2023



## Summary of Children in Care Attainment ([provisional data](#))



**All data is provisional and subject to change.** Unless stated otherwise, all data is based on pupils who were in care for at least 12 months as at 31<sup>st</sup> March. All Leicestershire and National figures are provisional (Source: NCER)

NB; Analysis of data will be provided in the April update once final data is confirmed.



Appendix 5 -  
Provisional Results -

[Appendix 5: Provisional Results Academic year 2022-2023](#)



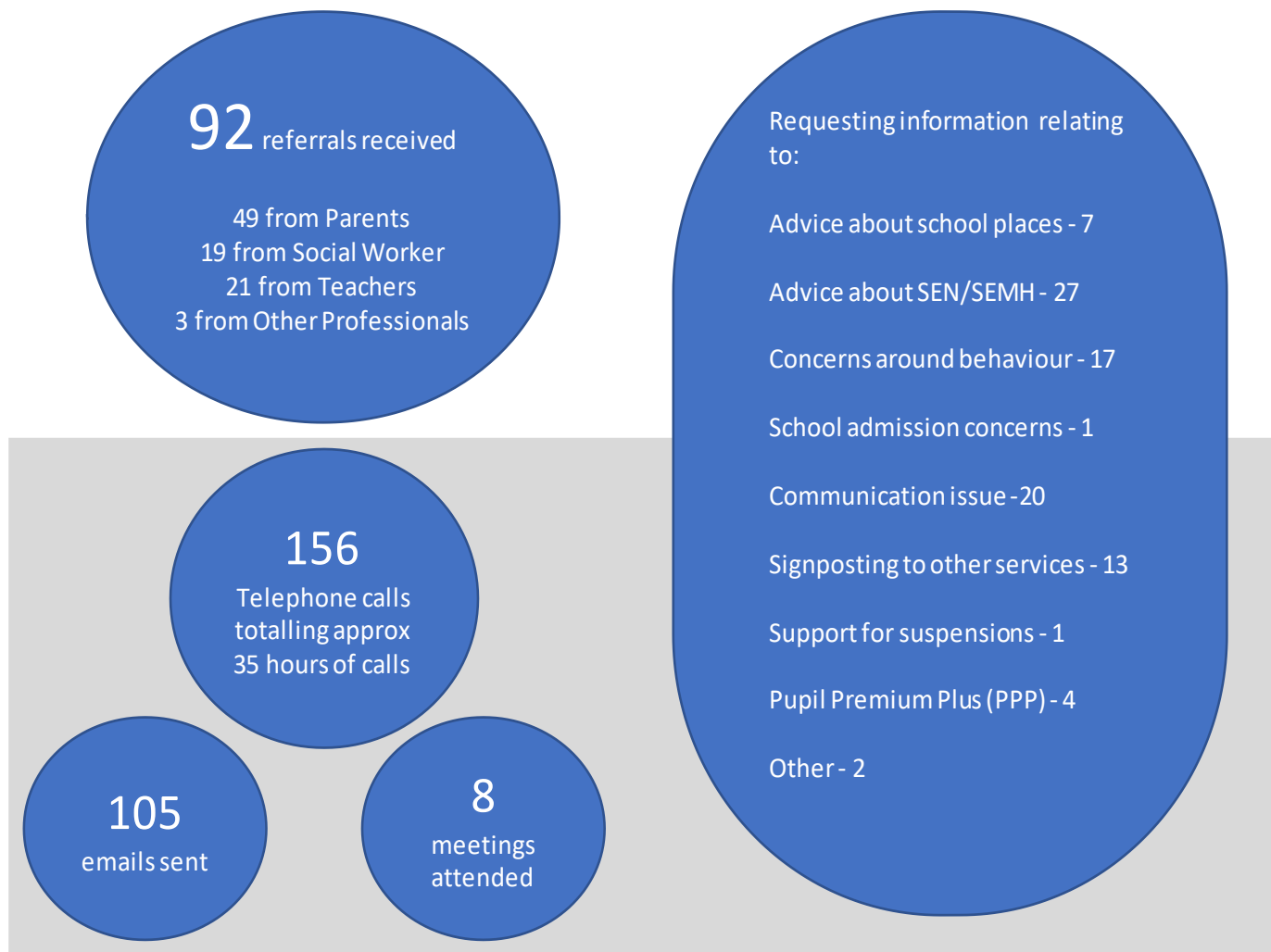
## Previously Looked-After Children

The number of requests for advice and information relating to the education of previously looked-after children has risen steadily since the introduction of the role in 2017.

Due to the high number of phone calls the VS received during the year and the work that each phone call entailed the VS were only able to attend a small number of very complex meetings. From next academic year we have introduced a VS PLAC duty desk to try and support with our increasing requests for advice and support.

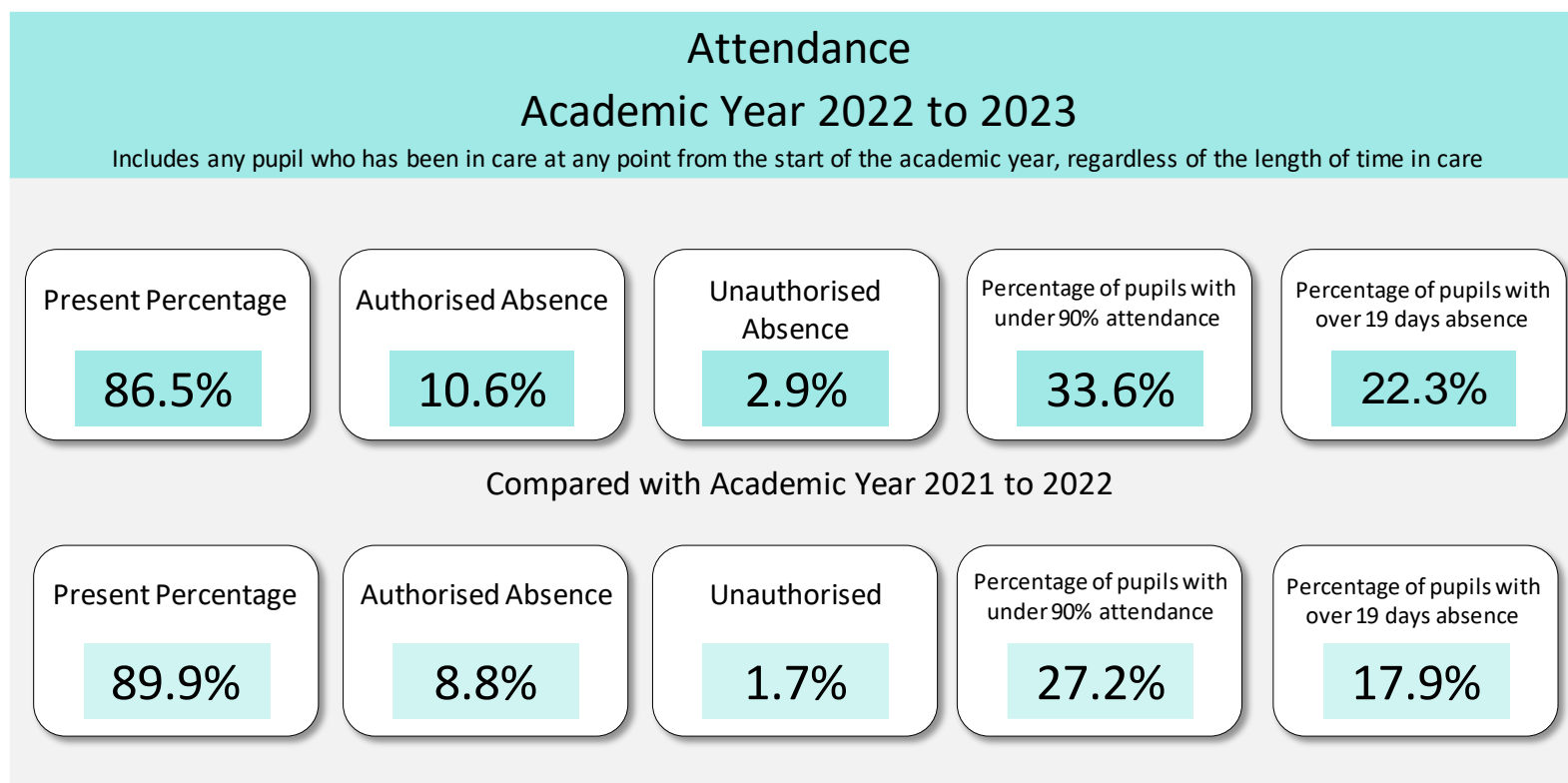
NB of the 92 referrals, numerous phone calls in addition to this to support with the queries.

## PLAC support offered during 2022-23 Academic Year



## Attendance and Suspensions

Reporting is prompt and supported using Welfare Call alerts; weekly and ongoing attendance and exclusion reports allied to termly Social, Emotional and Mental Health RAG reports from schools enable the VS to robustly monitor and respond to issues arising.



In 2021-2022 there were

- 14 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
  - Of these 5 young people were Yr 11 UASC's, 2 young people were Yr 10 UASC's, 5 young had an EHCP and were waiting and 2 had no SEN

In 2022-2023 there were

- 28 young people not on roll at the end of the academic year
  - Of these 13 were Yr 11 UASC, 3 were Yr 10 UASC, 1 was a Year 9 UASC, 6 had an EHCP and 4 had no SEN

NB The one of the main reasons for the drop in the attendance percentage, is due to number of UASC in Year 11 arriving late in the academic year and because they are marked as authorised absence until they are placed on a school roll.

There have been no permanent exclusions of children in care for several years – this is the result of collaborative work across schools/settings and Behaviour Partnerships with the VS. Reporting is prompt and helped using Welfare Call alerts; other weekly and ongoing reports against attendance and exclusions ensure we are robustly monitoring and supporting this agenda with schools and children and young people.

Overall, suspensions have risen slightly from 49 in academic year 2021/2022 to 58 in 2022/23. Suspensions at Secondary phase have risen. Within this figure, there are forty-nine pupils who received FTEs across Year 7 to Year 11 at secondary phase, a total of two hundred and eighty-one days lost of education between them compared to one hundred and eighty-one days the previous year. The main reason for suspensions being reported is for persistent or general disruptive behaviour which has increased significantly from the previous year as the main reason.

The Virtual School works closely with Schools/Settings/Services to develop understanding of issues involved and are working to improve and develop the Trauma informed agenda with schools to ensure consistent practise and support is in place for our young people.



Appendix 6 -  
Suspensions - Acad

[Appendix 6: Suspension dashboard 2022-2023](#)



Appendix 7 -  
Attendance - Acade

[Appendix 7: Attendance dashboard 2022-2023](#)

### [School Admissions \(2022-23\)](#)

The Virtual School strives to ensure that applications for school places other than at normal transition points are processed without delay with as little disruption to the child's education as possible. In 2022-23, there were 79 applications during the academic year for a change of school for Leicestershire LAC. Admissions authorities of all mainstream schools must give the highest priority in their oversubscription criteria to looked-after and previously looked-after children and cannot refuse to admit a looked after child based on challenging behaviour or refer a looked after child for action under the Fair Access Protocol on the basis of challenging behaviour. Looked-after children can be admitted as 'excepted pupils' in relation to the infant class size limit if they are admitted outside the normal admission round and schools cannot refuse admission on the grounds of being full.

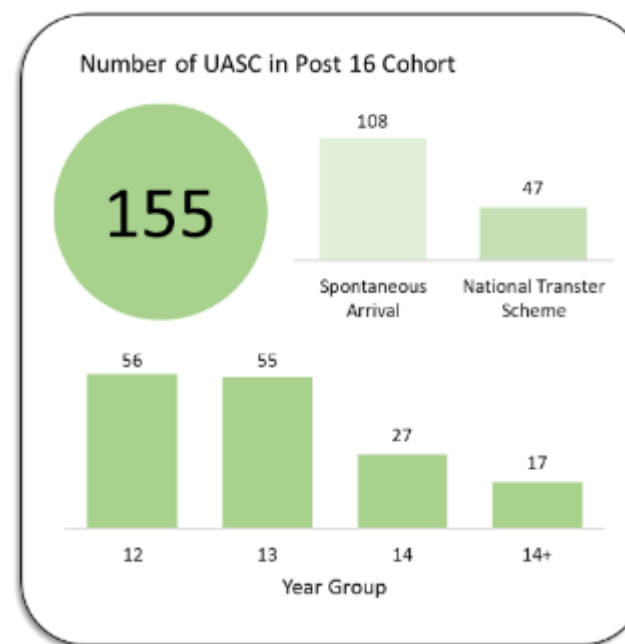
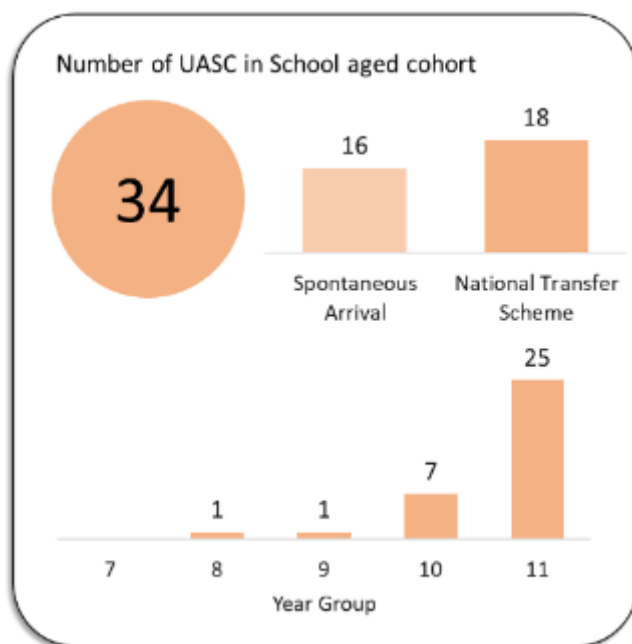
As a result of the circumstances of looked-after children, there tends to be a higher rate of in-year school admissions applications submitted for LAC than their peers. This is more usually due to placement moves.

When a child is removed from the roll of one school and is awaiting a new school place, they are reported as a Child Missing Education. Under these circumstances the VS funds 1:1 tuition to maintain a pupil's engagement in education or negotiates the commissioning of 1:1 tuition by SENA services, so that the impact of the delay in accessing formal education is minimised, and to ensure all children have an offer of educational input.

## UASC

The VS has the same responsibilities for UASC as it does for any other Leicestershire looked-after child or care leaver, starting with the identification of appropriate education provision and monitoring of progress once enrolled.

At the end of academic year 2022-23 there was 34 UASC students of statutory school age compared to 14 the previous year and 155 post-16 compared to 50 the previous year, making a total of 189 compared to 64 the previous year. This is a significant increase in our UASC cohort. This has therefore meant we have had to adapt our response to number of PEPs and increase a casework officers' role to include UASC PEP work. We are continuing to look at the needs of this cohort of young people and working in partnership with others to ensure the best education and provision is provided.

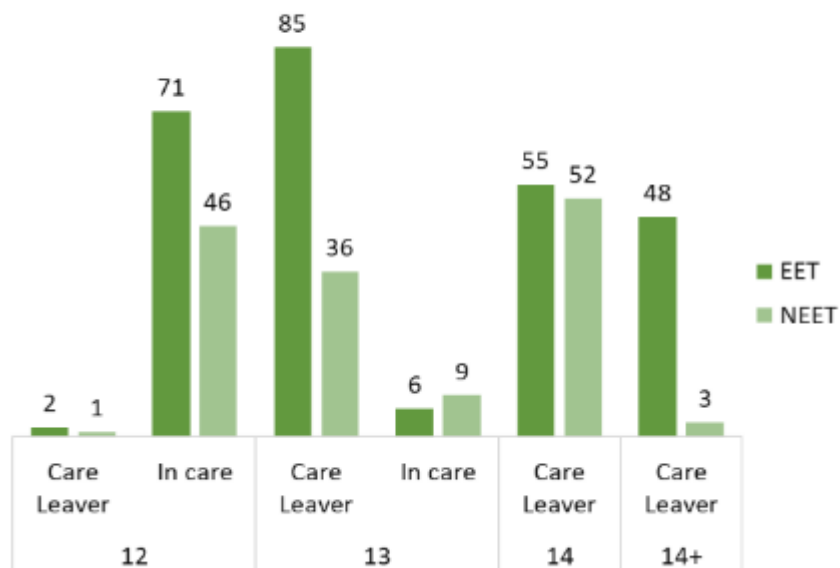


## Support for Early Years

The VS took on the role of supporting Early Years looked-after children from the Early Years Team at the start of the 2019-20 academic year. The increase in the number of children in this cohort has been supported by primary specialist SEAs and COs taking Early Years children onto their caseloads. See appendix with contextual data. We have been working hard to develop new pupil voice pages for PEPs to ensure our youngest children have an opportunity to share their voice in a manner that suits their needs and age. We have developed observation opportunities to allow this to be captured in a broader way.

## Post-16 Young People and Care Leavers

EET or NEET status



Employment or Training (NEET) over the past two years: 35.5% in 2022-2023 compared to 39.6% in 2021. We will always discuss with the social worker to make a referral where we feel a young person may be NEET or at risk of becoming NEET.

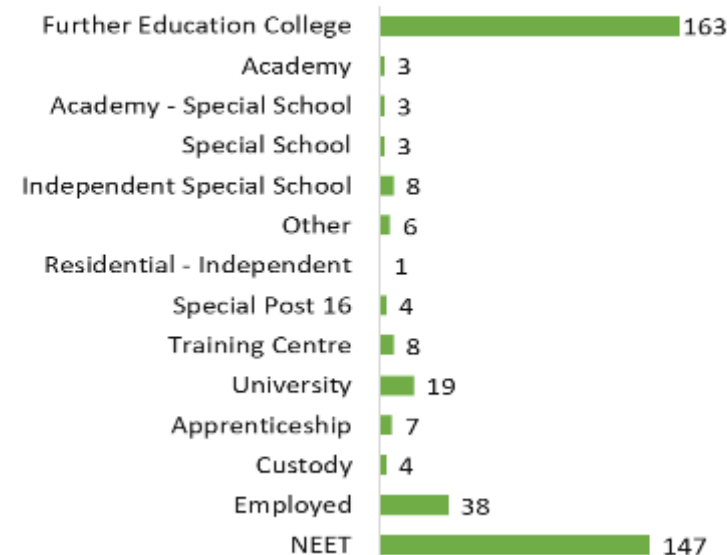
The Post 16 grant has been confirmed from the government to come into effect from September 2023 for the next 2 academic years. We have appointed a Post 16 casework officer to support with PEPS for this cohort of young people and will be able to therefore expand our offer to focus on our NEET young people and apprenticeship drive.

Priority is given to ensure all young people at the end of KS4 (age 16) have an identified destination and remain in Employment, Education or Training (EET) during subsequent years. College Designated Persons (DP) for looked after children are invited to the summer PEP meeting of Year 11 pupils whose college destination is known to ensure that plans are in place for a smooth transition into college.

Post 16 Senior Education Advisors conducted 466 PEPs and were much busier supporting a larger KS5 cohort who had more concerns around education as a result of the uncertainty around courses. The close links with all local colleges, forged over preceding years helped to ease the passage of young people into college, and to access appropriate support.

Number of Post 16 Not in Education,

Post 16 Setting



## Training

The VS continues to deliver a wide range of training to schools and college staff, governors, social workers, carers and adoptive parents. The aim of the training is to help all professionals understand the needs of children in care and previously looked after children by identifying the barriers and strategies to support them. We have moved back to face-to-face training where possible as we gain the most engagement from these sessions, and feedback suggests these are valued more in general.

Between September 2022 and August 2023, the VS delivered training as follows:

- Attachment and Trauma training sessions delivered to 21 schools/mixed staff groups (2x one-hour sessions)
- Induction Training for Designated Teachers of looked-after children and previously looked-after children in October and February,
- Emotion Coaching training to foster carers
- Training to governors
- Training to social workers
- Early Years training to settings
- Training to Adopters,
- ASDAN Training
- Key Adult and Principles of Theraplay courses

We have also expanded our offer to train Alternative provisions, of which 3 so far have taken part and feedback has been extremely positive.

Participants have made the following comments in response to the questions, "In what ways haven you benefited from this training and what will you do as a result of this session?"

*"Reflection on own practices and reflection on change that can be made in dept."*

*"Try to empathise more. Think about what the child is feeling/thinking more."*

*"Being more aware of how I respond to behaviour and thinking of the 3 steps."*

*"Very helpful and informative"  
"Will change protocol"*

## Achievements and participation

Participation in the arts and sporting events is a huge part of our young people's lives. It develops friendships, provides opportunities to experience things they may not have tried before and has a huge benefit in supporting wellbeing and mental health. The Virtual School are committed to providing as many opportunities as possible across a wide range of activities as possible to ensure all young people are given chance to engage in a variety of things.

## My books my story

Following the success of the My Books, My story project, we were nominated for 3 awards. We won 1!! Please see a link to the online exhibition and some photos below!

[My Books, My Story | Culture Leicestershire - Heritage, Libraries, Collections and Learning](#)





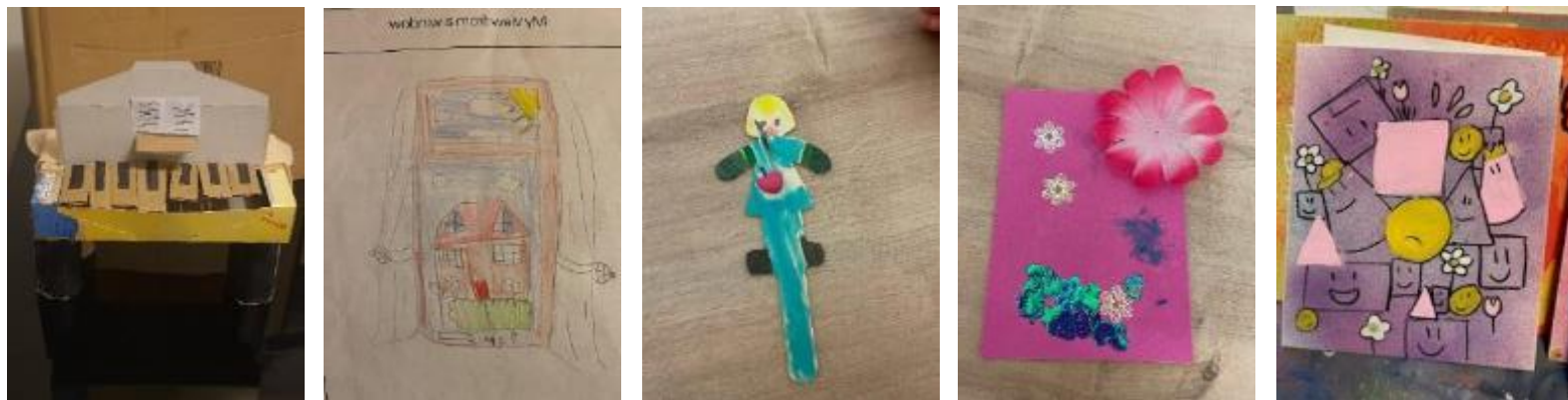
## Forest Schools

Outdoor learning and being out in nature has huge benefits. It provides the opportunity to be creative and focus on wellbeing. The Virtual school in partnership with the corporate parenting team has ran a forest school project across the year. We have had great engagement from our young people, alongside their carers, providing the opportunity to bond and build lasting relationships.



## Artsmark Journey

As part of the Artsmark journey, our young people have been completing arts journey booklets, where they have taken part in designing instruments, creating artwork, singing, and dancing at home.





## Pedestrian

Working with Pedestrian over the February and Easter holidays, our Primary and secondary young people took part in lots of arts based activities. Look at some of the fantastic creations they made.



## Logo

As the launch of our Artsmark Journey, we ran a logo competition to allow young people to design a new Virtual School Logo. We had some fantastic entries and as a team decided to use elements from different entries to create our new logo which will be used in our letters, newsletters and on our website. Look at some of the entries we had.



## Leicester City in the Community Inspire me careers day

We held a carers day as part of the Inspire me project in partnership with Rutland Virtual School. Young people were invited for a tour of the stadium and were spoken to by a range of staff working within different roles within Leicester City, including the club historian, grounds keeper and media suite experience.



## Careers event at the King power

Our fabulous post 16 team worked extremely hard to pull together exhibitors from colleges, universities, and employers across the county to enable a fantastic careers event to take place. We had a great turn out and excellent feedback from our young people about the experience.



## Sports festival

Another fantastic partnership we have made is with the Youth Sport Trust and Active together partnerships, to enable us to offer and support our young people in more sporting opportunities across the county. We were invited to take part as a Virtual School in the school summer festival;



Active Together state, 'over the course of the last year, Active Together have begun to work with the Leicestershire Virtual School to develop the sporting provision for children in care. This relationship culminated in a "Team All Star" group of looked after children attending the School Games Summer Festival at Loughborough University at the end of June for the first time. Active Together are committed to continuing to develop this relationship with the Virtual School to ensure the sustainability of opportunities for this group of young people in the future. '



## Care to Dance

This academic year we have joined a new and very exciting partnership with Care to Dance CIC. We have run a 12 week intro programme followed by a celebration event and will be starting a 12 month partnership in September. This programme will also offer a dance qualification, participation events and celebrations. Care to Dance Director Beth says;

‘We are passionate about working with care-experienced young people. A core value within Care to Dance CIC is celebration; we believe that every young person has interests and talents that should be celebrated. We have seen many young people develop and grow in their confidence, telling their stories and emotions through dance. Engaging with their support system, we found, enhances their positive experience within Care to Dance. Inviting carers, parents, social workers etc to visit them at dance class or to watch a performance facilitates community for them.’



We have recorded our very first podcast with Care to Dance! [Have a listen here.](#)

Please see our Impact report for the 12 week programme from the voice of our young people.



Leicestershire  
Virtual School feedb

## Staff involvement

The Virtual school love to get involved in participation, meeting and supporting our young people. Here are some of the events we have taken part in this academic year;



Forest School  
Team Building



CIC Easter Day



Careers Event



NAVSH  
Conference



Care to Dance



Uni days

## UASC football game

The Virtual School collaborated with Leicester City Football Club to arrange an exciting event for our Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children. On Friday 21<sup>st</sup> October, 18 young people from different backgrounds all came together to play football at St Margaret's training ground with LCFC coaches which was a fantastic way to start the day! After this they were then taken to the King Power stadium for lunch and full tour of the club. They were dazzled by the bright blue lights of the changing rooms, baths, director's lounge and trophies, and press room. They even went down the tunnel to pitch side to sit on the managers seats and see the infamous match football and immaculate pitch. The highlight was going up to Vardy's private box to see the views of the whole stadium! It was a truly fantastic day, the young people left very happy and hopefully inspired to do great things!



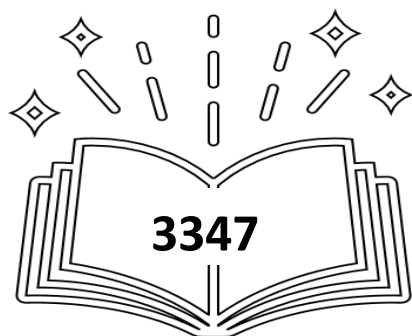
## Sypac

SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care) is a monthly social meet up for care leavers. The young people get consistent staff, engage with each other in games and activities, input into council business and policy and can access EET opportunities and advice through myself and other visitors who attend meeting throughout the year. There are regular young people who come and have been doing so for many years which means that there is no upper age limit and we have members beyond 25yrs who find the monthly sessions incredibly valuable and important. The sessions help to alleviate loneliness particularly for those young people who are living independently. By ensuring the VS have input there have been many opportunities to encourage and advise young people to engage in education, employment, and training. For example, one young person completed several online qualifications during covid lockdown, another is now at Dundee University studying Space Engineering – first contact was at SYPAC after she had been NEET for over 2 years, there are several who are now attending the care leaver council regularly and we have also managed to get a few engaged with Leicestershire Cares and it is hoped that some EET opportunities will follow.

## Book Parcels

1537 books have been sent out by the Dolly Parton Imagination Library scheme on our behalf to children in care aged 0 to 5.

1810 books have been sent out by the Virtual School to the primary school aged pupils.



We recognise the importance of encouraging reading. Children with poor reading skills will struggle to access all areas of the curriculum. To promote a love of reading and develop the necessary skills, we run our Book Clubs with monthly parcels being delivered to children in Reception through to the beginning of year 7. The Dolly Parton Imagination Library provides books to all looked-after children aged 0 – 5 years. The increase in the number of children in care, along with the increased cost of living means that the cost of providing high quality parcels to every child increases year on year.

We continue to purchase BookTrust Letterbox parcels for our children in years 1, 3 and 5. These parcels provide children with high quality books, resources and games to promote literacy and numeracy skills. We carefully select and purchase books for our Bookworm and Boomerang parcels. These parcels also contain resources and activity sheets with ideas for activities to carry out at home. Children have noted how much they value the book parcels. Children like receiving their named and addressed parcel in the post. The recent move to an ePEP using Welfare Cloud has enabled the child's voice to be evidenced during the PEP process. This has highlighted how well received all book club parcels are.

Children have made the following comments in response to the question, "What do you enjoy about the book parcels?"

*"The books, the activities and everything that comes in the parcel."*

*"Gives me new books I haven't read; I get to read different Authors."*

*"I get two book parcels, Bookworm and Letterbox. I enjoy them, they are really entertaining and funny. Why do astronauts burp? Full of jokes and it makes me laugh."*

*"They are really cool books. I also got some stationery."*

*"I like it because they send me good books and stationery I can use at school."*



## On-line Reading Groups

We have delivered two more on-line reading groups for those in year 5 and year 6. The young people in these on-line reading groups have enjoyed the weekly sessions. They have grown in confidence week on week. In addition, they have all improved their reading, inference and comprehension skills. Young people have developed the ability to confidently read aloud and have had an opportunity to discuss story lines in the books. This also gave the young people an opportunity to explore issues including some which were personal. Young people were able to share worries and supported one another. It was so lovely to see the young people smiling during our sessions and feeling part of something that was just for them



## Plans for 2023/2024

### LCIC – mentoring

We are excited to announce we have signed a 2-year contract with Leicester City in the Community to offer their Inspire me and Foster the future programmes to our children in care across Leicestershire. These two programmes work with young people to mentor and engage young people back into education, provide opportunities to experience different opportunities and work together to support aspirations and career opportunities.



### Care to Dance – including qualification

We are delighted to share that we are running the Care to Dance programme for a full year starting in September, after the success of our 12-week programme. This is an exciting opportunity for our young people to continue this journey, with the added option of completing their dance leadership award as part of the programme.

### Artful Alliance with Blue Cabin



We have been successful in being selected in partnership with Care to Dance to be part of the Artful Alliance action research project. We will be working together to research the impact the arts have on our young people in care and looking at using their voice to improve our offer going forward. As part of this we have linked in with Mighty Creatives to develop a video led by our young people to capture their voice on the arts.

### Charnwood Arts

We have linked in with Charnwood Arts who have opportunities such as painting, clay, music, and a recording studio! We are working together to bring some exciting events in the coming year for our young people to access and further opportunities including use of their recording studio and emerging artist programmes.

## New logo and Facebook

We plan to update all our correspondence with our new Virtual School logo! Approval for our very own Facebook page here at Leicestershire Virtual School has been granted! We have just launched this and invite you to join us as we share updates and signpost exciting opportunities going forward!

## UASC – Bright Path futures partnership

We have partnered with Bright Path Futures to pilot some exciting language resources for our UASC young people. This includes translated resources in 8 languages and Amiko wellbeing cards, to support new arrivals in their English language development. These resources will be given out at pre-entry PEPS and used as a supportive tool. Each resource has links to videos that can be easily accessed, and we aim to pilot this project to ensure these resources help our young people going forward.



## CWSW

The next academic year sees the extended duties for children with a social worker coming over to the Virtual School. We are really excited to be in the planning stages of what our offer can look like for this cohort of young people moving forward.

## 2023-2024 priorities/ action plan

The VS Service Delivery Plan reflects the ambitions and ethos of the Children and Family Service Departmental plan. The priorities and actions underpinning them are under constant review throughout the year. We aim

- i. To raise the aspirations of and for looked-after children (LAC) and previously looked-after children (PLAC)
- ii. To narrow progress and attainment gaps
- iii. To improve stakeholders' understanding of the educational needs of children in care and those adopted from care and strengthen their support of education
- iv. To ensure the views of children and young people are heard, recorded, and inform decisions regarding their education.
- v. To maintain a resilient, vibrant, informed, and knowledgeable team

National developments in the education landscape will always have implications for virtual schools and their support for vulnerable children. Amongst these are the development of PPP funding for post-16, the SEN Review, the Independent Care Review and Social care; stable homes built on love.

Donna Chapman  
Virtual School Head,  
Leicestershire Virtual School,  
Children and Family Services,  
Leicestershire County Council.

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