



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

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 3 June 2025 at 2.00 pm**

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

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

Email: **damien.buckley@leics.gov.uk**

Membership

Mr. M. Bools CC (Chairman)

Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. K. Crook CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Emily Greasley	Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Canon. C. Shoyer
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Adina Murataj	Mrs D. Taylor CC
Mr. D. Page 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>

AGENDA

<u>Item</u>	<u>Report by</u>
1. Appointment of Chairman. To note that Mr. Mark Bools CC has been appointed Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Rule 6(a) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4E of the County Council's Constitution).	
2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman.	
3. Minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2025.	(Pages 5 - 10)
4. Question Time.	



5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).
6. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.
7. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.
8. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.
9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.
10. School Place Planning and Admissions. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 11 - 22)
11. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Children in Care. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 23 - 28)
12. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Care Leavers. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 29 - 34)
13. Families First Reforms - Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 35 - 86)
14. Local Delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 87 - 96)
15. Quarter 4 2024/25 Performance Report. Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 97 - 104)
16. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 2 September 2025.
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 website 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?

Members are reminded that, to ensure questioning during meetings remains appropriately focused that:

- (a) they can use the officer contact details at the bottom of each report to ask questions of clarification or raise any related patch issues which might not be best addressed through the formal meeting;
- (b) they must speak only as a County Councillor and not on behalf of any other local authority when considering matters which also affect district or parish/town councils (see Articles 2.03(b) of the Council's Constitution).



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Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 4 March 2025.

PRESENT

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

Mr. R. G. Allen CC
Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC
Mr. R. Hills CC

Mr. M. Hunt CC
Mrs. S. Jordan CC
Mrs. R. Page CC

In attendance

Mr. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Families
Mr. C. Smith CC – Cabinet Support Member for Children and Families

54. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

55. Question Time.

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

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

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

57. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

58. Declarations of interest.

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

No declarations were made.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

60. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 35.

61. Expansion of Childcare for Funded Entitlements and Wraparound Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which outlined the County Council's statutory duties with regards to childcare and provide an overview of the work being undertaken by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service to support the delivery of the expansion of early education and childcare provision. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Concern was raised regarding whether a sufficient number of childcare places would be available in order to meet the demand expected as a result of the expansion of childcare policy. The Director assured members that she was confident that the Council would meet its statutory duties in line with the policy change. Members noted that a sufficiency survey which had been undertaken by Department for Education did not represent the whole picture in Leicestershire. The Department would work with providers to increase the level of provision. Expanded childcare provision would be supported by breakfast cubs and wraparound care.
- (ii) In response to a question relating to the number of Leicestershire childminders of which had left the sector, the Director advised that the most common reason for this had been an increase in provision costs. Members noted that grants were available to new childminders joining the profession. The Service would continue to provide support to new childminders joining the sector. It was agreed that the Director would provide Mr. R. Allen CC with the contact details of the Department's Early Years Business Development Adviser in order to facilitate further discussions relating to opportunities in this area.
- (iii) A question was raised in relation to the number of childcare apprentices who had dropped out of the course. There remained a high dropout rate, and the Service was undertaking work with colleges and other educational settings to understand the reasons for this in order to reduce future attrition. It was agreed that the Director of Children and Family Services would provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons behind apprentices having dropped out of childcare apprenticeships.
- (iv) With regards to breakfast clubs, 18 Leicestershire primary schools had become early adopters of the government scheme, although some had withdrawn from the scheme. The Cabinet Leader Member for Children and Families emphasised that breakfast clubs were not means tested and the level of funding provided was often not sufficient to meet costs within schools. It was agreed that the Director of Children and Family Services would provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons why some schools had chosen to not continue to provide breakfast clubs, despite being early adopters of the scheme.
- (v) Members noted that in 2021/22 the Early Years Block of Dedicated, Schools Grant (DSG) recorded a deficit of £4.26 million, and as of March 2024, this deficit had reduced to £3.1m. The Department planned to clear this deficit over four years, by March 2027.

- (vi) In response to a question relating to contingency funding, the Director stated that historically, the Council had not held a contingency fund. However, the Department was holding a contingency fund which was funding that could be utilised in order to respond to the financial implications of changes in the number of children taking up the entitlements. The budget was dependent on census information. As a result, the level of funding received from Government could be less than the amount required to be paid to providers to support the actual number of children who had taken up their entitlement.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's statutory duties with regards to childcare and the overview of the work being undertaken by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service to support the delivery of the expansion of early education and childcare provision, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons behind apprentices having dropped out of childcare apprenticeships.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons why some schools had chosen to not continue to provide breakfast clubs, despite being early adopters of the scheme.
- (d) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide Mr. R. Allen CC with the contact details of the Department's Early Years Business Development Adviser.

62. Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the Local Authority's duties and responsibilities, under the new regulations for the use of agency children and family social workers, which were published in September 2024, and to outline the progress made to date against these requirements.

In introducing the report, the Director stated that there was an error in Paragraph 7 of the report. Reference to November 2025 should have read November 2024.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding resource implications arising from the policy change, the Director stated that no additional costs would be required in order to implement the changes. The Department would continue to undertake work in order to stabilise the workforce further by aiming to increase the number agency staff returning to permanent employment. This move would also reduce financial staffing pressures considerably.
- (ii) The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the Department was in a good position with regards to Recruitment and Retention and that it would

continue to work with regional partners to influence the market in order to further improve outcomes for children and families.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the Local Authority's duties and responsibilities, under the new regulations for the use of agency children and family social workers, which were published in September 2024, and the progress made to date against these requirements, be noted.

63. Children's Innovation Partnership.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), with a particular focus on the residential redesign. 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 a question raised relating to meeting the changing needs of Leicestershire children in care, the Director assured members that demand and profile modelling exercises would continue to be undertaken in order to regularly assess need and to put the appropriate measures in place to meet this need. The Department also worked with the private sector and continued to develop its inhouse foster carer resource as part of its overall strategy to provide homes for children.
- (ii) The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the project would provide good homes for children with complex needs and enable them to live within their local communities and to make improvements to their lives. She thanked officers for the work undertaken to deliver this project.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), with a particular focus on the residential redesign, be noted.

64. Quarter 3 2024/25 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period October to December 2024 (Quarter 3). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding data relating to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the Director advised that there were 2,566 children with an EHCP at the autumn term school census which was 108 lower than at the summer term census when the number was 2,674. However, the autumn term figure was higher than that recorded in any other autumn term.

- (ii) Concern was raised regarding the number of children who had been subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Concern in this area had been raised by the Committee at a number of meetings. The Director stated that the Department continued to undertake robust work in order to prevent children from becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Members were provided with some reassurance that there were usually gaps between plans of two years or more, indicating that there are periods of improvement and stability. However, factors such as domestic abuse meant that there could be setbacks in such periods of stability.
- (iii) A question was raised in relation to a decrease in the percentage of children in care at the end of Quarter 3 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months. The Director explained it was important to consider that children in care received more health checks than children not in care and that. The Department continued to work with children and young people to understand health matters which are important to them, including mental health and wellbeing, in order to understand how to address health needs and provide the best level of support. This work also included working with colleagues within the health sector who provided health checks for children in care.
- (iv) With regards to Electively Home Educated (EHE) children, the Director stated that the Department had a duty to ensure that the education being delivered outside of a school setting was to an acceptable standard. Checks were undertaken annually to measure this. The Council had a statutory duty in terms of safeguarding children. Partner agencies also had a role to play in raising concerns relating to safeguarding. Members noted that the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which was being passed through Parliament, included provisions relating to the safeguarding and welfare of children as well as attendance of children at school.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period October to December 2024 (Quarter 3), be noted.

65. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 3 June at 14:00.

2.00 - 3.25 pm
04 March 2025

CHAIRMAN

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

SCHOOL PLACE PLANNING AND ADMISSIONS

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 update on the processes and work around school admissions and school organisation, the issues arising and anticipated trends.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Education Act 1996 places a statutory duty on local authorities 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. 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.
4. On 7 November 2023, the Committee noted an update on the admissions service, including a full performance breakdown of the year's outcomes, service improvements and a consultation on the Council's Admissions Policy.
5. On 7 February 2025, the Cabinet approved a reduction to admissions numbers in two primary schools, two junior schools and one infant school. Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes were also reviewed and amended following a public consultation.

Background

6. Local authorities have a legal obligation under Section 14 of the Education Act 1996 to ensure that sufficient school places are available to provide primary and secondary education for children within the area. Effective school place planning is a fundamental element of the Local Authority's role as strategic commissioner of good school places across all phases and types of statutory education.
7. When planning for school places, local authorities must consider factors such as:

- Forecast pupil numbers;
- School capacity;
- Impact of housing growth;
- The need to promote diversity and increase parental choice.

8. To meet their statutory duty, local authorities can consider:

- Expanding existing schools;
- Building new schools;
- Working with maintained schools and academy trusts to ensure sufficient places;
- Reducing capacity through a reduction in published admission numbers or closure;
- Consider alternative solutions such as transporting children and reorganising existing schools.

9. The School Organisation Service delivers school places by following a three-step process to deliver places where needed:

- a) Analysis of the need for school places using a range of information to identify the number and location of places required;
- b) Working with internal and external stakeholders to develop the best possible solution to provide high quality school places;
- c) Commissioning providers to deliver additional school places.

10. The School Organisation Service provides support and advice to all education providers in Leicestershire, including maintained schools and Multi Academy Trusts (MATs), on matters related to the planning of school places. The School Organisation Service also works with second tier councils and housing developers to ensure that provision is made for additional school places in new developments and with several other Council services including property, legal, finance, growth and highways.

11. The School Organisation and Admissions services share information to achieve the right mix of school places in the right place and at the right time. This strength of this work is demonstrated in the number of children achieving a place at one of their preferred schools.

12. Since 2023, the improvement journey in School Admissions has been significant with a data-driven approach now embedded, resources allocated according to demand and the Synergy IT system now being embedded.

13. The Local Authority consulted on its Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes to increase the number of parental school preferences from three to five for entry autumn 2025. This was predicated on giving parents improved choice and diversity, whilst also allowing parents to maximise their opportunities of securing a school of their preference.

14. In 2023/24, the consultation sought to reduce the admission number at several schools in response to continued low births and infant class size compliance and, in

some instances, in response to deficit budgets. In 2024/25 there was again a proposal to reduce admissions numbers at five primary schools from entry 2026.

Admissions phase transfer

15. 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.
16. The Local authority's statutory responsibilities are for the following phased rounds:
 - i) First time Admissions (FTA) – this is when children aged 4+ apply for a place in the Early Years Foundation Stage, **National Offer Date 16th April** (or next working day);
 - ii) Infant to Junior Transfers, **National Offer Date 16th April** (or next working day);
 - iii) Year 7 Secondary Transfers, **National Offer Date 1st March** (or next working day)

Phase transfer preference allocations

17. First Time Admissions

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
Preferred school:	97.9%	98.9%	99.4%	99.5%
Total applications	7410	7169	7012	7141
1st preference	92.9%	94.2%	94.8%	95.07%
2nd preference	4.06%	3.7%	3.6%	3.71%
3rd preference	0.97%	1%	0.8%	0.63%
4th preference	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.08%
5th preference	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.03%
Auto allocated	2%	0.9%	0.9%	0.48%

Table 1. Percentage of Successful First Time Admissions

18. Infant to Junior School Transfer

Year	Pupils Allocated	Pupils Refused	Total	Pupils Awarded First Preference
2022	435	0	435	100%
2023	423	1	424	99.76%
2024	421	0	421	100%
2025`	403	0	403	100%

Table 2. Percentage of Successful Infant to Junior School Admissions

19. Secondary Transfer

Year	2022	2023	2024	2025
Preferred school	92.8%	97.6%	98.2%	98.3%
Total applications	7918	7748	7640	8261
1st preference	84.7%	90.6%	91.1%	90.96%
2nd preference	6.5%	5.6%	5.8%	5.87%
3rd preference	1.6%	1.4%	1.4%	1.28%
4th preference	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.19%
5th preference	N/A	N/A	N/A	0.01%
Auto allocated	N/A	2.4%	1.8%	1.69%

Table 3. Percentage of Successful Secondary Admissions

Mid-term (in year) admissions

20. Applications to other year groups not part of the phased rounds do not form part of the statutory obligation on the Local Authority 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.
21. Most schools in Leicestershire co-ordinate their admissions processes through the Local Authority which provides a 24/7 online application system, information for families, an all year round service that ensures parents' rights are upheld, and, where applicable, access to the appeals process.
22. This offers a seamless process for parents in securing a school place. For the Local Authority 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.

	2022	2023	2024
% completed in 15-day target	15%	67%	68.5%

Table 4. Percentage of Mid-term Admissions Processed in 15 Days.

23. At least two thirds of mid-term transfer applications are processed within 15 days in line with the School Admissions Code and the Admissions service is continually working to improve this figure. The reasons why those that are not processed within this timescale are understood for each case and are usually a result of either waiting for responses from parents or schools or the outcomes of the Fair Access Protocol.

Independent schools

24. In July 2024 there were 12 independent schools located in Leicestershire; two of these schools designated as primary, three as secondary schools and the remaining seven as all through (4-18). In total, the 12 schools had a registered capacity of 7,005 places, with 5,945 pupils registered on roll. The Local Authority does not hold records of independent school placements and the children attending may or may not live within Leicestershire. Conversely, children resident in Leicestershire may attend independent provision in other areas.
25. Parents of children who leave independent schools and wish to take a place at a state-funded school are required to apply for a place, either through phase transfer or the mid-term process. To date, the number of children going through this process has not been high. All children have successfully gained places, although not always at their preferred schools. Other inflationary factors such as increased energy costs, employment costs and the application of business rates also make this market challenging to operate within. One independent school in Leicestershire and another in a neighbouring area have announced closure with effect from the end of the 2024/2025 school year. Both schools have Leicestershire children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) among their pupils (11 in total).

The context of Leicestershire schools

26. Currently, 72% of schools in Leicestershire are academies. A summary of the 282 schools and academies can be seen below:

	<i>Maintained Schools</i>	<i>Academy Schools</i>
Primary	75	153
Secondary	0	46
SEND	3	5
Total:	78	204

Table 5. Proportion of Schools and Academies in Leicestershire

27. The number of schools converting to academy status has reduced in recent years. In 2024, five schools joined a Multi Academy Trust (MAT). In April 2025, four schools were undergoing this process.
28. In 2024, five Stand Alone Trusts (SATs) joined a MAT. In April 2025, four SATs were progressing with joining a MAT.

Pupil Forecasts

29. Pupil forecasts identify future need and are used by the School Organisation Service to determine the quantity of additional school places needed. Forecasts are updated on an annual basis and include birth rate data from the Office of National Statistics, housing gains from developments that have secured planning permission and historical trends such as movement between school catchments.

30. There is a high level of accuracy in forecasting pupil numbers. The combined forecast for 2024 First Time Admissions and Junior National Curriculum Year 7 transfers was within 2% of the actual totals. This is important for schools' planning and in securing appropriate section 106 contributions from developers to create new school places.
31. The School Capacity (SCAP) return is submitted to the DfE on an annual basis. The forecasts submitted will determine the amount of Basic Need monies that the authority receives from the DfE to provide any additional pupil places required and which are not covered by section 106 monies received from developers. In 2024 this included SEND data for the first time.

Birth Rates

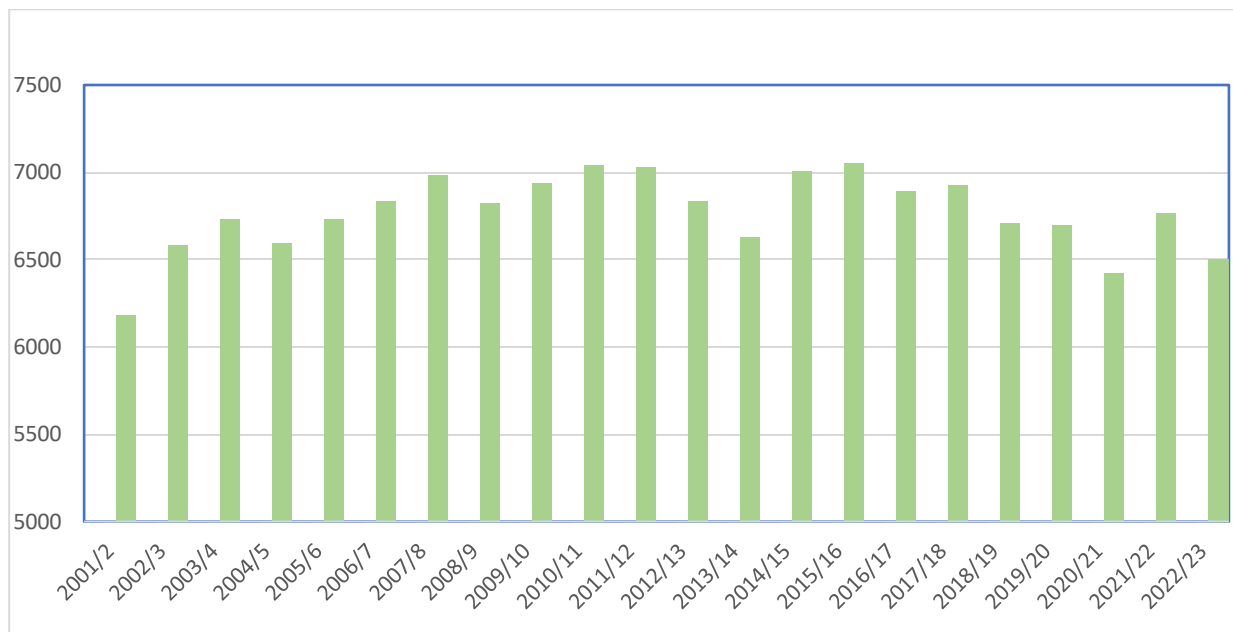


Figure 1. Live Births in Leicestershire, Office for National Statistics

32. From 2007 to 2013 the birth rate increased to around 7,000 per year and has since returned to a more typical number, despite population growth. The larger cohorts, which have also increased as a result of inward migration, are now progressing through secondary schools and Post 16.
33. Smaller cohorts in the lower primary school year groups are presenting challenges around sustainable pupil numbers for some primary schools and academies, especially those in rural areas where birth rates are particularly low with no increase in numbers forecast. As school funding is predicated on pupil numbers and is largely spent on staffing, which has become more expensive, this presents some challenges for the Council in respect of maintained schools and for MATs in respect of academies.

Primary school capacity

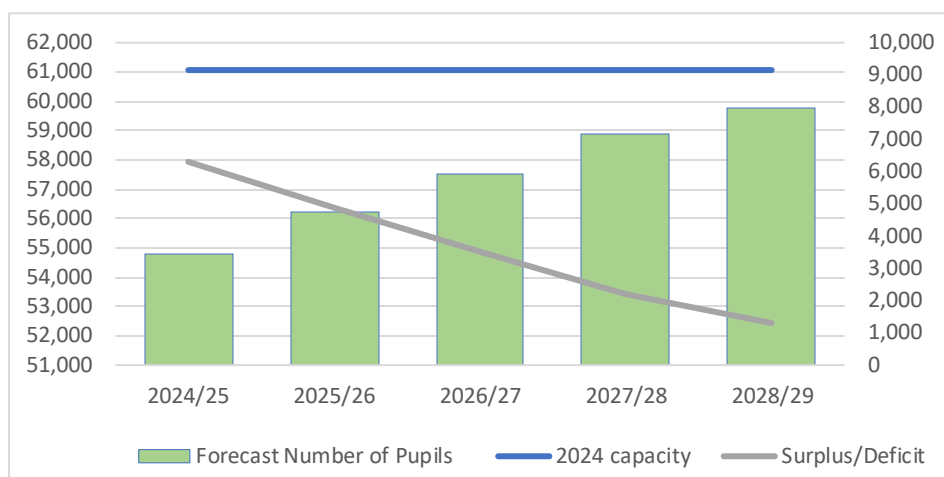


Figure 2. 2024 Primary DfE SCAP Forecast (Leicestershire)

34. The effect on primary school occupancy is inconsistent. Some schools in popular areas are oversubscribed, whereas some small primary schools in rural areas are significantly below capacity. Some maintained schools and academies have consulted to reduce their Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) and/or reorganised classes to reduce staffing costs.

Secondary school capacity

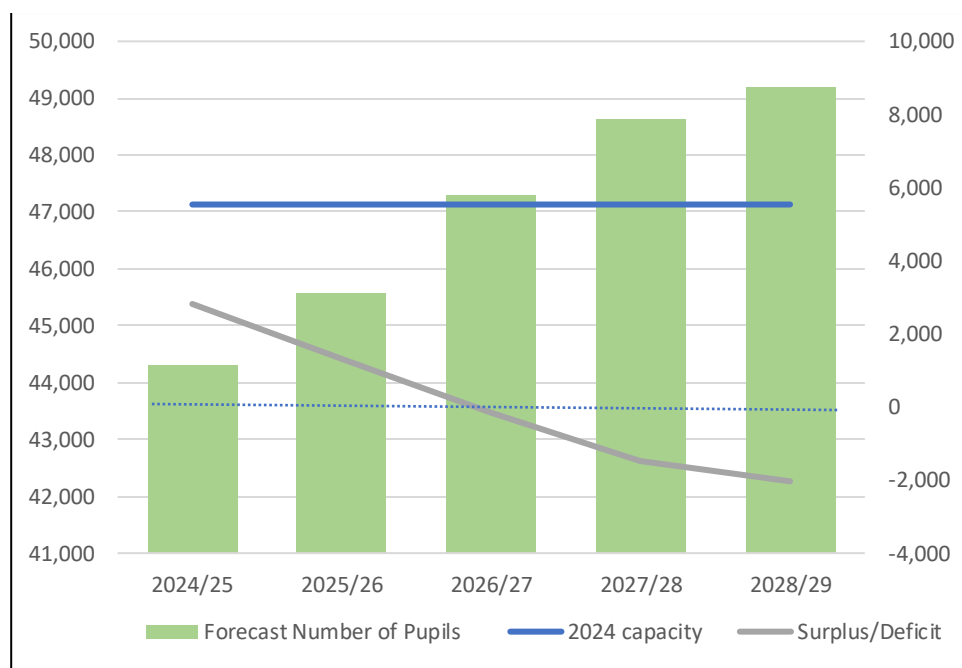


Figure 3. 2024 Secondary DfE SCAP Forecast (Leicestershire)

35. The graph shows a continued need to increase the number of places in secondary schools as a result of a combination of year groups with higher birth rates and inward migration including significant housing growth. A number of schemes to enlarge secondary schools are planned or in progress.

36. Although there is currently sufficient secondary places within the County, these are not evenly distributed which means that it can sometimes be challenging to find local places for mid-term applications.

Post 16 demand

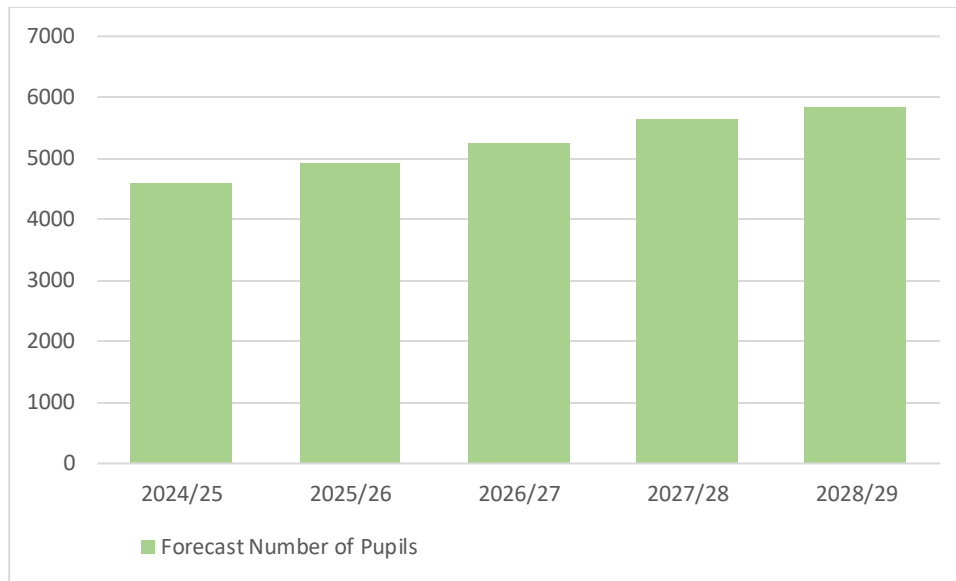


Figure 4. Forecast Pupils in School Sixth Forms and Sixth Form Colleges (Leicestershire)

37. The high demand at secondary is flowing through to Post 16. All Leicestershire school-based Post 16 providers are showing an increase in their forecast numbers with housing gains in some areas. At Post 16 students are more likely to attend provision that is not local, including FE colleges outside Leicestershire. A review of Leicestershire Post 16 provision is being undertaken.

DfE capital funding

38. The Council receives Basic Need funding for the provision of additional mainstream school places. Allocations for the next two years are:
- 2026/27: £1,153,746
 - 2027/28: £731,805
39. In addition to delivering additional school places funding is also being used to meet maintained school safeguarding needs and adaptations through the Schools Access Initiative (SAI) to enable children with a disability to be able to attend their local school.

Section 106 funding

40. Developer contributions or planning obligations are secured through legal deeds called S106 agreements or unilateral undertakings. Planning obligations contribute towards sustainable communities by enabling development to take place and mitigate the impacts of development to help make it acceptable in planning terms, including ensuring sufficient school places are available. Details of contributions secured are published in the County Council's Infrastructure Funding Statement

(IFS): <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/environment-and-planning/planning/developer-contributions>.

41. The contributions received are allocated to projects that will either deliver new school places or allow for enhancements to be made to existing schools. Each Section 106 agreement specifies how funding can be used.
42. Rising costs, particularly within the construction sector, present significant challenges in the delivery of school schemes within the original Section 106 contribution funding agreed prior to recent cost increases.
43. Leicestershire's Planning Obligation Policy (LPOP) is currently under review and is likely to be adopted later this year following consultation this summer. The education section has been reviewed in line with the Department for Education's 2022 Securing Developer Contributions for Education guidance. The guidance reflects much of Leicestershire's current practice that we provided information on during the DfE consultation for the guidance. A significant change is that available capacity will not be discounted in schools at the point a statutory planning consultation response is submitted so a full claim for the pupils yielded by the development will be made. Historically some potential contributions were not received as a result of this.. Under the new policy, the available capacity will be assessed just prior to the housing development starting and then any available capacity will be discounted at that point. This mechanism will allow a more accurate and timelier request for funding to be made.
44. Some previous new school sites provided in signed Section 106 agreements have presented challenges to build on resulting in high abnormal construction costs. Land and building specifications have been revised and full due diligence is now undertaken to fully understand the quality of any site proposed. If high abnormal costs still result the cost will be passed on to the housing developer to meet.

Background papers

45. Update on Admissions Service, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7 November 2023:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7194&Ver=4>
46. Leicestershire's Policy on Admissions to Mainstream Schools: Determination of Admission Arrangements, Cabinet, 7 February 2025:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7873&Ver=4>
47. School Admissions Code 2021:
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/school-admissions-code--2>
48. Leicestershire's School Admissions Policy and associated co-ordinated schemes:
<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/schools-colleges-and-academies/school-admissions/school-policies>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

49. A copy of this report will be circulated to all members of the County Council.

Equality Implications

50. An Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken in respect of the changes of the Admissions Policy. No further equality implications have been identified.

Human Rights Implications

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

Appendix

Capital Programme

Officer(s) to Contact

Ted Walker
Head of Service, Education Sufficiency
Ted.Walker@leics.gov.uk

Tim Browne
Assistant Director, Education, SEND and Inclusion
Tim.browne@leics.gov.uk

Capital programme

The CFS MTFS Capital Programme 2024/28 is valued at £91.1 million over the lifetime of the current MTFS. New school places are either delivered by the developer, Property Services or the academy trust themselves where they have the capacity to do so. New mainstream school places are being delivered at the following schools:

School	Phase	Year	Places
Harborough Wellington Place*+	Primary	2024	210
Hugglescote +	Primary	2024	105
Coalville Greenstone* + (Developer Built)	Primary	2025	420
Oakfield Short Stay School Relocation ^	Primary	2026	0
Oadby Brocks Hill ^	Primary	2026	210
Birstall Hallam Fields^	Primary	2026	210
Lubbesthorpe^ (Developer Built)	Primary	2026	210
Charnwood Broadnook* (Developer Built)	Primary	2027	420
Loughborough Garendon**^	Primary	2027	420
Thurmaston Thorpbury**^	Primary	2028	420
Melton Sysonby Farm**^	Primary	2028	210
	Primary Total:		2,835
Hinckley Redmoor Academy #	Secondary	2025	195
Burbage Hastings #	Secondary	2025	200
Shepshed Iveshead #	Secondary	2025	450
Oadby Manor High #	Secondary	2025	150
Harborough Robert Smyth #	Secondary	2025	150
Lutterworth High School ^	Secondary	2026	150
Harborough Welland Park ^	Secondary	2027	150
Ibstock Community College ^	Secondary	2027	150
Melton Longfield ^	Secondary	2027	300
	Secondary Total:		1,895
Shepshed Bowman Academy* +	SEND	2024	64
Quorn Farley Way Academy* ^	SEND	2028	90
Harborough Area Special School* ^	SEND	2028	125
	SEND Total:		279
	Grand Total:		5,009

*New school ^ Feasibility and Planning

+ Complete # Under construction



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CHILDREN
IN CARE

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 Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care, including children seeking asylum. The report will outline progress achieved and the development plan going forward.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The functions of local authorities in relation to children who are 'looked after' by them are set out in the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance; the principal regulations are the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010.
3. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 outlines Leicestershire's commitment to the seven corporate parenting principles set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Background

4. The Children in Care service work with children who have a care plan of long-term care (fostering or residential). There are children who are identified as children in care who do not yet have a long-term care plan or have a care plan of adoption. This report is focusing on children in the Children in Care Service with a care plan of long-term care including children in the Disabled Children's Service.
5. 'Our Promise' to children in care and care leavers was launched in 2019 and sets out the commitment that Leicestershire County Council and its partners will provide the best support, guidance and care to children in care and care leavers. It demonstrates that the Service values them for their individuality, provide stability and offer aspirational life chances as a good parent provides for their children. An annual report for Our Promise is completed to evidence the partnership working and impact for children and young people.

6. The most recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in April 2024 judged the Council's services to children in care as outstanding. The report identified:
 - a. 'Most children in care receive an outstanding service that results in their life experiences significantly improving. Social workers and managers are aspirational for the children in their care and demonstrate a determination to improve children's experiences'.
 - b. 'Children are seen regularly and are seen alone where appropriate. Manageable workloads mean that skilled social workers can spend quality time with children to get to know them well and build strong and enduring relationships with them. Social workers speak highly about the children they work with, and they positively beamed when talking about children's progress and achievements'.
 - c. 'Disabled children are supported to develop trusting relationships with their social workers. Workers recognise when children are not happy and invest time in understanding why, advocating on children's behalf. Workers are rightly proud of the progress children make and are ambitious for them'.
 - d. 'Children in care benefit from creative, insightful and beautifully presented life story work. This shows children how their life experiences are valued. This work is routinely carried out with children at their pace and to their timescales, and this assists them to understand their journey. Purposeful direct work is also of a high quality and reflects children's individual circumstances, wishes and feelings. Social workers are extremely skilled at helping children to understand why decisions have been reached and what the plans are for their longer-term care'.
7. A Continuous Improvement Plan 2024-2027 'Achieving Excellence through purposeful practice' is built upon the Road to Excellence 2021-2023 plan and both have steered the direction of work and development in the service areas of children in care. The core values of 'Aspirational, Being Curious and Collaboration' and the associated behaviours of 'professional kindness, active listening, outcome focused and being accountable'; are central to all engagement with children and their networks.

Children in Care

8. As of 29 April 2025, Leicestershire County Council had 717 children in care. This includes children who became looked after due to being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. 82 are children who became looked after due to seeking asylum (UASC), 388 are children with a care plan of long-term care in the Children in Care service and 41 in the Disabled Children's Service.

Service Overview

9. The children in care service comprises of four teams. Each team has a manager, five social workers and a senior practitioner. A Service Manager is responsible for this area of the service. There are currently 717 children in care in Leicestershire.
10. The children in care service supports children with a long-term care plan of foster care or residential care. The Service focuses on ensuring that all children have a

stable and caring and safe home where their needs are understood, and the right support is provided.

11. The children in care service works in partnership with a range of partner agencies and services to ensure that the holistic needs of children in care are met. These include, health, education, virtual school, fostering, police, youth justice and child exploitation service.
12. The Service Manager for Care Leavers and UASC has two Children in Care teams for unaccompanied young people, one team undertakes the specialist legal assessment for age disputes and holds a number of children in care and the other team works with children in care. The teams are currently working with 82 children seeking asylum.

Service Priorities

13. The Children In Care service ensures that all children have a good understanding of their own life story and the decisions that have been made for them. That they are supported to have meaningful and long lasting relationships with their network supported by the use of cultural genograms and network meetings.
14. The Service is aspirational and ambitious for children in care and focus on ensuring that all visits to children are purposeful and support them to achieve their best outcomes. This is built on strong relational practice where direct work with children and families is central to giving the right support at the right time.
15. The Children In Care service work with increasing complexity of need due to the trauma experienced by children. Complex risk and need require a multi-agency approach with a co-owned safety plan to ensure that the Service is providing the right safety and support with robust management oversight.
16. Opportunities for permanence are offered to children when it is right for them. This can include rehabilitation home, permanence in care and permanence through adoption or Special Guardianship Order. The S is determined that children will have a sense of belonging where their identity and sense of self is supported to thrive.
17. The Children In Care service ensures that the voice of children and carers inform services and the support offered. Children's voice and influence is supported by providing opportunities where their views are heard through direct work, in their Personal Education Plan and in their Review of Arrangements and in participation events such as the Children in Care Council.

Service delivery over the last 12 months

Children understanding their identity and their life experiences

18. The Service has focused on increasing the number of children who have a cultural genogram which fully explores all important relationships and the strengths and

vulnerabilities of them. These support identity discussions with children and families and support developing meaningful networks for children in care.

19. Life story work is an opportunity to support children to understand their experiences and decisions that have been made for them and often this supports them to comprehend how they feel. The Life Story Guidance developed in 2022 is well embedded and this focuses on ensuring that all children have life story work completed and that this is an ongoing process. Therapeutic Life Story work is delivered within the Service in order to strengthen the offer for children in care. The service also recognise the changing needs of children as they grow older and have developed a 'Moving Forward Letter', which gives greater detail of their experiences and decisions both before becoming a child in care and since.

Achieving Permanence and a sense of belonging for Children in Care

20. A key focus in the Children In Care service is for children to achieve legal permanence through a Special Guardianship Order in what has been their long-term foster home. The SGO Team was established in 2021 and provides specialist assessment and support to children and carers to achieve a Special Guardianship Order, which ends a Care Order for children, and then they are no longer a child in care.
21. Since April 2024, 13 children have achieved legal permanency via Special Guardianship through this route. Since the Team was established in December 2021 35 children have achieved permanence through SGO. There are currently six active cases progressing through to an SGO.
22. Over the last 12 months, the Department has introduced a support worker whose key role is to support the identification of long-term placements for children ready to step down from residential homes or who are in short term foster homes. Profiles for children have been developed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of children's personalities as well as their needs. Two children have been successfully supported to move from residential home to a foster family in the last six months.

Rehabilitation Home

23. The SGO Assessment Team service offer has extended to include undertaking work where a return home to parent(s) has been assessed and agreed as the plan, or where children/young people have already returned home (planned or unplanned), and revocation of the Care Order is the goal. The SGO Assessment Team will facilitate network meetings and ongoing reviews to ensure that the network and safety plans are robust and tested. The team ensure that there is a SMART trajectory to ensure timely decisions and assessments to progress to achieving revocation of the care order. The team are currently progressing seven children to revocation and have achieved five revocations in 12 months.

Family Time Pilot

24. Family Time is the opportunity for children to spend time with birth family when they are unable to live with them. The Children in Care Service currently has a pilot

focusing on both the approach and support offer for family time for children in care. The key areas are:

- i) ensuring that the family time is meaningful and purposeful for children and family members
- ii) for family members to be supported to develop their own approaches and skills engaging with their children
- iii) regular review of the family time offer and ensure this changes with the child and families changing strengths and vulnerabilities.

25. The Family Time pilot supports the broad consideration of permanence and reunification when this is right for the child. The regular review ensures that the needs of the children remain central to decision making and the children in care service are proactively driving the care plan

Robust and effective age assessments

26. An age assessment is a process used to determine a person's age when there's a dispute or uncertainty, particularly when it comes to unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers. This assessment aims to ensure appropriate care, safeguarding, and treatment based on a person's age. The Service undertakes age assessments when children with disputed ages by the Home Office are moved to Leicestershire through the National Transfer Scheme and when a brief enquiry of age by the Service indicates that they are not their stated age.
27. Home Office policy states that unless the claimant's physical appearance/ demeanour 'very strongly suggests that they are significantly over 18 years of age', they should be treated as a child until a holistic assessment can be made by a local authority. The Service aim to complete a [Merton-compliant age assessment within 28 days](#). This is a social worker-led assessment that adheres to standards established by the courts
28. Age assessments are being completed within timescales which has meant less delay in decision making for young people. Robust challenge on the quality of the assessments is meaning there are no current judicial reviews.

Impact

29. Children in care all have a Care Plan which gives clear actions around how to support them to achieve their best outcomes. Plans are reviewed every six months. As part of this plan there are expectations for the frequency of visiting by the social worker which are at a minimum of six weekly unless otherwise agreed. The Service is measured against the timeliness of both plans and visits. 100% of Care Plans are currently in timescale and recorded visits in timescale is currently 90%. Other key data which is measured is the health data of which Review Health Assessments are currently 90% in timescale and dental checks are at 90%.

Resource Implications

30. The work to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children is provided by the Home Office.

Background Papers

31. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025:
<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/8bb67275-2f3f-476c-91db-049bf6dd2dbc/corporate-parenting-strategy-2022-2025compressed.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

32. None.

Equality Implications

33. All assessments and services provided for Children in Care and Care Leavers are done so in a framework of respecting equality and diversity for young people. The Children and Family Services department is committed to equality and ensuring the human rights of all users, and importantly to support those young people who have arrived here from other countries as unaccompanied children.

Human Rights Implications

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

Officer(s) to Contact

Sharon Cooke
Assistant Director – Targeted Early Help and Children’s Social Care
Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Kelda Claire
Head of Service – Children in Care, Fostering and Adoption
Email: Kelda.Claire@leics.gov.uk



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CARE LEAVERS

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 Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The functions of local authorities in relation to children who are 'looked after' by them and for children who have become care leavers, are set out in the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance; the principal regulations are the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010.
3. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 outlines Leicestershire's commitment to the seven corporate parenting principles set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.
4. Local authorities have a duty to support young people who cease to be looked after (for example those referred to in legislation as 'relevant' and 'former relevant' children). The main aim of the Care Leavers Regulations and of this guidance is to make sure that care leavers are provided with comprehensive personal support so that they achieve their potential as they make their transition to adulthood. The Care Leavers (England) Regulations 2010 are made under the Children Act 1989.
5. Following a motion made at the County Council meeting on 21 February 2024, Leicestershire County Council committed to making being 'care experienced' a protected characteristic.

Background

6. As of 30 April 2025, Leicestershire County Council had 498 care leavers (aged 18-25). Of this, 226 are UASC care leavers with 10 being aged 22-25, and 272 are British born with 41 being aged 22-25.
7. 'Our Promise' to children in care and care leavers was launched in 2019 and sets out the commitment that Leicestershire County Council and its partners will provide the

best support, guidance and care to children in care and care leavers. It demonstrates that the Service values them for their individuality, provide stability and offer aspirational life chances as a good parent provides for their children. An annual report for Our Promise is completed to evidence the partnership working and impact for children and young people.

8. The most recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in April 2024 judged services to children in care as outstanding. The report identified:
 - a. Personal Advisors (PAs) know their care leavers extremely well, recognising their strengths and vulnerabilities. Children in care are allocated a PA at an early stage of their journey towards leaving care, which helps them to build positive, trusting and lasting relationships with their PAs before their transition to adulthood. Care leavers are typically highly positive about the support they receive, particularly in the relationships that they have built with their PAs and social workers.
 - b. Many care leavers in Leicestershire remain in contact with the service and have long-standing links with their PA. PAs act as good parents would and routinely encourage care leavers to continue to access help if needed, and most do. There is thoughtful discussion about care leavers' next stage in life, and what help and guidance is available to them. If care leavers do choose to opt out of receiving a service, they can opt back in at any time.
 - c. PAs are excellent role models and lead by example. They fiercely champion the rights of care leavers. Inspectors saw many examples of workers going above and beyond to ensure that care leavers have the support that they need. Feedback from care leavers themselves was also extremely positive. One care leaver said, 'The service I have received has changed my life. My PA is kind, and they care about me.' Another said, 'The service has been amazing and over time they have helped out as much as they can.'
 - d. Care leavers benefit from a comprehensive and ambitious local offer. The published offer is easy to navigate on the County Council's website and promotes an array of resources. This is a lifelong offer, enabling care leavers to return for support at any age. Care leavers have actively contributed to the development of the offer and PAs ensure that care leavers fully understand what support is available to them.

Service Overview

9. There are four teams for Care Leavers, two for British born Care Leavers and two teams for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Care Leavers, this provides care leavers with specialist personal advisor support, especially for those still waiting on decisions for asylum.

Service Priorities

10. The overall mission as a service is for care leavers to feel well prepared for independence, feeling safe, supported and having a sense of belonging. The priorities identified to achieve this are:

- a. To provide care leavers with the right support at the right time; to ensure that they are enabled to achieve their best outcomes and for the voice of care leavers to inform the Service and the support it offers.
- b. To be good corporate parents and work hard to ensure that young people leaving care are supported to develop their independence skills and have somewhere safe that they can call home. This is enhanced by the regular review of the Joint Housing protocol for Care leavers across the seven district authorities which guarantees priority access to social housing.
- c. Staff will ensure they learn who the important people are in the young person's life and what support networks are in place. They will help grow their networks through undertaking cultural genograms so young people have a good understanding of their own life journey and support them to have adults in their lives who care about them.
- d. All children in care will be allocated a Personal Advisor from the age of 16 to support establishing a meaningful and trusting relationship prior to turning 18. They will ensure the Local Offer for care leavers is provided to all young people and that all care leavers from age 18-25 years of age are fully aware of their rights.
- e. Being aspirational for care leavers, supporting them to engage with Education, Employment, and Training by linking in with work readiness programmes, apprenticeships and supporting young people to access college and further education.
- f. Safeguarding the most complex and vulnerable care leavers by ensuring multi-agency and network support is developed and is purposeful. For those who are assessed as having complex needs and associated risks that are high and medium, multi-agency meetings will be regularly undertaken to review the co-owned safety plans with clear management oversight.
- g. Ensure unaccompanied care leavers have access to legal support, interpreters and community organisations and encourage the use of advocates and Independent Visitors for young people.
- h. Ensure that Care Experience as a Protected Characteristic status is embedded into departmental and Corporate Policy with clear actions to improve outcomes for children and care leavers

Service Outcomes

Progressing the impact of Care experience being a Protected Characteristic

11. Following a motion made at the Council meeting on 21 February 2024, care leavers now have Protected Characteristic status due to the Council recognising that care experienced people are a group who are likely to face discrimination.
12. In the delivery of the Public Sector Equality Duty the Council will include care experience in the publication and review of equality objectives and the annual publication of information relating to people who share a protected characteristic in services and employment.
13. Future decision, services and policies made and adopted by the Council should be assessed through Equality Impact assessments to determine the impact of changes on people with care experience alongside those who formally share a protected characteristic. The Council needs to continue to proactively seek out and listen to voices of care experienced people when developing new policies.
14. Care Leavers can often struggle with engaging with training and employment due to their experiences. The service is working with Leicestershire Cares and Reed to support care leavers who are not in education, employment and training, to provide coaching and support for interview techniques, creating a CV and accessing training, apprenticeships and employment.

Supporting care leavers with complex risks and needs

15. The Service has improved processes to engage with adult social care, Health and Police when care leavers present with complex risk and/or need. This supports the development of co-owned safety plans which are robust and effective to reduce risk.
16. Care leavers in prison are identified as having complex need and risk and the care leaver Teams are working with the prison services across the East Midlands to ensure the Care Experience Matters guidance is being implemented. This has ensured that if a care experienced young person is being held in custody, the prisons record their Care leaver status, which identifies vulnerability and includes the details of their Personal Advisor. This improves support during their time in custody and planning for housing, employment, education six weeks prior to their release.

Housing offer for care leavers

17. Work has taken place with all seven district authorities to review the Joint housing Protocol. This includes the data on how long care leavers have been waiting for housing applications to go live and the length of time waiting for social housing in each District. Whilst young people are waiting for social housing, the service will provide care leavers with safe and appropriate accommodation that meets their individual needs, to help them transition into independence when they obtain their social housing.

Support for Care Leavers

18. The Local offer for care leavers includes exemption for Council tax, a bursary for University of £4,000, a Leaving Care Grant of £3,000, support with learning to drive and Leisure passes for 'Everyone Active' gyms. The Service is always looking for opportunities to further strengthen the offer which is for all care leavers.
19. The Service facilitates social opportunities for care leavers once a month through SYPAC (Supporting Young People After Care), where care leavers come together to share food, share views and socialise. Care leavers have been clear that they enjoy the social element of SYPAC rather than it being a structured forum. The Service has recently offered two separate SYPAC venues one in the north and south of the county, to support more care leavers being able to attend. This is open to all care leavers including unaccompanied care leavers

Impact

20. Care leavers all have a Pathway Plan which gives clear actions for how to support to achieve the best outcomes, this is reviewed every six months. As part of this plan there are expectations for the frequency of visiting by the Personal Advisor which are at a minimum of six weekly unless otherwise agreed. The Service is measured against the timeliness of both plans and visits. Pathway plans in timescale is currently 90% and recorded visits in timescale is currently 86%. There are also three key measures which are set by the Department for Education which are: being in contact with care leavers (up to 21), being in suitable accommodation and being in employment, education or training. Below is the current data for these measures.
 - i. Care leavers in Employment, Education or Training 63%;
 - ii. Care leavers in contact 97%;
 - iii. Care leavers in suitable accommodation 95%.

Background Papers

21. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025
<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/8bb67275-2f3f-476c-91db-049bf6dd2dbc/corporate-parenting-strategy-2022-2025compressed.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

22. None.

Equality Implications

23. All assessments and services provided for Children in Care and Care Leavers are done so in a framework of respecting equality and diversity for young people. The Children and Family Services department is committed to equality and ensuring the

human rights of all users, and importantly to support those young people who have arrived here from other countries as unaccompanied children.

24. Care Leavers as a protected characteristic is considered as part of all service development.

Human Rights Implications

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

Officer(s) to Contact

Sharon Cooke
Assistant Director – Targeted Early Help and Children’s Social Care
Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Kelda Claire
Head of Service – Children in Care, Fostering and Adoption
Email: Kelda.Claire@leics.gov.uk



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

FAMILIES FIRST REFORMS - KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE, HELPING
FAMILIES THRIVE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the national reforms for children's services, Keeping children Safe, Helping Families thrive; and to share details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. This is the first time that details of the reforms have been shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Although, reference to them was included within a report on Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers which was presented to the Committee on 4 March 2025.

Background

3. In November 2024, the Government published a policy paper called 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping families thrive'. The paper included plans for comprehensive reform of children's social care in the UK and the Government's commitment to keeping families together and children safe. The Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes legislation to support the reforms, is currently moving through the parliamentary process and is due to reach its final stage later in 2025.
4. The "Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive" paper has four main objectives:
 - a. The first is to prioritise support so that children can remain with their families when it is safe for them to do so;
 - b. The second is to ensure a focus on placing children who cannot remain with their parents with their wider family (known as kinship carers) or with foster carers, instead of resorting to residential care homes;
 - c. Thirdly the Government intend to address concerns about profiteering in children's social care and aim to regulate the market by introducing measures that will require private providers to disclose their finances;
 - d. The fourth objective is to invest in the workforce and in data systems by improving the skills of social care professionals and improving their data

sharing practices to inform evidence-based interventions for better outcomes.

Supporting children to remain with their families when it is safe to do so.

5. Families will be supported to stay together by mandating the offer of family group decision making for every family at the point before it is necessary to initiate care proceedings for a child.
6. To keep children safe, plans are included to improve the sharing of information across and within agencies by enabling the use of a Single Unique Identifier. To better protect children from harm, the policy aims to strengthen the delivery of a local decisive multi-agency child protection model through integrated multi-agency child protection teams, put a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and ensure parents have consent from local authorities to home educate children where there are safeguarding concerns.
7. The corporate parenting duty for children in care will be extended to a range of public bodies that provide housing, health, education and employment services. In order to remove barriers to opportunity for children and young people in care. In addition to this the duty on local authorities will be extend to promote educational outcomes for all children with a social worker through the Virtual School Head role. In order to reduce the risk of homelessness as a barrier to getting on in life, Staying Close support will be provided to all care leavers

Legislating to make the care system child centred, and to tackle profiteering

8. The policy document sets out that some children need the local authority to step in and provide another form of care because it is in their best interests. When residential care is needed it should be a positive experience for children in care and give them the best start in life. The policy sets out how those providing care will be held to account for the quality of the homes they provide and how the number of good quality homes will be increased, both through legislative and nonlegislative changes, so children receive the homes they deserve.
9. The full document, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive is appended to this report.
10. In March 2025, the Government published the Families First Partnership Programme Guide to support the first wave of the reforms. This covers the development of family help, multi agency child protection arrangements and the use of family group decision making. The expectation set out in the guidance is that April 2025 to April 2026 will feature ongoing business as usual service delivery alongside transformational activity and set out that it is crucial that reform is multi-agency and implemented effectively, with improving the safety and wellbeing of children at its heart.
11. The engagement of partners, in particular the Police, Health and Education colleagues to design and deliver the multi-agency aspects of the reforms will be critical to the success of the development of the model.

12. The Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, £270 million of new funding has been made available through the final local government finance settlement to support local authorities working with their safeguarding partners to invest in transformation and expansion of preventative support in the 2025-26 financial year. This equates to £1.4million for Leicestershire to develop an implementation plan for both designing and implementing services to deliver the reforms across Children and Family services.

Leicestershire delivery of the Social Care Reforms

13. The governance for the reforms in Leicestershire has been established through a multi-agency Implementation Board, chaired by the Director of Children and Family Services.
14. Work completed as part of the Defining Childrens Services for the Future programme has placed the department in a strong position to deliver on the reforms, and to have an established design and delivery structure and governance in place. Initial scoping of the new legislation and requirements is being undertaken in order to work through the gaps and areas that need to be developed and reformed in order to meet the new requirements.
15. The establishment of Family Help, Family Safeguarding and Targeted Family Help in February 2024 is in line with the reforms and means that we are in a strong position to build on the strength of this model, to not only meet the reforms but ensure that we build upon strong and safe services for children, young people and their families.
16. Learning from pathfinders, is an important part of the delivery plan in order to ensure that the Department builds the capacity to deliver on the design and initial implementation of the reforms based on good practice elsewhere. Each Local Authority was required to submit by April 2025 a plan for how the reforms will be implemented.

Resource Implications

17. The Department has been allocated £1.4m for the implementation of the reforms. It is not clear yet, what the full costs of implementing the reforms will be in Leicestershire.

Background papers

18. Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 4 March 2025:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7890&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

19. None.

Equality Implications

20. The reforms ensure that children, young people and their families are supported at an early opportunity to keep children safe and support families to positively parent

their children. When this option is not safe for the child, they will be, wherever possible, supported to remain with their wider family network. This will ensure that children and young people are given opportunities to thrive and meet their full potential.

Human Rights Implications

21. There are no human rights implications arising from these reforms

Appendix

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

Officer(s) to Contact

Jane Moore
Director Children and Family Services
Email: Jane.moore@leics.gov.uk

Sharon Cooke
Assistant Director Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care
Email: sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk



Department
for Education

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

Breaking down barriers to opportunity

November 2024



Government of the United Kingdom
Department for Education

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

Breaking down barriers to opportunity

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education by Command of His Majesty

November 2024

CP 1200



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Foreword by the Secretary of State

Our government is on a mission to give each and every child the very best life chances. We will ensure opportunity, not just for some of our children, but for all of our children.

Children's social care is a top priority because it has the power to transform children's lives. Around five children in every classroom will need support from a social worker at some point during their school years. Despite committed support from social workers, these children are more likely to be persistently absent, less likely to go on to university, and less likely to earn a decent living. Their life chances have been weighed down so heavily by their background.



Now is the time for change. It's my department's job to support families, of all shapes and sizes, and to break the links between background and success. Our vision for children's social care reflects our child-centred approach across government, where children come first and services are designed around the support they need to be safe, to be healthy and to flourish in life.

We need more families to thrive together, while keeping children safe from harm. The foundation of a loving family gives children the security and stability they need to live happy, prosperous lives. But all families encounter challenges. We will prioritise helping families, we will tackle problems before they become crises, and we will build on what we know works well.

Local government spending on children's social care has risen by £4.4 billion over the last decade whilst preventative services have been hollowed out, in part reflecting a greater number of children in care. However, outcomes for children and families remain poor. This paper sets out our first actions to address this. We are focused on working with children and families, supported by multi-agency teams, to deliver clear plans for each child and support to prevent escalating needs.

Our priority is to keep families together. But for some children, at certain times, the safest place to be is in care. There are pockets of excellent practice where care provides safe, loving and supportive homes. But sadly, there are too many homes that fail to meet this standard. A shortage of homes in the right places means children in care are often moved many miles away from their support network and loved ones. And the increasing number of very high-cost placements for children and young people is putting enormous pressure on local authority budgets. We will drive high and rising standards in care. This government will also never tolerate excessive profiteering. In partnership with local government, we will reshape how placements are delivered. As set out in our manifesto, we will strengthen regulation so that children's social care works in the best interest of all children.

This important new statement marks the first steps of this government's journey towards a children's social care system that delivers the best start in life for the children who most need it. It articulates our vision for the system, and sets out our legislative agenda for this new decade of reform. I thank all staff in the sector for your hard work and dedication, as well as the many committed carers across the country. You are all vital partners in this journey.

Children in social care are too often left feeling forgotten, powerless, and invisible. Our opportunity mission is for them. We are breaking down barriers for them, and delivering services that will support all children to succeed, regardless of their background. I was lucky enough to grow up in a family filled with love. That was my springboard to success. Life shouldn't come down to luck. Success belongs to each and every child. I want to build a country where all children grow up with the love, care and support they need to achieve and thrive. The proposals in this statement bring us closer to that goal.

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Bridget Phillipson". The script is cursive and fluid, with the first name "Bridget" and the surname "Phillipson" clearly legible.

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP, Secretary of State for Education and Minister for Women and Equalities

Our vision for the system

Children's social care has the ability to transform lives. At its best, it allows professionals to spend meaningful time helping families, and enables children to thrive and have the best life chances. It allows extended family members the space and resources to actively participate in a child's upbringing, and provides high quality foster carers, adopters and children's home places which give children who cannot remain at home the space they need to recover from childhood trauma, abuse and neglect. Children's social care also has a vital role in supporting the wellbeing of disabled children and their families: from provision of early help and short-term community-based short breaks to longer-term plans of regular care and support.

Over the last three decades we have seen incremental progress, collective learning and improving practice across children's social care. The introduction of [Youth Offending Teams](#), the [Sure Start children's centres](#), and [Every Child Matters](#) kickstarted far greater prioritisation of early intervention and multi-agency working. More recently, we have seen national and local government working to innovate together through the [Strengthening Families, Protecting Children \(SFPC\) programme](#) and the launch of the [Families First for Children \(FFC\) Pathfinder programme](#). Both of these programmes draw together reforms across family help and child protection. These reforms, as well as more than £700 million additional investment since the publication of the [Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#), have enabled many local authorities to safely reduce the number of children in care and improve the support offer available to families. We have also seen significant improvements in the number of local authority children's services rated 'good' or 'outstanding' by Ofsted, with a 20% reduction in services rated 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement' since 2022. However, we must recognise the challenges that remain.

Firstly, far too many children grow up in poverty and in households that struggle to afford the basic necessities which provide a secure home environment. Some families are particularly vulnerable. For example, poverty rates are higher for people living in families that include a disabled adult or child¹. We must build a country where background is no barrier. Children must have the best start in life irrespective of their family's financial situation. They simply cannot achieve and thrive if they are facing poverty that can leave them going to school hungry or living in unheated homes. That is why we have already established a new [Child Poverty Taskforce](#) and are taking a cross-government approach to tackling child poverty, alongside expanding free breakfast clubs in every primary school so all children are able to learn and succeed.

The external landscape has also fundamentally changed. There are several factors which might mean children are unable to grow up in a safe and loving home. An increase of online harms, rising mental health challenges, the prevalence of domestic abuse and addiction, extra familial harms, and an increase in serious youth violence, gang culture and knife crime – to name but a few. These factors will form important strands of our better joined up missions-led approach to government. For example, through the Opportunity and Safer Streets missions, we must ensure a cross-government focus on tackling violence against women, and improve national oversight on multi-agency working to protect children. We must also tackle the inequalities that children encounter too. We recognise there is much more to do.

¹ The [Social Metrics Commission 2023](#) report found that 30% of people in these families are in poverty, compared to 17% of people in families where no one is disabled. Disabled pupils have much lower attainment rates at school than non-disabled pupils and are significantly more likely to be permanently or temporarily excluded, according to the [Equality and Human Rights Commission](#).

Secondly, despite welcome improvements, we still see significant variation in the outcomes and support children and families receive, driven in part by the years of austerity imposed on local government finances, which must be addressed if we are to succeed. It is unacceptable that a child's postcode determines whether they get the support and services they need. And in too many cases unacceptable and unjustified profiteering has made a challenging financial position even worse. It has also contributed to an increasing proportion of funding being spent on statutory and acute services - at the expense of investment in early intervention.

Finally, it must be widely recognised that keeping children safe is everyone's business. From the local taxi drivers who can play a role in helping to identify child trafficking, to the health visitors, A&E staff and local police who help to spot child abuse and forced child labour, to the youth workers that support children's development. Too often this cross-system approach is stymied by poor information sharing and a lack of accountability. Yet history shows effective partnership working enables innovation and prevents barriers to opportunity. [The Care Leaver Covenant](#) is a great example of when private, public and voluntary sectors come together to support opportunities for care leavers and is starting to make a difference. We are building a child-centred approach across government and aim to ensure that, on both a national and local level, the system works for each and every child.

Delivering reform for children

As we enter a new Parliament, the time is right to reset the children's social care system. We are delivering a whole-system and child-centred approach to reform, and this will reset how national government works in collaboration with local government and local partners. All of our actions will be guided by four key reform principles, which are summarised below. At Annex A, we also include an overview of the actions we will take under each pillar.

- Firstly, wherever possible, **children should remain with their families and be safely prevented from entering the care system** in the first place. We are focused on working with the whole family, supported by multi-agency teams, to offer a clear plan and support to prevent escalating needs. We will take the evidence from the [Supporting Families programme](#), the [Strengthening Families, Protecting Children \(SFPC\) programme](#), and lessons so far from the [Families First for Children \(FFC\) Pathfinder programme](#), to further roll out reforms to family help and child protection, working in step with partners. Through future legislation we have an opportunity to embed family group decision making as an offer to all families before care proceedings and ensure more extended family members can play a role in children's lives. We will also take the opportunity, learning from the successes of Youth Offending Teams and other multi-agency approaches, to legislate for new multi-agency child protection teams. This approach will move us closer to creating a decisive child protection system, where partners and agencies work together to share expertise, experience, time and support to keep children safe.
- Second, where children cannot remain at home and it is in their best interests, we should **support children to live with kinship carers or in fostering families, rather than in residential care**. A reduction in reliance on children's homes will support better outcomes for more children. It will reduce spend on costly children's home provision and ensure that there is capacity and better quality of provision for children who need and benefit from residential care. Building on new legislation to embed family group decision making, we will achieve this through rolling out reforms to better support kinship care, recruit and retain more foster carers, provide increased opportunity for short breaks for disabled children, and provide access to support for both kinship and foster carers. Finally, we must also pay particular attention to ensure homes are available to children in the most complex

circumstances, and that we have foster carers who are properly trained and supported to care for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children.

- Next, it is vital that we **fix the broken care market**. In 2022 the [Competition and Markets Authority](#), and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, identified that the levels of profit made in the care placement market were above those that would be expected in a well-functioning market. Placements for children in care – foster homes, children's homes and supported accommodation – are, first and foremost, homes for young people to live in – and we must bring a swift end to excessive and exploitative profit making in a sector which supports our most vulnerable children. We will do this through introducing a range of measures, including through legislation, which will improve competition, regulation and commissioning, as well as shine a light on the levels of profit being made and bring greater visibility to the prices local authorities are paying. We will also ensure we are able to take action in the future to cap profits if these measures do not sufficiently improve the functioning of the market and reduce costs that arise from unnecessarily high levels of profit.
- Finally, we need to invest in the **key enablers** which underpin the children's social care system – including the workforce, better data and information sharing and, as mentioned above, to scale and spread evidence-based programmes which have improved children's outcomes. Legislation gives us the opportunity to do more to drive better information sharing in children's social care – including through a new Single Unique Identifier. We will also use legislation to improve the experience and outcomes of children and families by reducing local authority reliance on agency workers in children's social care services. And we will prioritise investment in the recently published [Children's Social Care National Framework](#) – which sets a clear vision for the outcomes we want the whole system to achieve. Whilst taking this action, we will continue to support local authorities through partnership working to improve how they deliver children's social care through our improvement and intervention work.

We are making a long-term commitment to working together better across organisational boundaries, continuing financial investment, and taking the opportunity we have to legislate where necessary to drive reform forwards.

Taking forward new legislation

Legislation must reflect our ambitious outcomes for children, young people and families. To bring forward our vision for reform we will require changes to the law in some areas. In the following chapters we set out where we expect this to be necessary. We expect that the legislative framework for children's social care will need to change further than the plans we have set out here, including to account for the Law Commission's reviews into [legislation for disabled children](#) and [kinship care for children](#). Where we need to change the law further, we are committed to engaging with the sector and those with lived and personal experience of children's social care to discuss this. Below, we set out more details about each of the legislative measures we plan to take forward subject to parliamentary time.

Chapter 1 - legislating to keep families together and children safe, and to remove barriers to opportunity

Summary

- We will help more families to stay together by mandating the offer of family group decision making for every family at the point before it is necessary to initiate care proceedings for a child.
- To keep children safe, we plan to improve the sharing of information across and within agencies by enabling the use of a Single Unique Identifier. To better protect children from harm, we also plan to strengthen the delivery of a local decisive multi-agency child protection model through integrated multi-agency child protection teams, put a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and ensure parents have consent from local authorities to home educate children where there are safeguarding concerns.
- We will remove barriers to opportunity for children and young people in care by extending the corporate parenting duty for children in care to a range of public bodies that provide housing, health, education and employment services.
- We will also extend the duty on local authorities to promote educational outcomes for all children with a social worker through the Virtual School Head role. And, to reduce the risk of homelessness as a barrier to getting on in life, we will provide Staying Close support to care leavers.

Our plans to change the law

Mandating local authorities to offer family group decision-making

Family group decision making (FGDM) is an umbrella term to describe family-led meetings that allow a family network to come together and make a plan in response to concerns about a child's safety and wellbeing². A Family Group Conference (FGC) is a specific model of FGDM which has strong evidence of diverting children from care, as shown by the [findings of the randomised control trial conducted by Foundations – What Works Centre for Children & Families](#). Children whose families were referred for an FGC as part of this randomised control trial were less likely to have had care proceedings issued (59%) compared to those not referred (72%) and were less likely to be in care one year later (36%) compared to those not referred (45%).

² A family network is a group of people close to a child made up of relatives and non-related connected people, such as stepparents, siblings, grandparents or close family friends.

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care reported that too often care proceedings commence without a FGDM meeting having taken place and that in some cases too little attention is paid to the inherent strengths of the child's extended family network and wider community. This can contribute to delay in the family court, which can often be the first place extended family members are made aware there is an issue.

We have seen widespread take up of FGDM by local authorities with most now offering a service to some children and families. However, the evidence from Foundations suggests that strengthening the offer of FGDM further will reduce applications for court proceedings as well as prevent children from entering the care system. In doing so, this will improve outcomes for children and families, as well as create significant savings for local government. Building on the excellent practice already offered by many local authorities, through legislation we will ensure every local authority must offer an FGDM meeting to families at the pre-proceedings stage. It will give parents the legal right to be involved in planning and decision making at this critical point, alongside their family network and with the support of coordinators, social workers and other professionals.

Existing statutory guidance, such as [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#) and the Children's Social Care National Framework, currently encourages local authorities to consider FGDM meetings, such as FGCs, from the point a family has involvement with children's social care and that they should be repeated as necessary. Identifying and involving family networks also ensures that if a child cannot remain in the care of their parents, alternative arrangements, such as [Special Guardianship](#), can be explored within the child's family network as a priority. To ensure that a family-led alternative plan can be considered before the local authority makes an application to the court, the Independent Review of Children's Social Care recommended a new legal entitlement to FGDM.

We acknowledge that there may be barriers for local authorities in implementing FGDM at scale, including financial constraints and challenges around the recruitment or training of staff. Our ambition is that through investment, better shared understanding of best practice and new legislation, every family will have the right to access this support before circumstances escalate, where it is in the best interests of the child. Where this offer is not in the best interests of the child, the local authority will explain why an offer of an FGDM meeting would not be appropriate to the court and to the child and family wherever possible.

To facilitate local authority implementation and support best practice, we plan to update relevant statutory guidance, drawing on the latest evidence on what works. We will also set out any exceptions to this new duty in legislation and statutory guidance.

Improving data sharing and introducing a Single Unique Identifier

Sharing information in a timely way can help identify and address risks to a child's safety and wellbeing and enable better provision of services to support their health and wellbeing. It enables practitioners to make informed decisions and provide timely interventions. For too long poor information sharing has been identified as a contributory factor to serious child safeguarding incidents and the barriers to improving this are well documented, including in reviews following the death of, or serious injury to, a child. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care and [the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report 'Child Protection in England'](#) highlighted that barriers to information sharing need to be broken down, to improve outcomes for children and families.

Subsequent reports, including from [the Children's Commissioner for England](#), have also highlighted that many agencies, especially those outside the education sector, are not aware of crucial data, such as attendance records, which can provide evidence for the whole picture of a child's wellbeing and health. A lack of effective data sharing at the right points can leave families feeling both unclear about what professionals know, and frustrated at having to repeat the same information multiple times. The knowledge gaps can make it harder for professionals to support families, and make it harder for families to be aware of their entitlements and access the support they need.

Tackling information sharing issues across agencies will be a long-term endeavour. One that is rooted in changing the law and in changing practice. In our manifesto we committed to improve data sharing across services to better support children and families by introducing a Single Unique Identifier. We plan to make two legislative changes to start to deliver on this ambition. The first is to introduce provision to enable the specification of a Single Unique Identifier, and the second is to clarify information must be shared for safeguarding purposes.

The use of a Single Unique Identifier (which has also been referred to in the past as a 'consistent child identifier') has been regularly cited as a potential solution to bring together data on children's interactions with different services³. An identifier has potential to increase confidence that practitioners from different agencies are talking about the same child and increase the ease and possibility of linking data together across datasets. We want appropriate agencies and practitioners to spend less time chasing information and more time acting on the full picture of relevant information about the child. This will enable practitioners to provide the right services at the right time to meet the needs of children and families.

We recognise the tangible impact an identifier could have on improving data sharing and linking, but also accept that there are broader cultural changes that need to be tackled for it to have sufficient impact. Barriers to effective implementation include confusion on when to share information, the need for clear leadership to increase practice confidence in the implementation of data and systems reform, as well as sector capacity and resource. Alongside legislating, we will pilot the implementation of the SUI first, so we can establish what works to resolve these challenges for each sector. We recognise that the new SUI must be delivered proportionately and only where it has impact. Our plan is to put provisions in law at the earliest opportunity to allow us to introduce an SUI nationally at a later point. Once we have the evidence from the delivery of

³ The National Children's Bureau (NCB) has been actively advocating for the implementation of an SUI and the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health (RCPCH) has expressed strong support. During discussions on the Health and Care Act, several parliamentarians, including Baroness Tyler, Baroness Walmsley, Baroness Meacher, Baroness Hollins, and Baroness Finlay, advocated for the introduction of an SUI.

pilots to inform secondary legislation, we will define the number for the SUI (expected to be the NHS number), and who will be required to use it.

Importantly, the SUI will work in tandem with wider reform to systems and processes to fully tackle the recurring issue of information sharing. We are committed to undertaking work to tackle system and process challenges, and will seek to make further changes to optimise the way systems can connect and accurately link records. We will bring the sector and their technology suppliers together to develop and agree the standards which will resolve information flow problems that matter to them.

Alongside this, we plan on tackling the perceived legislative and regulatory misconceptions practitioners tell us they face when sharing information. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care outlined that whilst legislation and guidance allow for information to be shared for the purpose of safeguarding, practitioners perceive it as a barrier and find organisational information sharing agreements confusing⁴. As clearly reflected in the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) [10 step guide to sharing information to safeguard children](#), it is currently lawful to share information without consent in order to safeguard and protect the wellbeing of children. Data protection legislation (the Data Protection Act 2018 (the DPA 2018) and UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR)) does not prevent the sharing of information for the purposes of safeguarding children, when it is necessary, proportionate and justified to do so. However, agencies often only feel confident doing this where there are serious child protection concerns.

User research by the Department for Education, the Home Office and the Department of Health and Social Care published in [Improving Multi-Agency Information Sharing](#) confirmed this. Research found that practitioners were generally confident in sharing information when there was clear evidence of harm. However, where risk was unknown or unclear, practitioners felt much less confident in sharing information given the complex judgements required in making decisions under the public interest test, which can lead to overcaution. To address this, we will introduce a new duty that provides absolute clarity on the legal basis to share information for the purposes of safeguarding children. The new duty will ensure a focus on safeguarding and provide the impetus for culture change around information sharing.

As set out in the Children's Social Care National Framework, our ambition is that practitioners seek, share, and analyse information proactively, that leaders put clear information sharing structures in place, and that those working with children champion careful consideration of how information and data about their lives is shared across organisations, including thinking about how information sharing impacts minority groups. Through these two intended changes, legislation should provide clarity for practitioners on when and how it is appropriate to share information for the purpose of safeguarding children so that this is no longer a blocker for providing targeted, timely and accurate support to families.

⁴ [Independent review of children's social care: final report](#)

Strengthening the role of education within multi-agency safeguarding arrangements

Often, teachers and educators are the ones that spend the most direct time with children, and education leaders can offer valuable insight into trends and concerns at a local level. Schools were the second largest ‘referrer’ of cases into children’s social care after the police in 2023-24, making close to 126,000 referrals nationally⁵. Although education settings are considered relevant agencies in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, the Independent Review of Children’s Social Care, and the Child Protection in England report recommended that education becomes a statutory safeguarding partner, alongside local authorities, police and integrated care boards. The intent behind these recommendations was to ensure that the contribution and voice of education was included when identifying priorities and support for children and families, as well as education settings taking the ownership to sufficiently engage with safeguarding arrangements as set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children. The review found that although some arrangements have worked hard to bring schools to the table, in too many places the contribution and voice of education is missing. Teachers and educators should have a seat around the table in safeguarding decision-making, and so we will mandate consistent and effective join-up between local authority, police and health services with schools and other education and childcare settings (or providers).

Existing safeguarding partners have the infrastructure in place that allows a single point of accountability for the organisations they represent – they can contribute resource, make decisions, and speak on behalf of their sector. The education sector is not set up in this way and therefore there is not currently an organisation or individual who can take on the role of a safeguarding partner. Our goal is to strengthen the role of education in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements (MASAs) to better protect children from abuse, neglect, and exploitation. We aim to build on existing legislation and recognise that the current system needs to change to ensure education is adequately represented both operationally and strategically.

Legislation needs to ensure consistent and effective join-up between children’s social care, police, and health services with education. The aim of our legislative change is twofold, to ensure that:

- all education settings⁶, including schools, colleges, early years and childcare settings, and alternative provision, are named as relevant agencies by default so that they are automatically included in safeguarding arrangements in a local area; and
- local safeguarding arrangements include representation from education as an agency at both operational and strategic decision-making levels.

To facilitate implementation and support best practice, we plan to update relevant statutory guidance such as Working Together, to set expectations of safeguarding partners and education based on models we know are working in local areas that involve education effectively in their arrangements. We will draw on the evidence of what works from the Families First for Children Pathfinder local areas and extensive work done with local areas on the implementation of statutory guidance. This legislation will enable consistency across all local areas in how education is involved in local safeguarding arrangements so that families have access to more consistent levels of care and support, and children are protected by more effective multi-agency working.

⁵ [Children in need, Reporting year 2024 - Explore education statistics](#)

⁶ Education settings as set out in the Schedule to [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review and Relevant Agency \(England\) Regulations 2018](#)

Strengthening multi-agency child protection

Our ambition is for a child protection system that is decisive and multi-agency with multidisciplinary skills – a system where practitioners have the expertise, experience, time and support to identify actual or likely significant harm quickly and take rapid and effective protective action. We want a child protection system where the rationale for decisions in relation to children is clear, and decisions focus on the needs and best interests of children, involving parents, family networks and others in a transparent and compassionate way.

Evidence shows poor and ineffective multi-agency working is an issue in child protection, when the system has failed to protect children. In addition to information sharing, key problems include: a lack of robust critical thinking and challenge within and between agencies; insufficient specialist skills and capacity; and inadequate multi-agency leadership. The Independent Review of Children's Social Care identified that "health, police, education and other partners must all play a role in child protection to ensure that the needs and risks to a child are fully understood and responded to. This includes sharing critical analysis and challenge across professional boundaries. Poor multi-agency working at child protection is a perennial issue that has been raised in every recent review that has considered child protection, from Laming to Munro and before."

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report 'Child Protection in England' most recently concluded that "whilst we have a well-embedded concept of partnership working across agencies, enshrined in statutory guidance, in practice, the key ingredients of effective operational delivery are not hard wired into our current arrangements. Trust, shared values, and identity are crucial behavioural factors in frictionless sharing of information between professionals. The current reliance on quickly pulling together a team from across overstretched agencies to think and act together to protect a child every time child protection processes are triggered is certainly inefficient and often ineffective"⁷. It recommended that multi-agency child protection units be established in every local authority area. It is our intention to legislate for this change.

The units will be integrated teams, staffed with multi-agency, experienced child protection practitioners from agencies working to protect children, including local authorities, police, health, and education settings. Other relevant agencies such as probation services, may also be part of the core team. Led by the local authority, these teams will support the delivery of core child protection statutory functions including investigating child protection concerns, decision-making, planning and overseeing support and protection activity. Integrated multi-agency involvement with specialist child protection skills across agencies is critical for these teams to ensure more children are protected at the right time.

Multi-agency child protection teams, based on the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's recommendations, have been a key element of the Families First for Children Pathfinders. In the ten pathfinder areas, multi-agency child protection practitioners from the local authority, police, health, education and other relevant agencies are expected to work together in a much more integrated way with overall responsibility for protecting children from harm, alongside social workers with the highest levels of knowledge and skills in child protection work. We know that by working together, agencies are better able to accurately and quickly identify when children are likely to experience, or are experiencing, significant harm and take decisive and skilled action to address this.

⁷ [The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel report 'Child Protection in England'](#)

We therefore intend to create a new legal duty for local authorities to establish multi-agency child protection teams and require other named agencies to be part of this provision. We plan to align commencement of the duty with the findings from the Families First for Children Pathfinder, so we can include specific expectations in regulations to ensure the multi-agency child protection teams are informed by the evaluation of the Pathfinder programme and provide areas with time to prepare. We will also use this time to engage with all sectors that will be part of the multi-agency child protection teams.

We would expect the teams to include dedicated, highly skilled, suitably qualified practitioners from local authority children's social care, police, education, and health. In addition to the core members, local authorities and their partners will want to include other relevant agencies aligned with local demographics, needs, and patterns of harm including extra-familial harm. We intend that MASAs will have strategic oversight of these teams. Teams will report into and inform strategic level safeguarding arrangements and vice versa.

Home education and child protection

The right to home educate is derived from Section 7 of the Education Act 1996, which states that parents have a duty to ensure that their child receives a suitable education either by regular attendance at school or otherwise, i.e. at home. There is agreement that elective home education is not in itself a safeguarding risk⁸. However, regular attendance at school can be a protective factor for children at risk of or experiencing harm in the home – a conclusion drawn by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's paper about safeguarding and elective home education.

Parents in England do not currently need consent to home educate, unless the child attends a special school arranged by the local authority. We propose to introduce a new requirement whereby if a child registered at a school is subject to an enquiry under Section 47 of the Children Act 1989, or on a child protection plan, their parent will need local authority consent to home educate that child. If a child in those categories is already being home educated, the Local Authority will have a power to require them to attend school. This will help ensure further help and protection for children suffering or likely to suffer significant harm. This will be further aided by our plans to enable local authorities to consider the home and any other learning environment when determining whether home education is suitable. We are also planning to create a duty on local authorities to have and maintain Children Not in School registers. These measures will create registers of all children not in school in every local authority in England, as well as a duty on local authorities to provide support to families, where it is requested by the parent.

⁸ [Safeguarding children in elective home education](#)

Extending corporate parenting responsibilities

‘Corporate Parenting’ is the term used to describe the local authority’s role in caring for and supporting children in care and care leavers, in recognition that these children and young people may not have the family support networks that others rely on throughout their life. The Children and Social Work Act (2017) introduced a requirement on local authorities to ‘have regard to’ a set of corporate parenting principles when exercising functions in relation to children in care and care leavers. This has resulted in numerous and significant improvements to local authorities’ local offers, including Council Tax exemptions, free access to leisure services and help with deposits/rent guarantor schemes. However, while local authorities play a crucial role in delivering services for children in care and care leavers, they do not have all the levers at their disposal to tackle barriers to opportunity to ensure that these children and young people can thrive.

We plan to extend corporate parenting responsibilities to government departments and relevant public bodies to create a culture change in which we realise our shared ambition to support children in care and care leavers. In this role, all “corporate parents” can help to break down barriers to good outcomes for care experienced children and young people in different ways, for example, by: ensuring that relevant policies and services that impact on children in care and care leavers’ lives take account of their additional needs and circumstances; taking steps to reduce the stigma or discrimination they face; or providing additional support as a parent or family member might. The examples below illustrate how these corporate parents can create a culture in which they recognise and embrace the role they play in improving the lives of some of the country’s most vulnerable children and young people.

These corporate parenting proposals will not change the current legal responsibilities on local authorities to accommodate and care for looked after children, nor the existing requirement for local authorities to support care leavers to transition from care to independent living. These responsibilities are set out in the Children Act 1989.

Examples of how corporate parents could meet their corporate parenting responsibilities

- Taking account of the challenges that care-experienced children and young people face when designing and delivering services that impact on them.
- Taking appropriate steps to ensure that children in care and care leavers can gain equal access to and benefit from the services and support they provide.
- Raising awareness of children in care and care leavers’ needs and circumstances among those who provide support and services to them.
- Providing opportunities (including employment, work experience and training opportunities for care leavers) that would support better outcomes for children in care and care leavers.
- Providing clear and transparent information on services they provide and on any specific rights and entitlements.

Government departments and relevant public bodies will be named as corporate parents and will be subject to the proposed corporate parenting responsibilities, in so far as it is consistent with their existing functions and to the extent that it is reasonably practicable for them to do so.

Proposed corporate parents

The list of corporate parents will be named in legislation, following agreement from other government departments. We expect named government departments to produce three-year plans and reports to set out how they are supporting children in care and care leavers, and a government-wide overview report will be produced by the DfE every three years to provide a summary of actions taken and progress made across all corporate parents.

Promoting educational outcomes for children with a social worker – through Virtual School Heads

The role of the Virtual School Head was created to champion the education of all children and young people in care within a local authority and to address the considerably lower educational outcomes of children in care. All local authorities have a statutory duty to promote the educational achievement of children in their care and are required to appoint an officer, known as the Virtual School Head, to ensure this duty is discharged.

The Virtual School Head plays a key part in the local authority's role as corporate parent for children and young people in care, acting as the education advocate that parents are for their own children. The Virtual School Head is the lead officer responsible for ensuring that arrangements are in place to improve the educational outcomes of the authority's looked after children, including those placed out of authority, and for championing their progress. Virtual School Heads use their expertise to support these children and young people to overcome barriers to attendance and attainment.

The role of the Virtual School Head has had considerable impact since introduction – galvanising the care and education systems to work together to improve educational outcomes. As a result of their intervention, children in care for 12 months or more now have some of the lowest rates of absenteeism of all children (see Figure 1, below) and of permanent exclusions. This cohort also makes better progress at both Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 4 in comparison with other children in need, and in stark contrast to children on child protection plans. While it is overwhelmingly positive to see children in care succeeding, we want to see the same for all children with a social worker.

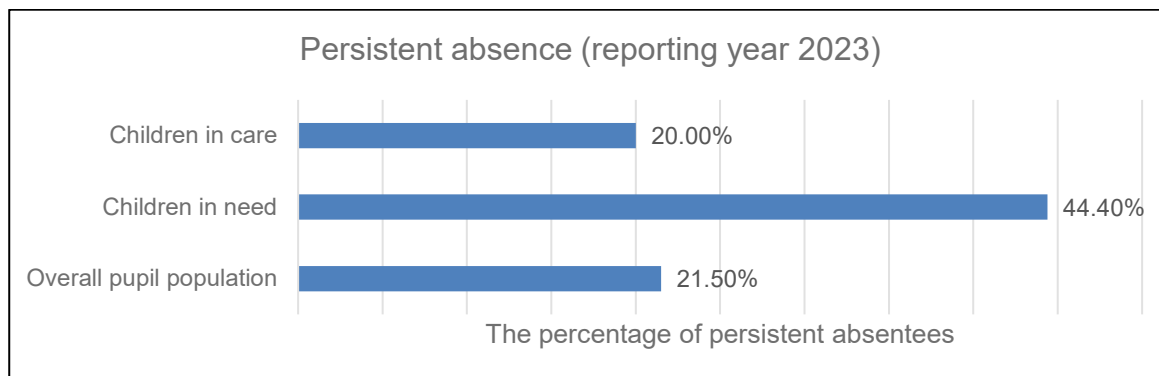


Figure 1 - A chart setting out the percentage of persistent absence for children in care, children in need, and the overall pupil population. Persistent absence in the reporting year 2023 was 20% for children in care, 44% for children in need and 21.5% for the overall pupil population. Note: this chart also relates to children in care 12 months plus to this reporting period too.

That is why the role was extended in 2018 to champion the education of previously looked after children. It was extended again in 2021, on a non-statutory basis to support children on child in need and child protection plans, following a key recommendation from the [Review of Children in Need](#), published in 2019. This review highlighted for the first time that 1.6 million children needed a social worker between 2012/13 and 2017/18, equivalent to 1 in 10 children. It found that these children had worse educational outcomes than their peers, and that poorer outcomes persist even after social care involvement has ended. We believe that background should be no barrier to education, which is why we expect to make two legislative changes, including: to extend the role again to represent children in kinship families, and to place a new statutory duty on local authorities to promote the achievement of all the cohorts of children represented by the Virtual School Head.

We know that children who grow up in kinship care typically have better outcomes than children who grow up in other types of non-parental care. However, their outcomes still fall behind children with no social worker involvement. We want to act quickly to go further to improve the attainment of these children. As part of our approach to championing support for kinship families, as of September 2024 the role of the Virtual School Head has been extended even further to include children in kinship arrangements.

We also plan to change the law to place a statutory duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children on child in need plans, child protection plans and in kinship arrangements. This legislative change will mean that local authorities will have a duty to appoint an officer of the local authority who is responsible for promoting the educational achievement of these children. In practice, we expect this role will be undertaken by the Virtual School Head.

This legislative measure will bring consistency to the deployment of the role of Virtual School Heads nationally, and will mean that all these cohorts of children will receive consistent support no matter which local authority they live in. Virtual School Heads will champion attendance, attainment and progress and will ensure that children with a social worker and those in kinship care are in school, safe and are learning. Education provides safety and stability for these children and provides support and relieves pressures on families often facing multiple challenges in life. We will continue to collect data on the role to inform our understanding of what helps Virtual School Heads to be most effective in supporting children with a social worker and children in kinship arrangements. In time, we hope to see similar evidence of progress for these cohorts as we have seen with children and young people in care.

We will also consider whether the extensions to the role of the Virtual School Head should include a requirement to support all children leaving custody. This is a small group of children that faces significant barriers to education, including on their release from custody, but at present only those with care status benefit from the expert support and championing of the Virtual School Head.

Providing Staying Close support to care leavers

A secure and stable home gives young people the foundation they need to get on in life. All children and young people deserve the security of a safe home, and support to thrive as they move into adulthood. Nationally, we see young people often stay at home with their parents until their mid to late twenties⁹. When young people do make the step into independent accommodation, where they can, parents and families often act to support their children during this transitional phase, by providing pastoral as well as financial help, whether that's help with housing deposits, purchasing white goods or supporting with budgeting and bill management. We have heard that many care experienced young people are not getting this continuity of support, particularly from age 18 when they leave care to live more independently.

Expert reviews have shown that many care leavers face barriers to securing and maintaining affordable housing. An unacceptable number of young people end up in crisis and experiencing homelessness shortly after leaving care. Care leavers are overrepresented amongst those sleeping rough. Combined Homelessness and Information Network (CHAIN) data 2020 shows that 11% of all rough sleepers aged 25 and under in London are care leavers. We must tackle this to secure a better future for these young people.

That is why, alongside other cross-government work to review and remove barriers to accessing housing for the most vulnerable groups, we intend to legislate to ensure all local authorities consider whether each former relevant child (up to age 25) in their area requires a package of support known as 'Staying Close support' and if their welfare requires it, provide that support. Staying Close support could include the support to find and maintain suitable accommodation/move-on accommodation for young people in residential or similar care placements, alongside a package of practical and emotional support from someone who they know and trust, just as a family would during this transitional time. Importantly, all the support and care given under Staying Close should be tailored to the needs of the young person, to help develop their confidence and skills for independent living, and for their emotional health and wellbeing.

Staying Close was first introduced as a pilot in 2018, working in collaboration with the third sector. Evaluation of the initial pilots showed Staying Close found promising evidence the programme can support better outcomes for care leavers. The evaluations found that in the pilot areas there were clear improvements in outcomes including: a 20% improvement in mental health outcomes, a 13% reduction in the number of young people who were NEET and a 21% reduction in anti-social behaviour. The independent evaluations also found that Staying Close supported young people to develop and build the skills needed to prepare for independent living. Meanwhile, feedback showed that young people's life skills had improved after six months of participating in the project. There was also evidence that young people felt happier in themselves, had better stability in their accommodation (most had lived in their house-share for six months or more) and there was increased participation in activities, whether education, employment or getting involved with other activities in the project. The Centre for Homelessness Impact (CHI) is currently undertaking an evaluation to further assess Staying Close's impact and is due to report in early 2025.

⁹ [Milestones: journeying through modern life - Office for National Statistics](#)

Since 2018, the Staying Close provision has expanded. The programme is now run in 47 local authorities and by the three original charities. We want to go further and widen its impact, so we intend to legislate so all local authorities consider whether each former relevant child (up to age 25) in their area requires a package of support known as 'Staying Close support' and if their welfare requires it, provide that support. It is our intention that this remains a broad framework of support, so that local authorities can consider care leavers' needs and views and ensure their choices are central to the decision-making process. We recognise that local authorities will need time to establish the Staying Close support programme within their local areas, and so we propose that the provisions will come into effect three years after legislation is made. There will be barriers to overcome to roll out the programme nationally, including to ensure there is sufficient staffing to support delivery. That is why during these 3 years we will support local authorities to set up the programme in their area, with both practical and financial support, including through the networks we have with current partners.

Chapter 2 - legislating to make the care system child-centred, and to tackle profiteering

Summary

- Some children need their local authority to step in and provide another form of care because it is in their best interests. When residential care is needed it should be a positive experience for children in care and give them the best start in life. We need to make sure those providing care are held to account for the quality of the homes they provide to make this vision a reality. This chapter sets out how we will boost the number of good quality homes, both through legislative and non-legislative changes, so children receive the homes they deserve.
- It needs to be easier to open more good quality homes where they are most needed to enable children to maintain relationships close to their communities. We are already investing in children's homes, including secure provision, but we want to go much further to remove barriers to creating new high-quality provision in the right places. We will break down planning permission and location assessment barriers, to establish new homes in areas where they are most needed. We will diversify the types of providers in the placements market by encouraging non-profit providers back to the market. And we will make sure the provision being built matches what the evidence tells us about the needs of children. Namely, there is a gap in provision for children who are deprived of their liberty, and so we will amend legislation to provide a statutory framework to place children in a new type of accommodation.
- However, it's not only about the volume of homes in the country. We also need to make sure there is the right level of accountability for the quality of homes children grow up in and ensure they are regulated and inspected. We are working with Ofsted as they look to update the [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#). We are also working with Ofsted and CQC in response to '[Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings](#)'.
- We want to raise the standards and professionalism of staff and managers in children's homes. As announced in the Ofsted Big Listen response, we will work with Ofsted to improve the re-registration process when a manager moves to a different children's home, and to make sure expectations on providers are clear and unambiguous.
- To ensure the right quality of homes we need to address the rising number of homes that are unregistered and operating unlawfully, as well as ensure group level accountability for provider groups that provide multiple homes. Unregistered homes are out of sight to Ofsted, and so we have no visibility of the level of care and support provided to children living in these homes. We want to give Ofsted greater powers to tackle persistent use of unregistered provision by giving them the power to issue civil penalties against providers of unregistered settings.

Our plans for reform, and to change the law

Making it easier to open the right kinds of homes which meet children's needs

The planning process, reforming registration and location assessments

We recognise that planning permissions and the need to register a children's home can be challenging to overcome when establishing new residential provision where it is needed. That is why we will work with Ofsted to consider a fast-track route for the registration of selected new children's homes, ensuring that the type of providers we are encouraging back into the market – as set out below – can establish new homes more quickly where they meet the entry criteria and checks specified by Ofsted.

Alongside this, in partnership with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) we are looking at options to reform the planning process to enable providers to more easily set up homes where they are most needed. MHCLG has recently consulted on changes to the National Planning Policy Framework to make it explicitly clear that local planning authorities must consider the need for children's homes as one of the types of specialist housing in their areas. We will look to go further and work with MHCLG to consider potential legislative options or further changes to support the delivery of small children's homes. Any planning changes taken forward will be coupled with the strengthened location assessment helping to ensure the right homes are provided in the right places.

Additionally, according to Ofsted, 25% of all children's homes are located in the North West of England, compared to 6% in London, 7% in the South West of England, and 8% in the East of England. This regional imbalance of homes means that there are not enough homes to meet local need. As a result, some children are – contrary to their care plan and their overall wellbeing – placed away from their home which breaks vital relationships with family, friends, education, and places they know. That is why, as part of Ofsted's registration assessment for new provision, we are going to strengthen the location assessment¹⁰ by including a requirement for an application to register a children's home be accompanied by an endorsement from the relevant children's services team that they have determined that there is a local need for the proposed children's home. This will give local authorities a greater say on the type and quantity of provision they need in their area, and will allow Ofsted to refuse registration where provision is deemed not needed.

Making the best use of existing homes

It's important that where we have registered homes, we are able to make the best use of them. Our workforce census in 2023 showed that the average number of places in children's homes was 4.2 and that almost 1 in every 4 places were unoccupied. For many homes, this might be a temporary vacancy (whilst they are waiting for a child referral), a deliberate decision so that they have capacity to accommodate a child or young person at short notice, or space is needed to maintain stability in the home so that the needs of children can be met. For example, a child's behavioural or mental health needs, may need fewer children and young people to be living in the home at the same time. Children must live in a home that is appropriate for them and can meet their specific needs, and not just somewhere that has a space. The Registered Manager of the home is

¹⁰ As set out in guidance from Ofsted ([Introduction to children's homes](#)) - a location assessment must show the steps taken to make sure that the home is needed locally, is in the right place and is safe, and promotes positive opportunities for children.

accountable for ensuring the safety of all the children and young people living there and making the decision to accept a child into the home.

However, our workforce census also showed the stark challenges around recruitment and retention in children's homes; 28% of homes who responded cited the reason for unoccupied beds was insufficient staff due to recruitment and retention issues. There are also wider challenges such as adequate provision of community and multidisciplinary services which residential homes rely on. We will continue to support local authorities to meet their sufficiency duty through a programme of capital investment to maintain existing capacity and expand provision in both secure and open children's homes.

Diversifying the market and managing new entrants to the market

The overwhelming majority of children's placements are provided by private sector providers. The growing prevalence of private providers, coupled with an overall shortage of appropriate places, means that local authorities are in many cases being charged excessive amounts. We will explore options to rebalance the market by encouraging new providers, for example, charities and voluntary sector providers and ethical investors, and by reducing barriers to creating and maintaining affordable provision.

We recognise that a major barrier to establishing new residential provision is the initial set-up cost. To encourage non-profit providers back into the market, national government will act as an enabler. We will work with providers, investors, and the sector at large to support them with innovative funding mechanisms – for example, social financing models like social outcomes partnerships – to break down barriers to setting up new residential care. As set out above, we will continue to support local authorities to meet their sufficiency duty through a programme of capital investment to maintain existing capacity and expand provision in both secure and open children's homes. In the Autumn Budget 2024 we announced £90m for 2025/26 which includes a multi-million-pound package of funding to create 200 additional open children's homes beds. This will provide high quality, safe homes for some of our most vulnerable children, including those who may need to be deprived of their liberty. This funding was secured to help tackle the challenges in supporting children with the most complex needs, and we expect the extra capacity will reduce local government reliance on costly emergency provision and improve outcomes for children by providing them with more suitable placements.

We want new provision to be established by providers who are motivated to deliver high quality outcomes for children in care in a financially sustainable manner. Therefore, we will explore introducing a requirement that any new provider wishing to enter the market must be owned and domiciled in the UK, including corporate owners and majority shareholders. In addition to working with MHCLG and others on reforming the planning and location assessment processes, we will also work in partnership with Ofsted, and other stakeholders where appropriate, to work out the practicalities of managing new entrants to the market and the requisite changes to secondary legislation that this will require.

Introducing a community-based approach to provision for children that can be deprived of their liberty

There is a gap in provision for children deprived of their liberty, due to challenging behaviour and complex mental health needs, often linked to trauma. This can result in children being placed in unregistered or otherwise unsuitable homes. In recent years, we have seen a steep rise in the number of children deprived of their liberty under the inherent jurisdiction of the High Court. We have commissioned research to build understanding for this cohort, including mapping the child's journey, and in the meantime we are acting in recognition that these children are some of the most vulnerable in our society and we must do all that we can to keep them safe and help them get on

well in life. We want new forms of provision to address the rising need for suitable homes and intend to change the legislation so that it supports this new type of provision.

To facilitate the use of such new provision, we will amend primary legislation to provide a statutory framework for LAs seeking to place children in a new type of accommodation, where they may be deprived of their liberty, but where the accommodation is not explicitly designed according to the same design specification as current Secure Children's Homes. For some children, and for a limited period, accommodation under the Secure Children's Home model will be most suitable. Other children would best be supported in provision that is able to respond more flexibly to their changing and fluctuating needs (i.e. in provision that can reduce restrictions at times when it is safe for the child), as well as provide the crucial therapeutic care and, when necessary, restriction. This new legislation will ensure that, where a secure children's home cannot meet a child's needs, there are clear criteria for when children may need to be deprived of liberty and mandatory review points to ensure that no child is deprived of liberty for longer than is required to keep them safe.

The changes to legislation are only one part of a significant programme of work to help ensure the wider system is set up to provide these children with the right place to live, which offers the right level of care, and that can truly meet their needs and keep them safe. DfE is working with NHS England, as well as with partners across national and local government, to support social care and health partners to commission joint care across sectors, which delivers integrated, consistent, and collaborative practice for these children and young people.

Drawing on the best evidence, including the voice of children, input from professionals and commissioned research, we will, in collaboration with NHS England, pilot a new, community-based approach to pathways and provision which provides treatment and care, bringing in professionals from children's social care, health, justice and education. This will enable the system to deliver specialist care and accommodation for children who have complex needs, which has the potential to reduce both local authority reliance on costly unregistered placements and immediate and lifetime costs to the health and justice systems.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner has recently published a report, commissioned by the Department for Education, which sets out the views and experiences of children who have been deprived of their liberty, their parents and the professionals that support them. We have also recently commissioned independent research on how the system works, its current impacts and how we could do things differently to achieve better outcomes for children and young people. We plan to publish this research in summer 2025. We will draw on these reports to support the development and testing of evidence-based models of safe, therapeutic care that delivers integrated, consistent, and collaborative practices for these children and young people. In addition, we will issue further guidance and resources that are informed by evidence, existing good practice, and, importantly, by what children, young people and their parents and carers say they want and would find helpful.

We will work directly with the South East Regional Care Co-operative to test an integrated assessment, commissioning and delivery model, including input from health, justice and children's social care professionals, and evaluate the effectiveness of the approach.

Improving accountability for the quality of homes

Strengthening Ofsted's enforcement powers

Children in residential settings are some of the most vulnerable in the country and need high quality care and support that they can trust to be in their best interests, and meet their needs. This is why it is a legal requirement for children's homes to register with Ofsted; it means the managers are checked, the homes children live in can be inspected to ensure they are suitable and compliant with the regulations, children are safe, and where there are failings, those responsible can be held to account.

Despite it being a local authority's duty to ensure that they have sufficient, registered places for children to live, local authorities' reliance on private providers means they have a limited ability to shape their local market. The lack of appropriate and affordable homes in the right places for children means that we are seeing a worrying trend in the rise of the use of unregistered provision – most notably in children's homes and supported accommodation, but Ofsted have also seen it in independent fostering agencies and residential family centres. Often these settings are wholly inappropriate places for vulnerable children to live in, and sometimes children are living there for extended periods of time. In 2023-24 Ofsted opened cases on 1,109 potentially unregistered settings and found that 887 (87%) should have been registered (compared to 370 in 2022-23). We suspect there are more unregistered settings operating than Ofsted have received intelligence about, but at a minimum this shows that nearly 1000 children were placed in unregistered settings in 2023/24 alone.

We must work with local authorities to ensure that there are the right homes, in the right places for children, and that the registration system works to protect children wherever they need to live. This is why we are supporting local authorities to meet their sufficiency duty by investing in new placements and opening up to 560 additional beds by March 2029. Where local authorities are using unregistered places, they tell us it is because they cannot find a suitable place in registered provision to meet the child's needs. We strongly believe in the principle that any setting accommodating children in care should always seek to register with Ofsted – if new provision has been stood up very quickly, it should be registered as soon as practicable. Ofsted will work with settings through the registration process, providing advice where needed, and we are working with them to expand their existing priority application process. Our wider reforms across children's social care seek to divert children away from residential care where their needs can be better met in family environments – we're recruiting new foster carers, and investing in kinship and family help so that children can stay with their families and receive more support in the community.

However, we must also act against those who are persistently seeking to avoid being held to account for the support and care, or lack of, that they provide to children, who can charge excessive amounts to local authorities who don't have sufficient places, and who knowingly repeat this behaviour multiple times, and across the whole country. Whilst Ofsted already has some enforcement powers to tackle unregistered settings and agencies, it is clear that Ofsted needs alternative options. We are therefore strengthening Ofsted's enforcement powers so they can issue civil penalties by way of a monetary fine against providers of unregistered settings. These are an alternative to criminal prosecution and will allow Ofsted to act at pace to tackle more unregistered settings, in a proportionate way (i.e. a single offence may warrant a financial penalty, whilst a repeat, or very serious offence may warrant prosecution). The Care Standards Act 2000 contains further offence provisions for which Ofsted can prosecute¹¹ – these may be subject to the new civil sanctions regime. This is logical and brings consistency to Ofsted's enforcement powers.

¹¹ [Care Standards Act 2000, Section 22A, 24-28 and 29](#)

Improving the quality of placements through a provider oversight scheme

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published its [Phase 1](#) and [Phase 2](#) reports on safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings, in response to the case of unacceptable abuse of the children living in homes managed by the Hesley Group. The findings highlighted that systemic and organisational weakness can cause the conditions for harm¹². We plan to legislate to ensure these conditions are not created, by increasing the transparency of governance arrangements of independent provider groups that own multiple children's homes and other children's social care provision, and by giving Ofsted stronger powers to hold these providers to account. We want to see cases of abuse eradicated, and where quality issues are found, for the legislation to enable Ofsted to act quickly and decisively to prevent harm. Such changes will mean that Ofsted will be better equipped to act in instances where poor quality of care exists across settings.

Ofsted's current registration and enforcement powers are limited to individual registered providers, such as the provider of an individual children's home. Ofsted's current inspection framework, the [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#) (SCCIF), applies to inspections of individual homes and focuses on the care and experience of the child¹³. A poor inspection result can lead to enforcement actions. The reach of current inspections is limited when quality issues are identified that exist across multiple settings owned by the same provider group. Where there is weakness in organisational structures, under the current framework Ofsted must inspect each individual setting and it cannot act at scale to improve the quality of provision and keep children safe. We want to make changes to the framework to empower Ofsted to be able to drive improvements to the quality of care for children more quickly.

It is important that we update the legislative framework to reflect the current placements market. Private provision has increased – 83% of children's homes are now privately owned – many of which are owned by larger provider groups who run multiple homes and influence decisions relating to the care of many children. Some groups own over 100 children's homes. Currently, Ofsted cannot hold these provider groups to account for any weaknesses across their organisation, despite their overarching influence in the care of children, both in individual homes and across the wider sector. We will change the regulatory framework so that where there are quality issues across several settings owned by the same provider group, Ofsted can hold provider groups to account for these.

Ofsted will be able to request an improvement action plan in which provider groups will be required to detail the actions that they will take to resolve any identified issues. Ofsted will have the ability to enforce the development of the improvement action plan, and the measures detailed within it. This should help to resolve issues quickly at a higher level in the organisation, before they spread or escalate.

¹² [Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings: phase 2 report](#) (page 86)

¹³ [The Social Care Common Inspection Framework \(SCCIF\)](#) provides a common approach to inspecting various social care services in England.

Government will also strengthen Ofsted's enforcement powers to hold provider groups to account where necessary. The measures will be proportionate, and it is expected that they will only be used when absolutely necessary. Enforcement could include a civil penalty by way of a monetary fine or Ofsted being able to restrict growth of the provider group, by refusing further registrations based on non-compliance of provider oversight requirements or place applications on hold where actions to resolve concerns are not fully implemented by the provider group. Once issues are resolved, registration of additional homes will be allowed.

Ensuring inspection reflects the makeup of the children's homes market

Working with Ofsted as they change their inspection frameworks

Ofsted have responsibility for inspection in children's social care through their framework for [inspecting local authority children's services](#) (ILACS) and their [Social Care Common Inspection Framework](#) (SCCIF). Understanding the effectiveness of the services that local authorities provide, and the quality of the provision for children is critical for driving high and rising standards.

As we move forward with our reform activity, we will continue to work with Ofsted to rebalance inspection and regulation to align with the direction of children's social care reform and the legislative measures set out in this statement. This includes working with Ofsted in response to the Big Listen to ensure inspection is a constructive force in the sector that champions good practice, empowers leaders and practitioners, and drives improved outcomes. Inspection needs to continue to focus on the areas that matter most to children and young people and reflect the outcomes that are included in the National Framework.

Improving the Ofsted registration process for children's homes managers and registered managers of other establishments and agencies

We are committed to ensuring high quality care for children living in residential children's homes. We know that the manager of a children's home plays a crucial leadership role in delivering this care and want to support people working in these roles. We are aware that the current process when a registered manager moves to a different children's home is costly and time-consuming. It creates a burden on people working within this profession. In their [recent report](#), the Competition and Markets Authority noted the registration process made opening new provision slow and costly, which can add delays to opening new provision.

We will work with Ofsted to improve the re-registration process when a manager moves to a different children's home, to reduce the administrative burden on the individual manager, provider and Ofsted. This will aim to accelerate the process, so managers can take up new positions more efficiently and providers can deploy managers to locations where they are needed.

Ensuring expectations for residential care are clear and unambiguous

We know that in children's homes and supported accommodation, there are examples of skilled and passionate staff, who go above and beyond for the children and young people they work with. We believe that through the design of national policy there needs to be a greater focus on factors which influence the experience of children in residential care, ensuring that for those who need it, residential care is a place where all children thrive. This includes how we ensure that everyone is ambitious and hold high standards for the children they care for and support, how providers respond to the needs of different groups of children, how effectively Ofsted and CQC can both assess and act in response to areas of concern and celebrate best practice, and how the voices of children in care are heard more loudly. We will engage with partners in the sector and those with lived experience to shape this programme of work alongside our proposals to legislate to make sure our work meets the diverse and changing needs of children in care, paying particular attention to how a child's identity shapes their experience of care.

Improving local authorities' ability to shape the market

Shaping the market through Regional Care Cooperatives

Building on recommendations by the Competition and Markets Authority, and the Independent Review of Children's Social Care, the government will enable local authorities to set up Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs) to plan and commission children's social care places regionally. We are currently working with two RCC pathfinder areas, in Greater Manchester and the South East, to support the delivery of this regional approach under current legislation. These pathfinders have been working closely with the Integrated Care Boards, youth justice partners, and others in their area to deliver the following set of minimum requirements:

- Carrying out regional data analysis and forecasting future needs of homes for children in care, in partnership with health and justice.
- Developing and publishing a regional sufficiency strategy setting out current provision and action to fill gaps.
- Market shaping, working as one customer with providers to address local needs, improve value for money and commission the care places required from external providers.
- Recruiting foster carers through a regional recruitment support hub and improving the support offer to both new and existing foster carers.
- Developing new regional provision where gaps have been identified. The Department is providing up to £5m capital funding per pathfinder to support this, and RCC members are also pooling sums of their own funding alongside this.
- Creating the leadership and governance arrangements necessary to allow the RCC to make swift decisions and invest sums of money over the long term.

We expect RCCs to gain economies of scale and harness the collective buying power of individual local authorities. They will facilitate greater collaboration with relevant partners (including health and justice) to improve services for children in care. Furthermore, RCCs will develop expertise in areas such as data analysis and forecasting, as well as targeted marketing, training, and support for foster carers. Working collectively with improved specialist capacities should allow for greater innovation so that local areas are better able to deliver services for children in care. For example, both pathfinders are trialling measures to boost the regional workforce for children's homes in response to local and regional recruitment challenges.

We plan to legislate to enable groups of local authorities to set up RCCs, encouraging them to do so in partnership with health and justice. The legislation will learn from the experience to date of setting up the two pathfinders. It will set out the RCC functions, which will be similar to the requirements for the pathfinders to deliver transformational change to the care system. This will be the minimum required of the RCC but local authorities are free to decide if they want the RCC to take on a greater range of functions. Our plan is that the legislation will create an RCC function to support local authorities to meet their statutory duties to accommodate looked after children¹⁴ and ensure sufficient accommodation for looked after children¹⁵. It will give government the power to direct local authorities to establish an RCC if necessary, for example in the case of failure of local authorities to perform their own statutory functions effectively, and to intervene if an RCC is not delivering services to a required standard. The legislation will also give Ofsted (and other inspectorates) the power to inspect RCCs. We know that any new inspection programmes will need careful consideration in partnership with the sector once RCCs have become established.

Alongside the RCCs programme, we are also working with local areas to improve their local and regional capacity for commissioning, forecasting, and market shaping activities. This programme will support areas in forecasting their future placement needs more accurately, and better understand the overall number of children likely to come into the care system and the different types of placements they might need. The programme is working primarily with RCC pathfinders in the first instance to spread identified good practice and put RCCs on a firm footing to be as effective as possible in these areas of practice. The programme will also support local authorities more widely through seminars and online learning materials so all areas can improve their ways of working.

Regulating the placements market to ensure financial stability and tackle profiteering

Bringing transparency to the costs of homes

We want to ensure that local authorities are supported to better understand, shape and commission placements that suit the needs of children in their area and bring transparency to the cost of placements. Currently, there is a gap in the data around the underlying costs of different types of children's social care provision. It is difficult to access the data that individual local authorities hold on the prices paid for private placements and their cost breakdown, and there is often only piecemeal sharing of this data across some local authority groupings¹⁶.

These gaps create challenges for assessing whether prevailing price levels in the sector are appropriate. Local authorities need more shared cost information to inform their commissioning practices and enable them to negotiate effectively with providers to secure the best placement for children at the lowest possible cost. We will engage with the sector to bring about greater cost and price transparency which will aid local authorities in challenging profiteering providers, as well as enabling greater central government oversight of the placements market.

¹⁴ [Section 22A of the Children Act 1989](#) states that when a child is in the care of a local authority, it is their duty to provide the child with accommodation.

¹⁵ [Section 22G of the Children Act 1989](#) places a general duty on local authorities to ensure there is enough accommodation in the local area to meet the needs of children that it looks after.

¹⁶ [Competition and Markets Authority Final Report](#)

Introducing a financial oversight scheme to ensure financial stability

To promote the stability of placements, we will introduce a new financial oversight scheme led by the Department for Education. The scheme will increase financial and corporate transparency among the most 'difficult to replace' providers, allow for an accurate, real-time assessment of financial risk, and provide advance warning to local authorities of likely provider financial failure, so they can take swift action and minimise disruption to children.

Currently, local authorities have no way of knowing if a provider of placements for children is at risk of failing financially. If a large or 'difficult to replace' provider did fail, it could lead to them closing their provision suddenly, causing huge disruption to children who could lose their home. This could leave local authorities having to find appropriate placements for a significant number of children at very short notice, making it challenging to meet their statutory duties. In addition to this, the ownership structures of some of the biggest companies that provide placements for children and young people in care can often be complex and opaque. We also know that some providers, especially those owned by private equity, can carry very high levels of debt¹⁷. The current system leaves open the risk of provider financial difficulty and the likelihood of business failure going undetected.

To participate in this market, we believe providers and their owners must be more accountable for how their business impacts the lives of the vulnerable children who live in their provision or who access fostering agency services. In their [study into the children's social care market](#), the CMA recommended that government create a proportionate statutory financial oversight scheme that could operate in a similar way to the Care Quality Commission's (CQC) current market oversight role. As a result of the Southern Cross failure in the adult social care sector in 2011, which led to the closure of care homes at very short notice (at its peak, Southern Cross owned or operated over 700 care homes across the UK), CQC's Market Oversight Scheme was set up under the Care Act 2014 to assess the financial sustainability of potentially difficult to replace adult social care providers. If a provider within the Scheme is considered likely to cease to provide a service because of business failure, the CQC will notify the relevant local authorities. This allows action to be taken by local authorities to ensure adults who use these services continue to have their care needs met. CQC's Market Oversight Scheme's purpose is not to prevent business failure, nor does it have a role in monitoring the financial sustainability of the entire adult social care market. We have been working closely with CQC to learn from their oversight scheme. This learning will inform the development of a tailored scheme that responds to the children's social care placements market.

Although Ofsted can request financial information at the time of inspection from children's homes and fostering agencies, registered providers are not required to submit ongoing, regular financial information or undergo rigorous financial checks. Moreover, Ofsted is not at present set up to conduct regular, forensic financial monitoring¹⁸.

Currently, local authorities and national government do not have the powers to obtain detailed information that give a full, live picture of the financial health of a provider and their owners. There are also few requirements on providers to plan what they would do in the event of financial distress to responsibly manage market exit and minimise disruption to children in their care.

¹⁷ [Competition and Markets Authority Final Report](#)

¹⁸ [The Care Standards Act 2000 \(Registration\)\(England\) Regulations 2010](#)

To deliver an effective financial oversight scheme, we will:

- set criteria for the most ‘difficult to replace’ providers to become subject to the scheme.
- require information from providers, up to the parent company level, to enable the Department to carry out ongoing assessments of the financial viability of the totality of the organisation.
- work closely with Ofsted to effectively bring together financial, corporate performance and quality indicators to inform an overall assessment of risk.
- introduce requirements for providers to have in place a contingency plan with assurances that providers have the appropriate cash reserves and will allow the necessary time to enable orderly transitions to new ownership, or to wind down operations in a well-planned manner if they need to exit the market.
- introduce an advance warning system to support local authorities to meet their statutory duties.
- notify Ofsted of concerns where they can play a role in evaluating the impact of any financial concerns on the quality of children's experiences.
- introduce enforcement mechanisms to ensure compliance and cooperation with the requirements of the scheme from providers up to the parent company level.

Creating a mandatory notice period for market exit

To complement the advance warning system, as part of the financial oversight scheme detailed above, we will explore introducing a new requirement for all providers to give both hosting and placing local authorities sufficient notice if a provider makes the commercial/business decision to actively exit the market. While it may not always be possible to predict financial failure in advance, we think it is appropriate that all providers operate their businesses responsibly, including ensuring a managed wind-down that allows sufficient time where they have decided to close or reduce provision. This ensures providers who operate placements for some of our most vulnerable children are more accountable and give more consideration to the impact of their decisions on the children in their provision.

Regulating the placements market further

As set out, we know that the placement market is not functioning properly and costs to local authorities are rising unsustainably. In addition to the CMA’s 2022 report, evidence from the Association of Directors of Children’s Services¹⁹, the Local Government Association²⁰, and Ofsted inspection, shows that children’s social care budgets are under significant pressure, largely due to rapidly increasing placement costs for children in care. Local government spending on looked after children has increased from £3.1 billion in 2009/10 to £7 billion in 2022/23. We know that some providers are making unjustified levels of profit.

¹⁹ [Safeguarding Pressures | ADCS](#)

²⁰ [High-cost children’s social care placements survey | Local Government Association](#)

If the reforms detailed throughout this chapter, do not have the anticipated impact in tackling profiteering across the children's homes placement market, we will not hesitate to take legislative action to prevent private providers continuing to make excessive profits from publicly funded services for some of our most vulnerable children. We plan to introduce powers for the Secretary of State to cap the level of profit which can be made from children's social care placements through secondary legislation in the future. We will allow time for our other market reforms to rebalance the market first and will only step in to cap profits if this does not happen. We expect that the secondary legislation needed to bring about a cap would include provisions for a limit on the level of profit that could be made in each financial year from the provision of specified children's social care placements. We plan to further engage with the sector before any such a measure is introduced.

Introducing a regulation-making power to govern LA use of agency workers within children's social care services

The Independent Review of Children's Social Care identified that the engagement of agency social workers is costly and a barrier to providing stable professional relationships for children and families²¹. In recent years, use of agency social workers has risen in local authorities delivering children's social care. There were 7,200 agency social workers in post on 30 September 2023, the highest since the data series started in 2017 and representing an increase of 6.1% from 2022. While agency social workers can play a role in allowing the children's social care sector to manage fluctuations in demand and fill in for staff that are temporarily absent, they should not replace a permanent workforce.

Work has already started to reform the use of agency child and family social workers in local authority delivery of children's social care. Between February and May 2023, a [consultation](#) focused on introducing national rules through statutory guidance, under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 (LASSA)²². There was broad support for its [proposals](#)²³. Then, between January and February 2024, a further technical consultation sought views on the detail of the statutory guidance 'Agency Rules for Local Authority Children's Social Care', which again received broad support. The final statutory guidance was published on 12 September 2024 alongside the Government's response to the consultation, and the guidance comes into effect on 31 October 2024²⁴.

However, statutory guidance is as far as we can go within the current legislative framework to address the rising use of agency staff in children's social care. That is why we intend to legislate to allow us to go further than statutory guidance in regulating the use of agency, to drive the right conditions for children's social work practice. We also want to look wider than local authority engagement of children and family social workers at local authority engagement of other agency workers in children's social care. Currently, the statutory guidance introduced this year applies solely to child and family social workers. However, we know that driving the right conditions for lasting relationships with children and families does not stop at social workers.

²¹ [The Independent Review of Children's Social Care](#) (page 188-189)

²² [Child and family social workers: agency rules statutory guidance](#)

²³ [Child and family social worker workforce](#)

²⁴ [Child and family social workers: agency rules](#)

The updated [Working Together](#) statutory guidance confirms that a range of lead practitioners can carry out section 17 work with children and families and we are keen that any future regulations do not create perverse incentives for the wider workforce. In the responses to the 'Child and Family Social Worker Workforce' Consultation in 2023, concerns were shared that limiting the agency rules to only child and family social workers may result in unintended consequences: for example, we heard that there may be a potential risk of agency growth in other parts of the children's social care workforce not subject to the same regulatory framework.

Fundamentally, creating the right conditions to allow those who work in children's social care to thrive and give the best support to children and families relies on a stable, effective, and supported workforce. Therefore, we are proposing a regulation making power that will enable us to strengthen the rules on how local authorities procure and manage temporary workers within children's social care services. The intention is that this regulation making power would also be used to make regulations which may apply similar provisions to those already introduced by statutory guidance to a broader cohort of agency workers within children's social care²⁵. This will ensure the supply of temporary workers in children's social care is directed towards supporting children and families while retaining workforce sustainability.

The regulation making powers we plan to bring forward will extend to local authorities in England only. The powers are likely to include the ability to make regulations on governance arrangements to ensure, for example, local authorities retain oversight and clear accountability over social work practice delivered, over workers' pay and labour costs, and over quality assurance provisions such as minimum experience requirements and pre-employment checks. It is our intention to engage with the sector ahead of introducing secondary legislation, on the detail of the regulations. If introduced, the regulations and related guidance will replace the guidance 'Agency Rules for Local Authority Children's Social Care'²⁶. We are not seeking further data collection powers relating to the use of agency workers in children's social care as we already have powers in this regard²⁷.

²⁵ [Child and family social workers: agency rules](#)

²⁶ [Child and family social workers: agency rules](#)

²⁷ The data collection on the agency child and family social work is under [Section 83 of the Children Act 1989](#) and [Section 251\(1\)\(b\) of the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009](#).

Glossary of Terms

Abuse - a form of maltreatment of a child or young person. Somebody may abuse or neglect a child by inflicting harm, or by failing to act to prevent harm. Harm can include ill treatment that is not physical as well as the impact of witnessing ill treatment of others. This can be particularly relevant, for example, in relation to the impact on children of all forms of domestic abuse, including where they see, hear, or experience its effects. Children may be abused in a family or in an institutional or extra-familial contexts by those known to them or, more rarely, by others. Abuse can take place wholly online, or technology may be used to facilitate offline abuse. Children may be abused by an adult or adults, or another child or children.

Act - an Act of Parliament creates a new law or changes an existing law. An Act is a Bill that has been approved by both the House of Commons and the House of Lords and been given Royal Assent by the Monarch. Taken together, Acts of Parliament make up what is known as Statute Law. Definition taken from UK Parliament.

Adoption agencies - the focus of all adoption agencies is on placing children successfully into adoptive families. These are families who the agency recruits, assesses, prepares and supports, so that they will meet the children's needs and enable them to develop and achieve throughout their lives. The services maintained by local authorities are described in section 3(1) of the Adoption and Children Act 2002. Local authorities place children with adoptive families recruited and approved by themselves, by other local authorities or by voluntary adoption agencies that must register with Ofsted. Adoption agencies may also provide birth records, counselling and intermediary services to adoptees and birth relatives.

Child in need - is defined in section 17 of the Children Act 1989 as a child who is unlikely to reach or maintain a satisfactory level of health or development, or their health or development will be significantly impaired without the provision of children's social care services, or the child is disabled.

Looked after child - Section 22 of the Children Act 1989 defines a looked after child as one in the care of the local authority or provided with accommodation by the local authority. A child provided with accommodation under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 is looked after once they have been in local authority accommodation for 24 hours. In this document we use the term 'children in care' or 'care experienced young person' interchangeably to mean the legally defined 'looked after child' as we have heard that is the language preferred by young people.

Child protection - part of safeguarding and promoting welfare. This refers to the activity that is undertaken to protect specific children who are suffering, or are likely to suffer, significant harm.

Children - anyone who has not yet reached their 18th birthday. The fact that a child has reached 16 years of age, is living independently or is in further education, is a member of the armed forces, is in hospital or in custody in the secure estate, does not change their status or entitlements to services or protection.

Children Act 1989 - the Children Act 1989 sets out what local authorities, courts, parents and other agencies in England should do to safeguard children.

Children's homes - the Care Standards Act 2000 provides that 'an establishment is a children's home if it provides care and accommodation 'wholly or mainly' for children. 'Wholly or mainly' means that most, or all, of the people who stay at a home must be children.

Children's Homes Regulations - the Children's Homes (England) Regulations 2015 cover children's homes; children's homes that provide short break care; secure children's homes; and residential special schools or boarding schools who accommodate children for more than 295 days per year.

Children in care - in this document, the term 'children in care' refers to all children whose care is being provided by the local authority. Legislation uses the term 'looked after children' to refer to children who are being cared for by the local authority, whether that is accommodated by the local authority or in the care of the local authority by virtue of a court order. Legally, the language of 'children in care' does not include children accommodated and looked after under section 20 of the Children Act 1989. However, children and young people often tell local and central government that the term 'looked after children' is unhelpful, and we have made the deliberate choice to prioritise the use of 'children in care' throughout this document to refer to all children, regardless of the legal provision under which they are being cared for by the local authority, except where we need to be explicit about the legal cohort we are referring to.

Child Protection Plan (CPP) - support for a child where there is reasonable suspicion that the child is suffering, or likely to suffer, significant harm.

Children's Social Care National Framework - the Children's Social Care National Framework is statutory guidance for local authority children's social care. It sets out the purpose and principles of children's social care and the outcomes that should be achieved for children, young people and families so that they grow up and thrive with safety, stability and love.

Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) - the [Competition and Markets Authority](#) is an independent non-ministerial government department, which helps people, businesses and the UK economy by promoting competitive markets and tackling unfair behaviour.

Corporate parent - the term used to describe the local authority who has the responsibility to support children in care and care leavers in a way that other children are supported by their parents. The existing corporate parenting 'principles' are set out in section 1 of the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Deprivation of Liberty - the term 'deprivation of liberty' comes from Article 5 of the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), which provides that everyone, of whatever age, has the right to liberty. Article 5 of the ECHR protects everyone's right to liberty by setting out the limited circumstances in which a deprivation of liberty is allowed and requires strict safeguards to be in place for those who are deprived of their liberty. The family courts can authorise a child's deprivation of liberty via section 25 of the Children Act 1989 (and section 119 of the Social Services and Well-being Act (Wales) 2014), which authorises the placement of looked after children in a registered secure children's home, subject to meeting the criteria outlined in section 25. Alternatively, the inherent jurisdiction of the high court can be used to authorise the deprivation of liberty of a child in an alternative placement, when none of the other statutory mechanisms apply (i.e. there are no places available in secure children's homes or the criteria under s.25 are not met). There are additional routes to deprivation of liberty outside of the family court, including the provision under the Mental Health Act 1983.

Domestic abuse - the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 introduced the first ever statutory definition of domestic abuse (section 1 of the Act). The statutory definition is clear that domestic abuse may be a single incident or a course of conduct which can encompass a wide range of abusive behaviours, including a) physical or sexual abuse; b) violent or threatening behaviour; c) controlling or coercive behaviour; d) economic abuse; and e) psychological, emotional or other abuse. Under the statutory definition, both the person who is carrying out the behaviour and the person to whom the behaviour is directed towards must be aged 16 or over and they must be 'personally connected' (as defined in section 2 of the 2021 Act). The definition ensures that different types of relationships are captured, including ex-partners and family members. Section 3 of the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 recognises the impact of domestic abuse on children (0 to 18), as victims in their own right, if they see, hear or experience the effects of abuse.

Early help - in the current system, early help is non-statutory multi-agency support provided by local authorities and partners to children and families. Early help is often delivered within universal services at lower levels of need.

Elective home education - a term used to describe the practice of a parent providing a child's education at home full-time, or at home and in some other way that a parent chooses (for example, a tuition centre) instead of choosing to send the child to school.

Extra-familial harm - children may be at risk of or experiencing physical, sexual or emotional abuse and exploitation in contexts outside their families. While there is no legal definition for the term extra familial harm, it is widely used to describe different forms of harm that occur outside the home. Children can be vulnerable to multiple forms of extra-familial harm from both adults and/or other children. Examples of extra-familial harm may include (but are not limited to): criminal exploitation, such as county lines and financial exploitation; serious violence; modern slavery and trafficking; online harm; sexual exploitation; child-on-child (non-familial) sexual abuse and other forms of harmful sexual behaviour displayed by children towards their peers; abuse, and/or coercive control, children may experience in their own intimate relationships (sometimes called teenage relationship abuse), and the influences of extremism which could lead to radicalisation

Family network - a group of people close to a child, made up of relatives and also non-related connected people (where connected people has the same definition used in The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 – relatives, friends and other persons connected with the child). A family network could include stepparents, siblings, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, or close family friends.

Family Help - a service that is coordinated by local authorities for families who need a higher level of support than can be provided solely through universal services and where it is beneficial for the child and family to work closely with a Family Help Worker. This service will be for families to engage with and will support children and families that are currently in targeted early help, child in need (including disabled children) and child protection.

Foster care - when children enter care, many are placed with an approved foster carer. Foster carers will have responsibility to care for the child and must be approved by the local authority or an independent fostering agency.

Fostering agencies - are defined in section 4 of the Care Standards Act 2000. Local authority fostering agencies and independent fostering agencies (IFAs) recruit, prepare, assess, train and support foster carers. Independent fostering agencies are private companies or charities. They are registered with Ofsted and provide placements to children and young people with foster carers approved by them. IFAs work closely with local authorities to deliver these placements.

High Court - the High Court of Justice in London, together with the Court of Appeal and the Crown Court, are the Senior Courts of England and Wales. It deals at first instance with all high value and high importance civil law (non-criminal) cases, and also has a supervisory jurisdiction over all subordinate courts and tribunals, with a few statutory exceptions.

Law Commission - the statutory independent body created by the Law Commissions Act 1965 to keep the law of England and Wales under review and to recommend reform where it is needed.

Legislation - legislation is a law or a set of laws that have been passed by Parliament. Legislating is the act of making a new law.

Local area - the 'local area' is the geographical area of the local authority. This includes the local authority, CCGs, public health, NHS England for specialist services, early years settings, schools and further education providers.

Location Assessment - an assessment completed as part of Ofsted's children's homes registration process which considers the proposed location for a children's home, whether it is suitably located, accessibility of local services, and any safeguarding concerns. Regulation 46 of the Children's Homes Regulations (England) 2015 introduced a requirement for providers or managers to 'review the appropriateness and suitability of the location of the premises at least once in every calendar year'.

Multi-agency working - work across organisations to safeguard children including effective information sharing, joint decision-making and co-ordinated interventions.

Multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) - a team which brings together agencies (and their information) to identify risks to children early and to respond with the most effective, joint interventions. The Hub team enables the multi-agency safeguarding team to carry out a joint initial assessment, research and the referral of vulnerable children to services.

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements - Local organisations and agencies that provide services for children and families to work together to discharge their duties to safeguard and protect the welfare of children. The way that these organisations and agencies work together is known as a multi-agency safeguarding arrangement (MASA). The safeguarding partners oversee the functions of the MASA and are responsible for its delivery and effectiveness. The MASA must help to ensure that information about a child and their family is shared effectively, risk of harm is correctly identified and understood, and that children and families receive targeted services that meet their needs in a co-ordinated way.

Multi-disciplinary working - a range of practitioners and professionals from different backgrounds working together to enable the best outcomes for children.

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) - first published on 27 March 2012 and updated on 24 July 2018, 19 February 2019, 20 July 2021, 5 September 2023 and 19 December 2023. This sets out the government's planning policies for England and how these are expected to be applied.

The Office of the Children's Commissioner - promotes the rights, views and interests of children in policies or decisions affecting their lives. They particularly represent children who are vulnerable or who find it hard to make their views known. Office of the Children's Commissioner is an executive non-departmental public body, sponsored by the Department for Education.

Ofsted - the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills, who inspect services providing education and skills, and inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people.

Parent - our definition of parent (as it relates to the working definition of kinship care— this is not a legal definition) includes:

1. 'any birth parent, with or without parental responsibility for the child'.
2. 'any stepparent, with or without parental responsibility for the child, who is in a subsisting relationship with the birth parent'.
3. 'any adoptive parent who prior to the making of the adoption order in respect of the child was not a 'friend or family member' as defined in this Act'.
4. 'any parent by virtue of section 42 or section 43 of the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008, whether or not they have parental responsibility for the child'.

Pathfinders - the programmes to test how reforms should be implemented and manage the associated risks, before wider roll-out (subject to various approvals and funding).

Providers - the institutions, organisations or agencies that provide services to the relevant children and young people.

Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) - bring together specialised adoption professionals from local authorities across a region, providing expertise and support at every stage of the adoption process. RAA's offer a new, innovative, and collaborative approach to recruiting adopters, finding families for the children with a plan for adoption in their region and providing long-term adoption support for families.

Regional Care Cooperatives (RCCs) - the organisations or arrangements between local authorities that we intend will plan, commission and deliver care places regionally.

Safeguarding - the broad set of actions that are taken to promote the welfare of children and protect them from harm. This includes protecting children from abuse and maltreatment; preventing harm to children's health or development; ensuring children grow up with the provision of safe and effective care; and taking action to enable all children and young people to have the best outcomes.

Safeguarding Partners - a safeguarding partner in relation to a local authority area in England is defined under the Children Act 2004 as: (a) the local authority, (b) an integrated care board for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area, and (c) the chief officer of police for an area any part of which falls within the local authority area. The three safeguarding partners should agree on ways to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; act as a strategic leadership group in supporting and engaging others; and implement local and national learning, including from serious child safeguarding incidents. To fulfil this role, the three safeguarding partners must set out how they will work together with any relevant agencies as well as arrangements for conducting local reviews.

Section 17 - section 17 of the Children Act 1989 is a general duty on local authorities to safeguard and promote the welfare of "children in need" in their area.

Section 47 - under section 47 of the Children Act 1989, where a child is the subject of an emergency protection order or is in police protection or there is reasonable cause to suspect that a child who lives, or is found, in their area is suffering or is likely to suffer, significant harm, the local authority must make or cause to be made enquiries to decide if any action must be taken to safeguard or promote the child's welfare

Secure Children's Homes - Secure Children's Homes accommodate children and young people who are remanded or have been sentenced for committing a criminal offence; and those whose placement there is authorised by a court because if kept in any other description of accommodation, they are likely to injure themselves or others or because they abscond from other types of accommodation and are at risk of significant harm if they abscond. Secure Children's Homes are children's homes for vulnerable young people aged between 10 and 20. These homes restrict children's liberty to ensure their safety. Secure Children's Homes are run by local authorities, voluntary organisations, or are privately run.

Social Work England - a specialist regulator focused on enabling positive change in social work.

Supported accommodation - is defined in the Care Standards Act 2000 (Extension of the Application of Part 2 to Supported Accommodation) (England) Regulations 2022. Supported accommodation provides accommodation with support for 16- and 17- year-old looked after children and care leavers, to develop their independence as they approach adulthood.

The Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel - An independent expert committee that was set up to identify, commission and oversee reviews of serious child safeguarding cases across England. The Panel brings together experts from social care, justice, policing, health, education and the third sector to provide a multi-agency view on cases which they believe raise issues that are complex, or of national importance.

Unregistered provision - Section 11 of the Care Standards Act 2000 provides that it is unlawful for any person to carry on or manage an establishment or an agency (as defined in Section 4 of the Care Standards Act 2000) without being registered with Ofsted. Any provision therefore that is required to be registered, but is not is called 'unregistered provision'.

Working Together - Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) is statutory guidance on inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children. It clarifies and builds upon the core legal requirements, making it clear what individuals, organisations and agencies must and should do to keep children safe. It seeks to emphasise that effective safeguarding is achieved by putting children at the centre of the system and by every individual and agency playing their full part.

Young Offender Institutions - a type of custodial setting that children may be placed in if they are sentenced to or remanded in custody. Young offender institutions are for boys aged 15 – 17 and young adult men aged 18 – 21. There are five young offender institutions (YOIs) in England and Wales.

Annex A – a summary of our actions to reform children's social care

We will give families the support they need, keep children safe, and break down the barriers to opportunity for children in care and care leavers by:

- Rolling out a single offer of help and protection for children and families experiencing multiple and complex challenges. Lead practitioners with appropriate knowledge and skills will support families, working seamlessly with a reformed child protection system, when the fiscal situation allows. This offer will be underpinned by whole-family working, engagement of and support for family networks, evidence-based interventions and mechanisms to enable effective multi-agency leadership and practice.
- Strengthening the role of 'education' in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and providing national direction to the child protection system through reviews to the multi-agency safeguarding statutory guidance entitled 'Working Together to Safeguard Children'.
- Improving multi-agency data sharing across services by bringing forward plans to deliver and implement a Single Unique Identifier to support children and families.
- Responding to the Law Commission's review of the legal framework governing social care for disabled children in England and taking forward actions to ensure the law is fair and allows children with disabilities to access the support they need.
- Removing barriers to opportunity for children in care and care leavers through a cross-government programme of work to improve outcomes across education, training, and employment, housing, mental health, and relationships.
- Extending corporate parenting responsibilities to a wider range of public bodies so that they consider their needs when designing and delivering services for children in care and care leavers.
- Extending the duty on local authorities to promote educational outcomes to all children with a social worker through the statutory Virtual School Head role.

We will empower family networks and offer secure and loving homes through kinship arrangements by taking the following actions:

- Bringing forward legislation that requires local authorities to offer family group decision making at pre-proceedings, before decisions are taken on whether a child should go into care, to empower family-led solutions in response to concerns about the safety and wellbeing of the children.
- Legislating to place a statutory duty on local authorities to promote the educational achievement of children in kinship arrangements, building on the non-statutory extension of the Virtual School Head role from September 2024.
- Publishing updated Kinship Care statutory guidance which sets out how local services should support children in kinship care and their families.

- Delivering a £40 million package to trial a new kinship allowance to test whether paying an allowance to cover certain costs – like supporting a child to settle into a new home with relatives – can help increase the number of children taken in by family members and friends.
- Continuing the delivery of the Family Network Pilot which is testing flexible funding and practical support for extended family networks to help keep families together and children out of care.
- Providing a training, information and advice offer so kinship carers across the country know where they can get support to provide loving homes for their kin, and funding peer support groups across England for all kinship carers so we can build a community of support for kinship carers.
- Appointing a National Kinship Care Ambassador who will advocate for kinship children and carers across government and work directly with local authorities to improve services.
- Engaging the Law Commission to undertake a review into the legal orders and statuses underpinning kinship care arrangements and provide recommendations to government to ensure that the legislative framework is fair, modern, and meets the needs of its users.

We want all placements to be secure, high-quality and designed with children's interests in mind, including by:

- Investing in and promoting the use of the Adoption and Special Guardianship Support Fund for eligible adoptive and eligible kinship families so children can access therapeutic support where they have experienced trauma.
- Providing funding for Adoption England to support Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs) to improve recruitment, matching and post adoption support while promoting consistency by setting national standards in adoption practice across the country.
- Investing an additional £15m to boost the number of foster carers to offer children a stable environment to grow up in. This will make sure every local authority has the offer of a regional fostering recruitment hub to help raise awareness about fostering and offer prospective carers support from the start of their fostering journey and also improve the support offer to existing foster carers.
- Introducing a provider oversight scheme to increase Ofsted's existing powers to ensure provider groups are held responsible for the quality of the children's homes and other children's social care provision that they own.
- Enhancing Ofsted's enforcement powers so that they can fine providers illegally operating unregistered children's homes, so we can make sure children are safe, and placed in homes that are properly regulated by Ofsted.
- Undertaking joint work with NHS England to develop integrated, multi-agency community provision to provide care and/or treatment where restrictions that amount to deprivation of liberty can be imposed.
- Improving our data on placements to give local authorities the information they need to assess need in local areas and assess longer-term demand for placements.

- Enabling local authorities to set up Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs), working in partnership with health and justice stakeholders. RCCs will carry out regional data analysis, develop regional sufficiency strategies, and develop regional provision.
- Boosting the supply and diversity of placements by encouraging non-profit providers back into the market to reduce costs and provide placements which better meet children's needs closer to home.
- Creating a fast-track route for the registration of some new children's homes to make it easier for homes to be set up where they most need them.
- Introducing a financial oversight scheme to increase financial and corporate transparency among the most 'difficult to replace' providers, increase provider contingency planning for financial failure, and provide an early warning system to local authorities.
- Exploring introducing registration requirements for companies that provide placements to children to ensure they have responsible tax practices and are domiciled in the UK.
- Introducing powers for the Secretary of State to cap provider profits from the provision of children's social care places in the future in the event that excessive profiteering is not brought under control.

To drive the change, we want to see in the system, we will take actions across enablers like leaders, multi-agency working and the workforce to:

- Embed the Children's Social Care National Framework (National Framework) and align policy with these expectations for practice, driving the whole national system to focus on the highest aspirations for children and families. We will also deliver a Dashboard to have a real-time picture of how the system is moving towards embedding the outcomes in the National Framework.
- Galvanise local leaders to drive improvements in their region, with a focus on outcomes, through work with the Local Government Association, through Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances (RIIAs) and other sector-led programmes such as Sector Led Improvement Partners (SLIPs)²⁸. We will continue to intervene in local authorities where Ofsted have found poor social care practice, to drive service improvements to keep children safe.
- Enable strategic multi-agency working by supporting statutory safeguarding partners across local authority, police and ICB with multi-agency national facilitators and use safeguarding partnerships yearly reports as an accountability and learning tool to improve the system.
- Support safeguarding partnerships to prevent or reduce the risk of recurrence of serious harm or abuse, through the sharing of data and evidence from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

²⁸ [Get support from children's social care sector-led improvement partners](#)

- Enable learning from data and take forward digital solutions to build a better understanding of children, young people and families and to create better support for individuals and communities.
- Address the drivers which cause delays in the family court, and improve the experience of children and families, by improving pre-proceedings practice and investing in developing local solutions.
- Support, champion and empower the social work workforce through recruiting and retaining social workers, and professional development programmes. The work social workers deliver for children and families is essential and deserves to be recognised and supported. We know a key part of retention will be about improving the offer of support social workers receive so we will populate a national virtual hub with resources to support local authorities with best practice on retaining social workers, including improving working conditions.
- Implement statutory guidance published on local authority use of agency child and family social workers to reduce the impact of workforce instability on children and families, improve quality and reduce costs, and underpin the agency rules with a new regulation making power which will create a legally binding framework in relation to the use of agency workers in children's social care which local authorities must adhere to.
- Work with Ofsted in response to the findings of their Big Listen, to explore how improvements to their frameworks can ensure inspection is a constructive force in the sector that champions good practice, empowers leaders and practitioners, and drives improved outcomes.
- Work in partnership with MHCLG, to ensure we have systematic and strategic join up in how local areas are funded and supported to deliver effective services. We will work to address some of the burdens placed on local authorities by consolidating small grants wherever possible and distributing funding as effectively as possible.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

LOCAL DELIVERY OF THE HOMES FOR UKRAINE SCHEME

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 Homes for Ukraine scheme and the support provided locally by the County Council over the past three years.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. In March 2022, in response to the Russian military invasion of Ukraine, the UK government set up visa schemes to allow Ukrainians fleeing war to gain a visa to seek temporary sanctuary in the UK.
3. The Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship scheme allowed people living in the UK to sponsor visas for Ukrainians, on the basis that the sponsor hosted them in suitable accommodation for at least six months. Ukrainian guests on this scheme receive a £200 welcome payment to support their transition to life in the UK and Sponsors (hosts) could receive 'thank you' payments of £350 per month for up to 12 months. This scheme involved local authorities in:
 - Meeting Ukrainians arriving to arrival points in their area;
 - Carrying out checks on sponsors and their properties to ensure Ukrainians would be safe and in suitable accommodation;
 - Administer welcome payments to Ukrainian guests and 'Thank you' payments to their hosts;
 - Provide support where host relationships broke down and alternative host or other accommodation was required for Ukrainians.
4. Local authorities could claim tariff payments of £10,500 per arrival into their area to be used to administer the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship scheme locally. This funds all costs associated with running the scheme on a day-to-day basis (including costs incurred by district councils). The only exception is 'Thank you' payments paid out to eligible sponsors/hosts which can be claimed back from Central Government separately.
5. Funding was also provided to cover the costs of Education provision for eligible children under the scheme. In total £1.9m was received which covered costs incurred by schools with Homes for Ukraine pupils and other related/relevant costs. This funding was only provided for an initial period – essentially until the pupils

themselves would have been included on the school census information that drives the usual funding streams for Education.

6. Two other Ukraine visa schemes were set up and fully administered by the Home Office. The Ukraine Family visa scheme allowed people in the UK to sponsor visas for Ukrainian family members. The Ukraine Visa Extension scheme allowed Ukrainians with an existing visa to stay in the UK to extend that visa.
7. In July 2022, guidelines and an approach to allow unaccompanied minors to be sponsored and hosted on the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, were established.
8. The response to the military invasion of Ukraine and subsequent humanitarian efforts (including the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship visa scheme) were managed in Leicestershire through Emergency Management processes. The emergency response was stepped down in December 2022 and the local management of the scheme and additional support managed within Children and Family Services. The funding for this is provided by central government and ringfenced.
9. This is the first specific report to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the local response to the war in Ukraine and specifically the local management of the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme.
10. The Ukraine visa schemes have developed since the original set up with 'thank you' payments for hosts on the sponsorship scheme being extended from the initial year to two years in early 2023 and then for the full length of guests' visas by the end of 2023.
11. In January 2023, the tariff payment for new arrivals reduced to £5,900 for arrivals from 1 January 2023 onwards. 'Thank you' payments for sponsors hosting guests in their second or subsequent year were increased by Central government to £500 per month.
12. In February 2024 the family scheme and extension scheme were closed to new applications, the length of new visas on the sponsorship scheme was reduced from three years to 18 months, and new visa sponsors had to be settled or British citizens. The latter prevented a trend of Ukrainians moving into their own accommodation and then sponsoring visas for family members. The Government also announced the set-up of the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme to allow any Ukrainian on any Ukraine visa scheme to apply for an 18-month visa extension.
13. In October 2024 hosts who were close family members of their guests were made ineligible for 'thank you' payments for all new 'thank you' payment claims.
14. In February 2025 the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme was launched with 'thank you' payments for hosts of Ukrainians moving from Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme to the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme. In addition, an exception was made to the sponsorship scheme so that Ukrainians could sponsor new visas for their children who had previously not had a visa. The Home Office will not provide any information to Local Authorities regarding Ukraine Permission Extension visas. Local Authorities need to gather this from guests and their hosts in order to carry out these functions. The government also confirmed that any time in

the UK on the Ukraine visa schemes does not count towards any consideration of settled status.

15. From April 2025 Central government has reduced all 'thank you' payments back to £350 per month.

Background

Local Emergency response

16. In Leicestershire, as part of the partnership emergency response, resources across the County Council were brought together to set up processes and procedures required to carry out the required functions for the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship scheme, and to manage the scheme and carry out the functions in partnership with the district councils for property inspections, local integration and housing support.
17. A number of volunteers from across organisations staffed a welcome point at East Midlands Airport to welcome people arriving there into Leicestershire and the surrounding areas.
18. With the scale of arrivals and work, the emergency response determined that a dedicated team to support the scheme for Leicestershire was required. Recruitment for this team began in August 2022. The team manager and initial staff were in place by November 2022 and the team fully in place by April 2023.

Ukrainians seeking sanctuary in Leicestershire

19. At the end of March 2025 1,279 Ukrainians have arrived to sponsors in Leicestershire on the Homes for Ukraine Sponsorship Scheme. This includes 409 children, seven of which are considered unaccompanied minors at some point.
20. The Service is aware that a number of Ukrainians arrived to stay with family members in Leicestershire on the Ukraine Family Scheme. However, the Service has not been provided with information on these from the Home Office and therefore do not know the number that have arrived via this route.
21. At the end of April 2025 296 Ukrainians including 52 children remain in 166 hosting arrangements. Other Ukrainians have moved into private accommodation in Leicestershire or surrounding areas, moved to other areas of the country or left the UK.
22. All unaccompanied children have transitioned to adulthood or left the area, returning to Ukraine or living with a family member in another area.

Support provided in Leicestershire

23. In order to support Ukrainians seeking sanctuary from war to adapt and integrate to life in Leicestershire a range of measures and support were put in place by local organisations including gym memberships and bus passes. The Department for Education provided one-off funding to be used by March 2024 to be used to support integration into education for Ukrainian children.

24. Recognising the rural nature of the County, the variety of public transport providers and dispersed nature of host accommodation, Leicestershire County Council set up a travel grant for Ukrainians on the Sponsorship scheme. The grant of £65 per person was initially applied for via the Council's website. From November 2023 this was automatically added to the welcome payment for all new arrivals, following analysis of grants applied for and provided.
25. The County Council school admissions team supported Ukrainian children to access schools in Leicestershire, which children and families have found essential in integrating and supporting their wellbeing. School Transport has been provided where necessary with exceptions to policy put in place to recognise the lack of choice Ukrainians have had in where they initially live in Leicestershire, funded through the scheme funding.
26. Additional English Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) provision has been funded through the scheme and provided by Adult Learning, recognising language is key to accessing employment and other services and living well in Leicestershire. This has included summer schools in the summer of 2022, 2023, and 2024. In 2024, in response to feedback and identified needs from guests, discrete courses supporting guests with no English language skills and conversation classes to support broader and informal language skills development were set up. Many Ukrainians also enrolled on mainstream ESOL courses.
27. By April 2023 the Support team was fully in place at the County Council comprising:
 - Three Support workers to carry out welfare checks, provide a first point of contact for guests or host concerns and support guests to access services they need;
 - One Social Worker to oversee work with Unaccompanied Minors and safeguarding issues.
 - Two Housing Options Officers and 1 Rematching Co-ordinator to support guests with accommodation needs, either seeking and supporting move to new hosts, or to understand and access private rental provision;
 - One Portal Co-Ordinator to oversee, develop and manage data, funding and reporting processes;
 - Two Triage Officers to support checks and funding processes, data management and respond to queries;
 - One Project Manager to manage the team and develop the local approach.
28. The Support team was initially set up for one year. As the war continued and the scheme was extended, the team was extended to July 2024, then July 2025, and now with the Ukraine Permission Extension Scheme to July 2026.
29. By January 2023 the team put in place processes to ensure almost all guests were visited within two weeks of arrival. By July 2023 Support Officers had cleared the backlog of welfare visits that were outstanding from the start of the scheme.

30. Support Officers keep in touch with guests and hosts, responding to queries, working to support hosting relationships to continue, and respond to safeguarding issues. Officers have also supported guests to understand and access health services, benefits, and employment and training opportunities, understand education and respond to bullying, and to understand changes to the scheme.
31. The team has sought to enhance engagement with Ukrainians and hosts by attending community groups and events, helping develop local support groups, and organising specific engagement and information events, alongside drop-ins connected to ESOL classes.
32. From November 2023 a Refugee Host Support service to build goodwill and provide an enhanced support service for hosts. The service includes a 24hr helpline, access to a range of resources to support hosts to host well, and financial and legal advice and counselling sessions.
33. Over time Support Officers have been able to build good relationships of trust with hosts and guests, seen through increased contact from guests - in particular regarding concerns and queries, and increased engagement by guests in difficult circumstances. Follow up visits for all hosts and guests who had been in hosting arrangements for two years or more has identified some really positive stories.
34. The Rematching Co-ordinator has worked to recruit new hosts, build a pool of emergency hosts and match guests who need to move on to new hosts. The Service has rematched 165 Ukrainians to new hosts in Leicestershire since the start of the scheme.
35. Housing Officers provide information on options for move on into private accommodation, carry out housing assessments, and help Ukrainians find, move into and settle in independent accommodation. The Service has also funded furniture support linked to a broader Council contract to prevent homelessness to enable Ukrainians to move into private accommodation.
36. The team has supported 98 families with housing advice including direct support to 50 families to move into their own accommodation.
37. Through district councils' homelessness processes, the scheme has funded temporary emergency accommodation for Ukrainians and rent and deposit payments for Ukrainians moving into private rental accommodation, where they could not afford this. With the early support and preventative work of Housing Options Officers, the Service has reduced the amount needed to be spent on temporary accommodation year on year.
38. As the number of Unaccompanied Minors arriving was not as high as expected the Social Work post was not extended beyond 2024 and the two remaining

unaccompanied minors still in hosting arrangements were overseen initially within Social Care and then the Homes for Ukraine team with Social Care oversight, as arrangements were working well.

39. The scheme has funded capacity in Social Care to support ongoing safeguarding checks on hosts and sponsors and any safeguarding matters. The scheme has also funded additional capacity for a Welfare Rights Officer for benefits support for Ukrainians.
40. From June 2024 a Participation Officer: Displaced and Unaccompanied Children was funded for a one-year project to work across the Homes for Ukraine and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) teams to run events to reduce isolation for Ukrainian children and produce resources highlighting the voice of displaced and unaccompanied children to support practice development across partners.
41. Three events for Ukrainian young people have been run to date. These have been well received and have allowed over 60 young people aged 11-18 from across the county to connect with each other. The events have also incorporated information and support including regarding education and choices, coping with the effects of trauma and making decisions about the future in places of uncertainty. This post and project are to be extended to December 2025 to build on the good feedback and close off these areas of work.
42. In response to needs identified in schools the Service set up a School Support Grant in January 2025 to provide additional funding for schools accepting new Ukrainian arrivals for the 2024/25 academic year following the ending of the DfE grant in March 2024. This is in recognition of the really positive impact school, including a good transition into school, has on young people's wellbeing.
43. Levels of presenting demand for support required for Mental Health and trauma has been lower than anticipated. Some community-based support has been funded through the Community Grant, and an evidence based Ukrainian language parent-child mental health support programme is being piloted in 2025. A national support scheme run by Barnardo's has now ended.

Voluntary and Community Support

44. Early in 2022 volunteers in local communities set up support groups in their area to help Ukrainians to settle. Many of these have been maintained by local volunteers and Ukrainians in local areas. Groups continue in Hinckley, Charnwood, Market Harborough, Oadby and Melton, as well as the Association of Ukrainians in Great Britain at the Kalyna club in Leicester. The team continues to liaise with these groups to maintain visibility and accessibility, provide support and gain community feedback.

45. A Ukrainian School runs in Leicester for children across the County and City. It provides Ukrainian education, and activities for Ukrainian children and families.
46. In 2024 Leicestershire County Council set up a Ukrainian Community Grant to support local groups to provide community and peer support to meet needs of Ukrainians in Leicestershire. This is a key strand in supporting ongoing independence of Ukrainians.
47. The grant fund has awarded £41k to date across 14 projects including: Community events and support; Ukrainian school – activities for children and families; Trauma recovery wellbeing sessions; Ukrainian library education and cultural support; Sports outreach and fitness; Integration workshops; English language and wellbeing programme.
48. The Service will consider the monitoring from the initial round of funding and based on this look to continue this funding in 2025/26 to continue to mobilise community support.

Communication and Engagement

49. The support team commenced regular communication with hosts in December 2022 via a newsletter and commenced regular communication with guests via a Ukrainian language newsletter from February 2023.
50. The support team carried out an online survey in 2023 to get views on forward support needs. The feedback from this was used to shape support approaches, initiate the work with young people, and shape ESOL provision.
51. In 2024 the Service set up Community Champions to support us to get messages and communication out into community and local Ukrainians social media groups.
52. The team ran information and feedback events online and in community locations in January 2025 to provide people with information about Ukraine Permission Extension and support available and continue to seek feedback on forward support needs.

'Thank you' payment top ups

53. Since the winter of 2022 the Council has agreed to top up the 'thank you' payments for the months of November to March in recognition of additional costs for hosts. In 2022/23 this was £150 per household per month, in 2023/24 this was £160 per household per month, in 2024/25 this was £170 per household per month. This has been funded from the tariff funding.
54. With the national changes to 'thank you' payments from April 2025, and in response to feedback from guests and hosts the Council will top up all 'thank you' payments by

£150 to £500 per month, to be funded from the tariff funding, but the Service is not intending to add a winter top up.

Forward Demand

55. Hosting rules relating to the Ukraine Permission Extension scheme mean that some Ukrainians could be hosted in Leicestershire to October 2028 or potentially beyond.
56. It is possible that Ukrainians will be able to apply for further periods of extension to their visas after their first one. However, they will not be able to be hosted in those periods.
57. Approximately a third of currently hosted guests will not be able to be hosted after December 2026, A third will not be able to be hosted after July 2027 and hosting for the remaining third will end between then and October 2028.
58. The forward demand for support is difficult to predict with the uncertainty surrounding the ongoing conflict. It is anticipated that a lower capacity of support will be required from October 2026.
59. The support team have had increasing approaches for housing support from guests who had already moved off the scheme into Private Renting but are struggling to maintain this and from Ukrainians on the family scheme, particularly relating to understanding and accessing housing.

Resource Implications

60. The Council's work relating to the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme is fully-funded through the tariff funding for the scheme provided by Central government, and the reimbursement of 'thank you' payments paid at the national rate.

Background papers

61. None

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

62. None

Equality Implications

63. The recommendations in this report directly support Equality Diversity, Inclusion and Community Cohesion.
64. The response of the Council and its partners has been based on providing support to Ukrainians in line with existing policy and procedures, for example regarding homelessness and school transport to support community cohesion. However policy and support have been applied in a way that recognises the specific additional needs

and barriers faced by Ukrainians fleeing war, including language and cultural barriers limited choice in their initial and further location in Leicestershire, and uncertainty of their future plans and location.

65. The ongoing support provided by the scheme aims to continue to support Ukrainians to integrate into communities and empower them to access existing services.

Human Rights Implications

66. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The scheme is operated in line with Central government guidance to provide a humanitarian response for Ukrainians fleeing war.

Officer(s) to Contact

Sharon Cooke

Assistant Director – Targeted Early Help and Children’s Social Care

Telephone: 0116 305 5479

Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

James Fox

Homes for Ukraine Project Manager (job share)

Telephone: 0116 305 8077

Email: James.Fox@leics.gov.uk

Elizabeth Esnouf

Homes for Ukraine Project Manager (job share)

Telephone: 0116 305 0103

Email: Elizabeth.Esnouf@leics.gov.uk

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

QUARTER 4 2024/25 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 January to March 2025 (Quarter 4).

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. 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 4.
4. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.
5. From 13 measures reported that have a national benchmark, one is in the top quartile, four are in the second quartile, seven are in the third quartile and one is in the bottom quartile.

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

6. Local Authority comparisons used in this section are most recent figures published by the government for end of year benchmarking of performance in 2023/24.
7. The percentage of Child Protection cases reviewed within timescales was 88.0% at the end of Quarter 4, with 294 of 334 children having all reviews on time within the last 12 months. This is a decrease compared to the Quarter 3 figure of

90.7% (284 of 313) and continues to place Leicestershire in the third quartile of all local authorities by published benchmarks.

8. The percentage of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time in the year to date increased to 24.9% at the end of Quarter 4 compared to 24.5% at the end of Quarter 3. In this quarter 51 children began a second or subsequent child protection plan, an increase from 41 reported in the preceding quarter. Leicestershire is now placed in the third quartile of local authorities compared to most recent national results published for 2023/24. 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 12 months was 26.4% at the end of Quarter 4 which is similar to 26.2% at the end of the previous quarter; 444 children were 're-referred' within Quarter 4. 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 4 was 83.6%, a slight decrease compared to performance at the end Quarter 3 (85.2%). Within Quarter 4, 1,608 assessments were completed, with 1,268 within timescale. Leicestershire continues to be placed in the second quartile of local authorities using most recent comparisons.
11. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Suitable Accommodation was 94.0% at the end of Quarter 4 (453 out of 482 young people), similar to the end of the previous Quarter (93.8%). Leicestershire continues to be in the top quartile of local authorities using available comparisons.
12. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Education, Employment or Training improved to 62.0% at the end of Quarter 4 (299 out of 482 young people). This is a further increase from the end of Quarter 3, 59.9% and continues to place Leicestershire in the second quartile using available comparisons. 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.
13. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 4 who had a dental check in the preceding 12 months was 76.7% (537 children), an increase from 75.0% reported for the previous quarter.
14. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 4 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months was 86.9% (608 children). This is an increase from 83.9% reported for the previous quarter.

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

15. Due to ongoing work following system changes, specifically relating to Capita/ Synergy, it is not possible to report the total numbers worked with by Targeted Family Help.

16. 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.
17. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) was 2,823 at the Spring term 2025 school census. This is 257 children higher than at the Autumn term 2024 school census (2,566). The Spring term 2025 school census EHCP numbers are the highest recorded on a Spring term census date since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed.
18. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire without an EHCP but in receipt of SEN Support was 13,429 at the Spring term 2025 school census. This is 264 higher than the Autumn term 2024 school census (13,165). The Spring term 2025 school census SEN support numbers are the highest recorded on a Spring term census date since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed.

People are safe in their daily lives

19. Local Youth Justice statistics are regularly reported to the Youth and Justice Management Board. The latest report was presented at the March 2025 board and reported that in Q4 2024/25 there were 17 first time entrants into the criminal justice system. This is a small increase from Q3 2024/25 (14).
20. Local data is currently unavailable for Use of Custody and Re-offending, although Ministry of Justice figures are available in the report.

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

21. The percentage of primary schools rated Good or Outstanding for leadership and management was 92.5% (210 out of 227 inspected schools) at the end of Quarter 4. This represents a 0.4% increase from Quarter 3 2024/25 and is the highest performance since September 2022. This figure is within the third quartile of local authorities and is 0.6% below the England average, which continues to be at a record level (93.1%), and 0.8% lower than the average for Statistical Neighbours (93.3%), which is close to its highest ever level.
22. The percentage of secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding for leadership and management was 90.9% (40 out of 44 inspected schools) at the end of Quarter 4. This represents no change from Quarter 3 2024/25, and it remains Leicestershire's highest performance since September 2017. This performance is within the second quartile of local authorities nationally. Leicestershire's performance is 2% higher than the average for England, which at 88.9% is a new highest ever level of performance, and 1.2% higher than the average for Statistical Neighbours (89.7%), which is also the highest ever performance figure for this group.

23. The percentage of pupils educated in Good or Outstanding schools for leadership and management was 92.2% at the end of Quarter 4 (approx. 92.7k out of 100.5k pupils). This is an increase of 0.2% from Quarter 3 2024/25 (92%) and is Leicestershire's joint highest ever level. This figure is within the third quartile of local authorities nationally. Leicestershire's performance is 0.4% lower than the average for England (92.6%), and 0.7% lower than the average for Statistical Neighbours (92.9%). Both the national and the average Statistical Neighbour performance continue to be at record levels.
24. The Department for Education (DfE) has released the final assessment outcomes for the Secondary school phase of education in 2024. At Key Stage 4 (16-year-olds) the average Progress 8 score for all pupils (7,678 pupils) was -0.10. This performance is within the third quartile of Local Authorities nationally, this represents the second lowest National percentile ranking since 2017. For Free School Meal eligible pupils (1,256 pupils) the average Progress 8 score was -0.76, this performance is within the third quartile nationally. Leicestershire's 2024 National percentile performance for Free School Meal eligible pupils remains above all years previously, except 2019 and 2022.
25. The Progress 8 score for SEN support was -0.51 (992 pupils), and Education and Health Care Plan pupils (EHCP), -0.94 (336 pupils). In comparison to the performance of other local authorities nationally the SEN support performance is within the third quartile, a drop from the second quartile in the previous academic year. The EHCP performance has improved to the second quartile from the third quartile in the previous academic year.
26. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 1,247 at the end of Q4 2024/25. This is an increase of 71 students (6%) compared to the end of Q4 2023/24 (1,176 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. The percentage of young people (16-17) in Leicestershire not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at the end of Q4 2024/25 was 1.5% (235 students). This rate was an increase on the end of Q3 2024/25 (1%), but still below the target of less than 2.1%.
29. The number of permanent exclusions from Leicestershire schools as a percentage of the school population in the 2023/24 academic year was 0.07%. This is the proportionately the same as the previous academic, 2022/23, but over 250% higher than in 2018/19. The number of permanent exclusions increased to 72 in 2023/24, from 67 in 2022/23, and 19 in 2018/19. 2023/24 saw the highest number of permanent exclusions from Leicestershire schools since 2008/09. The national data for benchmarking is not available yet.

30. The number of children receiving at least one fixed term suspension from Leicestershire schools as a percentage of school population in the 2023/24 academic year was 3.62% (3,654 children). This rate is 15% higher than for the last academic year (3.16% and 3,186 children), and 90% higher than the rate for 2018/19 academic year (1.9% and 1,860 children). The 2023/24 performance represents both the highest number of children and highest rate, as a percentage of school population, receiving at least one fixed term suspension since collection of this data began by the Department of Education (DfE) in 2005/06. The national data for benchmarking is not available yet.

Conclusion

31. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of Quarter 4 2024/25, covering the period January to March 2024.
32. Details of all metrics will continue to be monitored on a regular basis throughout the year, and any subsequent changes will be notified in future reports.

Background Papers

33. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

34. None.

Appendix

Children and Family Services Department Performance Dashboard Quarter 4, 2024/25

Officers to Contact

Jane Moore, Director – Children and Family Services

Tel: 0116 305 2649

Email: Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk

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

Tel: 0116 305 5479

Email: Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk

Tim Browne, Assistant Director – Education, SEND and Inclusion

Tel: 0116 305 7429

Email: Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk

Emma Jones, Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

Tel: 0116 305 7526

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














Alex Lea, Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

Tel: 0116 305 6803

Email: Alex.Lea@leics.gov.uk

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CFS Overview & Scrutiny Dashboard Q4 2024/25

Progress Summary				RAG Rating Summary				Quartile Summary				
Improve	No Change	Worse	N/A	Green	Amber	Red	N/A	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	NA
 6	 7	 5	 4	 2	 10	 1	 9	 1	 4	 7	 1	 9

Strategic Plan Outcome

All

Area

All

Search Indicator

All

Area	Indicator	Latest Data	Period	Previous Data	Perform. DOT	Target	RAG	Quartiles
Education	Children Electively Educated at Home	1247	Q4 2024/25	1176		NA	 N/A	NA
	Children receiving at least one fixed term suspension as a % of School population	3.62	2023/24	3.2		NA	 N/A	NA
	KS4 - Progress 8	-0.1	2023/24	-0.09		NA	 A	3rd
	KS4 - Progress 8 (EHCP)	-0.94	2023/24	-1.11		NA	 A	2nd
	KS4 - Progress 8 (FSM)	-0.76	2023/24	-0.76		NA	 A	3rd
	KS4 - Progress 8 (SEN Support)	-0.51	2023/24	-0.38		NA	 A	3rd
	NEET young people aged 16-17	1.5%	Q4 2024/25	1.0%		NA	 N/A	NA
	Permanent exclusions as a % of School population	0.07	2023/24	0.07		NA	 N/A	NA
	Primary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for leadership and managem..	92.5%	Q4 2024/25	92.1%		NA	 A	3rd
	Pupils in Good or Outstanding schools for leadership and management	92.2%	Q4 2024/25	92.0%		NA	 A	3rd
	Secondary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for leadership and managem..	90.9%	Q4 2024/25	90.9%		NA	 A	2nd
	Children in mainstream schools in receipt of SEN Support (without EHCP)	13429	Spring Term 2025	13165		NA	 N/A	NA
SEND	Children in mainstream schools with EHCP	2823	Spring Term 2025	2566		NA	 N/A	NA
	Assessments completed within 45 days	83.6%	Q4 2024/25	85.2%		>90.3%	 A	2nd
Social Care	Care leavers EET	62.0%	Q4 2024/25	59.9%		>54.0%	 G	2nd
	Care leavers in suitable accommodation	94.0%	Q4 2024/25	93.8%		>92.0%	 G	1st
	Child protection cases which were reviewed within timescales	88.0%	Q4 2024/25	90.7%		>97.2%	 A	3rd
	Children becoming subject to a CPP for second or subsequent time	24.9%	Q4 2024/25	24.5%		<20.8%	 A	3rd
	Children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	76.7%	Q4 2024/25	75.0%		NA	 N/A	NA
	Children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (..	86.9%	Q4 2024/25	83.9%		NA	 N/A	NA
	Re-referrals to CSC within 12 mths	26.4%	Q4 2024/25	26.2%		<18.7%	 R	4th
	No. of first time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10-17 (year to date)	17	Q3 2024/25	14		NA	 N/A	NA
Youth Justice								

