



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

*Date/Time:* **Tuesday, 2 September 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
Mrs. L. Danks CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Emily Greasley	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Canon. C. Shoyer
Adina Murataj	Mr. C. A. Smith CC
Mr. D. Page CC	Mrs D. Taylor CC

### **AGENDA**

<u>Item</u>	<u>Report by</u>
1. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 June 2025.	(Pages 3 - 12)
2. Question Time.	
3. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).	
4. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.	
5. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.	
6. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.	



7. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.
8. Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) Programme Summary and High Needs Block Update. (Pages 13 - 28)
9. Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024-25. (Pages 29 - 74)
10. Children in Need of Help and Protection. (Pages 75 - 82)
11. Leicestershire Music Overview Report. (Pages 83 - 88)
12. Quarter 1 2025-26 Performance Report. (Pages 89 - 100)
13. Draft Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2024-25. (Pages 101 - 176)
14. Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025. (Pages 177 - 218)
15. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting of the Commission is scheduled to take place on 4 November 2025.

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



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 3 June 2025.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC  
Mr. K. Crook CC  
Mrs. L. Danks CC  
Mrs. K. Knight CC  
Mr. J. McDonald CC  
Mr. B. Piper CC

Mr J. Poland CC  
Mr. K. Robinson CC  
Mrs B. Seaton CC  
Canon. C. Shoyer  
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In Attendance

Mr. C. Pugsley CC – Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted 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.

It was moved by Mr Bill Piper CC and seconded by Mr Kim Robinson CC:

“That Mrs Linda Danks CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

It was moved by Mr Craig Smith CC and seconded by Mr James Poland CC:

“That Mrs Deborah Taylor CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council”.

The Chairman informed members that both candidates had been duly proposed and seconded. In accordance with item 4 of Standing Order 27 a secret ballot would therefore take place.

The Chief Executive announced the results of the ballot, as follows:

Six votes for Mrs Linda Danks CC, four votes for Mrs Deborah Taylor CC, and one abstention. The motion “That Mrs Linda Danks CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council” was carried.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

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

Question asked by Mrs Sue Whiting:

“Could the Chair please state the number of Education Health Care Need Assessments (EHCNA) refused since 1st September 2024 which have then subsequently been appealed/been through mediation/gone to tribunal, with the result of an EHCNA and subsequent Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)?”

Response by the Chairman:

Since 1st September 2024, 306 Education Health Care Need Assessments have been refused. 112 of these appealed to mediation and 24 appealed to tribunal. 49% of mediations resulted in an EHCP being issued or an Education Health Care Need Assessment undertaken. All of the appeals to tribunals were conceded and have been issued as plans or have an Education Health Care Need Assessments.

Sue Whiting asked the following supplementary question:

“I’m a little puzzled by 49% of mediations resulted in an EHCP being issued or an Education Health Care Need Assessment undertaken. Is it possible to have the actual number of children this refers to please, for clarification?”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded to say that of the 112 cases which had been appealed, 57 of those cases were upheld and 55 were conceded. These 55 children were either allocated with an EHCP or were progressing through the assessment process.

5. 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).

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest.

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

Mr. D. Page CC cleared a Non-Registerable Interest in agenda item 10: School Place Planning and Admissions, as he had served as a parent governor at a school.

Mr. M. Bools CC declared a Non-Registerable Interest in agenda item 10: School Place Planning and Admissions, as he was a parent governor at a school.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

10. School Place Planning and Admissions.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the processes and work around school admissions and school organisation, the issues arising and anticipated trends. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was pleased with the performance of the admissions service, given that over 95% of children had secured their first preference school and over 99% had secured one of their preferences. He emphasised that this demonstrated the strength of policies relating to school-based planning and the robust execution of those policies by the Department. The Department had a clear strategy with nearly 5,000 new school places being delivered through the capital program, including for a significant number for children with SEND. He stated that the Department was operating effectively as it responded to growing demand at secondary level and to falling birth rates in some areas.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A question was raised relating to phase transfer allocations. The total number of applications had reduced from 7410 in 2022 to 7141 in 2025. This was in line with a reduction in the number of infant to junior school transfers, which had also decreased over the same period. However, the number of secondary transfers had increased from 7918 in 2022 to 8261 in 2025. The Director stated that this was a result of a significant increase in the transfer into secondary provision nationally, a reduction in the number of late applications received, changes to the independent schools' sector, and a year-on-year migration of pupils from neighbouring authorities.
- (ii) Members noted that the causes of parents requesting a school place outside the normal admissions round or part-way through an academic year were recorded and monitored. The Department ensured that it had spare capacity within the school system in line with recommendations set by the National Audit Office so that parents have the opportunity to request a mid-term transfer. A Fair Access Panel supported parents in accessing an alternative school place for their child. In addition to this, the Inclusion Team supported pupils to access an alternative school place in cases where they had been removed the school roll without a permanent exclusion, referred to as off-rolling.

- (iii) It was reported that some primary schools had struggled to maintain balanced budgets, as a result of smaller cohorts in the lower primary school year groups, which was linked to a reduction in birth rate. The issue had presented unsustainable pupil numbers for some primary schools and academies. The Director stated that Leicestershire's Planning Obligation Policy (LPOP) was under review and was likely to be adopted later in the year. A new school place planning strategy would be introduced as a result of this review. As part of this review, the Council would consult with schools regarding pupil capacity and review Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) where necessary.
- (iv) With regards to the utilisation of Section 106 contributions in order to ensure sufficient school places, a pupil ratio yield was used to assess and seek development contributions for education facilities. The contributions received were allocated to projects which either delivered new school places or allowed for enhancements to be made to existing schools. As Section 106 contribution funding was agreed at the point of the planning application having been submitted and approved, rising costs, often within the construction sector, presented significant challenges in the delivery of school schemes within the original Section 106 contribution amendment. In addition, a number of developers had requested a new primary school to be built alongside a development in order to increase appeal. However, the pupil ratio yield often indicated that a new school would not be necessary.
- (v) A question was raised relating to whether a new secondary school was expected to be built within the Harborough district. The Director stated that the Council would be consulted on the sufficiency of school places within the area as part of the local plan process and would make a consideration for any new school against the pupil yield ratio. Members noted that the Council had an obligation to ensure the viability of the whole school system. As there were smaller cohorts of primary aged children across the county at the time, this was expected to affect the cohort of secondary aged school children in some years.
- (vi) In response to concern regarding a reduction in Basic Need funding, capital funding from the Department of Education (DfE) for the provision of additional mainstream school places, the Director stated that the Department would approach DfE if there was an impact in the Council delivering its statutory obligation for ensuring a sufficient supply of school places.

#### RESOLVED:

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

#### 11. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Children in Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care, including children seeking asylum. The report also outlined progress achieved and the development plan going forward. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was pleased to see such strong indicators consistency within the care system with all children having had up-

to-date plans and 90% of health and dental checks having been completed on time. He emphasised that the Department was meeting its core responsibilities as well as ensuring good outcomes for children in care.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A member raised concern regarding the accessibility of the Disabled Childrens Service for families who were supporting children with complex needs. The Director stated that the Service was not responsible for providing support to all disabled children, but to children whereby an assessment had identified that they and their families would benefit from social work involvement. The Director agreed to respond to concerns relating to accessibility of the Service outside of the meeting with the member.
- (ii) In response to a question regarding the number of staff employed within the Children in Care Service, the Director stated that the Service comprised of four teams. Each team had a manager, five social workers and a senior practitioner. No vacancies were held within the Service, but it did reserve positions for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme and apprenticeships. The Director assured members that although the number of children in care was increasing, this growth had been built into the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in order to ensure that there were a sufficient number of social workers to support children.
- (iii) With regards to support available for staff, the Director stated that it was recognised that staff worked within a challenging environment and were supported in various ways. Members noted that staff had monthly supervisions which presented an opportunity to discuss cases, personal supervision which focussed on wellbeing, pods whereby teams could collaborate to discuss complex cases and challenges, and appraisals whereby wellbeing and training would be discussed. In addition to this, the practice excellence team was responsible for supporting staff through observing practice. The Council also had a wealth of wellbeing resources available to staff which included a counselling service. Members noted that the Department was mindful of experience, and therefore staff being trained the ASYE programme were allocated with a protected number of cases.
- (iv) Members noted that of the 717 children in care at the time, 206 of those were being supported by the family safeguarding service which would determine what the long-term plan for those children would be. In addition to this, 82 became looked after due to seeking asylum, 388 were children with a care plan of long-term care in the Children in Care service, and 41 were supported by the Disabled Children's Service.
- (v) In response to a question relating to how the Service overcame language barriers when supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), the Director stated that interpreters were present in meetings in order to facilitate communication between the child and social workers. In addition to this, UASC were enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses to assist with to reading, writing and speaking English.
- (vi) With regards to the assessment process relating to UASC, the Director stated that the Department would undertake a Merton compliant age assessment, follow government guidance, and refer to a court assessment. In order to make a

judgement on claimed age, the Service would consider their life journey and experiences in their country of birth, as well as a genogram. In the event that the individual was considered to be of adult age, the Home Office would then be responsible for their support.

#### RESOLVED:

That the overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care, including children seeking asylum, progress achieved and the development plan going forward, be noted.

#### 12. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Care Leavers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question asked regarding the responsibility for care leavers who had moved into another authority area, the Director stated that the Council would still be responsible for providing care leaver support to those individuals.
- (ii) Members noted that Personal Assistants (PA) were directly employed by the Council. All children in care were allocated with a PA from the age of 16 in order to support the establishment of a meaningful and trusting relationship prior to turning 18.
- (iii) With regards to support for the 37% of care leavers not in employment, education or training, the Director stated that senior practitioners were focussed on supporting these individuals. The Service was developing opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships, in addition to developing relationships with other organisations which provide support for those not in employment, education or training. Members noted that some of this cohort would be work ready, but that some would require additional support.
- (iv) In response to a question regarding the number of care leavers which had received a bursary for university of £4,000, as part of the local care leaver offer, the Director stated that she would provide this figure to members after the meeting.
- (v) At the request of the Chairman, the Director agreed to provide members with additional information relating to the journey of care leavers, in order to increase awareness of their experiences following leaving care.

#### RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward, be noted.



- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with the number of care leavers which had received a bursary for university of £4,000, as part of the local care leaver offer.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with additional information relating to the journey of care leavers.

13. Families First Reforms - Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided the Committee with an overview of the national reforms for children's services, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive; and details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that although the reforms were being introduced nationally, it was important that the Council was taking steps to respond in order to ensure that correct the approach was being taken. He emphasised that early work being delivered on workforce data and partnership working would ensure that the Department was in a position to respond effectively and would provide the opportunity to build on good practice which was being delivered. He stated that he was confident that the Department would continue to focus on delivering early, meaningful support to families and achieving lasting positive outcomes for children.

A question was raised regarding the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant. The Director stated that the £270 million grant was new funding which had been made available through the final local government finance settlement to support local authorities to deliver preventative support to children. Of the total grant amount, the Council would receive £1.4m which would be utilised in order to develop an implementation plan for both designing and implementing services in line within the national reforms. It was unclear whether the grant amount would be sufficient to cover the costs of service delivery. However, the Department would utilise existing prevention funding in order to fully deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire.

**RESOLVED:**

That the overview of national reforms for children's services, Keeping children Safe, Helping Families thrive; and details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire, be noted.

14. Local Delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and the support provided locally by the County Council. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) In response to a question relating to funding for the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, the Director stated that Council's work relating to the scheme continued to

be fully funded through tariff funding provided by Central government, and that the reimbursement of 'thank you' payments were paid at the national rate.

- (ii) Members were pleased with support which had been provided to Ukrainian families and wished to place on record their thanks to both hosts and officers for their ongoing work and support.

#### RESOLVED:

That the overview of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the support provided locally by the County Council over the past three years, be noted.

#### 15. Quarter 4 2024/25 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2025 (Quarter 4). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 15', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding whether the standard of education of children who were electively home educated (EHE) was monitored, the Director stated that the Council had no formal powers or duty to monitor the provision of education at home. Once parents had made the decision to EHE, they would then be responsible for ensuring that the child received a good quality education. The Department continued to offer support where it was requested by parents and promoted useful networks, but oversight was limited. If sufficient information about the home education had not been provided and it appeared that a child was not receiving a suitable education at home, the Council could serve a s.437(1) notice, requiring that the parents satisfy the Council that the child was receiving a full-time and efficient education at home which was suitable to the child's needs. If the parents failed to satisfy the Council that the child was receiving a suitable education, then it could serve a school attendance order.
- (ii) Concern was raised regarding the safeguarding of children who were not on roll within a school. The Director acknowledged the importance of a child being in school and stated that the Council had a duty to safeguard all children and had undertaken work to ensure that the public, parents and families were aware of safeguarding and child protection. Concerns regarding safeguarding were expected to be raised by the community. The Department continued to have contact with families with a child not in school and used the opportunity to look at the family's life.
- (iii) Members noted that the Council continued to follow national policy guidance on EHE and had reviewed internal policy to ensure that parents and children received the correct level of support with the decision to EHE. The reasons behind the decision to EHE were collected and monitored in order to inform the strategy for EHE. The Department continued to work constructively with families in order to ensure that children received the best education to meet their needs whether that was in a school environment or at home.

#### RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2025 (Quarter 4), be noted.

16. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 September at 14:00.

2.00 - 4.04 pm  
03 June 2025

CHAIRMAN

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**TRANSFORMING SEND AND INCLUSION IN LEICESTERSHIRE (TSIL)**  
**PROGRAMME SUMMARY AND HIGH NEEDS BLOCK UPDATE**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the work and impact of the Transforming SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme. It sets out the progress since the update considered by the Committee on 5 September 2024, programme impact and next steps, as well as an overview of the current High Needs Block financial position.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Children and Families Act 2014 sets out the legal duties that local authorities and Integrated Care Boards must fulfil for children and young people with SEND aged 0-25. This includes a duty to identify and assess the SEND of children and young people in their area when they become aware that they have or may have SEND, and to provide special educational provision where this is identified in an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
3. The SEND Code of Practice 2015 sets out the statutory guidance for supporting children and young people with SEND. This includes the legal framework for making decisions around requests for Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs).
4. The financial framework for pupils with High Needs and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) are outlined within the School and Early Years (Finance) Regulations and associated guidance issued by the Department for Education.
5. In March 2022, the Government outlined its ambitions for changes to the SEND system and opened a period of consultation on the proposals which Leicestershire responded to. The Green Paper, 'SEND review: Right support, Right place, Right time' proposed some fundamental changes to the SEND system. In response, the national SEND and AP Improvement Plan was published in March 2023, outlining a vision for a more inclusive, consistent, and financially sustainable system. The national Change Partnership Programme (CPP) was then established to test and refine the proposed reforms in real-world settings before rolling them out nationally.

6. In September 2022, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report which informed members on the development of the TSIL programme.
7. In November 2022, the Children and Family Services department was reinspected as a follow up to the local area SEND inspection which took place in Leicestershire in February 2020 by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC). A full update on the reinspection was provided to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in January 2023. The outcome of the inspection has further informed the progress and direction of the TSIL programme.
8. In March 2023, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered an update provided about the commencement of the TSIL programme.
9. The Scrutiny Commission also received a report in March 2023 regarding the SEND Service and Finance which provided an overview of support to children and young people with SEND, the position regarding provision, and the Council's financial position in relation to SEND. The Chairman and Spokespersons of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to this meeting.
10. In January 2024 and September 2024, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered further updates on progress of the TSIL programme.
11. In January 2025, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027, noting the ongoing demand pressures on the High Needs Block and agreeing a strategic direction for improvements to partnership SEND services supporting Education, Health and Social Care in Leicestershire.

## **Background**

### **Programme background and financial drivers for change**

12. Since the introduction of the Children and Families Act 2014 and SEND code of practice in 2015, significant and sustained increased demand for SEND support including Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and High Needs funding to support educational settings to meet needs has led to an unsustainable financial position for Local Authorities nationwide.
13. Despite substantial increases in government funding for High Needs, funding has not kept pace with the increase in children and young people with EHCPs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies in their report of December 2024 noted that nationally, per-EHCP funding has fallen by around a third in real terms between 2015/16 and 2024/25.
14. In England, additional funding for pupils with SEND comes from different 'blocks' within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) provided by the DfE either directly to schools or via the Local Authority following issuing of an EHCP. Leicestershire's DSG allocation for 2025/26 is £790.7m, of which £117.4m is allocated for pupils with High Needs and means that Leicestershire is the 5<sup>th</sup> lowest funded authority of gross DSG funding per mainstream pupil.

15. The **Schools Block** includes universal per-pupil funding and a delegated notional SEND budget of £6,000 per pupil with additional needs. Schools block funding is provided directly to schools as part of the annual DSG grant allocation. The £6,000 notional SEND funding amount has remained unchanged since its introduction in 2014 despite rising costs and increasing demand for SEND provision.
16. The **High Needs Block (HNB)** is provided for pupils with more complex SEND and funds the top-up cost (additional variable cost) which when added to the delegated SEND funding will fund the full cost of meeting the needs of children and young people set out in their EHCP in a mainstream school. High Needs block funding is allocated on an individual child basis to schools as agreed through their EHCP following a request for an EHCNA. Once agreed, the EHCP is reviewed and updated at least annually to ensure it continues to reflect the needs and support requirements of the child.
17. Slightly different funding arrangements are in place for pupils in special schools and independent special schools which are fully funded through HNB funding.
18. Most local authorities in England spend more on meeting their statutory obligations to support children with High Needs than available funding. Since 2020, local authorities have been able to accumulate a DSG deficit which does not impact the wider Local Authority budget through a temporary statutory accounts override which has recently been extended to March 2028. Unless further legislation changes this, from April 2028 Local Authorities will be required to make financial provision for the deficit within their wider budget.
19. In response to concerns around unsustainable levels of SEND deficits, the Department for Education (DfE) implemented a 'Changes Approach' in 2020. Nine Local Authorities with the highest level of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit were entered into 'Safety Valve Agreements'. A further 55 local authorities (including Leicestershire) with less severe but substantial deficits were invited to join the 'Delivering Better Value in SEND Programme' in 2022. Leicestershire concluded its involvement in the DBV programme when it ceased in March 2025.
20. Leicestershire's SEND arrangements were inspected by Ofsted and the CQC in 2020 and reinspected in 2022, resulting in a Written Statement of Action and an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) being established. A revised SEND local area inspection framework was introduced by the Government in April 2024 and Leicestershire is awaiting an inspection under the new framework.

### **The Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire Programme**

21. Between 2016 and 2022, Leicestershire saw an increase of 94% in the number of children and young people supported through an EHCP, compared to a national increase of 85% over the same time period. In March 2022, the current financial position facing the Authority as set out in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), indicated a cumulative DSG deficit in 2025/26 of £84 million if nothing was done to reduce demand and make significant savings.
22. In recognition of the increasing demand for support for SEND and the anticipated financial position, a change programme known as Transforming SEND and Inclusion

in Leicestershire (TSIL) was established in August 2022 with partners across the SEND system, with the aim of creating a sustainable system for the future.

23. This programme built on a previous High Needs Block development programme using a wider whole-system approach to support inclusion in mainstream wherever possible. This was supported by a third-party partner, Newton Europe, which was commissioned to support the programme, provide external challenge to the system, and to ensure effective, child-centred delivery. Newton Europe were the Department for Education's delivery partner for the Delivering Better Value programme and had detailed understanding of Leicestershire's SEND system as a result.
24. Collaborative working with a wide range of parents, young people, leaders, and staff across the education system (early years, mainstream, specialist provision and further education) and health, was essential to design and implement an inclusive system that puts independence, outcomes, and educational achievement at the centre.
25. A diagnostic was undertaken in late 2021 to understand the challenges and difficulties in the local SEND system and to inform programme planning for the TSIL programme. Using the evidence and data from the diagnostic, which highlighted the biggest challenges to meeting the needs of children and young people in the right place at the right time, the delivery of the programme was structured around four key workstreams where positive improvements could be made:
  - Inclusive Practice;
  - Service Transformation;
  - Accurate Information;
  - Communication and Engagement.
26. Throughout the programme, these four workstream areas have been connected and underpinned by a set of principles:
  - Maintain a focus on children and young people;
  - No one person or organisation can solve the problems alone;
  - Shift to a mindset of collective responsibility;
  - Work in genuine partnership;
  - Foster good working relationships;
  - Improved and honest communication;
  - Define roles and responsibilities;
  - Set clear expectations;
  - Make transparent and robust decisions;
  - Support children and young people early and close to home.
27. An initial programme Design phase, using a test and learn approach, commenced towards the end of 2022 and continued into 2023. Potential improvements and changes were tested and understood before being implemented across the system. A key principle of the approach in different workstreams was 'design by doing', trialling and iterating new ways of working to maximise the impact as soon as possible.



28. During the Design phase, Leicestershire received a reassessment of SEND services and provision by Ofsted and the CQC in November 2022, and findings were incorporated into TSIL programme workstreams.
29. In the second half of 2023, the TSIL programme moved into an Implementation and Sustainability phase where improvements created in the Design phase were rolled out with the relevant teams or stakeholders to deliver change. There was a strong focus on ensuring that changes were sustainably embedded by tracking and driving measurable progress in each area.
30. In April 2024, the TSIL programme moved into a Continuous Improvement phase, focused on ensuring that changes made through the programme continue to be embedded, monitoring ongoing programme benefits, and continuing to progress with areas of further opportunity.
31. Newton Europe subsequently carried out two Health Checks on the ongoing sustainability of the changes embedded through the TSIL programme in August 2024 and February 2025. Both checks were beneficial in highlighting areas of developing and continuing good practice and providing an external perspective on progress with continuous improvement and iterative service changes. Health check findings have been incorporated into the ongoing TSIL Continuous Improvement programme.
32. TSIL ways of working have transitioned into business-as-usual service delivery during 2025, with solid performance frameworks continuing to monitor ongoing sustainability and evidence-based approaches to continued service improvements now embedded. Heads of Service across Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs are now leading on the ongoing development of their services, building on the learning from the TSIL programme and continuing to work with partners to create a more sustainable SEND system.

### **TSIL programme achievements 2022-2025**

#### **Inclusive practice**

33. The Inclusive Practice workstream aimed to ensure everyone involved in supporting children and young people with SEND takes action and gives the right support where needed. Key areas of delivery included:
34. *Early Years* – Ensuring early and consistent planning and preparation for an inclusive and successful transition from early years to primary school for children with SEND. Focused work in Early Years ensures children are set up to start school in the best way possible with the right level of support to achieve their outcomes, using a clear scoring of needs and a transition document to assist families throughout this crucial period. Through the joint working set up through TSIL and the use of the 'Demand Management' tool, 44 young people started mainstream schools in September 2023 and another 52 in September 2024 where there was a strong parental preference for a specialist setting and/or professional indication of specialist required. At the end of the Autumn Term, when intensive transition support ended for each cohort, these children were happy and thriving within their mainstream school. Over £2m of specialist placement costs have been avoided through the Early Years workstream to date. Work has continued to support a new cohort of 272 Early Years children due to start school in September 2025.

35. *Inclusive Practice Toolkit* - The toolkit provides guidance on a common set of expectations about what schools should be doing to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, and where they can get additional support – also known as the Ordinarily Available Offer. The primary objective is to promote inclusive practices in Leicestershire schools and provides a framework to talk about provision, as well as roles and responsibilities within the system. The toolkit has been well used with over 5,900 visits to the webpages since their launch in August 2023.
36. *Specialist Provisions in Leicestershire (SPIL)* - The SPIL guide and directory Co-produced with the Leicestershire SEND hub aims to encourage parent/carers to actively explore alternative settings (e.g., mainstream and resource bases) by allowing comparison of different types of educational settings and provision available to make more informed decisions for children and young people with SEND. The SPIL directory and the SEND Provision in Leicestershire Guide were the top downloaded documents on the Council's website during 2024 and have collectively been downloaded over 4,000 times since June 2024.
37. *Setting Specific Planning* – Introduced a process of high support and high challenge for a targeted group of schools and trusts who have data that indicates they would benefit from support with the inclusion of children and young people with SEND. This ensures a consistent and high standard of SEND best practice in Leicestershire schools. The Education Effectiveness Team have worked with 36 schools since March 2024, who have benefited from support with the inclusion of children and young people with SEND.
38. *Service demands and impacts* - Supporting Autism Outreach and Inclusion services to make data-driven decisions about their capacity and provision, enabling more effective and more timely interventions for children and young people with SEND.

### **Service transformation**

39. The Service Transformation workstream built robust processes and operating models within the SENA service to ensure the local authority understands the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families and makes transparent, needs-based decisions with timely and clear communication. Key areas of delivery included:
40. *SENA operating model* – A new SENA operating model was introduced through TSIL which aimed to enhance productivity by around 30% and streamline operations by focusing on specialised areas where teams can excel. It introduced new ways of working to facilitate smoother collaboration and efficiency and facilitate robust decision making. The SENA teams which support assessments, reviews and placements have now embedded the changes introduced through TSIL and have continued to improve ways of working to better tackle the high levels of demand for EHCNAs facing the Service. Digital process improvements focused on increasing process efficiency and improving communication with parents and carers have been introduced during 2025 which are already reducing the number of complaints received by the SENA service and delivering faster decisions on requests for EHCNAs. Complaints received by the Service are down by 70% from an average of 41 complaints per month between April 2024 and March 2025 to an average of 12 complaints per month between April and July 2025. Further changes due to be

introduced in September 2025 to the SENA operating model are proposed to enable improved ongoing case management.

41. *SENA workload management* - New processes and tools improved workload visibility through stronger reporting, and performance improvement via ongoing KPI reviews. When staff were approached for their views, 94% of the surveyed SENA staff agreed that changes in their ways of working will lead to long-term benefits. There is strong ownership of performance and KPIs by the team which are reviewed weekly and used to drive operational improvements.
42. *Needs descriptors* – Early work on the development of needs descriptors allowing for more consistent and transparent decision making around levels of need was undertaken through the TSIL programme and has now been progressed into a proposed introduction of a banded model for EHCP funding which was reported to Cabinet in July 2025.

### **Accurate data and information**

43. The Accurate Data and Information workstream worked to ensure that across the Local Authority there is accurate and timely information about children and young people and service performance, owned by service areas, to support evidence-based decision making. Key areas of delivery included:
44. *Data visibility* - Throughout the programme, processes were improved to ensure collection and recording of the right information to drive key metrics and provide clear visibility through dashboards to ensure evidence-based decisions and improve operational performance. 17 new tableau dashboards have been developed to enable visibility of performance data tracking improvement progress, driving increased accountability.
45. *Forecasting* - An improved pupil forecasting methodology that takes into account the historic EHCP trends and specialist capacity was developed through the TSIL programme. This helps the Service to more accurately model financial outturns and make strategic decisions around capacity and demand.
46. *Finance data* - A Power App has been designed to ensure more structured and timely finance data collection, improving the accuracy of financial spend. Additionally, it enhances the visibility of data quality issues and prompts appropriate early action to remedy any concerns.
47. *CATT (Consults and Allocations Triage Tool)* – The CATT provides visibility of the consults sent to schools when seeking a suitable place for a child or young person with an EHCP, their responses and their vacancies, which allows us to consult in a targeted and effective way. Further work is underway to refine the CATT to support planning for sufficiency of school placements.

### **Communication and engagement**

48. The Communication and engagement workstream ensured that everyone had an opportunity to work together to improve the offer available to children and young people and understands the part they play in making a difference.

49. Throughout the programme, there was a focus on providing regular updates to stakeholders, and internal staff briefings providing information about Programme progress, next steps and evidence of impact. A system leadership group including school leaders in Leicestershire which has represented the local education system acted as a critical friend for the programme. Work is continuing throughout TSIL Continuous Improvement to foster co-production and co-design on a number of activities.
50. The local Parent Carer Forum, the Leicestershire SEND Hub, has also been a key partner supporting co-production in all phases of the programme. Work with the SEND Hub has been aligned to other activity and co-production around the departments Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) and the DfE Change Programme Partnership, as well as contributing to the strengthening and maturity of the Council's relationship with this key strategic partner.

### **Change Programme Partnership (CPP)**

51. As part of the Continuous Improvement phase of the TSIL programme, Leicestershire is part of the Leicester City, Leicestershire and Rutland local area partnership who are collectively taking part in the national Change Programme Partnership for SEND and Alternative Provision reforms. The CPP was launched by the Department for Education (DfE) in September 2023 to test and deliver reforms to SEND and Alternative Provision with a small group of local area partnerships. The Programme has recently been extended to March 2026 and includes a number of new areas to test and learn from, with a specific focus around supporting mainstream inclusion.
52. During 2024, a Local Area Inclusion Plan (LAIP) was developed to replace the existing self-evaluation of local partnership SEND arrangements which supports the work of the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board. This document tested a new format for self-evaluation which drew together data and information about services across local partners. The LAIP informed a recent refresh of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2025-2028 which was reported to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee in January 2025.
53. As part of the CPP, Leicestershire has been an early adopter for the Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) programme and is actively working with a selection of local primary schools to test models of support to enable neurodivergent children and young people to remain in mainstream education.
54. The Early Language and Support for Every Child programme (ELSEC) also being managed through the CPP is focusing on early identification and support for children and young people with Speech, Language and Communication needs, with the aim of reducing the rate of referrals, increasing workforce capacity and improving the join up between Health and Education.

### **Performance framework and culture**

55. A clear performance framework was established early in 2024 is now well embedded, with appropriate governance and ownership of KPIs supporting meaningful performance support and challenge. This framework ensures accountability among senior managers, fosters a data-driven performance culture, and instils confidence in service operation and performance. Continuous improvement of the performance

framework includes a focus on improving data quality and the visibility and use of operational KPIs, with additional performance dashboard builds underway.

56. Financial performance is monitored monthly both for TSIL benefits and MTFS monitoring cycles and further work is underway in order to refine forecasting methodology.
57. The Education Quality and Performance Service was introduced in 2024 and is now well established with roles including a Sustainability Officer in place to ensure the ongoing assurance of TSIL processes and structures and sustainability of TSIL savings. This role is working well with the wider teams engaged in TSIL and is supporting continuous improvement and iteration of processes, monitoring the impact on KPIs and finances and undertaking case audits on a regular basis to assess ongoing compliance.

### **TSIL programme impact**

#### **More children and young people supported through EHCPs in mainstream schools**

58. Pre-TSIL, the proportion of children and young people with EHCPs placed in mainstream schools was an average of 41.5% of the total number of EHCPs between 2020/21 to 2022/23, with 28.8% placed in special schools and 7.4% in independent special schools.
59. The impact of TSIL on the proportion of placements now made in mainstream schools is significant, with 50.8% of EHCPs projected to be for children and young people in mainstream schools in 2025/26, and a reduced proportion of placements in special schools (22.3%) and independent special schools (6.2%).
60. As a result of this change to the overall placement mix, analysis suggests that the programme has enabled around 750 more children and young people with EHCPs to be educated within a mainstream school than would have been achieved pre-TSIL.

#### **Avoided costs**

61. The TSIL programme is forecast to have enabled £16.6m of avoided costs this financial year. The current Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) projects a total of £34.2m of defined opportunities for avoided costs through the TSIL programme by the end of 2028/29. A refresh of both projected costs and offsetting opportunities is currently being undertaken as part of MTFS budget planning.

#### **Slower growth in EHCPs**

62. From a starting position of higher-than-average growth in the number of children supported through EHCPs in Leicestershire, growth in EHCPs over the course of the TSIL programme (2022-2025) has slowed by comparison with the national average. Based on the latest published DfE data, Leicestershire showed a 24% increase in EHCPs during this period against a 35% national increase over the same period.

### **Reduction in requests for tribunals and complaints**

63. Robustness of decision making and strengthened communication introduced through the TSIL programme saw a reduction in requests for tribunal reviews of decisions around EHCPs which often lead to the Courts overturning the decision of the Local Authority, from 234 received in 2022 to 193 in 2024.
64. As noted in paragraph 40, complaints received by the SENA service are down 70% since April 2025 compared to the previous year, demonstrating the impact of improvements to timeliness, communication and processes.

### **Ongoing legacy of inclusive practice within Leicestershire**

65. The Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire programme has built a shared ethos of inclusive practice across the SEND system, which continues to encourage children and young people to be supported within mainstream schools where their needs can be met in this type of setting.
66. Despite the ongoing challenge of funding and increasing demand, inclusion within mainstream schools continues to produce the best possible educational outcomes for most children and young people with SEND. Ongoing work with schools continues to reinforce the importance of inclusive practice and expectations of schools to make suitable accommodations to support SEND through the SEND code of practice.

### **Educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND**

67. Where children and young people with SEND receive high-quality, inclusive teaching within a mainstream school setting, research from the Education Endowment Foundation in their 2025 report demonstrates that their educational outcomes can be expected to improve.
68. Progress 8 is a value-added measure used in England to assess how much progress pupils make between the end of Key Stage 2 (age 11) and Key Stage 4 (age 16). The average progress 8 score for young people with EHCPs in Leicestershire using the latest published data for 2023/24 is significantly better at -0.94 than the national average of -1.13 and is improving over time from -1.19 in 2021/22.
69. The proportion of 19-year-olds with EHCPs achieving a level 2 qualification in Leicestershire has improved from 10.1% in 2021/22 to 20.4% in 2023/24 and is now above the national average of 18.3%. Improvements have also been noted in the proportion of 19-year-olds with EHCPs achieving a level 3 qualification, which has improved from 8.3% in 2021/22 to 12.2% in 2023/24 and is moving closer to the national average of 14.2%.

### **Current demand pressures and HNB position**

#### **EHCNA requests and EHCPs**

70. Despite the work undertaken through the TSIL programme, significant demand pressure remains locally and nationally for support for children and young people with SEND. The number of requests for EHCNAs in Leicestershire increased 12% in 2024, in line with a similar (11.7%) increase in requests nationally.

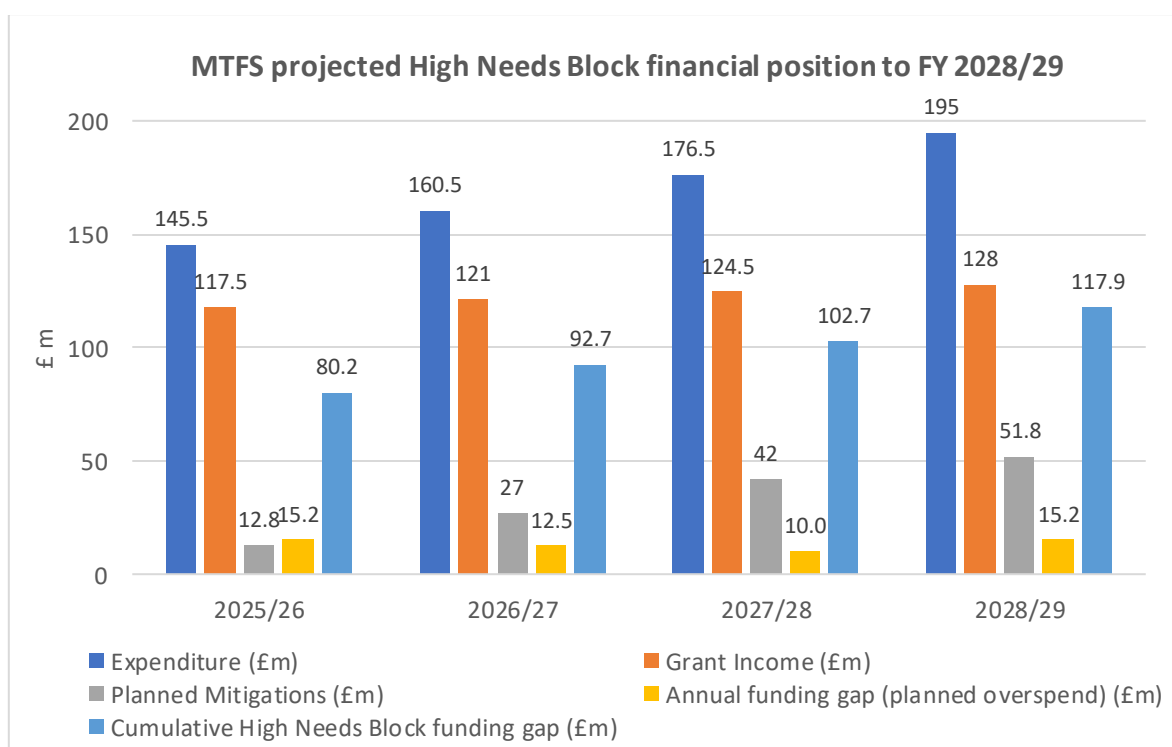
71. Leicestershire has experienced an additional 20% increase in the number of EHCNAs received between January and June 2025, following government announcements earlier in the year that a White Paper setting out the future of support for SEND in England was due to be released in the near future. Speculation on potential changes to eligibility appears to be driving up requests; while comparative data for 2025 will not be published by the DfE until June next year, it is understood from discussions with colleagues across the SEND system that this trend is being seen nationally. It is currently understood that the White Paper will be released in Autumn 2025.
72. Timeliness of the assessment process for EHCP requests has been a considerable challenge for Leicestershire for a number of years, with the authority only finalising 4.3% of assessments within the 20-week statutory timeline in 2024. This was particularly driven by delays in assessing requests, and in May 2024 the Cabinet noted action taken to award a contract for provision of Educational Psychologists in order to provide additional temporary resource to improve timeliness.
73. Despite the ongoing pressure of increased demand for assessments into the Service, process improvements in conjunction with additional temporary resource have enabled the Special Educational Needs Assessment (SENA) service to reduce backlogs of requests awaiting assessment and improve the overall timeliness of the process for requesting an EHCNA. This work has delivered an overall reduction in the number of assessments on the SENA caseload awaiting an assessment or decision from over 1500 in July 2024 to around 800 in July 2025. Timeliness is also improving, with 18.6% of assessments finalised within 20 weeks in July 2025. Improvements in the speed of assessment process mean that children and young people with SEND and their schools will receive support more quickly however also means additional costs are reflected in the HNB more quickly.
74. TSIL improvements to accuracy and visibility of caseload data have been critical to developing improved ways of working and measuring their impact.
75. As a result of the current spike in demand, the total number of EHCPs for Leicestershire stands at 8,213 as of 31 July 2025. This is 14% increase on 2024.
76. Data around decision making on requests for assessment and the decision to subsequently issue an EHCP shows that decisions continue to be made in a robust evidence-based way despite the significant increased demand. However, should the current level of demand continue, ongoing work within the SENA service to reduce backlogs of requests awaiting assessment and improve timeliness will not be sustainable without considerable additional staffing resource.

### **High Needs Block position**

77. The current DSG deficit position for 2025/26 is budgeted at £68.8m, a significant improvement on the pre-TSIL DSG budget deficit forecast for the same period of £84m. While TSIL has enabled a slowing of the growth in the deficit, the amount being spent on supporting SEND from the High Needs budget continues to outstrip available funding.

78. The High Needs Block financial plan projects an annual funding gap of £15.2m, with a subsequent cumulative HNB funding gap for 2025/26 of £80.2m. Both the bar chart and detailed table below provide a summary view of the key financial components impacting the current HNB financial position.

Year	Expenditure (£m)	Grant Income (£m)	Planned Mitigations (£m)	Annual Funding Gap (£m)	Cumulative HNB Funding Gap (£m)
2025/26	145.5	117.5	12.8	15.2	80.2
2026/27	160.5	121.0	27.0	12.5	92.7
2027/28	176.5	124.5	42.0	10.0	102.7
2028/29	195.0	128.0	51.8	15.2	117.9



79. Following recent sizeable increases in EHCNA requests and subsequent increases in EHCPs, early forecasts suggest demand increases are likely to result in at least an additional £20m in-year financial burden during 2025/26. Further work is underway to quantify the financial impact both in-year and over the remainder of the MTFS and will feed into future budget planning.
80. Nationally, concern over increasing deficits in High Needs expenditure, and the financial difficulties this exposes local authorities to, is growing. SEND system reform is anticipated through the Government's upcoming White Paper however the scale of proposed change is not yet known, and such changes may take a number of years to be implemented.
81. Based on the anticipated end of the statutory accounts override in March 2028, local authorities will be required to set aside resources to offset growing deficits. At the levels of expected growth, the financial position is unsustainable. As such it is essential that the planned measures to contain ongoing growth are successful.



## **Next steps**

82. The work of the TSIL programme has succeeded in slowing growth in demand for EHCNAs and improved the overall High Needs deficit position, and TSIL changes to ways of working, processes and an inclusive practice ethos have become embedded in business as usual. Ongoing performance and financial monitoring of changes made during the programme will be undertaken using embedded performance frameworks to ensure early visibility of changes in demand and tracking of sustained process improvements.
83. While the TSIL programme has now been concluded, recent unanticipated rises in demand reinforce that the SEND system remains unsustainable, and continued uncertainty around what might be included within the White Paper proposed for release in Autumn 2025 is expected to continue to fuel demand at least until there is more clarity over proposed changes.
84. There are still significant opportunities for improvement to be made both to internal service performance and to support inclusive practice across the SEND system. Building on the work of the TSIL programme and an expected emphasis of the White Paper on mainstream inclusion, Leicestershire will be working to embed 'belonging' in schools and other educational settings.
85. Belonging focuses on children and young people feeling personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in the school social environment. Children and young people who feel safe, valued and cared for within their educational setting are much more likely to experience academic success, positive social connections and a confident perception of their connection with the community.
86. The authority plans to develop a *Belonging in Education* strategy, co-producing with system partners, school leaders, parents, carers and young people with SEND. This work is due to commence in September 2025, with the aim to have a draft of the strategy by the end of December 2025. The strategy will set out how Leicestershire will deliver the ambition of belonging for every child and young person in all educational settings across Leicestershire and will provide the framework for all areas of Leicestershire's SEND and Additional Needs improvement work so that children and young people can *live their best life*.
87. Other new areas of improvement are continuing to be developed which will support the achievement of existing TSIL savings targets, contribute towards a more sustainable High Needs Block position and support children and young people to feel they belong. These include initiatives such as:
  - a. The SEN Investment Fund, which is developing a series of new support offers for mainstream schools and children with social, emotional and mental health (SEMH) needs using the 2025/26 schools block transfer. These offers have been co-produced with schools to make the most impactful use of the fund and will include training, specialist outreach support and clinics for school staff, a directory of support and advice for school staff and for parents and carers of children with SEMH needs, and a pilot of in-school alternative provision leading to a GCSE

qualification for young people with SEMH needs struggling to access standard mainstream classroom learning.

- b. The introduction of a banded model for EHCPs, which gained approval from the Cabinet in July 2025 to consult with schools on transitioning from EHCP funding based on Learning Support Assistant hours to a more flexible model of banding based on an assessment of the child's needs.
- c. More efficient processing of requests for assessment and improved communication using additional digital process improvements and an activity-based model allowing as many tasks as possible to be allocated to support staff at lower grades, supporting those at higher grades to focus on specialist tasks and reducing the need for growth in specialist staff to meet the increased demand. Work to date has been estimated to have delivered £350k benefit in 2024/25.
- d. Improvements to the EHCP review process to ensure all children with EHCPs receive an annual review and offer evidence-based support to SENA staff on prioritisation of their caseloads.
- e. Improvements to placement recording processes, changing the way in which placement financial information is captured in order to enable more efficient processing of contracts and invoices. This will drive tighter controls over sufficiency linked to finances that will better control the financial monitoring for the service area.
- f. Extending the Commissioning offer for Education, SEND and Inclusion services to improve the department's ability to broker specialist placements and work more closely with providers to shape the market.
- g. Reviewing traded services across the department to ensure ongoing value for money.
- h. Improving the overall quality of EHCPs through monthly multiagency audits and ongoing quality sign-off processes.
- i. Preparing the authority for an upcoming inspection of partnership SEND services by Ofsted and the CQC.
- j. Working with Primary Schools across the County to develop enhanced educational provision for children with SEND transitioning from Early Years settings into their first year at Primary School. Four new Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) enhanced resource bases were introduced in 2024 and another four are due to accept new pupils during the 2025/26 academic year. Further discussions are underway with a number of schools to develop additional enhanced resource bases for 2026/27 school starters.
- k. A School Place Planning Strategy currently under development which will set out the strategy for delivering additional school places for the future, including specialist school places. This will enable the avoidance of costs to place children and young people with SEND in expensive Independent Special Schools due to a lack of places within the Council's existing Area Special Schools.

88. A refreshed approach to governance of ongoing continuous improvement projects is underway and future updates to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee will detail the impact of this work in conjunction with the ongoing High Needs budget position.

### **Background papers**

Transitioning to a Banded Model for Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Funding, Cabinet, 15 July 2025:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7878&Ver=4>

SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 21 January 2025:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7889&Ver=4>

Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) Programme Update, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 5 September 2024:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7480&Ver=4>

Exception to Contract Procedure Rules: Urgent Action taken by the Chief Executive in relation to the Educational Psychology Service, Cabinet, 24 May 2024:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7506&Ver=4>

Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) Programme Update, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 23 January 2024:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7477&Ver=4>

SEND – Service and Finance Update, Scrutiny Commission, 15 March 2023:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=137&MId=7099&Ver=4>

Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) Programme, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7 March 2023:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7191&Ver=4>

SEND Local Area Revisit, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 24 January 2023:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7190&Ver=4>

SEND and Inclusion, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 6 September 2022:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=6884&Ver=4>

SEND Provision in Leicestershire (SPIL) guide and directory:

<https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/education-and-children/special-educational-needsand-disability/education-and-childcare/send-support-in-schools/send-provision-inleicestershire-spil>

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

89. None.

**Equality Implications**

90. The TSIL and subsequent SEND programme of work actively seek to reduce inequalities, increasing belonging so that all children and young people, including those with additional needs, can live their best life.

**Human Rights Implications**

91. There are no human rights implications directly arising from this report.

**Officer(s) to Contact**

Lindsey Kirby  
High Needs Block Strategic Lead  
0116 305 5976  
[Lindsey.Kirby@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Lindsey.Kirby@leics.gov.uk)

Tim Browne  
Assistant Director Education, Inclusion & Additional Needs  
0116 305 7429  
[Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk)

Jane Moore  
Director of Children and Family Services  
0116 305 2649  
[Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk)



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**  
**– 2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS AND**  
**COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2024-25**

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

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with a summary of the Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report for 2024/25.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 sets out the policy framework against which children's social care complaints should be considered.
3. Local authorities must, each financial year, publish an Annual Report (Regulation 13(3)).

**Background**

4. The Complaints Team, which sits within the Corporate Resources Department of the County Council, manage and co-ordinate complaints relating to three separate complaints systems:
  - a) Adult Social Care - a statutory process;
  - b) Children's Social Care – a statutory process;
  - c) Corporate Complaints – a non-statutory process, which considers complaints relating to other services provided by the Council and where there is no other form of redress.
5. The Children and Family Services Department is contacted daily by service users, carers and other parties with concerns or requests for information. These queries are dealt with at a local level within care teams or through the Director's office without recourse to the formal complaints process. The complaints team do, on occasion, also receive queries and concerns that suggest a child or young person may require immediate support or which raise safeguarding concerns. Such reports are best handled outside of the formal complaints procedure and are referred into the First Response team or allocated workers for urgent consideration as appropriate.

6. The Annual Report for Children's Social Care is appended to the report and provides a summary of the statistical information and headline issues emerging from the analysis of complaints activity for 2024/25.
7. Also appended is the Corporate Complaints Annual Report for 2024/25 and analysis is included of complaints about Children and Family Services. This is to allow the Committee to scrutinise and further explore all the departmental areas highlighted in both reports. The Corporate Complaints Annual Report for 2024/25 will be considered by the Scrutiny Commission on 8 September 2025.

### **Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints received and outcomes.**

8. The number of complaints received in 2024/25 were as follows:
  - 41 complaints considered at Stage 1, compared to 42 in 2023/24
  - Four complaints considered at Stage 2, compared to seven in 2023/24
  - Three complaints considered at Stage 3, compared to three in 2023/24
9. Using the figures relating to the number of referrals made to Childrens Social Care, 0.7% of those using childrens services needed to make a complaint. This is identical to the previous year.
10. The number of requests accepted at Stage 1 decreased this year by 49%.
11. It is important to note that some complaints regarding Childrens Social Care are not considered through the statutory procedure. The Council follows guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in determining such cases. This can be either because the complainant is not eligible, or the subject matter falls outside of the scope of the statutory procedure.
12. The Council considered 168 complaints under the corporate procedure a significant increase from previous year (129). The majority being Child Protection matters.
13. Taking this all into consideration, the overall number of complaints saw an increase as shown below.

<b>Financial Year</b>	<b>Statutory Complaints</b>	<b>Corporate Complaints</b>	<b>Total</b>
2023-24	52	129	<b>181</b>
2024-25	48	168	<b>216</b>

14. The number of complaints escalating to Stage 2 reduced this year by three. As a percentage of Stage 1 complaints this equates to an escalation rate of 8.3%, slightly down from the previous year (9.8%).
15. There were three complainants who requested escalation to Stage 3 after completing Stage 2.
16. Analysis of the complaints received show the main areas complained about were staff conduct / customer care and poor communication. These were very often interlinked.
17. During the year, two complaints were received directly from children or young people

18. The Complaints Manager continues to have good links with Children's Rights Officers. This is to ensure and validate that young people are not blocked in any way from accessing the formal complaints procedure.
19. The Council responded to 58% of the complaints at Stage 1 (63%) within the statutory maximum of 20 working days.
20. There are often good reasons why complaints can exceed 20 working days to resolve, for example meetings being arranged. Whilst personal contact is positive and should be encouraged, statutory guidance makes clear this does not "stop the clock" in terms of the 20-working day deadline.
21. Timescales for Stage 2 complaints also improved during the year with three of the completed investigations being concluded within the statutory timescales of 65 working days.
22. The Council has continued to manage Stage 2 investigations through an in house "arms-length" investigator. This is helping with response timescales but more crucially with quality of reports and reducing un-necessary escalation.
23. Two of the three Stage 3 review panels held were convened and responded to within statutory timescales (50%). The remaining cases were delayed by the complainant's availability to attend a panel hearing.
24. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman investigated 31 complaints relating to Children's Social Care during 2024-25 and found fault in eleven instances.
25. Financial payments totalling £5,200 were made this year along with recommendations to review policies and procedures, strengthen complaint handling and take steps to improve record keeping and documenting key conversations with partner organisations.
26. The Council received six compliments and forwarded to the Complaints Manager during 2023-24. This is a decrease on last year (18). The Complaints team continue to remind managers of the importance of recognising and sharing positive feedback, which bring balance to the annual report.
27. There is good evidence of learning from complaints at a local level with upheld complaints having clearly articulated actions to improve wider performance over and above resolving the individual issues.

### **Resource Implications**

28. The annual report outlines that the costs incurred through the statutory complaints procedure were £9,300 a decrease of £12,750 from 2023/24.
29. This, together with improved consistency of reports, evidences the expected benefits from the department continuing to fund a full-time complaints investigator during the year 2023-24.

30. Other improvement activity will be carried out within existing resources and therefore there are no resource implications. The Director of Corporate Resources has been consulted on this report.

### **Equality and Human Rights Implications**

31. The Children and Family Services Department supports vulnerable children and young people from across all communities in Leicestershire. Complaints and compliments are a way of ensuring that service responses are fair and equitable to all. This report does not highlight any specific equal opportunities implications.

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

32. None.

### **Officers to contact.**

Jane Moore  
Director, Children and Family Services  
Tel: 0116 305 7441  
Email: [Jane.moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.moore@leics.gov.uk)

Sharon Cooke  
Assistant Director, Children and Family Services  
Tel: 0116 305 5479  
Email: [Sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk)

Chelsea O'Neill  
Complaints and Information Manager,  
Corporate Resources Department  
Tel: 0116 305 6243  
Email: [Chelsea.oneill@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Chelsea.oneill@leics.gov.uk)

### **List of Appendices**

Appendix A – Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments: Annual Report 2024-25

Appendix B – Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024-25



# **Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2024/2025**



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## 1. Purpose and Summary of Report

- 1.1. To report to Members and Officers on Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Children's Social Care complaints activity from 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.
- 1.2. To meet the requirements of Regulation 18(2) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1681 Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Regulation 13(3) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738 The Children Act (1989) Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.
- 1.3. For the current year the following Statutory guidance remains relevant:
  - Getting the best from Complaints 2006
  - the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) [Practitioner Guidance](#) which should be referenced alongside the existing statutory guidance
- 1.4. This annual report provides analysis and commentary for Children and Family Services on all complaints managed under the statutory process. Those complainants who do not qualify to use the statutory process are considered under the County Council's Corporate Complaint procedure and reported in the Corporate Annual Report presented to the Scrutiny Commission.
- 1.5. The Complaints Manager role is responsible for ensuring that complaints are handled appropriately and providing support to the department in resolving complex cases. In addition, the Complaints Manager will highlight key trends that emerge each year and any recommendations that would improve how we work. The Children and Family Services department retain responsibility for actioning any such improvements.

## 2. Complaints and compliments received 2024-25

### 2.1. Foreword

This report only considers complaints identified as statutory complaints as defined by the Statutory Guidance outlined within “Getting the Best from complaints”

There are two key tests applied in making the above assessment.

- 1) Is the complainant eligible?
- 2) Is the subject matter within scope of the procedure?

Concerns that fall outside of the scope of the statutory complaints’ procedure are responded to by the Complaints and Information team and are then handled in line with the relevant alternative route which typically includes

- Consideration as a corporate complaint
- Referral to the Leicestershire Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCB) appeals procedure
- Explanation that the matter cannot be considered as the subject matter has / will be adjudicated in Court

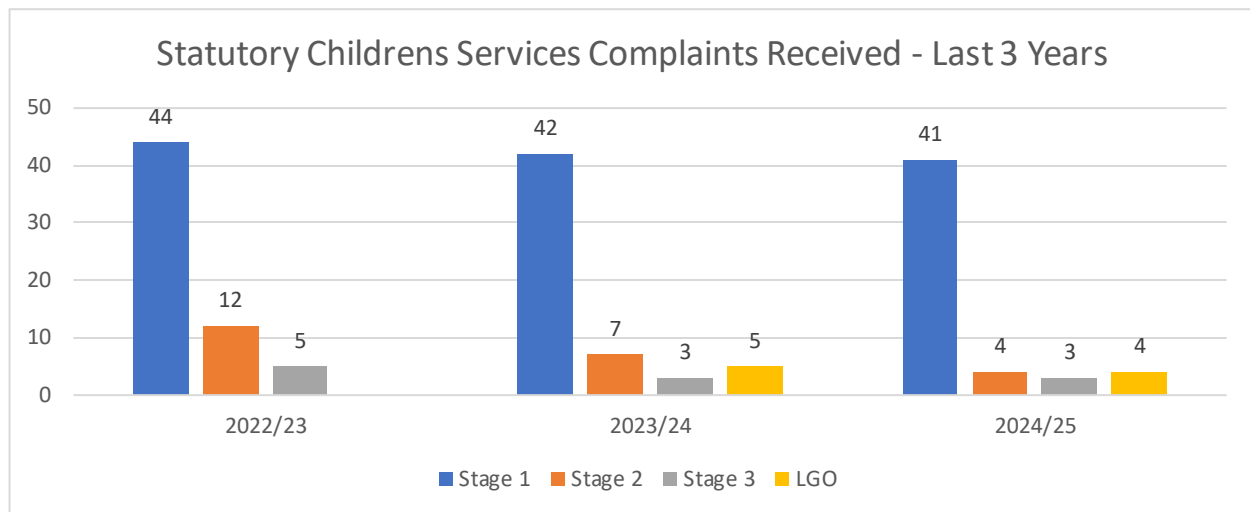
### 2.2. Complaint Volumes

Volumes of complaints are considered in light of the number of cases which Children’s Social Care dealt with during the year. Table 1 shows the key referral categories and the increased demand on services.

<b>Table 1 – Social Care demand</b>	<b>2023/243</b>	<b>2024/25</b>	<b>% Change</b>
Referrals to Children’s Social Care	6190	6797	+9.8
Single Assessments	4507	6530	+44.8
Children in Care at 31 March	726	694	-4.4
Child Protection Plans at 31 March	430	506	+17.6

The above shows a mixed picture but with a significant increase in the number of referrals. Each of these will trigger action from Childrens Social Care and therefore could form the basis of a complaint.

To provide further context to complaint volumes, the number of referrals to Children’s Social Care in Table 1 has been used and this shows that 0.7% go on to make a formal statutory complaint. This has remained unchanged for the last 2 reporting years.



As illustrated above (Table 2), 48 complaints were accepted under the statutory procedure. This represented a decrease on the previous year (52)

Of those 48, 4 requested escalation to Stage 2 and required an Independent Investigation be carried out (8%)

There are also a number of complaints regarding Childrens Social Care matters that are responded to under the Corporate Complaints procedure so to give the full picture of complaints, table 3 sets out all social care complaints for the last 2 years.

This shows that, overall, there has been an increase of 3% in the total number of complaints about Childrens Social Care.

The Council follows guidance issued by the LGSCO in assessing eligibility to the statutory procedure and this sees most complaints that are **not** focused on the impact on a child handled under our corporate procedure. This helps control costs incurred should complaints escalate.

**Table 3: All Complaints about Childrens Social Care**

Financial Year	Statutory Complaints	Corporate Complaints	Total
2023-24	52	129	181
2024-25	48	168	216

### 2.3. Complaints accepted at stages 2 & 3

The number of requests considered at Stage 2 of the process reduced by 4 compared with the previous year. As a percentage of Stage 1 complaints this represents 8%, very slightly reduced from 2023/24 (10%).

Three Stage 3 panels were convened during the year. Stage 3 Panels cannot re-investigate complaints and as such can only look at the quality and comprehensiveness of the Independent report at Stage 2.

The LGSCO take a rigid approach on consideration of early referrals. The implications are that it is more important than ever to be clear at the outset which complaints procedure should be used. Once the statutory procedure has been initiated, the LGSCO expects all stages to be completed.

This has implications for the department and highlights the need to ensure every effort is made to resolve complaints at Stage 1 of the process.

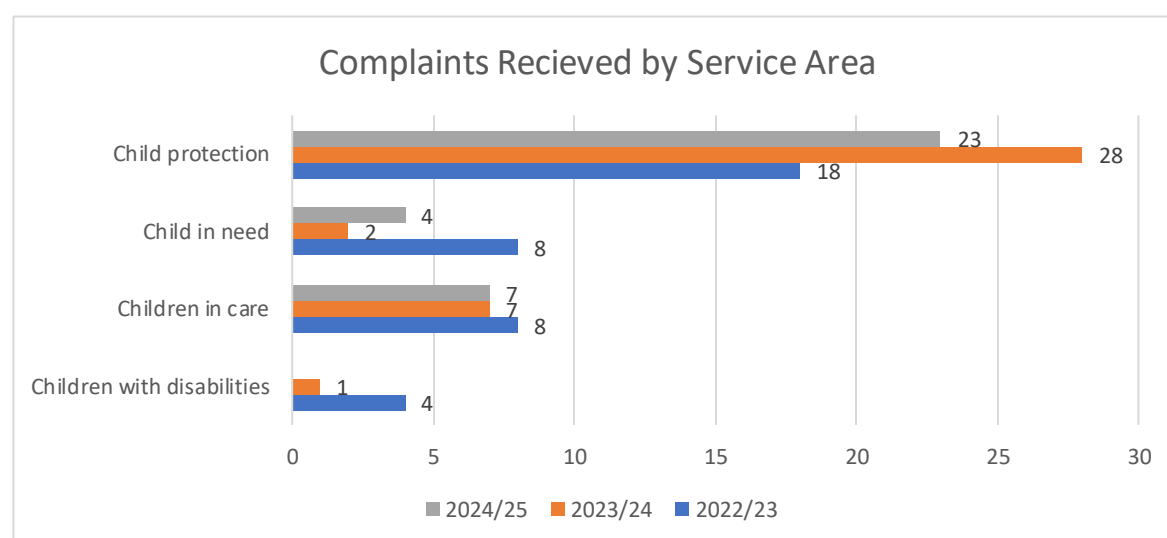
The Ombudsman considered 3 complaints during the year which had exhausted all stages of the statutory complaints procedure, and 1 complaint which was referred following stage 2 for early referral.

### 2.4. Statutory complaints by Service area

The Complaints Manager records all statutory complaints at a service level and table 4 below shows the results for 2024-25 overlaid against the previous year.

The biggest change that presents is a decrease of complaints regarding Child Protection. Themes are explored later in this report.

*Table 4: Complaints received by Service Area*



## 2.5 Compliments received

During 2024-25 there were 6 compliments recorded regarding Children's Social Care officers. This is a decrease on last year (18). The Complaints Team can only record compliments which are received directly via our online compliments form, or shared when received directly into the service. As many compliments are received directly by the service, the above data may not be truly reflective of the overall amount received.

The positive comments received appears in Appendix A and provide an important balance when reviewing the performance of the department.

## 3. Service Performance 2024-25

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been *resolved* within any given reporting period rather than received.

This is important as it ensures that full data sets can be presented, both to departments on a quarterly basis, and at year end. It also avoids the scenario whereby Ombudsman findings of maladministration might not appear in annual reports.

It follows from the above that the figures presented below will not match the data presented in section two of this report which focused on complaints *received*.

### 3.1. Responsiveness to complaints

*Table 5: Children's Services Performance at stage 1*

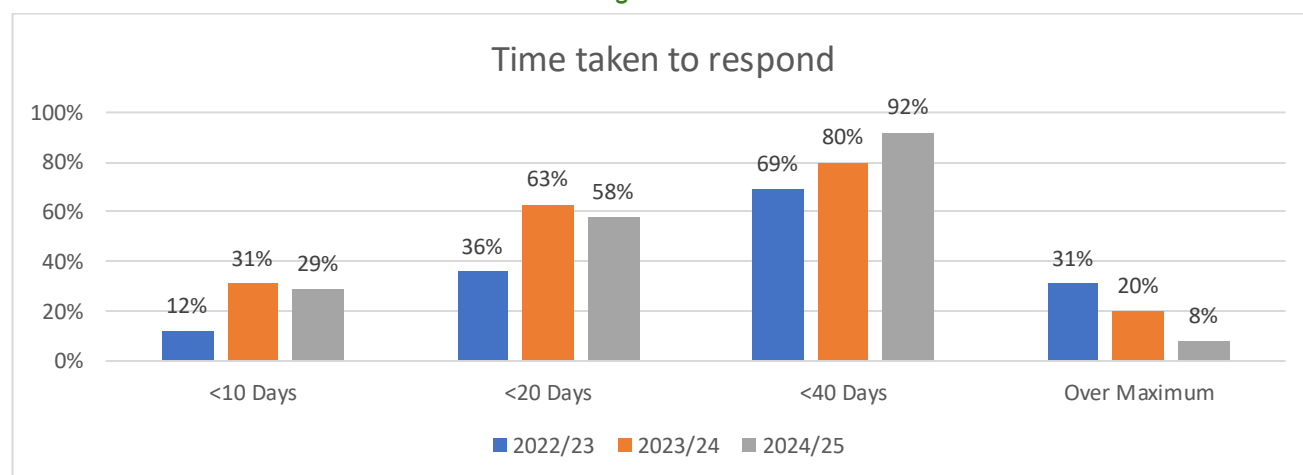


Table 5 above details the time taken to respond to complaints at Stage 1 and provides a comparison between last year and the current reporting year.

58% of complaints at Stage 1 were resolved within 20 working days, a slight decrease from 2023/24 (63%).

Statutory guidance sets out an expectation that “the majority” of complaints should be resolved within 10 working days with 20 working days considered reasonable for “complex cases”. Whilst

improvements are being made this will need to be a continued focus to ensure more complaints are resolved within these statutory timescales.

It is important to note that, where complainants have not agreed an extension and there is no good reason for a complaint to exceed 20 working days, the Complaints Manager is duty bound to offer a Stage 2 investigation.

The Complaints Manager has not had to exercise this duty during the year.

## **Response timescales at Stage 2**

Completion of Stage 2 investigations within the statutory guidelines (65 working days) has improved throughout the year with 3 of the 4 completed investigations achieving this.

Regional and national benchmarking shows that the Council is very much in line with other authorities and the Ombudsman has indicated that providing the Local Authority is managing the expectations of a complainant and not unduly delaying resolution, there is unlikely to be severe criticism of not meeting this timescale.

## **Response timescales at Stage 3**

There were 3 requests to escalate to Stage 3 during the year with 3 of them proceeding to panel hearings.

Of the 3 complaints heard by panel, 3 of these were managed within the statutory timescales.

There are no concerns with the timeliness of this stage of the process

## **3.2. Complaint Causes**

To try to understand the main causes leading to complaints, the complaints team assess the underlying causes for each complaint determined.

Very often there are multiple factors being complained about and to reflect this the Complaints team now record against multiple categories.

The biggest single cause during 2024-25 was around staff conduct / customer care. Inevitably these were often interlinked with poor communication.



### 3.3. Who complains?

In 2024/25, two complaints were made by children or young people<sup>1</sup>. This is very lower than 2023/24 (9%) and represents 4% of the overall volume. The remaining complaints were made by parents or others who were deemed to have sufficient interest in the child's well-being.

It is not unusual for numbers of complaints made by young persons to be proportionally low and this mirrors the situation reported by regional colleagues.

It remains a key priority of the Complaints Manager to ensure that everything is being done to improve accessibility of the complaints process to our children and young people and there continue to be good links between the Children's Rights Officers and Complaints. Regular discussions are held to ensure and check that appropriate processes are followed to resolve issues.

Most complaints continue to be made by parents or family members (where they have sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare.<sup>2</sup>)

### 3.4. Complaint Outcomes

*Table 6: Children's Services complaints recorded by outcome*

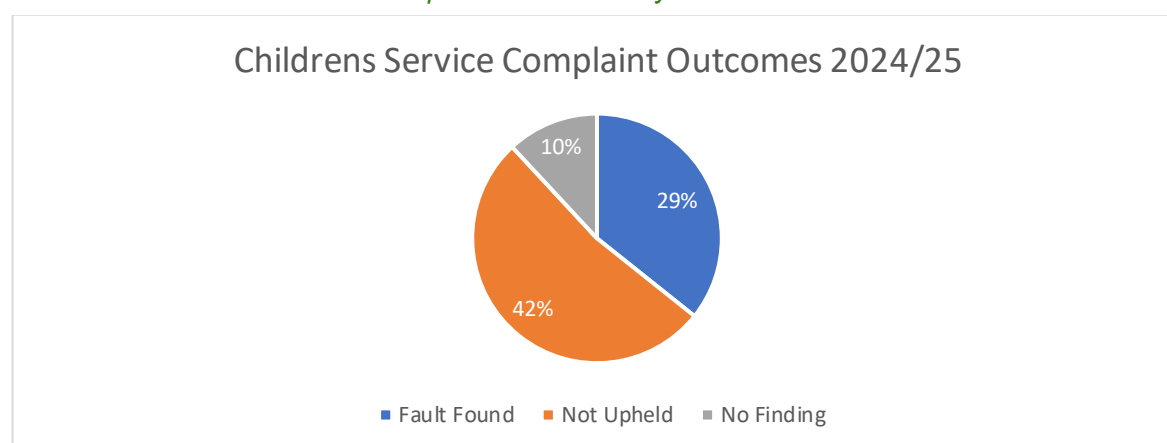


Table 6 above shows that fault was found in 29% of the statutory complaints considered during the year.

It is important to note that a finding of fault is not necessarily a bad thing as it can also be a sign of greater maturity within complaints handling. It is always important to listen to what we are being told about our service to put matters right at the earliest opportunity, and to learn and improve. Managers are also encouraged not to handle complaints defensively and this is evidenced in a number of cases whereby we have accepted that there are opportunities to improve.

In some cases, complaints are not able to be determined as there are irreconcilable versions of events. In these situations, rather than record the complaint as "Not Upheld", the complaints

<sup>2</sup> Guidance set out in section 2.6 of Getting the Best from Complaints.

team will instead record them as “No Finding” which more accurately reflects the outcome. This will also include some complaints whereby the Court process is the appropriate forum to make a finding.

## Financial Implications

### Children’s Service Complaints expenditure

Both Stages 2 and 3 of the statutory complaints’ procedure require independent investigation to take place.

At Stage 2, the authority is required to appoint an Investigative Officer who must not work in the same area as the complaint being investigated and be suitably trained to carry out investigative work.

In addition to the Investigative Officer, the Regulations also require an Independent Person to be appointed to ensure the investigation is carried out fairly. This is a mandatory requirement, and this person cannot work for the Council.

At Stage 3, the procedure is for a panel hearing to be held to review the Stage 2 investigation. This involves the appointment of 3 external panel members.

Leicestershire County Council can also explore independent mediation as an alternative form of redress through Stages 2 or 3. Mediation has not been used this year for any cases.

Finally, on some occasions, financial redress is offered as part of the Complaints procedure. Usually this is by way of a Local Settlement with the Ombudsman but can also be recommended at either Stage 2 or 3 of the procedure.

Table 8 below details the total costs incurred during the last 3 financial years. All costs are re-charged directly to the department.

*Table 8 Costs incurred through complaints procedure<sup>3</sup>*

<b>Spend</b>	<b>Total 2022/23</b>	<b>Total 2023/24</b>	<b>Total 2024/25</b>
Commissioned Investigations	£41,650	£7,050	£4,100
Mediation	£0	£0	£0
Financial Redress	£2,500	£5,700	£5,200
<b>Total</b>	<b>£44,150</b>	<b>£12,750</b>	<b>£9,300</b>

Costs incurred for 2024/25 through commissioned investigators represent a significant decrease on previous year. This reflects the in house investigations and reduced spend following recruitment of an Independent Pool rather than use of agencies to supply these people.

Costs continue to be controlled through several ways including:

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<sup>3</sup> Figures are rounded up to nearest £10.

- Complaints Team proactively looking for opportunities to resolve via meetings if any prospect of success.
- Ensuring that complainants are eligible to use the statutory complaints procedure .
- Imposition of restrictions to the scope of some independent investigations. Typically, around matters that have been determined in the Court arena.
- Recruitment of a casual pool of Independent Investigators. This both saves money but is helping ensure consistency of work.

## 4. Learning from Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information which can help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. We know that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably of more importance is to understand the impact those complaints have on people and to learn the lessons from complaints to improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld and, in some instances, where no fault was found and where the Authority identifies that improvements to services can be made.

Occasionally during an investigation issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council.

### 5.1 Corrective action taken

All the 15 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

Remedial action typically consists of both individual redress (e.g., apology, carrying out overdue work) and wider actions that may affect many.

The most common action taken was staff training. There are lots of good examples of this taking place both at individual and team level. These included:

- reminding teams of the need to record rationale for decisions made
- reminder on need to cross-check information provided in referrals from partner agencies
- reminder to escalate cases where there are concerns with a lack of action from other agencies involved
- Commitment to develop training on trauma informed approach

## 6. Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman made decisions on thirty one complaints which related to children's social care<sup>4</sup> during the year.

A summary of the complaints considered, and their respective outcomes appears below.

- 3 Outside of Jurisdiction or where at an assessment stage the Ombudsman felt unlikely it would achieve anything through further investigation.
- 7 Premature for the Ombudsman as the complaint had not fully exhausted the Council's complaints procedure.
- 11 findings of Fault with Injustice.
- 10 No fault found with the Council's actions

It should be noted that where the Ombudsman was satisfied that the Council had already recognised fault and acted appropriately to remedy this, it will still be recorded as Fault with Injustice.

## 7. Monitoring the Process

The Complaints team continues to support Children's Services to manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered to CFS are -

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Commissioning and administrative support for all Independent Investigations
3. Production of Performance Reports
4. Liaison with Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
5. Quality Assurance of complaint responses
6. Complaint handling training for Operational Managers

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to Heads of Service in drafting adjudication responses to Stage 2 investigations. This helps ensure a consistency of response and that clear action plans are created.

Work has also started to help improve oversight and tracking of actions agreed within Stage 1 responses which was identified as a weakness during the year.

## **APPENDIX A – compliments received**

- Thank you R for all the support you have given us, the service needs more people like you.
- Thank you J for all your help and support in regard to my son. Chairing meetings for us with the school has been invaluable.
- Thank you N for everything you have done for us. Your incredible dedication, empathy and unwavering support have meant the world to us.
- Thank you V for everything you have done for us. You really have made a positive impact!
- Thank you to R and team for all your hard work and effort to try and help my daughter as best as you could.
- Thank you so much to N for all his support to my son and me. Also, thank you to T for being an amazing support in what was a very difficult time and for always being a listening ear.

### **Additional compliments which were not recorded but have since been shared with the Complaints & Information Team**

- Amazing!! Thanks you so much C! We can't tell you enough how much we appreciate you sorting our adoption allowances out for us. (Shenton family).
- I just wanted to say a big 'Thank You' for your contribution to K's memory book which we received a couple of weeks ago. Thank you again for everything you did for K, S and I are extremely grateful
- Its an absolute pleasure to have been working with K over the years as a fellow co-chair of channel – her professionalism, attention to detail and superb chairing is second to none. I continue to learn so much from her approach and the application she takes when considering channel referrals. She is always organised having planned the chairing in advance and her communication style is excellent. She is an asset to the channel approach and invaluable.
- We put a CAMHS plan in for daily visits over the weekend and have had a multi agency meeting today, which G was present at. G was fab – she clearly has a good understanding of the family despite only having been allocated a few weeks ago, she had a plan in place for next steps and was really clear about what the social care offer will be which has really supported multi agency planning to support this young person to stay in the family home and parents to feel supported.

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# Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report

2024 - 2025



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# Glossary

<b>Enquiry case</b>	A request for information or clarification about a service, policy or specific issue.
<b>Compliment case</b>	An expression of praise or satisfaction regarding the services provided by the Council.
<b>Complaints case</b>	A formal complaint following one of the three Council policies for handling complaints.
<b>Alternative route of redress</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complainant has decided to take other means for resolution, for example court proceedings or insurance claim.
<b>Fault Found</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complaint has been investigated, found in favour of the complainant and remedial action is required.
<b>Fault Found – remedy carried out</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complaint has been investigated, found in favour of the complainant and remedial action has been completed.
<b>No Fault Found</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complaint has been investigated, and the council had been found to have acted correctly regarding the matters raised by the complainant.
<b>No Finding</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means there was insufficient evidence to make a finding, for example, two irreconcilable version of events.
<b>Not Upheld</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means following an investigation, the complaint was not found in favour of the complainant.
<b>Referred to another organisation</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complaint is not in the jurisdiction of the council and we have signposted to the correct organisation.
<b>Response given – no further action</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complaint has been investigated, a response provided, and no further action is required regarding their complaint.
<b>Service request</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the issue has been passed to the customer service centre, as this is the first time it had been raised to the council.
<b>Withdrawn</b>	This is a complaint outcome and means the complainant no longer wishes to continue with their complaint.

# Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to provide Members and the public with information concerning compliments and complaints managed under the Corporate Complaints Procedure for the period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report provides data and insight on the volume and types of corporate complaints, compliments and other contact, highlighting areas of positive performance and those for development.

Complaints managed under the Adult Social Care Complaints Policy or Children's Social Care Complaints Policy are captured in separate, standalone reports.



# Executive Summary

Leicestershire County Council (the Council) delivers a range of statutory and discretionary services, within a landscape shaped by increasing demand and budget pressures. The volume of service delivery, transactions and contact across the Council is vast and most of our customers experience a good service. For context there were 9,360,485 contacts across e-forms, email, phone, web views and visits to County Hall in the 2024 calendar year.

Overall demand has increased by 0.3% this year and our customers continue to utilise our digital platforms the most. Enquiries continue to be the highest cases received, followed by complaint cases. Compliments as a percentage of total demand is not too dissimilar with the previous reporting period, with Libraries, Heritage and Museums receiving 57% of the total compliments for the period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025.

The number of Corporate Complaints received in 2024/2025 has decreased by 12% from 2023/2024, with highest volumes relating to Special Educational Needs Assessment (SENA) and School and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport, although School and SEN transport has seen a decrease in cases compared to the previous year.

From a performance outcome perspective, 72% of SENA closed corporate complaint cases had a fault found, with most complaints relating to a delay in providing a service. 79% of closed School & SEN Transport corporate complaint cases had the same theme.

Most Stage 1 cases were responded to within the maximum stated period within the Corporate Complaints Procedure, with the percentage of cases over the maximum decreasing by 2% from the previous year. Performance of Stage 2 response times has slightly dipped. The number of Stage 1 cases escalating to Stage 2 has decreased by 6% from the previous year.

In terms of Ombudsman performance, the Council's satisfactory remedy performance is above average, and it continues to maintain a 100% recommendation compliance rate. The value of remedy payments has decreased by 22%. No public reports have been issued in 2024/2025.

The Council's Customer Programme has completed several initiatives to improve customer experience and recently consulted on its Draft Customer Strategy, which ensures:

- The focus is on customers, and that they have a positive experience in their interactions
- All council employees take responsibility for customer service
- That the council will adopt best practice, and that interactions are efficient to maximise taxpayers' money
- That people use our online options if they can, freeing up more traditional channels for those who can't
- The council appropriately manages any changes to the way customers are asked to interact with us.

The Complaints and Information Team continue to work with senior leadership teams to effectively utilise complaints intelligence and customer feedback to support positive improvements in service delivery.

# Background and Introduction

## Legislative context

In the UK, complaints are governed by several pieces of legislation and statutory guidance, key legislation to note has been included below; however, further detail is available within local policy documentation:

- The Local Authority Social Services and National Health Service Complaint (England) Regulations 2009 provides the legal framework for handling complaints about local authority adult social care services.
- The Children Act 1989 Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006 is the legal framework for handling complaints about local authority children's social care services.
- The Local Government Act 1974 is a key piece of legislation for handling complaints under the Corporate Complaints Procedure. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) is empowered under the Local Government Act 1974.

## Introduction and local policy context

The Council is dedicated to delivering high-quality services, celebrating successes, and continuously improving based on customer feedback. Recognising and celebrating good practice is a priority, as is learning from instances where standards fall short. Mechanisms are in place for customers to provide feedback, whether positive or negative, through compliments, feedback, or complaints. Where possible, action to address issues at the first point of contact is taken. Complaints procedures are integral to the Council's commitment to its customers as complaints provide valuable insights into how services are perceived and how they can be improved.

Customers can make a complaint, provide feedback or give a compliment via a variety of channels, including webform, email, telephone, letter or using the Council's complaints leaflet.

The Council manages complaints using one of three policies and associated processes, these are:

1. **Adult Social Care Complaints Policy**  
This policy follows legislative requirements and applies to adult social care services provided by or arranged by the Council. This is a two-stage statutory process (with the Ombudsman being the second stage) and may include (but not limited to) complaints relating to assessment of need, provision of services, delays, or decisions made under the Care Act 2014.
2. **Children's Social Care Complaints Policy**  
This policy follows legislative requirements and applies to children's social care services provided by or arranged by the Council. This is a three-stage statutory process and may include (but not limited to) complaints regarding care planning and placement, services to children in need, child protection, fostering and adoption.
3. **Corporate Complaints Procedure**  
This procedure is for complaints where the above two named statutory processes do not apply. The Corporate Complaints Procedure may not be used where exemptions apply, for example court proceedings or a tribunal process, or where other routes exist, for example, to report a pothole.

These policies can be found on the Council's Internet [www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/contact-us/complaints-and-comments](http://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/about-the-council/contact-us/complaints-and-comments)

## Corporate Complaints and Information Team

The Corporate Complaints and Information Manager (statutory post) and their team, in close liaison with the Director of Law and Governance, act as the central point of oversight and coordination for complaints (including those referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)) and compliments, as well as Freedom of Information (FOI) requests and Environmental Information requests (EIR). The Complaints and Information Manager acts as the nominated Link Officer and handles all correspondence between the Council and the Ombudsman. Additionally, the team receive and process contacts relating to enquiries and feedback. The team will resolve issues informally, where appropriate, such as signposting to other organisation or alternative routes of redress. Please see Appendix A for further information on this team.



# Case Information

## Analysis Approach

- The reporting period is 1 April – 31 March for each year indicated. The data has been cleaned to remove duplicate information.
- Cases are categorised as Enquiry case, Compliment case, Corporate Complaints case, Adult Social Care (ASC) Statutory Complaint case, Children's Social Care Statutory Complaint case or Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman case.
- All cases are counted by their unique reference number, either by date received or date closed.
- The case management information system logs the stages of the local complaints policies as separate cases, each with their own unique reference number. For example, the Corporate Complaints Procedure is a two-stage process, stage 1 is counted as one case and stage 2 is counted as one case.

## Overall Volume

Demand cases have been counted based on date received to reflect the volume of cases coming into the Council each year. Figure 1 below shows the demand, split by case type, for the last four reporting periods, whereas Figure 2 provides information regarding the percentage change.

There is a rising trend in overall demand across the four reporting periods, with the rate of increase slowing between the two most recent reporting periods. Total demand increased by 0.3% between 2023/24 and 2024/25 and by 52% from 2021/2022 to 2024/2025 and so demand pressures are ever present.

The proportion of each case type logged in each reporting period follows a consistent pattern, with Enquiry cases consistently presenting as the most frequent case type. There has been a percentage increase of 18% for Enquiry cases between 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, whereas all other case types have seen a percentage decrease.

Examples of Enquiry cases are those matters that are informally resolved, a first-time request for a service and signposting to other organisations or to other routes for redress. Although Enquiry cases are the highest case type logged, most of officer time is focussed on complaint cases, with Corporate Complaint cases consistently presenting as the second largest case type.



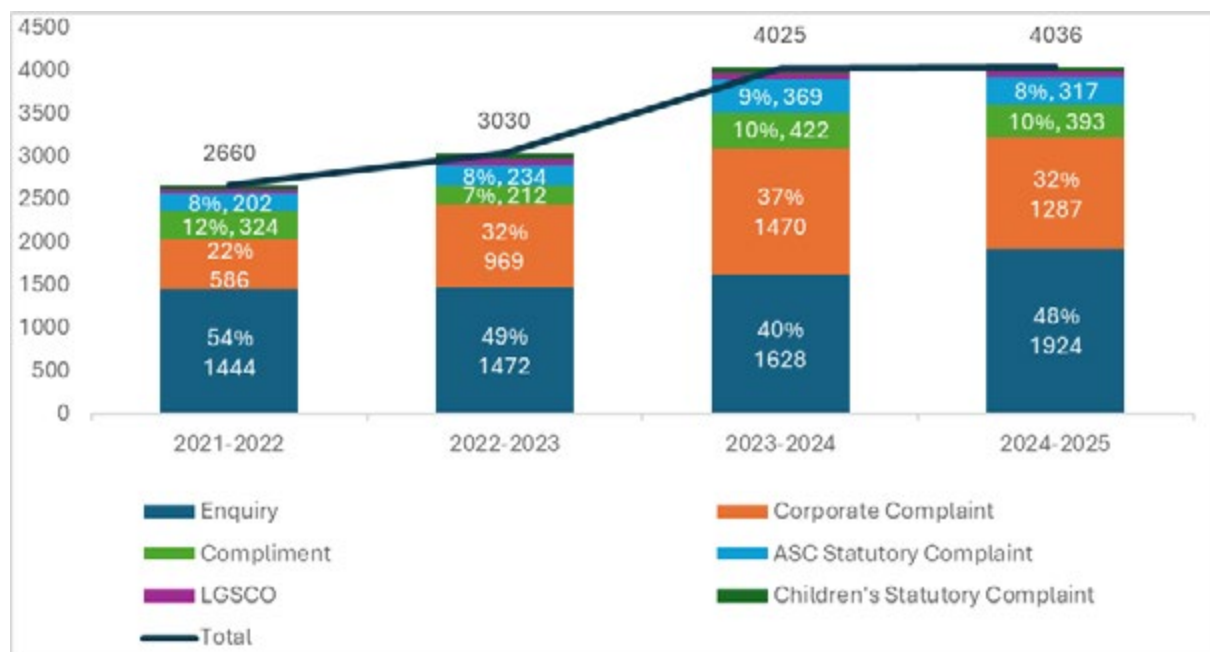


Figure 1 - Chart showing demand (cases received), by case type, for each reporting period

	2021-2022 to 2022-2023	2022-2023 to 2023-2024	2023-2024 to 2024-2025
Enquiry growth	2%	11%	18%
Corporate Complaint growth	65%	52%	-12%
Compliment growth	-35%	99%	-7%
ASC Statutory Complaint growth	16%	58%	-14%
LGSCO growth vs PY	52%	2%	-20%
Children's Statutory Complaint growth	22%	-15%	-8%

Figure 2 - Table showing the percentage change between the reporting periods (a negative number represents a percentage decrease)

## Compliments Volume

The number of compliments received in 2024/2025 compared to 2023/2024 decreased slightly by 7%. The Adults and Communities and Environment and Transport departments have consistently presented as the top two departments receiving compliments throughout the reporting periods shown. From a service perspective, Libraries, Heritage and Museums (a service within the Adults & Communities Department) received 57% of the 393 received in 2024/25. This service has received the most compliments in the last three reporting periods, reflecting the value residents place on this provision. A sample of compliments received in 2024/2025 is included in Appendix B.

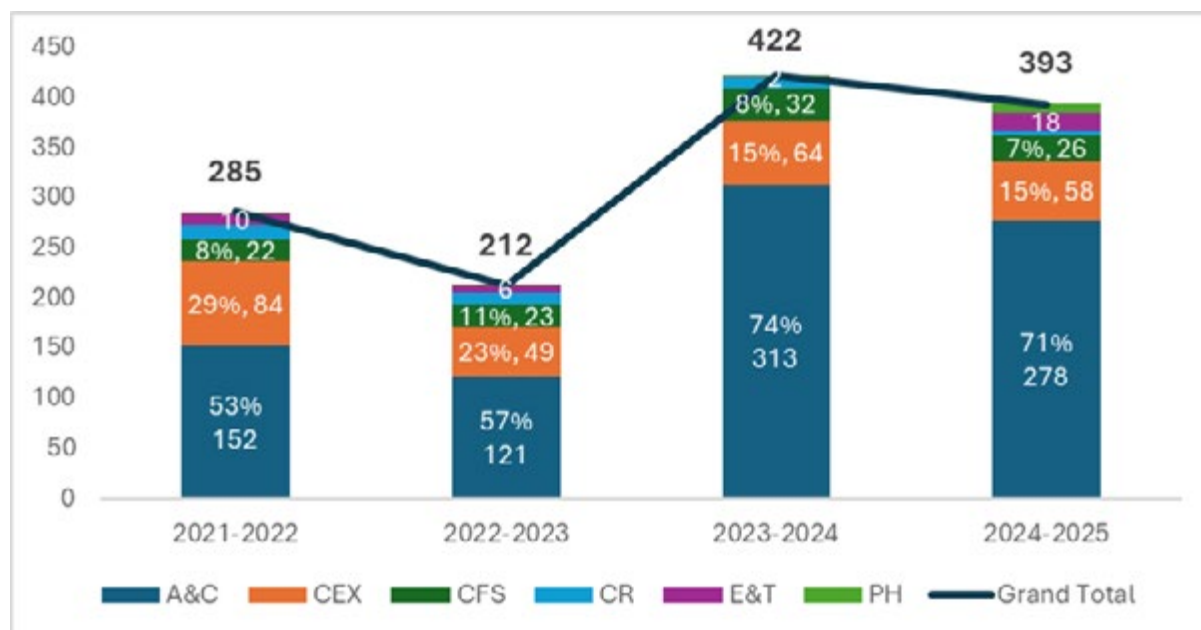


Figure 3 - Graph showing the count of compliment cases received, by department, for each reporting period

## Corporate Complaints Procedure

The Council defines a complaint as

“Any expression of dis-satisfaction about the Council’s provision of, or failure to provide, a service for which it has responsibility”

Figure 4 illustrates the two stage, Corporate Complaints Procedure, and the maximum response time for each stage. A complaint should be made by a member of the public or their representative within the permitted period of 12 months from the day they first had notice of the matter, please note exceptions may apply. Where possible, the Council aims to respond to complaints within 10 working days at stage 1. Should the complaint remain unresolved, a complainant may escalate to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO). Please see the section on the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, later in this report, for more information on its role.



Figure 4 - Shows the stages of the corporate complaints procedure and ombudsman escalation

## Corporate Complaints Volume

Figure 5 shows the number of Corporate Complaint cases received by each department, showing a percentage decrease of 12% from 2023/2024 to 2024/2025. The Children and Family Services (CFS) and Environment and Transport (E&T) departments have consistently presented as the top two departments receiving Corporate Complaints throughout the reporting periods shown. This is driven by the volume of the Special Educational Needs Assessment and Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport related complaints, although SEN transport has seen a decrease in cases compared to the previous year.

The performance section of this report will explore drivers for these trends in the context of complaint outcomes.

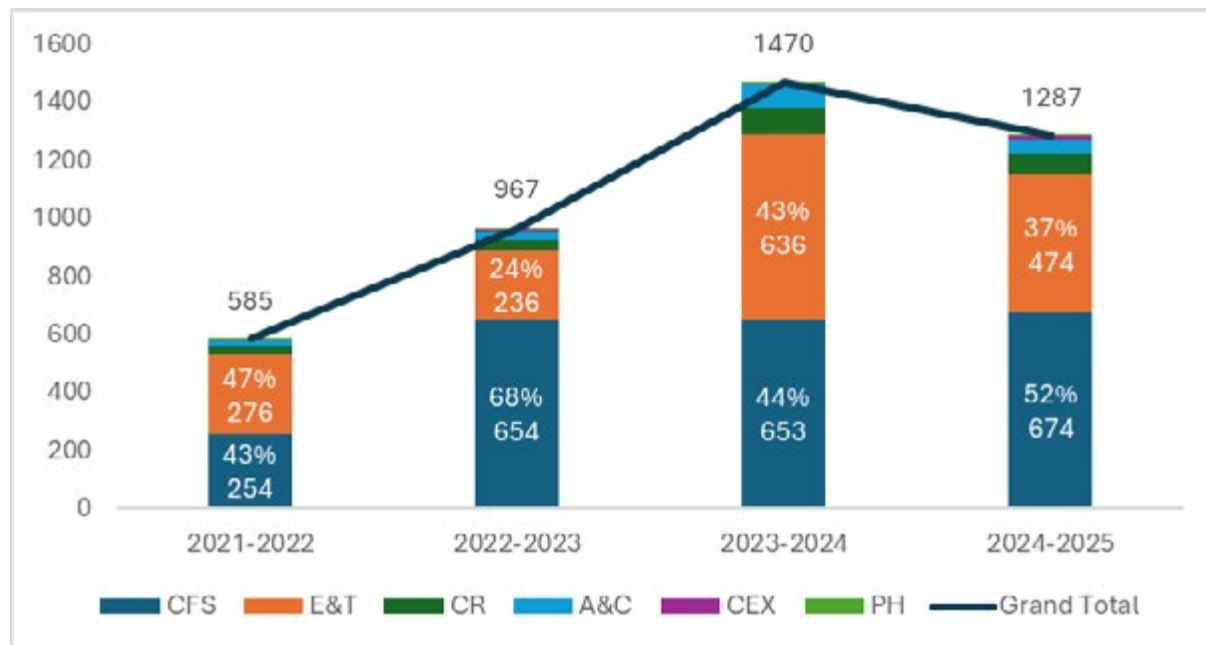


Figure 5 - Chart showing count of corporate complaint cases received for each reporting period

## Corporate Complaints Performance

### Analysis Approach and Outcome Definitions

Performance data is counted on the date the case was closed. To align with the LGSCO's data classification and simplify Council reporting, the Council does not differentiate between whether a complaint was partly or fully upheld. Instead, the Complaints team will assess all complaints responded to and classify as either "Fault Found" or "Not Upheld". Please refer to the Glossary section for the definitions of complaint outcome categories.

### Volume Performance

The charts at Figure 6 show the count of corporate complaints closed by service area for each reporting period. Special Educational Needs Assessment (SENA) consistently presents as the service with the most closed complaints across the reporting periods, with a percentage increase of 43% between 2023/2024 and 2024/2025.

School and Special Educational Needs Transport is the second frequent for three of the reporting periods (School Admissions was second in 2022/2023), with a 20% decrease from 2023/24 to 2024/25.

Please note services with very small values have been grouped under 'Other' for ease of visualisation.

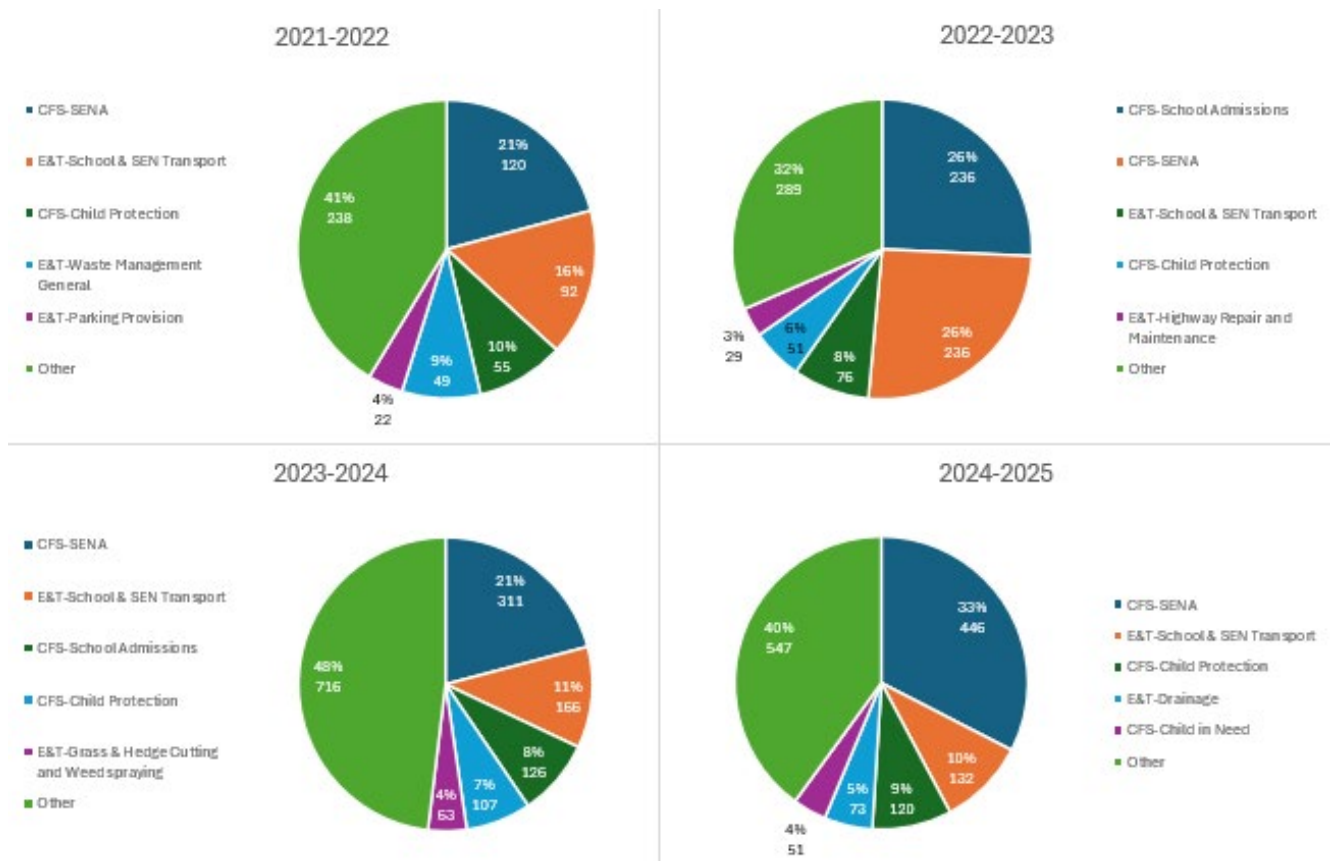


Figure 6 - Charts showing the count of closed corporate complaint cases by service

## 2024/2025 Decision Outcomes

The charts in this section show the Decision Outcomes for Corporate Complaints which have been closed during 2024/2025 (Second Tier), this is a further drill down into the complaints shown above in figure 6. The charts are broken down for the top five services (SENA, School & SEN Transport, Child Protection, Drainage & Child in Need). Each Decision Outcome is further broken down by Reason (third tier). Where values are small, these have been grouped under 'Other' for ease of visualisation. For clarity, the categories associated with Reason and Decision Outcome are included below.

Reason categories are:

- Delays in proving a service
- A decision we made
- Poor/inadequate communication
- Quality of our work
- Accuracy of information held
- Accessibility of our services premises or infrastructure
- Not applicable
- Our policy
- Staff conduct or customer care

Decision Outcome categories are:

- Alternative route of redress
- Fault Found
- Fault Found – remedy carried out
- No Fault Found
- No Finding
- Not Upheld
- Referred to another organisation
- Response given – no further action
- Service request
- Withdrawn

## SENA

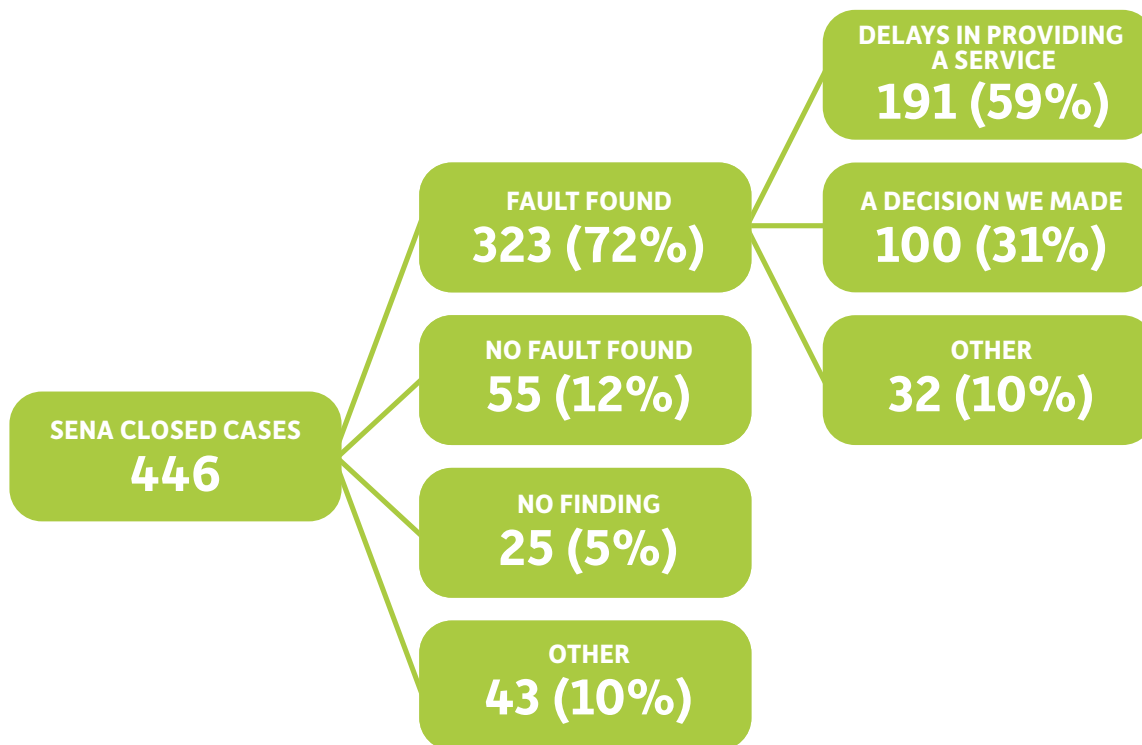


Figure 7 - Chart showing closed sena cases broken down by decision outcome and reasons for 2024/2025

72% of SENA corporate complaints cases have an outcome of Fault Found. One of the biggest factors featuring in these complaints is the delay in meeting statutory timescales for completing the Needs Assessment; the step that precedes a local authority's decision on whether to issue an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

For context, once a local authority receives a request for an EHC Needs Assessment, the authority has 6 weeks to decide whether to carry out the assessment. If the local authority agrees to carry out the assessment, they will then seek advice and gather information from a number of professionals on a child or young person's education, health and care needs. After assessment, the local authority decides whether to issue the EHCP. The parents/young person have 15 days to comment on the draft plan and request a specific setting to be named. If no EHCP is going to be issued following assessment the local authority must tell the parent or young person within 16 weeks from the date of the request for assessment. The local authority has within 20 weeks of the initial request to issue the final plan. The EHCP must be reviewed at least once a year, to check if outcomes are being met and whether changes are needed. There are a few minor exceptions to these deadlines; resource issues is not one of them.

A significant programme of work was introduced in September 2024 to improve customer service and access to communication. This was in response to two main issues:

#### 1. Lack of timely communication

Parents/young families escalate matters to formal resolution, where their informally raised issue has not been responded to in a timely manner. To minimise such recurrence, a range of channels for communication have been launched in spring 2025, including digital solutions.

#### 2. Duration of Needs Assessment

Investment in locum resource and the introduction of a new model, with different ways to ensure educational psychological advice is given in a timely way, has reduced the backlog of Needs Assessment and will bring the assessment duration back into 20 weeks.

For context, the average time to issue an EHCP has reduced from 63.5 weeks in December 2024 down to a rolling 41.3 weeks in May 2025. In addition, Figure 8 below shows the number of SENA cases received per quarter for 2024/2025, has a decreasing profile. SEN now makes up 40% of the LGSCO's case work nationally. This has overtaken Adult Social Care which has always been the highest area of work since the Ombudsman was created in 1974.

FY24/25	Qtr1	Qtr2	Qtr3	Qtr4
SENA complaints	138	101	77	68

Figure 8 - Table show count of sena cases received by quarter for 2025/2025

In respect of 'A decision we made', commons themes include:

- Needs Assessment findings
- Provision/outcomes of initial EHCP
- Named setting/school

### School and SEN Transport

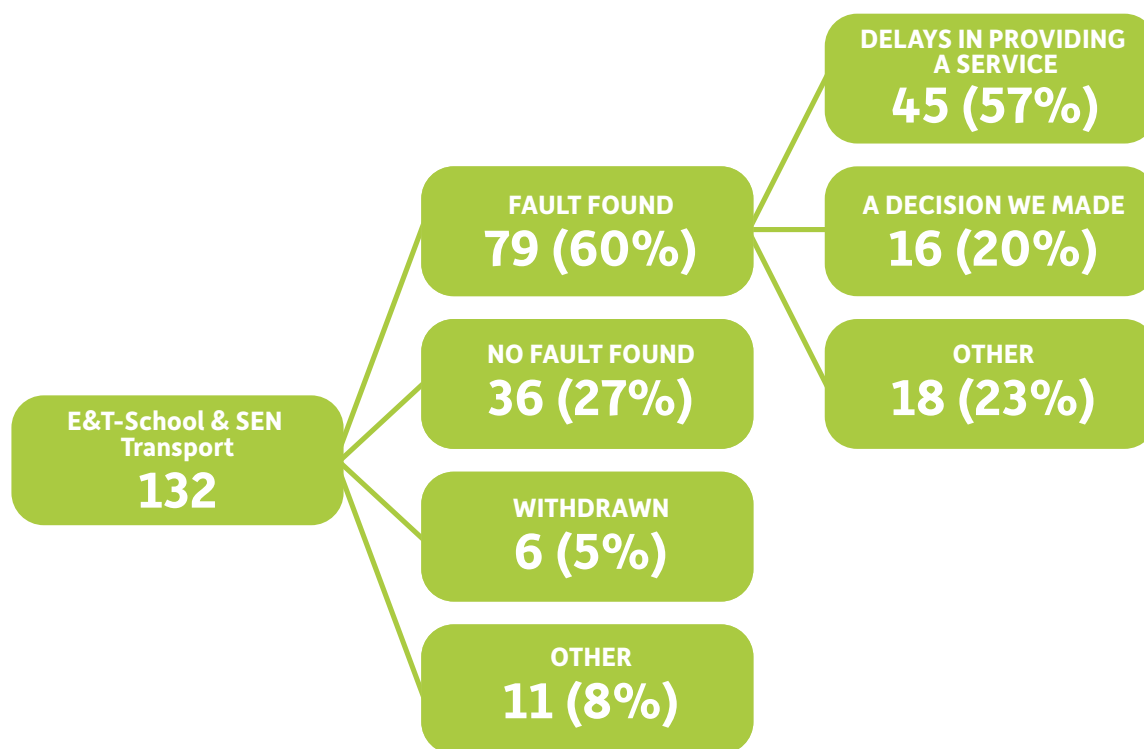


Figure 9 - Chart showing closed school & sen transport cases broken down by decision outcome and reasons for 2024/2025

79 (60%) of the 132 cases had a fault found and 57% of those 79, were due to a 'delay in providing service'; common themes include:

- Delay in sending personal transport budget
- Failure in providing transport
- Delay in processing applications

It should be noted that a dependency exists between the naming of a placement as part of the formulation of the final EHCP. This information is required to enable transport to be commissioned and influences the Transport Team's ability to procure timely transport.

## Child Protection

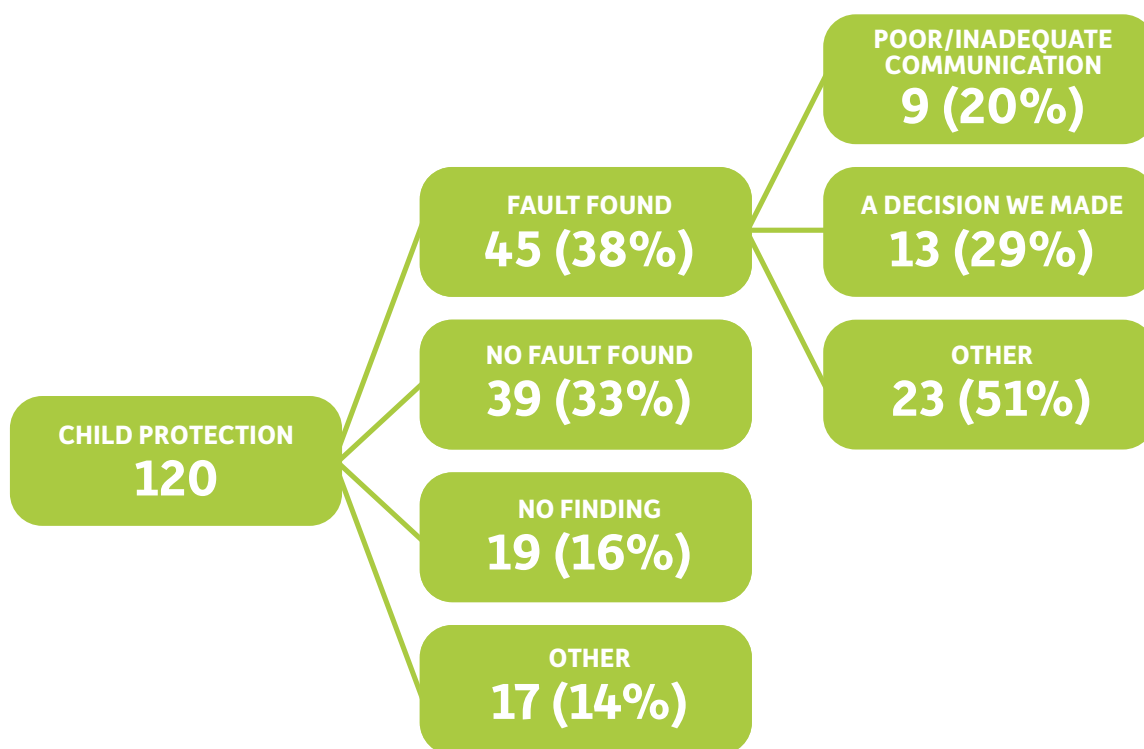


Figure 10 - Chart showing closed child protection service cases broken down by decision outcome and reasons for 2024/2025

45 (38%) of the 120 cases have a fault found, with the reason for 13 (29%) of those 45 logged as 'a decision we made'; commons themes include:

- The way the case was handled
- Lack of support



## Drainage

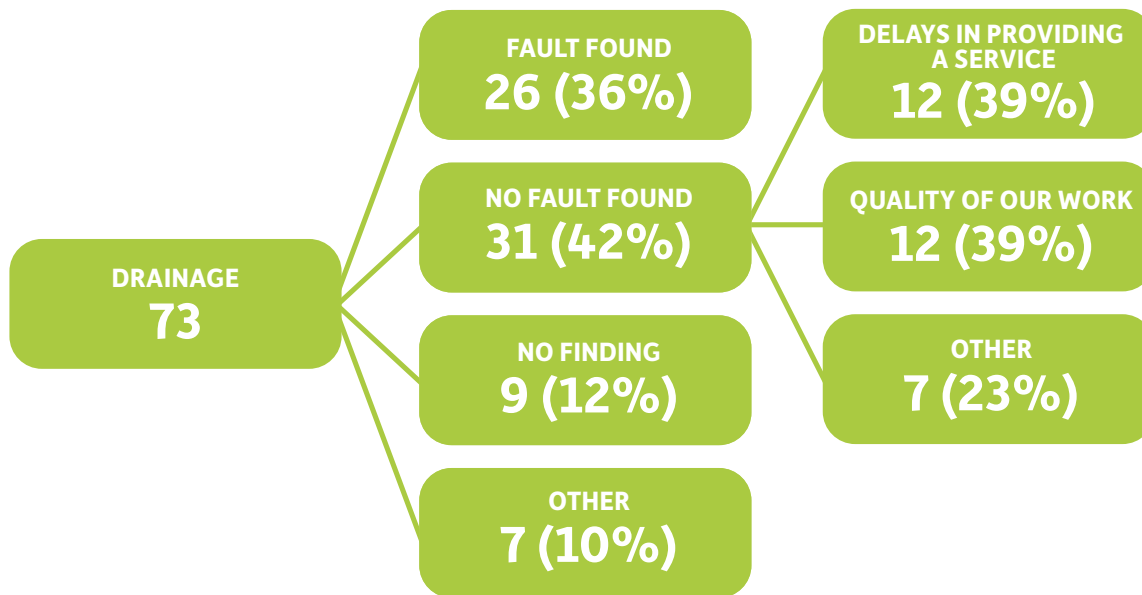


Figure 11 - Chart showing closed drainage service cases broken down by decision outcome and reasons for 2024/2025

31 (42%) of the 73 cases had 'no fault found', followed closely by 'fault found' in 26 (36%) cases. In terms of the 'no fault found' cases, the highest recorded reasons were 'a decision we made' and 'quality of our work'; common themes include:

- Blocked drain has caused flooding
- Lack of support following flooding

## Child in Need

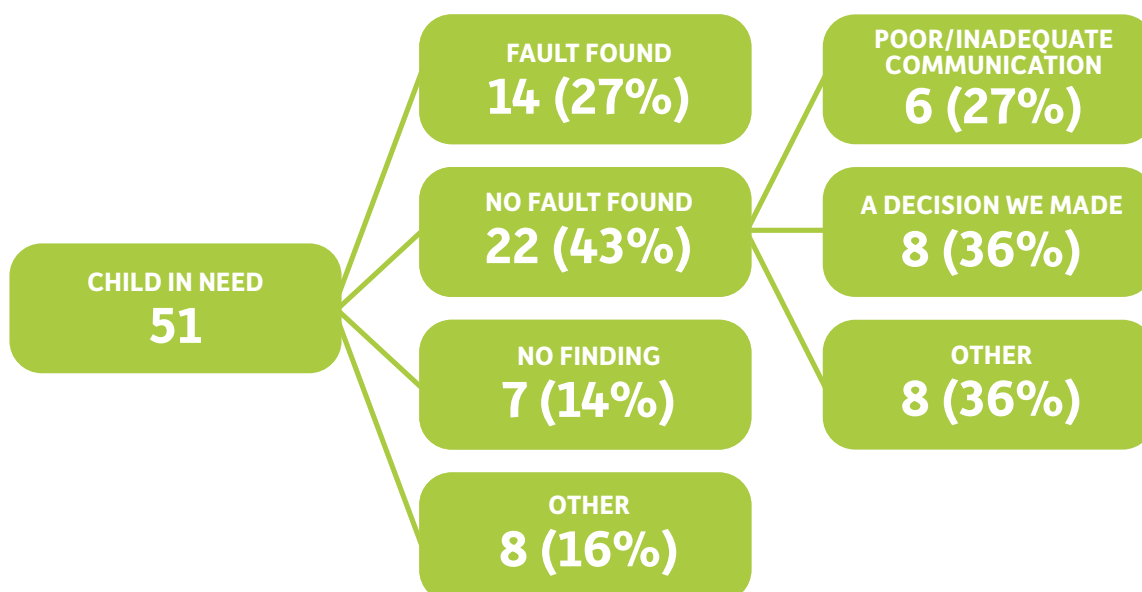


Figure 12 - Chart showing closed child in need service cases broken down by decision outcome and reasons for 2024/2025

22 (43%) of the 51 cases had 'no fault found', of which 8 (36%) were due to a 'decision we made'; commons themes include:

- Unhappy with the service process
- Unhappy with their allocated worker
- Safeguarding concerns

### Responsiveness to Corporate Complaints (Stage 1)

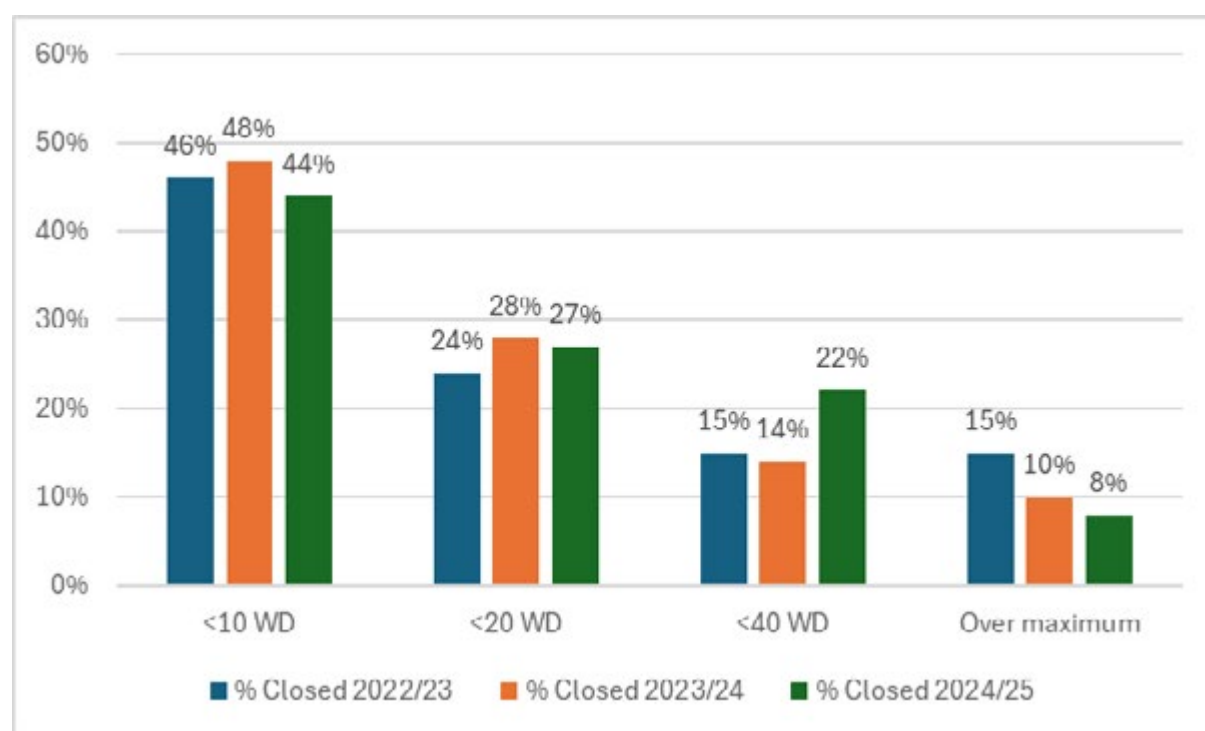


Figure 13 - Chart showing the response time for stage 1 closed corporate complaints

The Corporate Complaints Procedure states the Council aims to respond within 10 working days of receipt of the complaint, with a maximum response time of 40 working days. Between 2023/2024 and 2024/2025, there has been a slight decrease in the number of Corporate Complaints closed within 10 working days and 20 working days, an increase in complaints closed within 40 working days and a decrease of 2% in those closed over the maximum response time. Of those responded to over the maximum Stage 1 response time, 58% were complaints relating to Special Educational Needs Assessment, which falls in line with previous years.

## Responsiveness to Corporate Complaints (Stage 2)

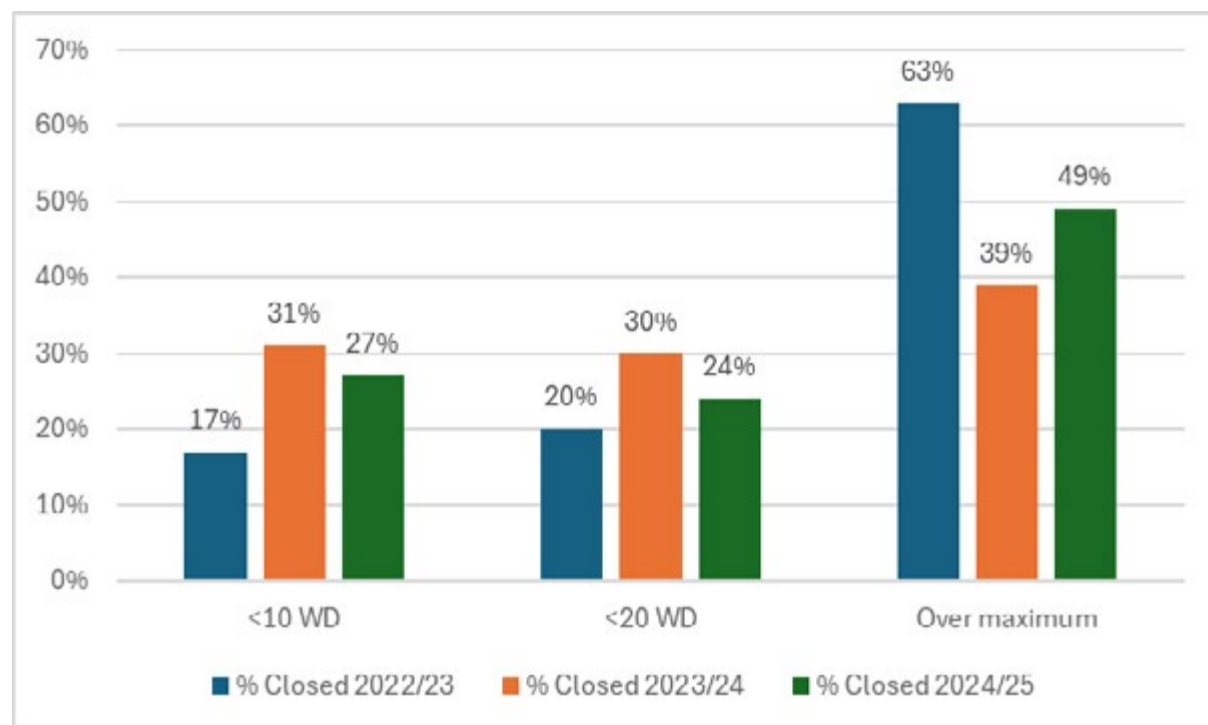


Figure 14 - Chart showing the response time for stage 2 closed corporate complaints

The Corporate Complaints Procedure states the Council aims to respond within 20 working days and includes a senior manager review. Percentages between the two most recent periods have decreased for within 10 and 20 working days and increased for cases responded to over 40 working days, therefore showing a slight dip in performance.

In 2024/25 75 complaints were escalated to Stage 2, this was a slight reduction on 2023/24 (80) and 2022/23 (82).

## Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) has authority to investigate individual complaints about most Council services. If it decides to investigate, it will look at whether a Council has made a decision(s) the right way. It does not 'review' decisions, instead it will decide if the Council has followed the right steps to make a decision or take action.<sup>1</sup>

Complainants may refer a complaint to the Ombudsman at any time; however, the Ombudsman will refer a complainant back to the Council, if the Council's relevant complaints process has not been exhausted, unless exceptional circumstances apply. The Complaints and Information Manager acts as the nominated Link Officer and handles all correspondence between the Council and the Ombudsman. The Manager tracks compliance with the Ombudsman's recommendations to remedy complaints on behalf of the Council.

The LGSCO, in conjunction with the Housing Ombudsman, launched the Complaint Handling Code in February 2024, which applies to complaints where there is no statutory process in place. Councils should consider the Code within their policies and when responding to complaints. The Ombudsman will apply the Code to their casework from April 2026.

The Ombudsman publishes data and its Annual Review of Local Government Complaints for each local authority. An Annual Review Letter is shared each year with Leicestershire County Council outlining performance against the Ombudsman three key focus areas: complaints upheld, compliance with recommendations and satisfactory remedy provided by the authority. This will also be reported to Corporate Governance Committee in November. The Ombudsman issued 2024/2025 data in May 2025, allowing incorporation into this report.

### LGCSO Demand

Typically, there is a lag between the date the Ombudsman receives an enquiry and when the Ombudsman then contacts the Council. As such, Figure 15 is the count of cases the Council receives. The case management system logs one case, whether a matter is only an enquiry or whether a matter has progressed to investigation by the Ombudsman. The number of Ombudsman cases received in 2024/2025 has decreased by 20% from the previous year.

	CFS	A&C	E&T	CEX	CR	PH	Total
2021-2022	15	12	23	3	1	0	54
2022-2023	44	18	16	1	1	1	81
2023-2024	51	22	11	0	0	0	84
2024-2025	34	18	14	0	1	0	67

Figure 15 - - Table showing the count of ombudsman cases received by department by reporting period. This reflects the performance throughout the period so will differ to figures below in figure 16.

## 2024/2025 LGSCO Annual Report Data

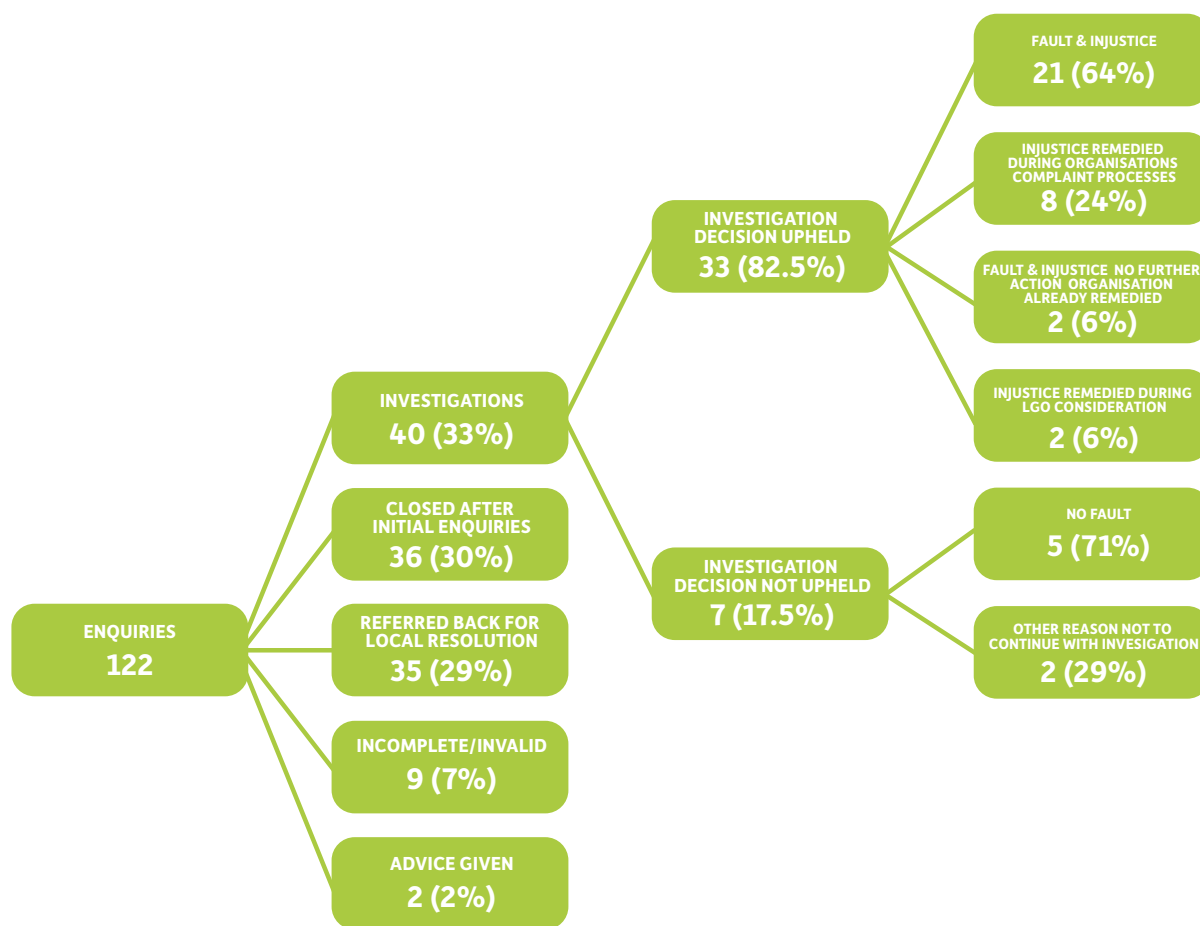


Figure 16 - Chart showing the breakdown of the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's performance data for 2024/2025. This reflects the demand and therefore figures will differ to those above in figure 15.

### Decisions Upheld

According to the 2024/2025 dataset, the Ombudsman investigated **40** complaints and upheld **33** (83%). This compares to an average of 89% in similar authorities. Adjusted for Leicestershire County Council's population, this is **4.5** upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. The average for authorities of this type is **5.3** upheld decisions per 100,000 residents, demonstrating above average performance.

For comparison, the 2023/2024 dataset, showed **83%** of complaints were upheld, with an average of 85% in similar authorities, giving **4** upheld decisions per 100,000 residents, with an average of **4.5**.

Brief details of those upheld are:

### SEND

45% (15) of upheld complaints were relating to SENA, key themes include:

- Non-compliance with statutory timescales
- Failure to carry out annual reviews
- SEN provision within EHC plans

## Financial assessment for care and support

30% (10) of upheld complaints were relating to care, key areas include

- Value of service user's assessed contribution
- Scope of needs identified in care and support assessment

## Satisfactory Remedy

According to the 2024/2025 dataset, in **10** (30%) out of **33** upheld cases the Ombudsman found the Council had provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman. This compares to an average of **10%** in similar authorities, demonstrating above average performance.

For comparison, in the 2023/2024 dataset, in 24% of upheld cases the Ombudsman found the Council provided a satisfactory remedy before the complaint reached the Ombudsman, with an average of 7% in similar authorities.

## Recommendation Compliance

According to the 2024/2025 dataset, the Council's compliance rate with the Ombudsman's recommendations was **100%**. This compares to an average of **100%** in similar authorities.

For comparison, a 100% compliance was reported in the 2023/2024 dataset also.

## Public Reports

The Ombudsman issues reports "on certain investigations, particularly where there is a wider public interest to do so. Common reasons for reports are significant injustice, systemic issues, major learning points and non-compliance with recommendations...Reports are published for 10 years."1

No public reports were issued in the reporting period 1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025.

## Remedy Payments

Reporting Year	Remedy Payment Value Recommended by Ombudsman
2022/2023	<b>£40,750</b>
2023/2024	<b>£27,222.15</b>
2024/2025	<b>£21,113</b>

Figure 17 - Table showing total value of remedy payments for each reporting period

The direction of travel across the three reporting periods shows a reduction in the total value of remedy payments, with a 22% decrease between the two most recent periods.

23 complaints were decided with a financial redress remedy, a decrease from 27 in 2023/24. 9 upheld complaints with financial remedy were due to SEN assessments. 8 upheld complaints with financial remedy were due to assessments and charging within adult care.

# Learning from Corporate Complaints

Complaints are a valuable source of information which help to identify recurring or underlying problems and potential improvements. The Council knows that numbers alone do not tell everything about the attitude towards complaints and how they are responded to locally. Arguably of more importance is to understand the impact those complaints have on people and to learn the lessons from complaints to improve the experience for others.

Lessons can usually be learned from complaints that were upheld, however, in some instances where no fault was found the Council recognises that improvements to services could still be made.

Occasionally, issues will be identified that need to be addressed over and above the original complaint. The Complaints and Information Team will always try to look at the “bigger picture” to ensure that residents receive the best possible service from the Council.

## Remedial Actions - 2024-25

All complaints where the Council’s decision outcome was ‘Fault Found’ have been reviewed to ascertain what action the relevant department took, both in remedying the fault, and wider learning to minimise or prevent such issues occurring in the future.

A sample of positive improvements the Council has made is set out below.

You complained that	We have
Refund not received	New system implemented for efficient payments and staff training provided on process for issuing refunds
Blue Badge Process	A review of the process has been completed and a new process implemented
Received final demand letter whilst bill being investigated	Workshop provided reminding staff not to issue final demands until case has been finalised
Delay receiving payment	LCC implemented a new system for efficient payments
Lack of assistance provided from transport team	Reminded the need to consider re-imbursement for mileage costs if there are delays in commissioning arrangements
School bus stop location unsafe	New designated bus stop has been assigned further along the road
No response to emails to First Contact	Implemented new process where workers will phone and email customers

# Appendix A -

## Complaints and Information Team

The Complaints and Information Team continues to support departments to both manage and learn from complaints. The key services offered by the team are:

- Complaint's advice and support
- Production of Performance Reports
- Liaison with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
- Quality assurance of complaint responses
- Complaint handling training for managers
- Acting as a critical friend to challenge service practice
- Support with persistent and unreasonable complainants

The Complaints and Information Manager offers regular assistance in complex cases and on occasion will act as a single point of contact within the Council. This helps manage protracted disputes and ensures consistent responses are issued.

In-house training focused on the core techniques of investigation and responding to complaints has again been promoted this year with three courses offered to Managers.

Assistance continues to be routinely provided to managers in drafting comprehensive responses to complaint investigations. This helps ensure consistency of response and that due process is followed.

Quarterly complaints reports are produced and presented to Departmental Management Teams or Senior Leadership Teams as appropriate.



# Appendix B –

## Sample of compliments received in the reporting period 1 April 2024 – 31 March 2025

- Compliment to Lount waste staff for their customer care after a fall at the site
- The BeatFeet at Wigston Library was very good, very funny and I had fun drumming, I loved it.
- The support and care given by HART is much appreciated. They worked positively with my mum to build her confidence and provide support.
- Thank you N, for everything you have done for us. Your incredible dedication, empathy and unwavering support have meant the world to us.
- A was so patient with me because I kept making mistakes but he persevered and managed to solve everything for my blue badge application. Took him 30 minutes so please thank him again from me.
- Thank you to the recycling service on George Street, Enderby and to the young chap in a cap who was very polite and although busy wished me well in my day. It was nice to have such positivity so early in the morning and his wonderful help.
- Thank you so much to N for all his support to my son and me. Also, thank you to T for being an amazing support in what was a very difficult time and for always being a listening ear.
- Thank you to the E&T team for the prompt action in fixing broken street lights.
- Thank you F for your commitment and exceptional work in delivering LCC services in a professional manner and we appreciate the support and guidance that you provided in regards to my brother.
- I have been so impressed with the way that D has dealt with my mother's case. She is truly a credit to your team.
- I spoke to the school admissions team several times and was really pleased with all the officers - it is a very helpful service.
- Staff did a fab job once again at Wigston library with a good number of fun crafts accessible and a lovely helpful atmosphere.
- Thank you to the Heritage & Museums team, the visitor centre in Leicester was excellent with lots of information, touch screens & extras, Loved it
- Thank you to R and team for doing a professional job on the Dawson's Road drainage and for being wonderful ambassadors for the council.





**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of work in the Children and Family Department in relation to children within Leicestershire that require Help and Protection. The Committee will be aware that these children are identified within the Children Act 1989 and are more commonly referred to as Children in Need (CIN) and Children in Need of Protection (CP).
2. This report also provides a summary of the Local Authority's performance in relation to this cohort of Leicestershire's most vulnerable children.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

Whilst the key piece of legislation in respect of Children in Need and those in need of protection is The Children Act 1989; there are many other key pieces of legislation and regulations pertaining to this group of children. Some of the key pieces of national legislation and guidance which govern the safeguarding of children and young people are:

- Children Act 1989;
  - UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
  - Education Act 2002;
  - Adoption and Children Act 2002;
  - Children Act 2004;
  - Children and Families Act 2014;
  - Children and Social Work Act 2017;
  - Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023, updated June 2025);
  - Social Work England Professional Standards (updated 2025);
  - Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked-After Children (2023);
  - Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules (HC 997, July 2025) – relevant for social work involving migrant children and families;
  - Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) – implementation expected to replace Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), with implications for children aged 16+.
3. The Children Act 1989 provides the most comprehensive framework for the care and protection of children. It remains the defining document for Local Authority Children's

Services, defining legal statute, partnership working with parents and the overriding principle that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

4. The Children Act 2004 complemented the 1989 Act and reinforced the message that all organisations working with children have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
5. The 2023 edition of Working Together to Safeguard Children, updated in June 2025, strengthens multi-agency working and introduces national multi-agency child protection standards, a whole-family approach, and clearer expectations for cooperative relationships with parents and carers

## **Background**

How Services for Children and Young People in need and in need of protection are delivered in Leicestershire.

6. Following a detailed service redesign in February 2024, Children's Social Care in Leicestershire underwent a significant realignment to refocus its attention on achieving better outcomes for children. In addition to a strong First Response service, services are delivered across Family Help and Family Safeguarding locality-based teams. Children with a disability are supported via a specialist county wide service that sits within Family Safeguarding.
7. The Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) signal a transformative shift in children's social care, placing greater emphasis on early intervention, multi-agency collaboration and family-led decision making. Local authorities are expected to embed Family Help Teams and Lead Practitioners to deliver a seamless offer of support for children in need and those at risk of harm. The Bill introduces a statutory duty to offer Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings before initiating care proceedings, empowering families to propose solutions that safeguard children while maintaining family unity. Additionally, the legislation mandates the creation of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs), integrating professionals from health, education, police, and social care to respond collectively to significant harm. These reforms require children's services to restructure front door arrangements, enhance information sharing, and adopt a more holistic, preventative approach to safeguarding and wellbeing.

## **First Response Central Duty**

8. First Response Central Duty (FRCD) is the front door to Children's Social Care services (CSC) in Leicestershire and has responsibility for the screening of all contacts into the Service, new referrals, provides an assessment service who respond to the most vulnerable and high-risk cases, provides an out of hours children's social work team and Child Sexual Exploitation. It works closely with the Target Family Help triage team who provide a response to requests for Early Help including access to group work programmes and parenting programmes. This includes the extended domestic abuse team who offer an early offer in response to emerging domestic abuse related incidents to divert families by provision of advice and support.

9. FRCD is centrally based in County Hall and is made up of two dedicated services for screening incoming information and subsequently undertaking assessments of need, including responding to immediate safeguarding concerns which require coordinated safeguarding responses. These two services are supported by business support teams who contribute to the complex administration of the process including uploading new information into the recording system and starting workflow in line with statutory requirements.
10. The Screening Service has four Team managers, four Senior Practitioners and eight social workers. The Assessment Service has five teams working across a five-week rota to manage allocation of work in a way that is responsive to unplanned emergencies whilst maintaining the process of assessments within statutory timescales. These teams are made up of five team managers five Senior Practitioners and five social workers.

### Assessment.

11. In the year April 2024-March 2025, the number of contacts received by First Response was 28,124. On average across the year, 24% of all of these contacts meet the threshold to be progressed as a referral to Children's Social Care and may require an assessment under S17 or S47 of the Children Act 1989. It should be noted that First Response provides the gateway into both Targeted Family Help and Children's Social Care (CSC). The number of contacts, in 24/25, that have proceeded to referral in CSC was 6,754. This was an increase from 6,236 in the previous year.
12. Re-referrals are measured to ensure that children are not being referred on numerous occasions because their needs have not been appropriately assessed. During 24/25 the figure for re-referrals is 26.4% of total referrals. This was above the local target of 22% and Year To date in 25/26 this has now improved to 22.5% close to this target Audit work across services is in place to review learning against this target to drive continued improvement.
13. Once a referral is accepted, consideration is given for a full assessment of the child's circumstances to be undertaken by the relevant service area. Year-on-year since 2016, the number of Single Assessments completed has increased significantly. Over the last twelve months, 6,516 assessments have been completed across the service, which is approximately 545 per month. This compares with 4,491 assessments completed during the previous year showing an increase of 2025. The timely completion of assessments within 45 days is measured. In 24/25 83.7% of all assessments were completed within 45 days. This is under the target of 85% and subsequent work has seen this improve to the current figure for 25/26 of 86.8% and over 91% in June 2025. There is further work underway to drive processes across the Service.
14. Strategy Discussions are multi agency decision making forums that consider whether a child is at risk of significant harm. They, along with Section 47 enquiries, occur across First Response, Localities and the Disabled Children's Service. In 24/25, 2962 Strategy Discussions were completed across children's social care. On average 72% of these lead to the initiation of a Section 47 enquiry, this is a formal statutory intervention as set out in Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard children. 2,028 Section 47 enquiries were completed in the year leading to 728 children

subsequently being considered within a multiagency initial child protection conference.

15. It is of note that Section 47 enquiries do not always directly correlate with the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan as the enquiries can occur during any part of the child's journey.
16. The number of children who are subject to Child Protection Plans as of 1 August 2025 is 552. This is an increase compared to 427 children at the end of August 2024.

### Family Help

17. In 2024, the Children and Family Services Department created a new service – Family Help that sits alongside Family Safeguarding. This new service was created in response to wider national agendas, such as the Independent Care Review, Stable Homes Built on Love.
18. Family Help was established to focus on timely support at appropriate levels of intervention for children in need, with elements of practical hands-on approaches with more intensive one-to-one support. Where needed children can move seamlessly between what was the old Children and Family Wellbeing Service and the old Children's Social Care children in need locality teams ensuring no delay in support.
19. Family Help is a service that is relationship-based, offering consistency for children and their families. Where Child in Need level support is required, this work may be allocated to either a Social Worker (Family Help) or a Keyworker (Targeted Family Help). Where it is a Keyworker, the work will always have a social work oversight and direction from the Senior Social Work Oversight Practitioner, Ofsted have had oversight of the model and were confident in its strength.
20. Targeted Family Help is the side of the Service that has a focus on targeted earlier intervention. Targeted Family Help is one of many services that makes up the wider early help system in localities – many organisations, such as schools, health visiting, voluntary sector, faith communities, district councils, deliver 'early help' to families.

### Family Help Teams

21. *Five Locality Family Help Social Work teams:* One Team Manager, one Senior Practitioner, Social workers (three or four per team dependant on locality) and a Senior Social Work Oversight Practitioner who is supervised by the social work Team Manager and has robust social work oversight of all children in need allocated to a Targeted Family Help Keyworker.
22. *Five locality Targeted Family Help teams:* One Team and Partnership Manager (Oversee CIN integrated model and all aspects of Targeted family help), two or three Team Leaders (who supervise all Keyworkers alongside other Targeted workers and partnership tasks) and three or four Keyworkers who have Child in Need led plans or Targeted led (early help) plans.
23. *Targeted Family Help Triage Team*, which forms the "Front Door" alongside the First Response Children's Duty team; they work closely together to ensure families get the support that best meets their needs.

24. *SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)*, which is managed through the Family Help Triage Team, and provides independent information, support and advice to parents and young people who are experiencing difficulties with education.
25. *Teen Health 11-19 Service*, supports young people through a range of group offers, one-to-one support and drop-in sessions, via all secondary schools in Leicestershire and in community settings. The team has now extended its offer to post-16 support.
26. *Extended Domestic Abuse Team*: A preventative service that works countywide with families involved with First Response, Family Help and Family Safeguarding as well as other agencies including schools, to try and promote a way of working which better supports the whole family where there are concerns about domestic abuse.
27. *Brighter Futures*: A team which supports parents who have had recurrent children removed from their care, the Service provides intensive support alongside other professionals to reduce future children being removed. The team consists of a Team Leader and three Keyworkers.
28. There are currently (July 2025) 688 children subject to Child in Need plans, of which 550 sit within the Family Help service; 50 children subject to child in need plans sit within the Families Together team, Child exploitation team or the family safeguarding team and are allocated to social workers within those teams. There are a further 90 children who are open on Child In Need Plans within the Children's Disability Service.

### Family Safeguarding

29. In February 2024, Leicestershire County Council undertook a strategic restructure of its Family Safeguarding Service to enhance its capacity to respond to children and young people at risk of significant harm. The revised model delivers a specialist child protection and court work service, aligned with the departments commitment to providing the Right Service at the Right Time.
30. The Service is designed to support families through targeted intervention under child protection plans, with a focus on achieving sustainable change. Where significant risk remains and change has not been evident, practitioners initiate Public Law Outline (PLO) processes.
31. The PLO process is applied nationally to provide a framework to manage high levels of risk within the community using specific 'pre-proceedings' processes. This is intended to divert cases from court and enhance the coordination of planning with the provision of free legal advice to parents, clear timescales for change and structured oversight. PLO also provides timescales and structures for applications to court and the management of court proceedings for both immediate issues that cannot be supported in pre-proceedings or when that intervention brings insufficient change. This all aims to bring the best possible outcomes for children using structured and timely intervention. The enhanced specialisation and oversight to local PLO work has led to demonstrable improvements in the timeliness and quality of work, reducing delays for the most vulnerable children.
32. Family Safeguarding operates across four locality areas:

- i. North: Loughborough and Coalville
- ii. South: Wigston and Hinckley

33. Social Workers and Senior Practitioners hold caseloads focused on child protection, pre-proceedings, and court work. Support and Assessment Workers undertake parenting assessments for children subject to child protection plans or court orders. Support Workers play a vital role in supervising family time and delivering life story work for children involved in care proceedings.
34. This integrated and specialist model reflects the department's strategic priorities around early permanence, timely intervention, and strengthening family resilience, while ensuring robust safeguarding for children at risk.
35. The specialised child protection service means that work is focussed specifically on child protection and court work. When children are identified as being at risk of immediate harm, action is taken without delay to safeguard them. The case decision making panel is well embedded. Decision-making at this panel is proportionate and leads to appropriate actions, including the decision to initiate pre-proceedings or court applications to safeguard children.
36. Within Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children's Service, there are 511 children subject to Child Protection Plans of which 82 Children are subject to Pre-Proceedings. There are currently 140 children subject to care proceedings.

#### Children's Disability Service

37. The Disabled Children's Service plays a critical role in ensuring that children and young people with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive. These services are designed to uphold the rights of disabled children, promote their well-being, and enable them to live safe, fulfilling lives within their families and communities. The work of these services is underpinned by legislation such as the Children Act 1989, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the Care Act 2014, particularly in relation to transition planning. In Leicestershire, the Disabled Children's Service support children subject to Child In Need Plans, Child Protection Plans, Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
38. There are two teams and one Service Manager The teams consist of 1 x Team Manager, 1 x Senior Practitioner, Social Workers, Support and Assessment Workers and Personal Assistants.
39. As of 14 August 2025, there are 177 children open to the Service. Of these 177 children, 90 are subject to a Child In Need plan, 10 are subject to Child Protection Plans, 37 are Children in Care, 18 incoming assessment, and 22 are Care leavers supported under (Section 24 Children Act 1989).
40. At the heart of the Service is the responsibility to carry out statutory assessments to determine eligibility for support. These assessments consider the impact of a child's disability on their daily life and the family's ability to meet their needs. Where eligible, the Service develops tailored care plans that may include access to short breaks, personal care, direct payments, and specialist equipment. These interventions are designed to support children to remain at home, participate in community life, and achieve their potential.



41. A key function of the Children's Disability Service is to ensure that children with disabilities are safeguarded from harm. Research shows that disabled children are at greater risk of abuse and neglect, and the service works closely with child protection teams to ensure robust safeguarding measures are in place. This includes contributing to child protection plans and, where necessary, initiating care proceedings.
42. Another vital area of focus is transition planning. From the age of 14, the Service begins preparing young people for adulthood, working in partnership with education, health, and adult social care services. The aim is to ensure a seamless transition that supports continued access to education, employment, housing, and health services, while maintaining the young person's independence and well-being.
43. The Service also plays a central role in multi-agency collaboration, contributing to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and working alongside schools, health professionals, and voluntary sector organisations. This integrated approach ensures that support is coordinated and responsive to the child's evolving needs. There are two Designated Social Care Officers (DSCO's) who drive this area of practice.
44. In addition to direct support for children, the Service provides guidance and advocacy for families, helping them navigate complex systems and access the services to which they are entitled. This includes emotional support, signposting, and practical assistance, recognising the vital role families play in the care and development of their children.

### **Background papers**

45. None.

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

46. None.

### **Equality Implications**

47. There is no requirement to include an EHRI assessment as the report does not propose any changes to the Council's policies, procedures, functions and services.
48. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **Human Rights Implications**

49. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **Appendices**

50. None

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

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director, Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care  
Tel. No: 0116 3055479  
E-mail: [Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk)

Hayley Binley, Head of Service, Locality Fieldwork  
Tel. No: 0116 3057566  
E-mail: [Hayley.Binley@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Hayley.Binley@leics.gov.uk)



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**LEICESTERSHIRE MUSIC OVERVIEW REPORT**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about the work of Leicestershire Music (LM). The report will share data about latest achievements and impact as well as explain the funding and governance arrangements for Leicestershire Music as the Lead organisation for the Leicestershire Music Hub (LMH).

**Previous Decisions and Policy Framework**

2. On 7 June 2022, the Committee received a presentation on Leicestershire Music which provided an overview of the work delivered by the Service and its focus moving forward.

**Background**

3. Leicestershire Music is thought to be the oldest music service of its kind in England and celebrated its 75th anniversary in 2023.
4. In 2024, LM was established as the Lead Organisation for the Leicester and Leicestershire Music Hub, implementing the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) through a Local Plan for Music Education (LPME).
5. Through a central workforce and a variety of partnerships, including schools, LM enables children and young people from all backgrounds in Leicester and Leicestershire to enrich and connect their world through life changing experiences.
6. LM is a service within the Council's Children and Family Services Department and LMH's leadership is strengthened and supported by a Hub Board.

**Funding**

7. The LMH receives two ring-fenced grants allocated by the DfE:
  - Core funding through the revenue grant to co-ordinate and support the delivery of music education provision through a Hub partnership in line with the vision, aims and strategic functions for Hubs as set out in the NPME.

- A capital grant to increase the volume, range, relevance and accessibility of musical instruments, equipment and technology in the Hub area.
- The revenue grant of £1.47 million has not increased for the 2025-26 academic year and has only increased by 4.61% since 2015-16. Had the grant kept pace with inflation, the 2023-24 allocation would have been £0.5m higher. The Local Government pay award offer for 2025/26 is forecast to add £120k to employment costs. Income generation via instrument hire and small group and one-to-one lessons has helped minimise overspend and a new Business Development Manager is leading a Fundraising Strategy to help drive sponsorship and generate additional funding.

### **Delivery**

8. LMH's vision for the musical future of children and young people in Leicester and Leicestershire fully embraces the objectives and recommendations of the NPME.
9. In particular, LMH is committed to:
  - Providing an inclusive, diverse, and engaging music education and recognising that music education plays a vital role in developing creativity, cognitive skills, social connections, and overall wellbeing.
  - Delivering high-quality music education programmes, achieved by investing in the continuous professional development of music educators; fostering partnerships with local schools and cultural organisations; regularly evaluating the impact and effectiveness of work delivered.

### **Alignment with Children and Families Priorities**

10. LM works extensively with children across Leicester and Leicestershire supporting departmental priorities such as:
  - a) Inclusion and SEND: LM delivers bespoke SEND projects and supports schools and settings, leading on the award winning 'Uprising' programme, training specialist teachers in SEND Music delivery;
  - b) Wellbeing and Personal Development: LM supports children to participate in music fostering mental health and generating social benefit and can be part of an early help offer for children;
  - c) Partnership and Outreach: LM works with schools across Leicester and Leicestershire, community groups, and LMH partners to broaden access.
11. LM's school team fosters relationships with all state-funded schools in Leicester and Leicestershire and supports them to deliver high-quality music education, including curriculum support, staff development, specialist tuition, supply of instruments and group playing activities. Children participate in performances at a range of venues in the city and county.

### **Partnerships**

12. LM has strong partnerships with schools, local and national organisations and community groups to enable equitable access to broad and diverse music education. Partners include Pedestrian, Soft Touch Arts, Cosmopolitan Arts, Bullfrog Arts, The Philharmonia, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, National Youth Jazz Orchestra and Orchestras Live. Partners use Hub grant money to leverage further funding, through agreements which are reviewed annually. Case studies are published at <https://leicestershiremusicshub.org/hub-partnership-case-studies>

### **Progression and Musical Development**

13. LM focusses on individualised progression pathways for young musicians, enabling them to develop their skills and pursue music education at all levels. This will involve collaborations with a range of diverse partners, professional musicians, and industry experts to provide guidance, mentorship and performance opportunities.

### **Inclusion**

14. LM is committed to delivering an inclusive and welcoming environment for music education, performances, training, and developing opportunities for all, where anyone can positively explore their musical talents and passion safely.

### **What is Working Well**

15. Performance data 2024-25 shows that:
- 95 % of all schools in Leicester and Leicestershire have been supported in their music education – via Continuing Professional Development (CPD), school music development plans, performance opportunities and music teaching;
  - 79% of schools took part in a singing opportunity such as staff development, massed choirs and choir competitions;
  - 21.6% of all pupils taking part in LM activity are eligible for Pupil Premium or have Special Educational Needs;
  - LM worked with over 18,000 students in schools;
  - Pupils performed at The Royal Albert Hall as part of the Youth Proms, went on tour to Belgium, performed at De Montfort and The Venue, De Montfort University and for the first time had a stage at Leicester's Riverside Festival;
  - Media coverage included interviews on BBC Radio Leicester and an editorial in Niche Magazine;
  - Performing Rights Society/Phonographic Performance Limited (PRS PPL) sponsored the June 2025 'Leics Make Music' festival.

### **Key Challenges**

16. The Service had identified four key challenges:
- The Local Government Pay Award is unfunded and will add £120k to LM salaries;
  - Continuing real terms funding reductions;
  - A local authority music service is more restricted in fundraising opportunities (such as grant applications, gifts and donations) than a charity;
  - Schools and families are purchasing fewer traded goods as a result of competing educational priorities and limited available funding.

## **Future Plans and Development**

17. It is planned for the service to move to the Haymarket Theatre as the venue for school bands and orchestra work. This will give LM a more visual presence and the ability to grow and work with more young people.
18. The 'Musician in Residence' programme will be offered to key schools where music is a priority. Music Leaders will spend more time in one school fostering relationships, enabling progression for young musicians and creating a musical culture within a school. This will support deeper long-term progression for young musicians and reduce travel for music leaders.
19. The Leicester Music Board, which was established to bridge the gap between music education and the music industry, is planning a 2026 Young Person's Music Careers Conference as well as several collaborative funding bids.
20. Performance opportunities for young people in 2025-26 include Haymarket Theatre, De Montfort Hall, The Venue and the National Music Mark conference in November 2025.
21. Ashmount Special School is LM's Lead SEND School for Music and will be assisting other special schools to develop their SEND music ensemble provision in 2025-26 as well as showcasing their ensemble at the national Music Mark conference in November 2025.

## **Background papers**

22. Leicestershire Music Service, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 7 June 2022:  
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MID=6883>
23. National Plan for Music Education:  
[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62bc1242d3bf7f292040d364/The\\_Power\\_of\\_Music\\_to\\_Change\\_Lives.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62bc1242d3bf7f292040d364/The_Power_of_Music_to_Change_Lives.pdf)
24. Leicestershire Music Local Plan for Music Education and associated policies:  
<https://leicestershiremusichub.org/lpme>
25. Leicestershire Music Hub Inclusion Policy:  
<https://leicestershiremusichub.org/uploads/inclusion-policy-april-2025.pdf?v=1748876530>
26. National Music Hub Data Dashboard:  
<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrljoiMmY0MDg5ZGMtMGYwNi00Zjk3LTk3NTQtOWZmNmRkYzZIOTNiliwidCI6ImM3YTZmYzMyLTc1MzgtNGlwZS1hOTZhLTA1Zjg1NTAwN2MxMSJ9>

## **Equality Implications**

27. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

## **Human Rights Implications**

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

**Officers to Contact**

Sarah Barton-Wales, Head of Leicestershire Music and Strategic Lead for Leicestershire Music Hub

Telephone: 0116 3050400

Email: [sarah.barton@leics.gov.uk](mailto:sarah.barton@leics.gov.uk)

Tim Browne

Assistant Director, Education, SEND and Inclusion

[tim.browne@leics.gov.uk](mailto:tim.browne@leics.gov.uk)

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**QUARTER 1 2025/26 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

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

**Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2025 (Quarter 1).

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

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

**Background 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 1.
4. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.
5. From 12 measures reported that have a national benchmark, 3 are in the top quartile, 5 are in the second quartile, and 4 are in the third quartile.

**Tableau Dashboard Usage**

6. Across the Children and Family Services department in Q1 2025/26 there were 521 active Tableau Server users, a decrease from Q4 2024/25 (580). Across the department there were 80,332 views, down from 84,817 views in the previous quarter, at a rate of 154 views per user, up slightly from the previous quarter (146).
7. Across the two main service areas, in Q1 2025/26 there were 289 users and 44,960 views in Targeted Family Help and Social Care at a rate of 156 views per

user, compared with 132 users and 8,884 views in Education and SEND at a rate of 67 views per user.

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

8. 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.
9. The percentage of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time in the year to date decreased to 23.0% at the end of Quarter 1 compared to 24.9% at the end of Quarter 4. In this quarter 35 children began a second or subsequent child protection plan, a decrease from 51 reported in the preceding quarter. Leicestershire is now placed in the second 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.
10. The percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months was 22.4% at the end of Quarter 1 which is an improvement compared to 26.4% at the end of the previous quarter; 396 children were 're-referred' within Quarter 1. Leicestershire is now placed in the third quartile of local authorities.
11. The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days to the end of Quarter 1 was 86.8%, an increase compared to performance at the end Quarter 4 (83.6%). Within Quarter 1, 1,550 assessments were completed, with 1,346 within timescale. Leicestershire continues to be placed in the second quartile of local authorities using most recent comparisons.
12. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Suitable Accommodation was 96.0% at the end of Quarter 1 (121 out of 126 young people), an improvement compared to the end of the previous Quarter (94.0%). Leicestershire continues to be in the top quartile of local authorities using available comparisons.
13. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Education, Employment or Training improved to 63.5% at the end of Quarter 1 (80 out of 126 young people). This is a further increase from the end of Quarter 4, 62.0% and now places Leicestershire in the first 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.
14. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 1 who had a dental check in the preceding 12 months was 74.5% (549 children), a decrease from 76.7% reported for the previous quarter.
15. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 1 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months was 81.8% (603 children). This is a decrease from 86.9% reported for the previous quarter.

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

16. Due to ongoing work following system changes, specifically relating to Capital/Synergy, it is not possible to report the total numbers worked with by Targeted Family Help.
17. The Children and Families Services Departmental Plan states the intention to ensure that the needs of young people are identified as early as possible so that timely and appropriate support is provided in the right setting, therefore reducing the risk of needs escalating at the same time as ensuring children and young people's best outcomes are achieved.
18. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire with an Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) was 3,526 at the Summer term 2025 school census. This is 703 children higher than at the Spring term 2025 school census (2,823), and an increase of 24.9% in a single term. The Summer term 2025 school census EHCP numbers are the highest recorded on a Summer term census date since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed. The increase is also the largest ever within year termly increase under the current SEN Code of Practice, with the average increase since the 2020/21 academic being 126 per term. Between Summer Term 2024 and Summer Term 2025 EHCP children numbers in mainstream schools have increased by 852, during the previous 3 academic years the increase totalled 430.
19. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire without an EHCP but in receipt of SEN Support was 13,400 at the Summer term 2025 school census. This is 29 lower than at the Spring term 2025 school census (13,429). This is the first time since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed that in academic year SEN support numbers have declined. At Summer term 2025 EHCP and SEN support numbers in mainstream schools, totally 16,926 children. This is the highest ever recorded under the 2014 SEN Code of Practice and is 878 high than at the same period in 2024 (16,048). SEN support children now represent 79.2% of the SEN cohort in mainstream schools compared to 83.3% at the same time last year.

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

20. 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 was reported in the Q4 2024/25 performance report.
21. 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 get the best possible start in life**

### **Early years**

20. In the Spring term 2025, 66.5% of eligible two-year-olds took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE). This is a decrease from the Autumn term 2024 (71.3%). For three-year-olds, the figure was 95.6%, a slight increase over the Autumn term 2024 (95.1%). Overall, 97.2% of eligible two- and three-year-olds took up their FEEE in high-quality provision in the Spring term 2024, a slight decrease from the Autumn term (97.3%).

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

22. The percentage of primary schools rated Good or Outstanding for leadership and management was 93.0% (212 out of 228 inspected schools) at the end of Quarter 1. This represents a 0.5% increase from Quarter 4 2024/25 and is the highest performance since April 2017. This figure is within the third quartile of local authorities and is 0.3% below the England average, which continues to be at a record level (93.3%), and 2.2% higher than the average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours (90.8%), whose performance has been on a recent downwards trend.
23. The percentage of secondary schools rated Good or Outstanding for leadership and management was 88.6% (39 out of 44 inspected schools) at the end of Quarter 4. This represents a reduction of 2.3% from Quarter 4 2024/25. This performance is within the third quartile of local authorities nationally, a decline from the second quartile last quarter when performance was at a record high. Leicestershire's performance is 1.1% lower than the average for England, which at 89.7% is a new highest ever level of performance, and 0.7% lower than the average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours (89.3%), which is also the highest ever performance figure for this group.
24. The percentage of pupils educated in Good or Outstanding schools for leadership and management was 91.5% at the end of Quarter 1 (approx. 92k out of 100.6k pupils). This is a decline of 0.7% from Quarter 4 2024/25 (92.2%), when performance was at a joint record high level. This figure is within the third quartile of local authorities nationally. Leicestershire's performance is 1.4% lower than the average for England (92.9%), and equal to the average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours (91.5%). Both the national and the average Statistical Neighbour performance are at new record levels.
25. The official benchmarking data has been made available by the Department for Education (DfE) for offers relating to primary and secondary school entry in September 2025.
26. The percentage of applicants obtaining their first preference for first time admission to Primary school in 2025 was 95.4% (approx. 6.5k out of 6.8k applicants). This is 0.4% higher than in 2024 (95%). This figure is within the second quartile of local authorities, and 1.8% higher than the average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours (93.6%).

27. The percentage of applicants obtaining their first preference for Secondary school transfer in 2025 was 92.0% (approx. 6.8k out of 7.4k applicants). This is with rounding is 0.4% higher than in 2024 (91.5%). This figure is within the first quartile of local authorities, and 1.6% higher (with rounding) than the average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours (90.3%).
28. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 1,461 at the end of Q1 2025/26. This is an increase of 182 students (14%) compared to the end of Q1 2024/25 (1,279 students).
29. Trends show an increase since 2023/2024 in the number of young people with who have attendance difficulties due to mental health difficulties, school anxiety and/or relationship breakdowns with their education setting. This, coupled with a high number of young people who go down the EHE route due to their existing school being unable to meet their needs points towards there now being increasing group of families who feel like their school setting is not the best place for their children. This fits with the trends being seen nationally with increasing EHE figures within most local authorities.
30. The percentage of young people (16-17) in Leicestershire not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at the end of Q1 2025/26 was 1.5% (240 students). This rate remained the same as at the end of Q4 2024/25 and remains below the target of less than 2.1%.
31. The official benchmarking data has been made available by the Department for Education (DfE) for suspensions and permanent exclusions during the 2023/24 academic year.
32. 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 proportionately the same as for the previous academic, 2022/23, but a rate that is 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. This places Leicestershire in the second quartile of performance nationally. The national benchmark was 0.13%, an increase from 0.11% in 2022/23. The national rise was due to an annual increase of 1,509 permanent exclusions, to 10,885 in total. This is the highest national number and proportionality of permanent exclusions since the data collection started in its present form in 2006/07. The average for Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours was 0.12%, which is 0.05% higher than the average for Leicestershire. This group of Local Authorities saw a 0.02% annual increase in rate, from 0.10% in 2022/23.
33. The most recent locally validated data for Leicestershire in relation to permanent exclusions is showing 62 for the period September to end of March of the 2024/25 academic year, compared to 52 for the same period of the previous academic year.

34. 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 2006/07. Leicestershire's performance is in the second quartile nationally, and is both below the national performance, which increased by 12% to a rate of 4.04%, and Leicestershire's new set of Statistical Neighbours, who saw a 14% increase to a rate of 4.14%.
35. The most recent locally validated data for Leicestershire in relation to the numbers of children with a least one suspension shows 2,791 for the period September to end of March of the 2024/25 academic year, compared to 2,866 for the same period of the previous academic year.

### **Conclusion**

36. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of Quarter 1 2025/26, covering the period April to March 2025.
37. 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**

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67375fe5ed0fc07b53499a42/Keeping\\_Children\\_Safe\\_Helping\\_Families\\_Thrive\\_.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/67375fe5ed0fc07b53499a42/Keeping_Children_Safe_Helping_Families_Thrive_.pdf)

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

None.

### **Appendix**

Children and Family Services Department Performance Dashboard Quarter 1, 2025/26

### **Officers to Contact**

Jane Moore, Director – Children and Families Service

Tel: 0116 305 2649

Email: [Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk)

Sharon Cooke, Assistant Director – Children's Social Care

Tel: 0116 305 5479

Email: [Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.Cooke@leics.gov.uk)

Tim Browne, Assistant Director – Education, SEND and Commissioning

Tel: 0116 305 7429

Email: [Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk)

Emma Jones, Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

Tel: 0116 305 7526

Email: [Emma.j.Jones@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Emma.j.Jones@leics.gov.uk)

Alex Lea, Business Partner – Business Intelligence Service

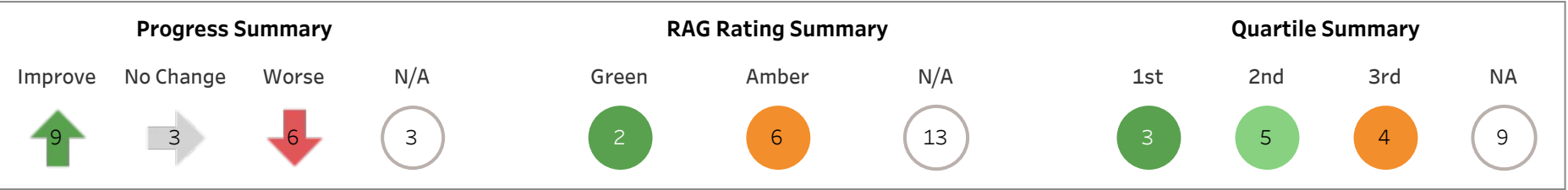
Tel: 0116 305 6803

Email: [Alex.Lea@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Alex.Lea@leics.gov.uk)

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# CFS Overview & Scrutiny Dashboard Q1 2025/26





























Strategic Plan Outcome  
All

Area  
All

Search Indicator  
All

Area	Indicator	Latest Data	Period	Previous Data	Perform. DOT	Target	RAG	Quartiles
Early Years	Eligible 2 and 3-year olds taking up their FEEE in a high-quality provision	97.2%	Spring Term 2025	97.3%	→	NA	N/A	NA
	Eligible 2 year olds taking up their FEEE	66.5%	Spring Term 2025	71.3%	↓	NA	N/A	NA
	Eligible 3 year olds taking up their FEEE	95.6%	Spring Term 2025	95.1%	↑	NA	N/A	NA
Education	Applicants obtaining their first preferences for first time admission to Primary school	95.4%	2025	95.00%	↑	93.7%	N/A	2nd
	Children Electively Educated at Home	1461	Q1 2025/26	1247	○	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	2nd
	NEET young people aged 16-17	1.5%	Q1 2025/26	1.5%	→	NA	N/A	NA
	Permanent exclusions as a % of School population	0.07	2023/24	0.07	→	NA	N/A	2nd

SEND	Primary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for leadership and managem..	<b>93.0%</b>	Q1 2025/26	92.5%		NA		3rd
	Pupils in Good or Outstanding schools for leadership and management	<b>91.5%</b>	Q1 2025/26	92.2%		NA		3rd
	Secondary pupils achieving their first preference for Secondary transfer	<b>92.0%</b>	2025	91.5%		NA		1st
	Secondary schools rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding' for leadership and managem..	<b>88.6%</b>	Q1 2025/26	90.9%		NA		3rd
	Children in mainstream schools in receipt of SEN Support (without EHCP)	<b>13400</b>	Summer Term 2025	13429		NA		NA
	Children in mainstream schools with EHCP	<b>3526</b>	Summer Term 2025	2823		NA		NA
Social Care	Assessments completed within 45 days	<b>86.8%</b>	Q1 2025/26	83.6%		>90.3%		2nd
	Care leavers EET	<b>63.5%</b>	Q1 2025/26	62.0%		>54.0%		1st
	Care leavers in suitable accommodation	<b>96.0%</b>	Q1 2025/26	94.0%		>92.0%		1st
	Children becoming subject to a CPP for second or subsequent time	<b>23.0%</b>	Q1 2025/26	24.9%		<20.8%		2nd
	Children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	<b>74.5%</b>	Q1 2025/26	76.7%		NA		NA
	Children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (..	<b>81.8%</b>	Q1 2025/26	86.9%		NA		NA
	Re-referrals to CSC within 12 mths	<b>22.4%</b>	Q1 2025/26	26.4%		<18.7%		3rd



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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**DRAFT LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN**  
**PARTNERSHIP YEARLY REPORT 2024-25**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on the draft Yearly Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LRSCP) for 2024-25.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties for Local Authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the Local Authority to provide services to children in need in their area; section 47 of the same Act requires Local Authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
3. These duties can only realistically be discharged with the full co-operation of other partners, many of whom have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Children Act 2004.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2023 (statutory guidance on multi-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) give responsibility for this join-up locally to the safeguarding partners, the Police, Integrated Care Board and the Local Authority, which have a shared and equal duty to agree and make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area.
5. The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements locally are managed through the LRSCP that covers the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.
6. It is a statutory requirement, as set out in Working Together 2023, that the Safeguarding Partners publish a report at least once every twelve months on the arrangements and their effectiveness.

## **Background**

7. The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements for Leicestershire and Rutland were presented to this Committee on 5 March 2019, prior to being published on 28 June 2019. These were updated in October 2022. In 2024-25, the arrangements were reviewed in light of the updated government guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#). Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be based on Local Authority areas. Arrangements can cover two or more local authority boundaries by agreement. As a number of partners are shared with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, joint [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) are published now. They were published in December 2024, in line with government timescales.
8. The Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) shares some operational arrangements with the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board and some partnership structures with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership.

## **Yearly Report**

9. The key purpose of the Yearly Report is to assess the impact of the work undertaken in 2024-25 on safeguarding outcomes for children in Leicestershire and Rutland. Specifically, it evaluates performance against the priorities that were set out in the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships' [Business Plan 2023-25](#).
10. The draft Yearly Report 2024-25 is appended to this report. This is the content of the report which has been to the Design Team but can be updated as necessary before being published.
11. The report outlines the learning, assurance, training and improvement activity of the LRSCP and its partners, and the impact this has had on safeguarding children. Key messages from the SCP to Leicestershire are:
  - The “Safeguarding Babies” priority has been in place since 2021-22 and a lot of work has been completed in this time, with the implementation of ICON<sup>1</sup>, an updated Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure and the launch of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool. Also, during this time, there have been numerous training events and individual courses, both in person and online, and a range of learning and development resources have been produced and disseminated. It is evident that this business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and so it has not been carried over to the 2025-27 Business Plan. It is acknowledged, though, that further awareness raising is required around key guidance and resources, particularly with a large and dynamic workforce. Therefore, babies will always be seen as a key cohort of focus for the SCP.
  - Since its inception in 2021-22, it is felt that the “Child Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing” business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and so it has not been carried over to the 2025-27 Business Plan. It is

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<sup>1</sup> ICON is an evidenced-based programme focused on reducing abusive head trauma (AHT) triggered by crying. The mnemonic **ICON** outlines the key messages of the programme: **I**nfant crying is normal, **C**omforting methods can help, **I**t's **OK** to walk away, and **N**ever, ever shake a baby.

acknowledged, though, that children's mental health continues to be a subject of both local and national importance. Therefore, the Planning and Delivery Group of the SCPs will continue to seek assurance that mental health and safeguarding are effectively addressed together locally by receiving CAMHS highlight reports.

- A priority on "Harm Outside the Home" has been included in the [Business Plan for 2025-27](#), which will build on the progress made since 2022-23 around the "Keeping Adolescents Safe / Supporting Safe Adolescents" priority. This acknowledges the continued prevalence of this theme nationally, with persistent concern about the themes raised in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, including group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming gangs. Implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023 is also at the forefront of national interest, following the release of the Netflix drama *Adolescence*, and with Ofcom's child safety measures coming into force for social media, search and gaming apps and websites in July 2025.<sup>2</sup> Assurance around the local response to these themes continues to be required.
- A priority on "Belonging" has been included in the Business Plan for 2025-27, which will build on the progress made since 2021-22 around the "Safeguarding children from diverse backgrounds" priority. This will continue to seek assurance around the work already in progress and address the questions for SCPs raised in the briefing from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel – "[It's Silent': Race, racism and safeguarding children](#)".
- It is evident that the "Effective Safeguarding in independent and out of school settings" business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and has led to the embedding of key, and ongoing, forums and so it will not be carried over to the 2025-27 Business Plan. The role of Local Authorities around safeguarding and supporting home educated children is due to increase, in light of the new duties and responsibilities to be introduced through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This includes the creation of a Children not in School Register. These national changes will inform any required changes to local policies and procedures.
- "Transitional safeguarding" has been carried forward to both the SCPs' Business Plan for 2025-27 and the [Safeguarding Adults Boards' Business Plan for 2025-27](#). It has been incorporated into a thematic priority, on "Belonging" for the SCPs and "Equality, Diversity and Inclusion" for the Safeguarding Adults Boards, so that the cohort of children and young people to be addressed can be clearer and more targeted.

## **Proposals/Options**

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

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/new-rules-for-a-safer-generation-of-children-online>

### **Consultation**

13. The Yearly Report includes a summary of the consultation and engagement work the SCP has carried out with children, young people and families.
14. All members of the SCP, including the Independent Scrutineer, have had opportunities to contribute to and comment on earlier drafts of the Yearly Report.

### **Resource Implications**

15. Safeguarding partners have, along with Safeguarding Adults Board partners, set a single agreement of principles to share the operating costs of the SCP and Safeguarding Adults Board for Leicestershire and Rutland.
16. As part of this agreement, Leicestershire County Council contributed £66,258 to the SCP in 2024-25. This is 33% of the total funding for the SCP (£203,092). This matches the contribution for 2023-24.
17. Expenditure overall was £246,270. Although costs have risen, evidence suggests that the output of the Partnership demonstrates value for money. The difference between funding and expenditure was covered by the SCP's reserve funds.
18. As of 1 April 2025, the SCP's reserve funds stand at £117,721. This amount has been held due to a foreseen increase in costs and has meant that partners have not been asked for an increase in contributions; however, this surplus will eventually be used and therefore all partners will be expected to ensure that the LRSCP is self-sufficient.
19. Leicestershire County Council hosts the Safeguarding Partnerships Business Office that supports the SCP and Safeguarding Adults Board.

### **Timetable for Decisions**

20. The Yearly Report of the SCP will be presented to the Cabinet for noting on 12 September 2025. The Yearly Report will be published by the end of September 2025. Any comments will be considered and addressed prior to the final report being published.

### **Conclusions**

21. The Committee are asked to comment on the draft LRSCP Yearly Report 2024-25.

### **Background papers**

22. Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 September 2024: [Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/24](#).

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

23. None.



### **Equality Implications**

24. Safeguarding children and young people concerns individuals who are likely to be disadvantaged in a number of ways. Information on the differing needs of and impacts on different groups of individuals with regard to safeguarding is considered as part of the process to develop the Business Plan. The Partnerships initiated a specific priority in 2021-22 exploring safeguarding of children from diverse backgrounds. The work on this continued into 2024-25. It will now be overseen under the “Belonging” priority included in the 2025-27 Business Plan.

### **Human Right Implications**

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

### **Crime and Disorder Implications**

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

### **Health Implications**

27. Safeguarding is everyone’s responsibility. Health and care needs can be linked to safeguarding risk for adults and children and the health and care system can support the prevention of identification of and response to safeguarding risk.

### **Appendices**

Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2024-25

### **Officer to Contact**

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

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# Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2024-25

## Foreword

We are pleased to present this report of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership that covers the period from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025.

In 2023, there was the publication of the current version of the statutory guidance, Working Together, and national reforms to Children's Social Care began. The implementation of the reforms continues, as set out in the Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive policy paper published in November 2024, and the upcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. In 2024-25, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership, alongside the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, has embedded changes at a system and practice level influenced by these national updates.

In December 2024, we published our updated Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. In particular, these better reflect the role that Education and the Voluntary and Community Sector play in safeguarding children and address how these sectors influence work at both a strategic and operational level.

In 2024-25, we have seen our Local Authorities receive strong inspection results. We have also seen excellent examples of evidence-led multi-agency collaborative practice, working to the principle of "a shared responsibility" highlighted in Working Together 2023.

Across 2025-26, we will continue to implement quite significant changes to our quality assurance, scrutiny and communication and engagement arrangements, with a new Performance Group and Audit Group and the commissioning of a Young Scrutineer. This demonstrates our continued commitment to ensuring our work is led both by the voices and lived experiences of the children and families we seek to support and keep safe.

We want to thank all the dedicated workers in organisations across Leicestershire & Rutland that are working to support the welfare and safety of children and families.

The Safeguarding Partners for Leicestershire & Rutland

**Include signatures and logos of partners – Leicestershire County Council, Rutland County Council, LLR Integrated Care Board, Leicestershire Police**

Key Achievements in 2024-25	Key Challenges in 2024-25
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Formed a new Education Subgroup, which promotes and strengthens the role of local schools, colleges, early years and childcare settings in safeguarding arrangements</li> <li>Expanded the reach and membership of the Leicester,</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Implementing the changes required as a result of Working Together 2023 and ensuring that the measures agreed were suitable and proportionate</li> <li>Progressing our Transitional Safeguarding Business Priority. The</li> </ul>

<p>Leicestershire &amp; Rutland Voluntary and Community Sector Forum to strengthen engagement with this sector</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Quickly addressed and started to implement any learning required as a result of national reviews published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel</li> <li>• Delivered high quality and well-attended large scale training events alongside our regular training programme</li> </ul>	<p>issues faced have been addressed and for 2025-26 there will be new vigour and focus to this work</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Having the capacity to fulfil our audit schedule, in light of competing priorities linked to the Joint Targeted Area Inspection programme. As a result of the issues faced, for 2025-26, the work of the Assurance and Audit Group will be split and taken up by two separate subgroups – the Performance Group and the Audit Group</li> </ul>
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*"I am so beyond grateful for the support that you've given me, the boost in confidence when I've needed it, the way that I know you've championed me to management above you, the way you've never looked down on me with any judgement and the many sleepless nights you've had over our family situations!"*

Feedback from Leicestershire parent/carer

*"To our social worker and social worker assistant, you were awesome today. As hard as it is, you have put this beautiful little girl first and that will be the most important decision anyone has ever done for her. So thank you. I wanted to say it but I would have cried saying it and it was emotional."*

Feedback from Rutland parent/carer

## Observations from our Independent Scrutineer

Throughout the period April 2024 to March 2025, I have continued to work alongside members of the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland (LLR) Partnerships in the role of Independent Scrutineer. The Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships work closely together. This results in the ability to maximise learning to continuously improve safeguarding practice, align processes and use the available resources efficiently. The LLR Partnerships have been very open to scrutiny, which has resulted in reflection and a clear commitment to drive improvements, ensuring the effectiveness and quality of the multi-agency arrangements in effectively safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children.

In undertaking scrutiny, a scrutiny framework has been established and agreed by partners. The scrutiny framework reflects the functions as described in Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023) and adopts the 'Six Steps to Independent scrutiny' model. The framework aligns with the priorities identified and documented in the [Joint Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Plan](#). The scrutiny plan continues over a two-year period to allow evidence of both progression of areas identified as priorities and impact of the activity.

During the last year of undertaking the role, I have attended a range of meetings of the Partnerships, scrutinised agendas, minutes and a range of reports.

I have participated in a range of meetings with Safeguarding Partners to discuss governance, areas of priority, safeguarding activity, staffing and the funding requirements of the Partnerships.

In undertaking scrutiny, I have had the pleasure of meeting a range of partners, professionals and of hearing the voice of children. This has allowed the opportunity of triangulating the evidence of the effectiveness of the work undertaken by the Partnerships.

As part of the scrutiny framework, I have undertaken a range of scrutiny activity to support my assessment of the strength of the Partnerships' safeguarding arrangements.

Areas of scrutiny have included:

- ❖ Scrutiny of work undertaken by the subgroups to progress the identified priorities
- ❖ Scrutiny of the Partnerships' data and quality assurance processes, providing challenge and advice regarding areas of development
- ❖ Scrutiny of the readiness of the Partnerships to respond to the requirements of Working Together (2023)
- ❖ Scrutiny of the rapid review and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review process and activity undertaken to embed the emerging learning and assess impact
- ❖ Supporting the work undertaken to continually progress a joined up approach across the Safeguarding Children Partnerships (SCPs) and Safeguarding

Adults Boards (SABs) with a focus upon the safeguarding of those transitioning to adulthood

- ❖ Scrutiny of approaches used to hear the voice of children, supporting the plans to develop opportunities for children and those transitioning to adulthood to support the Partnerships as young scrutineers
- ❖ Ongoing scrutiny of the embedding of the developments in response to Working Together 2023
- ❖ Participation in regional and national fora

In triangulating the findings from the range of scrutiny activity, there is clear evidence of robust child focused leadership with commitment to ensuring that children in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are safeguarded and their welfare promoted.

The system of rotating chairing responsibilities among partners, introduced within the last year, is effective. Education have an increasingly strong voice and all statutory partners are fully committed to the safeguarding ambitions of the Partnerships. There is a culture of openness, respectful challenge, and a willingness to learn and continually improve.

In the coming year, the Partnerships face a number of challenges including the need to consider the local response to implementing the Children's Social Care reforms alongside significant changes within partner organisations. The impact of such changes needs ongoing monitoring.

As the Independent Scrutineer, I am committed to hearing directly from children, young people, families, and frontline practitioners to understand what is working well and how multi-agency working can be improved. Given the plans to recruit a young scrutineer are progressing, I look forward to working with them to ensure the voices of children, young people and families continue to inform the Partnerships' work.

While challenges lie ahead, I have confidence in the ability of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships to build upon their strengths and I will continue to scrutinise and support the Partnerships in navigating risks and challenges.

Amanda Boodhoo  
Independent Scrutineer

## The Partnership

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LRSCP) brings together organisations across the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland with a vision.

Our vision is for children and young people in Leicestershire and Rutland to be safe, well and achieve their full potential.

The local Safeguarding Children Partnership was established in 2019 to oversee the multi-agency safeguarding children arrangements under the [Children Act 2004](#), as amended by the [Children and Social Work Act 2017](#).

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be based on Local Authority areas. Arrangements can cover two or more local authority boundaries by agreement. As we share a number of partners with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP), we now publish joint [Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) (MASA). In 2024-25, we reviewed our arrangements in light of the updated government guidance [Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023](#). These were re-published in December 2024, in line with government timescales.

Our principles and aims across Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland are:

- for clear accountability
- for clear and demonstrable influence
- for equitable and fair contributions from all partners

Amendments made by the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to the Children Act 2004 placed duties on Police, Integrated Care Boards (ICBs), and Local Authorities, as statutory safeguarding partners. Safeguarding partners are under a duty to make arrangements to work together, and with other partners locally, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.

In accordance with the requirements and inclusions outlined in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023,<sup>1</sup> these arrangements aim to ensure that at a local level:

- there is a clear, shared vision for how to improve outcomes for children locally across all levels of need and all types of harm
- when a child is identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm there is a prompt, appropriate and effective response to ensure the protection and support of the child
- organisations and agencies are challenged appropriately, effectively holding one another to account

<sup>1</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 24, paragraph 40.



- the voice of children and families combined with the knowledge of experienced practitioners and insights from data, provides a greater understanding of the areas of strength and/or improvement within arrangements and practice
- information is sought, analysed, shared, and broken down by protected characteristics to facilitate more accurate and timely decision-making for children and families, and to understand outcomes for different communities of children
- effective collection, sharing and analysis of data, enables early identification of new safeguarding risks, issues, emerging threats, and joined-up responses across relevant agencies
- senior leaders promote and embed a learning culture which supports local services to become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- senior leaders have a good knowledge and understanding about the quality of local practice and its impact on children and families

Further information about the structure and governance of the Safeguarding Children Partnership is available in the “Progress against statutory guidance” section of the report.

Working Together 2023 states that “Safeguarding partners must jointly report on the activity they have undertaken in 12-month period”.<sup>2</sup> This Yearly Report fulfils this requirement.

<sup>2</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 40, paragraph 106.

## Area profile

### Local Context

Include map used in Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements document

The sources of information for this section are the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), which analyse the health needs of populations, and the latest statistics on school and pupil numbers published by the Department for Education.<sup>3</sup>

#### Leicestershire

Leicestershire, not including Leicester City, is made up of seven council areas: Blaby District Council, Charnwood Borough Council, Harborough District Council, Hinckley & Bosworth Borough Council, Melton Borough Council, North West Leicestershire District Council and Oadby & Wigston Borough Council.

The Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2022-2025,<sup>4</sup> specifically the Demography chapter published in August 2024,<sup>5</sup> states that:

- The total population of Leicestershire in 2023 was 734,015, an increase of 1.5% since 2022. There were approximately 8,475 more females (371,245) than males (362,770).
- In 2023 Charnwood was estimated to have the largest population (188,010) of the Leicestershire districts, followed by Hinckley and Bosworth (114,970). Melton had the smallest population (53,237).
- There were 120,090 children under the age of 15 in Leicestershire in 2023 (16.4% of the population).
- In comparison to England, the population of the county is less likely to be very young (under 14s) and younger adults (25-39 age bands) and slightly more likely to be older adults (50-74 age bands).
- The majority of the county population (87.5%) belongs to the white ethnic group (including the white Irish ethnic group). This equates to 623,429 people. The next largest ethnic group in Leicestershire is the Asian ethnic group (8.2%), followed by the mixed or multiple ethnic group (2.2%) and the black ethnic group (1.1%).
- According to the 2019 Indices of Deprivation, Leicestershire is not deprived overall; the county is ranked 137<sup>th</sup> out of 152 upper tier authorities in England for Multiple Deprivation, where 1<sup>st</sup> is the most deprived. However, pockets of significant deprivation exist; four neighbourhoods in the county fall within the

<sup>3</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-and-joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategies-explained> and <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lsr-online.org/leicestershire-2022-2025-jsna>

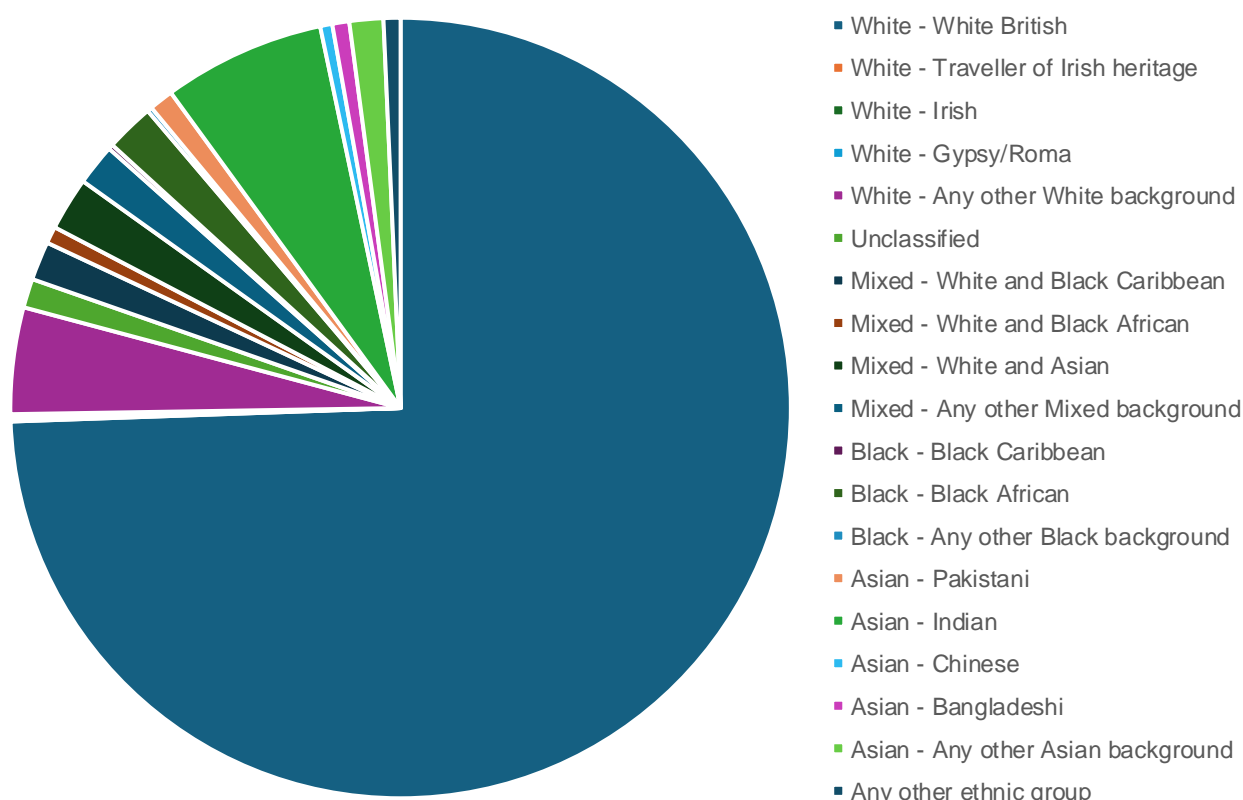
<sup>5</sup> [Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2022-25, Demography](#) (August 2024), pages ii-v.

most deprived decile in England. These areas can be found in Loughborough and Coalville.

Statistics on school and pupil numbers for the Academic Year 2024-25, published by the Department for Education,<sup>6</sup> show that:

- There were 100,791 pupils in Leicestershire schools.
- The majority of the school population (74.3%) belongs to the White British ethnic group.
- English is known or believed to be the first language of 88.7% of pupils, with 9.7% of pupils known or believed to have a first language other than English and 1.6% where language is unclassified.

Percentage of pupils in Leicestershire Schools by Ethnicity



<sup>6</sup> See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>

## Rutland

The Rutland Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2022-2025,<sup>7</sup> specifically the Demography and Growth chapter published in May 2023,<sup>8</sup> states that:

- According to the 2021 Census, the total population of Rutland in 2021 was 41,049, an increase of 9.8% since 2011. This rate of increase is well above the national increase of 6.6%.
- There were approximately 1,095 fewer females (19,977) than males (21,072).
- In 2021, 4.0% of the population were aged 0-4 (1,639 people), 17.7% were aged 5-19 (7,273 people), 53.0% were working age (21,747 people aged 20-64) and 25.3% were older than 65+. This includes 3.5% of the total population that was aged 85 and over (1,447 people).
- Overall, the Rutland population is weighted towards older adults (those aged 50 plus) with 25.3% in the 65+ age bands compared to 18.4% in England.
- The vast majority of the county population (94.8%) belong to White ethnicities, including White British and White Irish. This equates to 38,909 people. The next largest ethnic group in Rutland is Mixed or Multiple Ethnic Group, which constitutes 1.8% of the population, followed by Asian with 1.5%, Black, with 1.3% and Other Ethnic Group with 0.5%.
- Rutland is ranked 303<sup>rd</sup> out of 317 local authorities in England for Multiple Deprivation, where 1<sup>st</sup> is the most deprived. Though there are pockets of rural and other elements of deprivation in areas of the county. One neighbourhood in the county falls within the 50% most deprived in England.

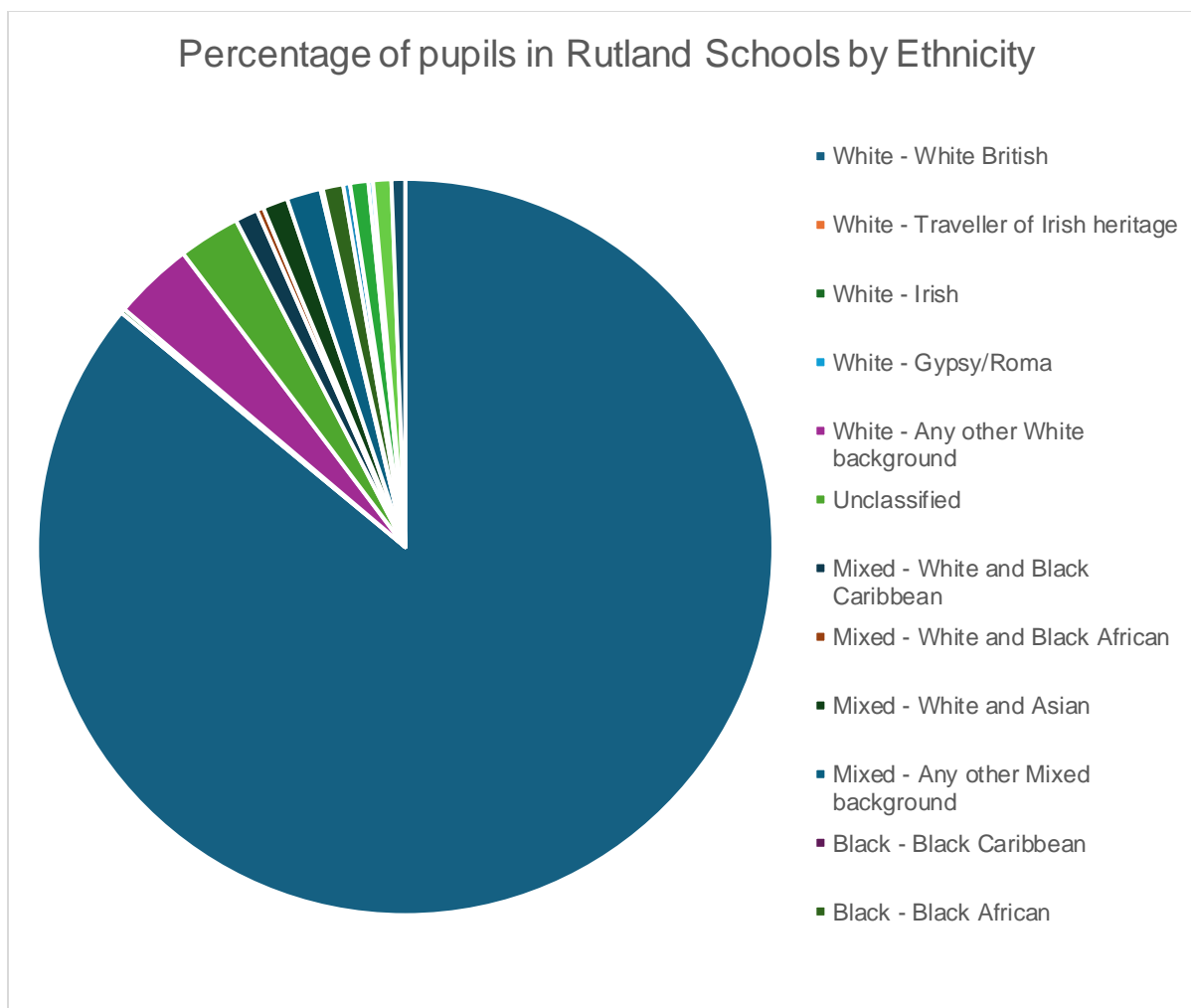
Statistics on school and pupil numbers for the Academic Year 2024-25, published by the Department for Education,<sup>9</sup> show that:

- There were 5,881 pupils in Rutland schools.
- The majority of the school population (85.9%) belongs to the White British ethnic group.
- English is known or believed to be the first language of 94.7% of pupils, with 5.2% of pupils known or believed to have a first language other than English and 0.1% where language is unclassified.

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.lsr-online.org/joint-strategic-needs-assessment>

<sup>8</sup> [Rutland Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2023, Demography and Growth](#) (May 2023), pages iii, 9 and 19.

<sup>9</sup> See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2024-25>



### Review of use of restraint in secure establishments

There are no Youth Custody homes within the local authority areas but those which are in the region which house young people from the area will be required to report on arrangements as and when necessary.

### Recent Inspections

#### Leicestershire County Council Children and Family Services

Following an Ofsted inspection that took place in April 2024, Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services were rated as outstanding by Ofsted.<sup>10</sup>

The [full report](#) was published on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

In the report, inspectors praised work to build “*strong and long-lasting relationships*” with children and families which lead to many families achieving “*positive changes*”

<sup>10</sup> See <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/news/outstanding-rating-for-leicestershires-children-and-family-services>.

in their lives. They also said a culture has been created by Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services which puts the "*experiences and progress of children at the heart of social work practice*". Ofsted also looked at the work to protect and safeguard children, work that enables families to stay together and the experiences and progress of both children in care and care leavers.

### Rutland Children's Services

Ofsted reviewed Rutland's Children's Services in April 2024 to look at children and young people's experiences of the help, protection and care given to them by workers at the local authority.<sup>11</sup> The services were rated as good by Ofsted.

The [full report](#) was published on 12<sup>th</sup> July 2024.

These services were last inspected in 2020, when they were judged to require improvement. The Council's new judgement means that more children are now getting better help and support.

The report notes that council workers are skilled at listening and enjoy their work, helping children to become happier and safer. Inspectors also noted that social workers in Rutland have good relationships with the children they support and work with them in a variety of creative ways, depending on their needs. Children in Care and Care Leavers benefit from "excellent" life story work that helps them to understand their history.

The report acknowledges there is more work to be done in this important area and that some children have too many changes in social worker. In both cases, senior leaders are already aware and actively working to address these challenges.

## **Multi-Agency Collaborations**

### Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs)

Joint Targeted Area Inspections are carried out by inspectors from Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission (CQC), and His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS).<sup>12</sup>

Locally, a JTAI has not been requested or carried out since the process was implemented. However, supported by the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships, multi-agency partners carry out audits on current JTAI themes to measure their effectiveness and consider improvements.

In Summer 2024, the Planning & Delivery Group received the findings from the Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation audit – see the section on the

<sup>11</sup> See <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/council-news/2024/07/ofsted-report-highlights-quality-childrens-services-rutland>.

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-targeted-area-inspection-of-the-multi-agency-response-to-identification-of-initial-need-and-risk-2/joint-targeted-area-inspection-of-the-multi-agency-response-to-identification-of-initial-need-and-risk>.

“Keeping Adolescents Safe / Supporting Safe Adolescents” business plan priority for further information.

A new programme of Joint Target Area Inspections (JTAs) started in autumn 2024, with the focus being on the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse. Since JTAs last focused on this theme in 2016, the Domestic Abuse Act 2021 has made clear that children are victims of domestic abuse in their own right if they have seen, heard or experienced the effect of the abuse.

As a result, Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland agencies carried out an audit of domestic abuse cases in December 2024. Single agency learning has been identified and is being taken forward.

### **Strengthening multi-agency collaboration**



An excellent example of effective partnership collaboration has been showcased by Leicestershire Family Help and a Primary Care Network. As a result of community engagement activity across 2023-24, the Family Hubs' Engagement Workers established a relationship with a Practice Manager from a Primary Care Network, who has responsibility for a number of surgeries across Melton and South Charnwood. It was agreed that there could be an opportunity for a collaborative approach to support a universal cohort of families who typically might book clinical appointment time to seek advice often linked to key public health messages.

As Family Hubs already ran universal stay and play sessions run by volunteers, it was proposed that these sessions became the natural forum to host general information sessions, which would be delivered by key health staff.

The first session was attended by approximately 38 parents and children. Topics covered were vaccinations, in particular whooping cough (due to a rise in cases in Nottinghamshire) and measles, delivered by a Doctor and Lead Vaccination Nurse. The session was felt to be a success, so much so that additional sessions were agreed, and the focus was on winter illnesses, self-care at home and the different services available (GP, Pharmacy, 111). 18 families attended the winter illness session, which also covered sleep patterns, constipation, potty training, viral infections, ADHD/Autism concerns and eczema. The Doctor who hosted the session estimated that, from the group of parents that attended, approximately a third would have typically made an appointment. These appointments were no longer required as a result of this information sharing opportunity.

The team are having conversations to consider how to further develop this offer that ensures they can continue to raise community resilience, increase awareness of Family Hubs and how to access support, but more importantly to continue to develop

collaborative approaches in local areas to maintain effective working relationships that benefit children and their families.

DRAFT



## Progress against statutory guidance

### Implementation of changes set out in statutory guidance

In 2024-25, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership, alongside the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, reviewed their [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) in light of the updated government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. The review particularly considered:

- Reflecting the role that Education plays in safeguarding children
- Reflecting the role that the Voluntary and Community Sector plays in safeguarding children
- The role of Safeguarding Partners – Lead and Delegated
- The role of Partnership Chair
- Updating Scrutiny arrangements.

### Activities achieved

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships have strengthened the role of Education within the partnerships, with schools, early years and other settings now a core part of their arrangements.<sup>13</sup> An LLR Education Group has been formed. Further information is provided below.

The reach and membership of the LLR Voluntary and Community Sector Forum has been expanded. It runs three times within each business year, and jointly with the local Safeguarding Adults Boards. It shares safeguarding updates with the Voluntary and Community Sector, faith-based organisations, and sport clubs / organisations, promoting the welfare of local children and adults with care and support needs. The qualitative feedback that members of the Forum provide can shape future agenda items and areas of focus for the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Strategic leadership, and accountability within the Safeguarding Children Partnerships, is provided by the Lead Safeguarding Partners. Working Together 2023 defines Lead Safeguarding Partners (LSPs) as Chief Executives of Local Authorities, Chief Executives of Integrated Care Boards, and Chief Officers of Police forces.<sup>14</sup> Each Lead Safeguarding Partner should appoint a Delegated Safeguarding Partner (DSP) for its agency, sufficiently senior to make decisions on behalf of the Lead Safeguarding Partner and hold their organisation to account.<sup>15</sup> The Lead Safeguarding Partners and Delegated Safeguarding Partners are documented in the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.<sup>16</sup>

Previously, the Safeguarding Children Partnerships were chaired by an Independent Chair. As advised in Working Together 2023, a clearer distinction has been made between the leadership and scrutiny roles.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Lead Safeguarding Partners have appointed the role of Partnership Chair for the local multi-agency

<sup>13</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 33, paragraph 76.

<sup>14</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 24, paragraph 48.

<sup>15</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 28, paragraph 56.

<sup>16</sup> [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) (December 2024), page 8.

<sup>17</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 29, paragraph 61.

arrangements to individual Delegated Safeguarding Partners, rotating on an annual basis.

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships are now supported by an Independent Scrutineer, rather than an Independent Chair.

### Impact of the activities

The new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements recognise the central role that Education play in safeguarding children and ensure a more rigorous and effective independent scrutiny function, which provides challenge to local safeguarding partners.

### Future Plans

A Young Scrutineer will be appointed to work alongside our Independent Scrutineer to ensure the views and experience of a range of children across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland are at the centre of the work of the partnerships. They will provide independent scrutiny from the perspective of a young person within a broader independent scrutiny framework and hold partnership members to account bringing challenge from a young person's perspective.

### **Updates to published arrangements**

In line with Working Together 2023, the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements will be updated when there are key changes, such as changes to the Lead Safeguarding Partners, or the list of relevant agencies, and any updates will be sent to the Department for Education.<sup>18</sup>

### **Representation of Education sector**

#### Operational level

In the earlier part of 2024-25, the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships continued to run their LLR Independent Schools Forum. It met every six months and its purpose was to share information, with the schools selecting safeguarding topics for discussion that were specific to them.

The advent of the LLR Education Group recognises that all local schools (including independent schools, academies, and free schools), colleges, early years and childcare settings, and other educational providers (including alternative provision) are relevant agencies for the purpose of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. They are included in the local safeguarding arrangements through this subgroup, which promotes education engagement within the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and coordinates what is done across the education sector for the purposes of safeguarding. Safeguarding themes already discussed include Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) and healthier screen time.

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<sup>18</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 40, paragraph 105.

For several years, a representative from the Leicestershire Safeguarding in Education team has been a standing member on other subgroups, including the Case Review Group, Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group, and the Assurance and Audit Group. The plan is for this to continue. They support schools in submitting Rapid Review responses and audit information, as well as working to develop the learning which is taken from these processes. In 2024-25, they have been a key member of a Task & Finish Group working on a new procedure on safeguarding children with complex health needs.

### Strategic level

For many years, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership has included representatives from primary and secondary schools and further education from both areas on its membership.

The new Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements strengthen the role of Education on the partnership. The Chair of the LLR Education Subgroup will now join the Delegated Safeguarding Partners at the LLR Meeting of Safeguarding Partners.

### **Partnership Chair**

The Lead Safeguarding Partners appoint the role of Partnership Chair to individual Delegated Safeguarding Partners, rotating on an annual basis. Chairs and Deputy Chairs have been agreed until 2029-30 and their names are available via the LLR Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.<sup>19</sup>

### **Partnership Governance Structure**

The membership of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership comprises of Safeguarding Partners and other relevant agencies, including Education, Health agencies, Probation and other organisations working with children. The full membership of the partnership can be found on the Safeguarding Children Partnership website: <https://lrsb.org.uk/scp-membership-list>.

The engagement of all partners, at a Partnership and subgroup level, is monitored. If a partner agency does not attend a number of meetings, this is escalated to the Chair of the group. If the matter remains unresolved, it is further escalated to the statutory Safeguarding Partners.

Delegated Safeguarding Partners and the Chair of the LLR Education Subgroup attend the LLR Safeguarding Partners meeting. This meeting considers shared matters of governance, funding, and sharing intelligence as well as setting the forward agenda for meetings of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships. The Independent Scrutineer and Business Managers are invited to these meetings, where appropriate. Up to half of these meetings are joint with the statutory partners

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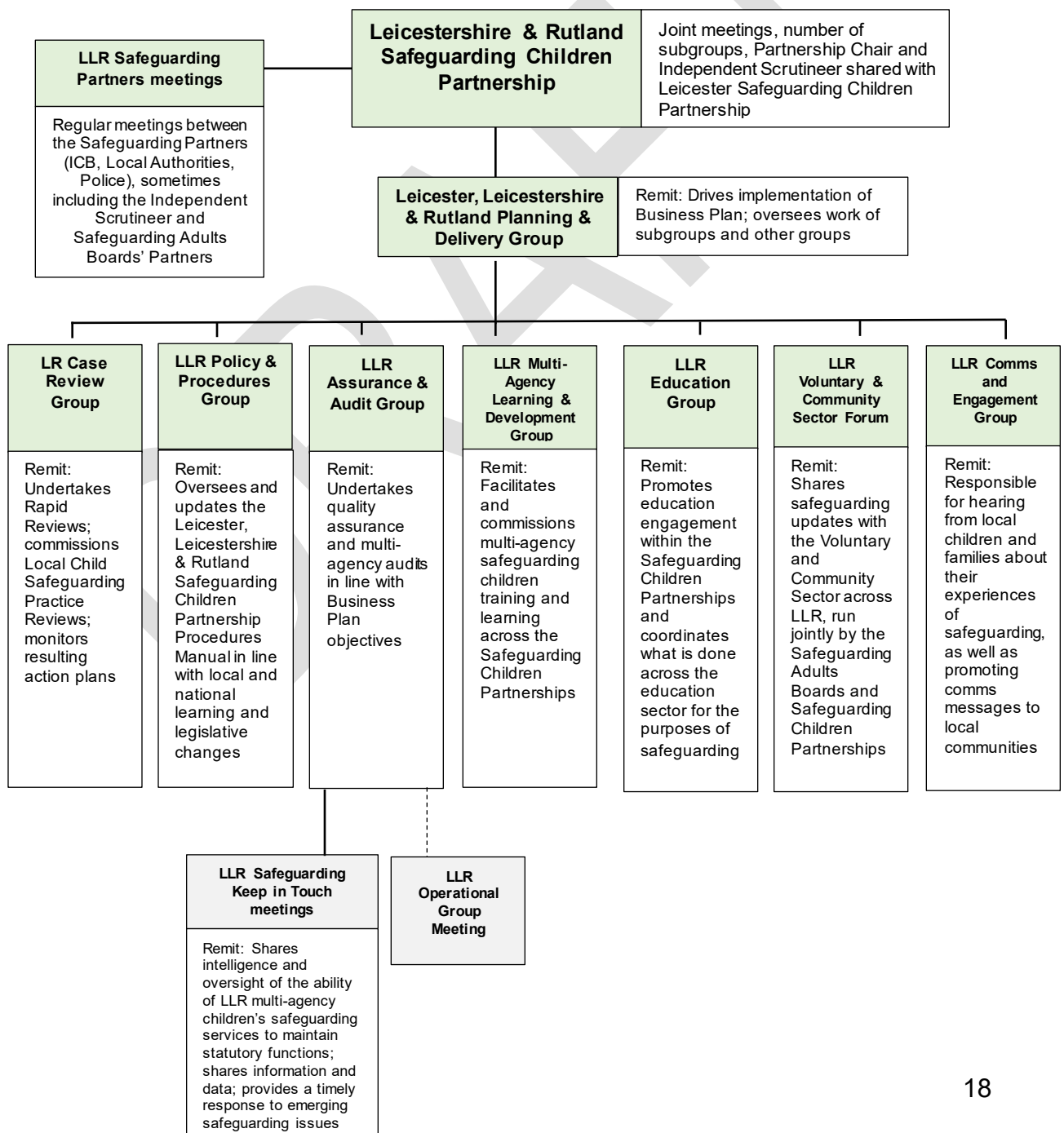
<sup>19</sup> [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) (December 2024), page 8.

of the local Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs) and the Independent Chair of the local SABs is invited to join these meetings, where appropriate.

Representatives from the Safeguarding Partner agencies form the Planning & Delivery Group, with chairing duties rotating through the membership. This group drives implementation of the Partnerships' Business Plans; scrutinises and responds to multi-agency safeguarding performance and assurance; has oversight of learning from reviews; oversees work of the Partnerships' subgroups; and agrees learning and development arrangements.

Statutory Safeguarding Partner representatives also chair several subgroups. The Safeguarding Partners are accountable for decisions regarding Rapid Reviews and whether to proceed to Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews.

The structure chart below demonstrates the governance of the Partnership and its subgroups.



The interface between the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and other local strategic boards ensures assurance and joint work, where appropriate. The Safeguarding Children Partnerships receive the Annual Report of the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). They are provided with annual updates, within dedicated agenda items in meetings, from Domestic Abuse Boards and the Adolescence Safety and Diversion Board, which sits under the Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) and works to prevent and reduce involvement in violence through safeguarding, early intervention and diversion. The Yearly Report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership is shared with the Health and Wellbeing Board to highlight safeguarding matters relevant to their work and to support understanding and effective partnership working across systems. The 8 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Leicestershire and Rutland commission the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board (SAB) and Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) to manage the Domestic Homicide Review process. Relevant learning from Domestic Homicide Reviews is fed into the work of the SCP Subgroups.

### **Financial breakdown and value for money**

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

A single funding arrangement for the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards for 2020 onwards was agreed between the statutory partners for the Safeguarding Adults Boards and the Safeguarding Children Partnerships for Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland.

**The contributions from partners for the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2024-25 can be seen below alongside contributions for the previous year:**

	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>
Leicestershire County Council	£66,258	£66,258
Rutland County Council	£30,000	£30,000
Leicestershire Police	£53,417	£53,417
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB)	£53,417	£53,417
<b>Total income for SCP</b>	<b>£203,092</b>	<b>£203,092</b>

**Expenditure for the SCP was apportioned as follows:**

	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>
Staffing	£130,010	£147,121
Independent Advisor/Chair*	£10,396	£13,973
Support Services	£3,600	£1,920

Operating Costs	£7,605	£10,665
Training	£54,660	£70,341
Case Reviews	£0	£2,250
<b>Total Expenditure</b>	<b>£206,271</b>	<b>£246,270</b>

\*In 2023-24, the Safeguarding Children Partnership commissioned an Independent Chair, but in 2024-25 it commissioned an Independent Scrutineer.

Staffing costs increased as a result of the agreed Leicestershire County Council pay award (as the staff are hosted by this Local Authority). The cost of the Independent Advisor was higher in 2024-25. Their contract started part way through the previous year hence the lower cost. Throughout the year, the Scrutineer also completed additional work in relation to Working Together 2023. Whilst there was no expenditure on Case Reviews in 2023-24, there was a small cost in 2024-25 in relation to work stemming from a Rapid Review case. Training costs have increased due to the commissioning of a large scale multi-agency training event.

Costs have risen and we spent more than we received from partners' contributions. The shortfall was made up from reserves. Although costs have increased, we believe that the output of the Partnership demonstrates value for money. Despite budget constraints, we have still achieved developments to enhance engagement of Education, the Voluntary Sector, and the Faith and Sports sectors and have introduced new Subgroups into our governance structure.

## Implementation of national reforms

### Children's Social Care reforms

In 2023, reforms to Children's Social Care began, supported by the Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy. The implementation of the reforms continues, as set out in the [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#) policy paper, published in November 2024, and the upcoming Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill.<sup>20</sup>

### Family Help

#### Leicestershire

In 2024, Leicestershire County Council's Children & Families Department created a new service – [Family Help](#). It sits alongside Family Safeguarding. This new service was created in response to wider national agendas, such as the [Independent Care Review](#) and [Stable Homes Built on Love](#). Nationally, there were concerns that children on a Child in Need plan had a less consistent approach to those children on Child Protection or those in receipt of targeted early help services.

Family Help was developed to ensure that all Child in Need work flows seamlessly between what was the old Children & Family Wellbeing Service and the old Children's Social Care Locality teams. Family Help focuses on timely support at appropriate levels of intervention for families, with elements of practical hands-on

<sup>20</sup> See Community Care Inform Children: <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/childrens-social-care-reforms/>

approaches. For more intensive 1-1 support, where possible, there is a focus on matching families with workers who have specific skills needed to meet the needs of the families they support.

- **Family Help** is a service that is relationship-based, offering consistency for children and their families. Where Child in Need level support is required, this work may be allocated to either a Social Worker or a Keyworker from the Targeted part of the service. Where it is a Keyworker, the work will always have social work oversight and direction from the Senior Social Work Oversight Practitioner.
- **Targeted Family Help** is what Leicestershire calls the side of the service that has a focus on targeted earlier intervention. Targeted Family Help is one of many services that makes up the wider early help system in localities – many organisations, such as schools, health visiting, voluntary sector, faith communities, district councils, deliver early help to families.

The different teams that come under the Family Help umbrella are:

- Five Locality Teams, which deliver the Targeted Family Help activities such as family support, 0-2 Pathway and group work
- Family Help Triage Team, which forms the “Front Door” alongside the First Response Children’s Duty team; they work closely together to ensure families get the support that best meets their needs
- [SEND Information, Advice and Support Service](#) (SENDIASS), which is managed through the Family Help Triage Team, and provides independent information, support and advice to parents and young people who are experiencing difficulties with education
- [Family Hubs Team](#), see below
- [Teen Health](#) 11-19 Service, which supports young people through a range of group offers, one-to-one support and drop-in sessions, via all secondary schools in Leicestershire and in community settings
- Extended Domestic Abuse Team, which works all over the county with families involved with First Response, Family Help and Family Safeguarding as well as other agencies including schools, to try and promote a way of working which better supports the whole family where there are concerns about domestic abuse.

### Rutland

In late 2023-24, Rutland changed their structure so that their Targeted Support / Early Help service and front door service became one under a service manager. Whilst they operated a ‘joint’ front door for some time, the structure change strengthened this approach. The purpose of this was to enable more consistency for children and families and to ensure that more support was offered at the right time. As a result, they have offered more consistency to families with workers.



Their Family Help Team have continued working with families for longer and they have co-worked with more families when they have transferred for social work assessment. Through 2025-26, they will continue to strengthen this approach. Through 2024-25, they have strengthened their working relationships in this part of the service further and will continue this work as they implement their Families First.

### Family Hubs

[Family Hubs](#) aim to support any family with children aged 0-19 years, or 25 years for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), who may need help. A Family Hub is not a single service; it is a group of services working together to make sure the right person with the appropriate skills offers their support.

There is a national framework for the delivery of Family Hubs,<sup>21</sup> and this sets out expectations of the types of activity and partnership working that is expected by the Department for Education.

### **Leicestershire**

For Leicestershire families, [Family Hubs](#) are there to present a joined-up approach to requests for support. Many organisations, such as schools, health visiting, voluntary sector, faith communities, district councils, deliver early help to families from their Family Hubs, and they work in partnership to provide the right support at the right time.

For Leicestershire, their developments have indeed included buildings that are known as Family Hubs which can be a 'one stop shop' for advice, information and support where it is needed at the heart of local communities. Targeted Family Help delivers the Family Hubs programme, and many of the Targeted Family Help activities, such as 0-2 Pathway and group work, take place within the Family Hub. The Hubs are also used by other agencies to deliver services – for example, Midwifery, Health Visiting, housing advice, Local Area Coordinators, Police Community Support Officers, voluntary sector groups. This varies from area to area. Within five of Leicestershire's Family Hubs, they also have Community Fridges; these are all run by their volunteers and support reduction of food waste plus are a source of free food for anyone that needs it. Family Help social work teams are co-located or integrated with the Family Hub model to provide expertise to support coordinated and timely responses to emerging safeguarding concerns. Additional more focused safeguarding expertise is available by regular communication with the Family Safeguarding teams which are also aligned to the model.

### **Rutland**

In Rutland, the [Family Hub](#) brings services together in one place to improve access, strengthen connections between families and professionals, and place relationships at the heart of community wellbeing. It is built around a strong Start for Life offer that

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<sup>21</sup> [Family hub model framework 2025-26: Family Hubs and Start for Life programme guide](#), Department of Health and Social Care and the Department for Education (February 2025).



ensures families get the best possible support from pregnancy through to young adulthood.

The Rutland Family Hub offer includes:

- **Buildings**  
[Oakham Family Hub](#) sits in the Living Well Rutland Service along with the libraries and Adult Learning Service. Together they provide communities and Rutland residents of all ages with support. The Family Hub offers local support for all families, young people, parents and carers. Living Well Rutland spaces, such as the hub and libraries, offer welcoming, inclusive spaces for families to access information, learning opportunities, support services, and community events.
- **Outreach**  
 The Family Hub delivers health and family support services in the community, bringing services to families in their locality because it might be difficult to get to one of the main building-based sites. This might be because someone lives in a more isolated, rural area or perhaps on one of the military bases in the county.
- **Services and support**  
 Services and support are provided which all families can access. These services include face-to-face activities and some digital services and support, including online groups and virtual, interactive learning activities.

### **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA)**

As well as the six priorities set out in the 2023-25 LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Business Plan, it stated that the Assurance and Audit Group would undertake a partnership wide self-assessment in relation to Child Sexual Abuse, linked to national findings on local multi-agency leadership from the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) (October 2022). Since the implementation of that Business Plan, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published their national review, [“I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment](#), in November 2024. Consequently, for 2025-26, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships have signed up to work with the NSPCC (funded by the Home Office) to undertake a local system-wide child sexual abuse (CSA) snapshot. This will be completed to inform the work of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' subgroups to evidence the effectiveness of the local response.

### **National Care Records Service**

The National Care Records Service (NCRS) is a service that allows Health and Social Care professionals to access and update a range of patient and safeguarding information across regional integrated care system (ICS) boundaries. This is being rolled out across LLR: [National Care Records Service - NHS England Digital](#). This

work is progressing at an appropriate pace in line with Information Governance criteria.

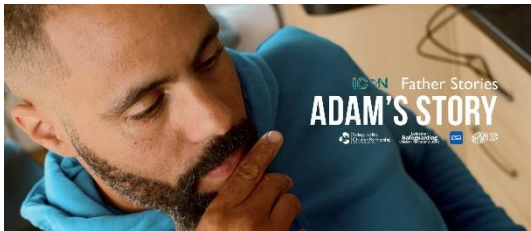
### **Moving Forwards**

Locally, we will work towards the delivery expectations for safeguarding partners set out in [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#), published in March 2025. Safeguarding partners will receive updates and assurance on the local transformation activity for Family Help, multi-agency child protection, and Family Group Decision Making. The Policy and Procedures Group will lead on publishing a refreshed Thresholds document by the end of the transformation year (March 2026), confirming changes and setting out a broad continuum of Family Help.

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

During 2024-25:

- A range of Father Stories were launched in May 2024. These are short films, performed by actors, which have been scripted by local fathers to reflect their experiences of becoming parents, the impact on their mental health and how to seek support and to manage crying babies. These have been promoted widely with practitioners so that they reflect on working with Dads and use these resources to support them.



- The local Safer Sleep Champions continued to monitor any family feedback provided to frontline practitioners regarding the local [Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool](#). The Tool was updated in January 2025, taking into account feedback from a practitioner survey which sought their experiences of using the tool with families.

The Safeguarding Children Partnership wants to have meaningful engagement with children, young people and families that makes a difference to the work of the partnership. To acknowledge that engagement could be improved, two new initiatives have been introduced.

A Communication and Engagement Group has been introduced. It is responsible for hearing from local children and families about their experiences of safeguarding, as well as promoting comms messages to local communities. The group does not promote comms to practitioners as this is the role of the Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group.

In the future, the Safeguarding Children Partnership will commission a Young Person Scrutineer.

### **In Leicestershire Children and Family Services:**

- They have a strong focus on voice underpinned by a Departmental Voice Strategy led by the Voice Strategic Group, chaired by the Assistant Director. This sets out a clear vision to embed the voice of children and young people across all services, ensuring they are central to decision making and practice and assists in the development of their services.
- Grounded in the Lundy Model of Participation, it promotes a rights-based, inclusive approach that values lived experiences and cultural identity. The strategy outlines practical tools and principles for practitioners, emphasising collaboration with families, early years settings, and multi-agency partners. It aims to create a culture where listening to children is not only expected but meaningfully acted upon to shape services and improve outcomes.
- Voice champions in each service area play a key role within their teams by keeping a focus on the importance of the voice of the child in team meetings, sharing good practice and resources. All new starters have an introduction to the strategy as part of their induction.
- They maintain direct links with children and young people, through forums including the Corporate Parenting Board, Children in Care Council, After Care Council, Supporting Young People After Care, SEND Youth Forum and County Youth Council for Leicestershire, to make sure that their voice is strongly heard and acted upon. Their Corporate Parenting Board provides opportunity for young people to challenge both their own, but also partner agencies, with a key focus on Health services, Housing and developing a sense of belonging as part of the promise to children. This has, for example, led to care leaver status being accepted as a protected characteristic by the County Council and its District Council partners.
- They hold bespoke drop-in Voice events for young carers and their families across the County, which provide a safe space for them to share their experiences, shape and influence Leicestershire's offer to young carers and allow them to gain insight into their young carers' needs. The Youth Service holds post work evaluations with both children and their parents and carers to gain insight into their perspectives on the impact of work and to identify any areas of improvement in the offer.
- Direct work with children in Leicestershire is a strength. The relationships social workers and professionals across Education and SEND build with children and young people supports Leicestershire to have a better understanding of the child's world and helps them capture their voice. Children's voices are embedded in their assessment process and plans and their practitioners ensure that children's voices and their wishes and feelings are recorded. Leicestershire take time to observe and record their behaviour and experiences, use creative methods to listen and involve children and young people and, through network mapping and safety meetings, ask other professionals or family members for their knowledge of the child or young person. Leicestershire know that no child is too young to have a voice, and

children are involved regardless of age or ability – with understanding what life is like for the child central to analysis of need and risk.

- In March 2024, Leicestershire had their first Voice Week with a number of workshops to support staff skills gathering but also embedding voice into all aspects of work, with key areas of learning focused on voice of fathers, voice of babies and what young people tell them about their lived experiences. Young people regularly form part of their recruitment processes with all senior management roles including a young people's panel. In June 2025, they will be holding a Voice Month with lots of sessions for staff to come together to share how they capture voice and showcase direct work.
- Their thematic audits in Children's Social Care and Targeted Family Help include feedback from children, young people, and their families, where appropriate. They are invited to score the support they receive, and their perspectives directly contribute to the overall audit outcomes. This approach not only strengthens accountability but also reinforces their commitment to co-production, ensuring that lived experience shapes their understanding of practice quality and informs their continuous improvement.
- Their Quality Audits for Children and Young People's Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) focus on the child's voice being pivotal to the plan and a golden thread throughout each section, to ensure professionals are effectively capturing the voice and children and young people are encouraged to help design how they want to be supported. This model is embedded throughout Education and SEND services who are directly working with children and young people.
- An example of how children's views have helped to influence Leicestershire's practice is the development and implementation of the 'Language that cares' approach. Developed and refined and signed off by their Children in Care Council, this has become a toolkit for capturing the views of children about their life in care. This approach is now embedded into the Review of Arrangements process with children telling them what they call the place they live; what they call their carers and what they call the time they spend with their birth family. This has become a central part of the child's care plan overseen by the Independent Reviewing Officer and sets the scene for avoiding jargon and being led by the child.
- They regularly use parents' feedback to develop their services with parental views actively sought to develop and shape their post Adoption support offer, "Brighter Futures". In addition, they have used the voice of parents to support staff training and development, particularly learning from complaints but also capturing what worked well. For example, they have used a video message from a father to demonstrate how important their voice is to engagement and what works best. They seek feedback routinely via the use of QR codes in their closure processes and use this to give an insight into parents' experiences.
- They are currently embarking on the implementation of the Government's new policy requirements set out in Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

and incorporating the views of parents and children is built into their Families First programme. There is recognition that a number of co-design workshops will be required which will include children, families and partner agencies, to help Leicestershire to understand the level of support currently provided and what this could look like in the future. This will be done by making use of existing groups, surveys and specific events to ensure they engage with a wide range of people representing local communities.

- The Leicestershire SEND Parent Carer Forum is a key strategic partner. The feedback they regularly gather from their parent/carer membership, as well as feedback that is gathered from other parent carer groups, feeds directly into changes in process and services.

Below is feedback that reflects the views of families in receipt of multi-agency services coordinated by Children's Social Care in Leicestershire.

*"During what has been a very difficult time for myself and the children, both workers have been invaluable. When first approached by this service, I was a little anxious and perhaps had fears of the stereotype that I would be branded a bad mother. I was never made to feel this way. Instead I was supported and encouraged and never judged."*

*"I know from every social worker we have come into contact with that you are amazing at your job and they are extremely lucky to have you within their team. Your passion and drive is rare...don't ever change no matter the work load they put on you because you have been a breath of fresh air to us since meeting you and we never dread your visits like others that come. You have gone above and beyond and whatever we ask of you, you are on it!"*

Feedback from Leicestershire parents/carers

*"This group has helped me flourish and grow. It has changed myself to be a positive and bright person. The worker was a great person to help if I came in really upset. I would definitely recommend this group to anyone. Thank you."*

*"I decided to work with Teen Health because talking about my feelings to someone who I didn't really know made me feel more secure. I felt overwhelmed before coming to Teen Health and speaking to the worker made me feel stronger within myself."*

Feedback from young people about Teen Health Service

#### **In Rutland Children's Services:**

- They reviewed their Corporate Parenting Board with feedback from young people and now have a co-chair arrangement.
- They use feedback from young people to shape activities for all their Aiming High and Young Carer groups. They regularly plan with the groups to listen to their feelings and wishes around session plans and trips.



- Relating to Short Break activities, for the Step To It Group, parents gave feedback that they wanted their children to be included in Social Media posting by Rutland Dance Youth Academy so that they felt more included. This was addressed. Also, parents gave feedback that activities relating to trains would interest children. They are trialling an event with “Trainmaster” this summer, who will provide an interactive track building session.
- Feedback from parents was used to shape the ADHD service that they deliver. They had feedback that it was daunting for some people to attend a support group and that there were parenting issues they needed help with but did not want to share in public. From this, they set up 1-2-1 consultations for parents to access.
- A forthcoming Life Skills Course has also been shaped by the needs of the cohort. Previously, they had delivered a set Award Scheme Development and Accreditation Network (ASDAN) programme. For this course, they have asked parents and carers to prioritise the needs of their young people. The course has been tailored around the output of this feedback with a stronger emphasis on social skills.
- Rutland has listened to parental feedback around the quality of Personal Assistants to produce the Rutland Personal Assistant Quality Award training.

Below is feedback that reflects the views of families in receipt of multi-agency services coordinated by Children’s Social Care in Rutland.

*“I can’t fault my social worker. She is always there when we need her. The kids have phoned her from school when they have needed to talk to her. She seems like she is on top of it and working with us.”*

*“Our social worker is an outstanding social worker and I genuinely cannot say this about many people. He should be absolutely proud of the job he does.”*

*“My social work assistant is amazing. Nothing is ever too much of an ask. If I don’t know where to turn, she always does. This lightens the mental load when you have someone like her to help with tricky tasks, appointments or general questions.”*

Feedback from Rutland parents/carers

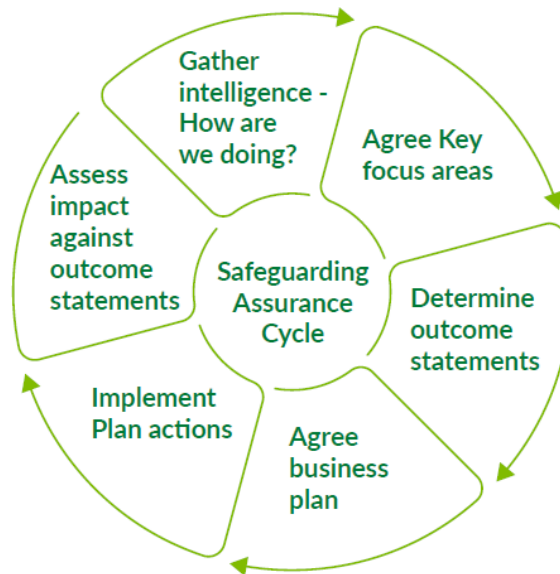
*“I would scale my social worker 9 out 10 as they understand me and I know that they are trying to help me.”*

Feedback from Rutland young person

## The Business Priorities of the Partnership

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership worked with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board to identify shared priorities for the [Joint Business Plan 2023-25](#). The annual Business Plan was replaced with a two-year-plan to allow time to embed the outcomes of the key deliverables and, subsequently, analyse the impact of these outcomes.

Updates on the joint business plan are provided throughout the business year to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships.



Progress on the following priorities was monitored throughout the year and assurance secured that actions were making a positive difference to the lived experience of local children and families.

**Safeguarding Babies:** Improving how we work together with families before and after births to safeguard babies and seek assurance that multi-agency working with families to safeguard babies is effective.

### What we did in 2024-25:

- Continued to raise awareness of the LLR SCP [Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure](#), last updated in April 2024 to reflect learning from local reviews and a [multi-agency audit](#) completed in 2023-24. The procedure was relaunched in June 2024. There were two in-person launch sessions held at County Hall, followed by a session at City Hall in September 2024. There was also a section on the procedure at Safeguarding Matters Live in July 2024. The [video of the session](#) is available on the LLR SCP YouTube Channel.
- Continued to promote and monitor the impact of [ICON](#), which was launched early in 2022-23. ICON is an evidenced-based programme focused on reducing abusive head trauma (AHT) triggered by crying. The mnemonic ICON outlines the key messages of the programme: **I**nfant crying is normal,



Comforting methods can help, It's OK to walk away, and Never, ever shake a baby.

In 2023-24, it was recognised that further assurance of touch point messages being recorded by Maternity and GP services was still required. In 2024-25, an audit was carried out to continue to analyse the embedding of ICON in frontline practice and its impact. There remains issues with the recording of maternity ICON touch points and those for the GP final touch points. These are due to how they can be recorded with maternity systems changing and where the GP touch point is recorded. This is being monitored.

In May 2024, the ICON Father Stories were launched at the Phoenix Cinema and Arts Centre. These are 6 short films performed by actors that have been scripted by local fathers to reflect their experiences of managing crying babies. Research evidence indicates that 70% of AHT is perpetrated by men and, therefore, it is of importance to ensure men are given the ICON message as well as the support and resources to help them manage a crying baby and reduce AHT. Full and shortened versions of the stories are available on the YouTube Channel here: [LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships - YouTube](#).

The DadPad App, commissioned by Perinatal Mental Health, was made available to all fathers across the sub-region from Summer 2024 and includes national and local ICON information.

An [“Invisible” / “Hidden” / “Unseen” Men: Engaging fathers and male carers in effective practice Resource Pack](#) was published in September 2024 to collate information on local and national resources available.

- Undertook a spotlight audit of babies up to one year old, subject to Child Protection Plans, across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to consider whether there has been an improvement in safeguarding babies in recent years. Further detail on the audit is available in the “Quality Assurance and Service Improvement” section of this report.
- Considered the impact of the local [Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool](#) in Summer 2024, six months after its launch. A frontline practitioner survey was disseminated by the Safer Sleep Champions across the multi-agency partnership to understand how the tool works in practice and how it could be improved and further promoted.
- Through the Section 11 self-assessment process, this year completed using a frontline practitioner survey, assessed evidence of the impact of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool and improved approaches to working with males, in response to the publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review’s third national review on [“The Myth of Invisible Men”](#).
- Supported “Baby Fortnight” in April 2024, which was held across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. There were two different strands to the fortnight: one for the whole workforce, with a variety of workshops for those working with parents/carers and children from pregnancy into the early years, and the other with a variety of sessions delivered to parents/carers in

Family Hubs. These sessions were delivered by the Family Wellbeing Workers in the Family Help Service, and colleagues working for Active Together.

### Outcomes and Impact:

- ICON is well embedded locally with review and audit work evidencing that ICON messages are being shared widely and appropriately by local agencies. ICON messages are delivered by health staff to **all parents** through the 6 touch points and ICON is **targeted in greater detail** to families with specific vulnerabilities, for example, parents who misuse substances, young parents, and parents of premature babies. The voluntary sector support ICON messages through parenting sessions and ICON is also promoted to male prisoners.
- The ICON Father Stories have been well received with over 500 views on YouTube since their launch.

*“Powerful, beautiful, moving, important. Thank you to you and the team for creating these films. A personal note to the actor who did an incredible job. My partner was a mess after the film. His delivery and authenticity is superb. I’m very honoured to be part of this truly groundbreaking project. Thank you. It’s remarkable and I’m positive it’ll have an impact on many lives.”* – feedback from a father who provided his story for one of the films

- Across the county, 108 families with 126 children attended the Baby Fortnight sessions. At the end of the session, parents were given a QR code so they could give feedback. Over half of those attending completed the survey.

*“It is so important for the babies to interact with other babies and to build on their social skills. I needed this for my baby as we do not go out very much.”*

*“Today has made me think how I can do some activities at home with my Baby that do not have too cost much.”* – feedback from parents/carers attending Baby Fortnight sessions

- The feedback from the survey disseminated by local Safer Sleeping Champions informed the updates to the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool which was republished in January 2025. The update did not require extensive changes. The updated tool was widely promoted via the Safer Sleeping Champions and the Safeguarding Matters Digest to tie in with national Safer Sleep Week 2025 (10<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> March).

The results of the Section 11 frontline practitioner survey, completed in late 2024, indicated that further promotion and awareness raising around the tool is required. 44% of respondents to the online survey<sup>22</sup> answered that they were aware of the tool, with 42% of those saying they had used it in

<sup>22</sup> The majority of practitioners completed the online practitioner survey, but GP Practices participated in a different way, via an Integrated Care Board managed process.

practice. Of those that had used the tool, there were some positive responses, with 58% saying they found it very useful.

*“Good conversation point for parents and also identifies risk in a clear manner and enables practitioners to document their concerns.”*

*“It is a protective measure to help both the child and parents whilst giving useful advice on sleeping arrangements to keep the baby safe. This tool can be used with the parents to also help recognise the pitfalls to co sleeping and how it could impact them and their baby.”* – comments made by survey respondents

- The results of the Section 11 frontline practitioner survey indicated more limited knowledge than hoped of the [“Practice Principles – Engaging Fathers, and Male Carers in Effective Practice”](#), launched in September 2023, with 39% of respondents to the online survey<sup>23</sup> saying they were aware of them. Around a third of those that were aware of the principles had used them and most found them useful.

*“I find the Practice Principles helpful because they guide me in effectively engaging fathers and male carers in a child’s life. They promote inclusive, strength-based approaches, ensuring fathers are active participants in care and support, benefiting the child’s overall well-being.”*

*“Helpful to focus on engaging fathers in all care from checks to consultations. Gives us a better understanding of family situations.”* – comments made by survey respondents

### **Moving Forwards:**

The Safeguarding Babies priority has been in place since 2021-22 and a lot of work has been completed in this time, with the implementation of ICON, an updated Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure and the launch of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool. Also, during this time, there have been numerous training events and individual courses, both in person and online, and a range of learning and development resources have been produced and disseminated.

The national analysis of Serious Incident Notifications for 2023-24, published in May 2024, noted that *“Despite the fall in notifications for under 1s, this remained the most common age group in 2024, accounting for 1 in 3 notifications (33%).”*<sup>24</sup> In a change from previous years, and out of line with the national picture, under 1s did not account for the majority of Leicestershire notifications in the same time period.

It is evident that this business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and so it will not be carried over to the 2025-27 Business Plan. It is acknowledged, though, that further awareness raising is required around key guidance and resources, particularly with a large and dynamic workforce. Therefore, babies will

<sup>23</sup> As above.

<sup>24</sup> Serious Incident Notifications: Reporting year 2024, Child Characteristics section (May 2024) – <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/serious-incident-notifications/2024>

always be seen as a key cohort of focus for the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

**Child Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing:** Seek assurance that partnership working supports good mental health for children and that mental health and safeguarding are effectively addressed together.

**What we did in 2024-25:**

- Received information and assurance, via the Planning & Delivery Group, regarding the Complex Care Escalation Process, which supports leaders within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to access timely support to progress the care arrangements of local children and young people. This includes the management of care for children and young people with mental health, learning disabilities and/or autism and/or placement needs.
- Formed a Task & Finish Group on “Capturing the Voice of the Child in the Child Protection process”, which considered the experiences of local children subject to safeguarding arrangements and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).
- Recommendations and learning from the LLR Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP) themed review informed the review and update of the LLR SCP [“Practice Guidance: Supporting Children and Young People who Self-Harm and/or have Suicidal Thoughts”](#).
- Continued to consider the local implications of [“Right Care, Right Person”](#) (RCRP). This is a collective national approach from the Home Office, Department of Health & Social Care, the National Police Chiefs’ Council, Association of Police and Crime Commissioners and NHS England which aims to work to end the inappropriate and avoidable involvement of police in responding to incidents involving people with mental health needs and ensure that individuals in mental health crisis are seen by the right professional.
- Following the multi-agency audit of referrals to Children’s Social Care (CSC) across the three Local Authorities where the contacts were labelled as ‘child’s mental health’, the Assurance and Audit Group have initiated a follow-up audit on young people open to CAMHS and subject to Child Protection Plan.

**Outcomes and Impact:**

- The CAMHS Young Person’s Team provided information to the Voice of the Child Task & Finish Group on the activities undertaken in capturing the voice of the child. CAMHS sessions, which are in the main face-to-face, include the voice of the child. Several approaches are used to facilitate engagement and communication such as play and alternate communication forms, such as written or flashcards. Also, events have been held such as the ‘my voice’ event, where young people were invited to join poetry and rap

music workshops to share their views on mental health. This was followed by an 'Active' event where young people were invited to join CAMHS staff for professional led physical activities such as yoga and kickboxing with themes of emotional wellbeing fed through and staff available to talk during physical movement. A Learning Disability Nurse is embedded within the team, who offers consultation and support around adapting communication and resources. For young people for whom English is not their first language, interpreters are booked to ensure communication needs are met.

The CAMHS Young Person's Team reported that this work has enabled an understanding of the impact for our young people of often having multiple professionals in their lives. They have voiced that they feel unheard at times or that their paperwork is shared and people draw judgement from this rather than getting to know them. Groups and events such as 'my voice' and 'active' have helped them to break down some of these barriers. They recognise, though, that these were one-off events rather than an ongoing resource they can offer. Having a Learning Disability Nurse in their team has made a huge difference in enabling them to expand their ability to offer differing layers of communication.

*"The nurses in the Young Person's Team have changed my life."*

*"We can't thank you enough for the amazing care, kindness, sensitivity and professionalism you have given to our family especially our child over the last 12 months. When we really needed it, you were there and we felt so supported when things didn't always feel great. You are the epitome of the NHS at its best and we wish you all the very best for the future."* – feedback provided to the CAMHS Team

- The LLR SCP "Practice Guidance: Supporting Children and Young People who Self-Harm and/or have Suicidal Thoughts" includes more information on referral pathways to the Children and Young People Mental Health Triage and Navigation Service which now has a self-referral portal. The updated guidance and procedure were re-launched at the Safeguarding Matters Live event in December 2024.

*"Learning more about self-harming behaviour as I am working with a young person that is displaying these behaviours."* – feedback from attendee of Safeguarding Matters Live regarding what went well and what impact this will have on my work

*"It's brilliant to have. We use with families and children to look at what self-harm means."* – feedback from attendee of VCS Safeguarding Forum

### **Moving Forwards:**

The learning from the audit on young people open to CAMHS and subject to Child Protection Plan will be reported to the Safeguarding Children Partnership and any procedural or training needs will be considered.

Since its inception in 2021-22, it is felt that this business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and so it will not be carried over to the 2025-27 Business



Plan. It is acknowledged, though, that children's mental health continues to be a subject of both local and national importance. Therefore, the Planning & Delivery Group will continue to seek assurance that mental health and safeguarding are effectively addressed together locally by receiving CAMHS highlight reports.

**Keeping Adolescents Safe / Supporting Safe Adolescents:** Seek assurance that there is a clear governance and approach for safeguarding children from harm outside the home and that it is effective.

**What we did in 2024-25:**

- Continued to receive assurance from the Adolescence Safety and Diversion Board which provides governance to the Strategic Partnership Board's work relating to child exploitation (under 18s) and violence affecting young people (under 25s). It has been agreed that the Adolescence Safety and Diversion Board Chair will attend the Safeguarding Children Partnership meetings each year to present, within a dedicated agenda item, the progress of the ASD Board and delivery plans.
- Representatives from the Business Offices and several partner agencies of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships attend meetings of the Child Criminal Exploitation and Serious Violence Delivery Group.
- Received the findings from the multi-agency Serious Youth Violence and Child Exploitation audit, completed as part of the Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) preparation. Learning was identified regarding the link between school exclusion and exploitation, support required for neurodiverse children, risk assessment and screening and transitional safeguarding. Recommendations have been taken forward with awareness raising with schools and work around risk assessment tools.
- Supported promotion to schools and wider partners of '[Tips for a Healthier Screen Time](#)', which is a useful guide for parents, carers, children and young people produced by Dr Sanjiv Nichani OBE, Senior Consultant Paediatrician at the East Midlands Congenital Heart Centre and Leicester Children's Hospital. It raises awareness of the effects of screen time on the health, well-being and safeguarding of children and young people.
- Linked to the national discussion regarding online harm and abuse, in relation to both children and adults, the December 2024 Safeguarding Matters Live Event was focused on Safeguarding and the Internet, with a presentation on the impact of social media on children, delivered by [Warning Zone](#), and a presentation on Prevent.

**Outcomes and Impact:**

- Assurance work informs training requirements and procedural reviews, with procedures on "Safeguarding Children and Young People from Child Sexual Exploitation" and "Online Safety" being updated in April 2025.

- The focused Safeguarding Matters Live led to some positive feedback about how the information presented will help professionals in practice:

*“Interesting information about online platforms and I will be able to use this knowledge in direct work and safety planning with children and young people.”*

*“Increased knowledge and understanding about online platforms, in particular how many very young children access these.”* – feedback from attendees of Safeguarding Matters Live.

### **Moving Forwards:**

A priority on Harm Outside the Home has been included in the [Business Plan for 2025-27](#), which will build on the progress made since 2022-23 around this priority.

This acknowledges the continued prevalence of this theme nationally, with persistent concern about the themes raised in the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA), including group-based Child Sexual Exploitation and grooming gangs. Implementation of the Online Safety Act 2023 is also at the forefront of national interest, following the release of the Netflix drama Adolescence, and with Ofcom’s child safety measures due to come into force for social media, search and gaming apps and websites in July 2025.<sup>25</sup> Assurance around the local response to these themes continues to be required.

**Safeguarding children from diverse backgrounds:** Understand and improve how well partners work together with children and families from diverse backgrounds.

### **What we did in 2024-25:**

- Continued to promote the locally agreed definition of cultural competency and the standard of expected practice. It has been shared with the Safeguarding Children Partnerships’ Trainers’ Network as something to include in training wherever relevant and appropriate.
- Ensured that the impact of abuse and neglect on protective characteristics is analysed during the Rapid Review process.
- Continued to plan how best to provide multi-agency learning and development around immigration status, culture, faith, and parenting, to sit alongside already existing training and resources that consider safeguarding children from diverse backgrounds.

A Task & Finish Group is researching data and information about the demography of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR) and engaging with key contacts within those communities who can become advisors. It is recognised that the required learning and development cannot be achieved

<sup>25</sup> <https://www.ofcom.org.uk/online-safety/protecting-children/new-rules-for-a-safer-generation-of-children-online>

through one training course. The group is planning a multi-faceted approach, including consideration of a practitioner workbook/tool/resource of where to go for help/support; delivering some basic awareness information courses/sessions about different communities that live in LLR and the experience of being a migrant – what that journey might have looked like/what some of the terms mean – such as ‘no recourse to public funds’; and providing practice forums and/or resources for building confidence for practitioners working in child protection/safeguarding, informed by local and national learning.

- Started to promote the learning from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s Briefing [“It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children](#), published in March 2025. This has been included in the annual Learning from Reviews resource disseminated to Case Review Group members to share within their individual agencies.

#### **Outcomes and Impact:**

- Cultural competence and intersectionality are considered in audits and reviews across the Safeguarding Children Partnerships, improving our understanding of how well partners work together with children and families from diverse backgrounds. It is acknowledged, though, that further work is required to improve this understanding, particularly in light of the questions raised by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s Briefing.

#### **Moving Forwards:**

A priority on Belonging has been included in the [Business Plan for 2025-27](#), which will build on the progress made since 2021-22 around this priority. This will continue to seek assurance around the work already in progress and address the questions for Safeguarding Children Partnerships raised in “It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children’.

**Effective Safeguarding in independent and out of school settings:** Work with faith groups, independent schools, community organisations and other settings to support them to play an effective role in safeguarding children.

During 2022-23, a Task and Finish Group, chaired by Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs), developed and promoted [information leaflets for parents and carers](#) about keeping children safe in out of school settings. These leaflets were added to the websites of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

#### **What we did in 2024-25:**

- Safeguarding in out of school settings and the associated leaflets were promoted via schools, as well as at the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS) Safeguarding Forum at their July 2024 meeting.



- Continued engagement via the local Independent Schools Forum, with the schools selecting topics for discussion that were specific to them. The Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway was a featured theme.
- Continued to expand the reach and membership of the LLR Voluntary and Community Sector Forum, which includes voluntary and community organisations, faith-based organisations, and sport clubs / organisations. Topics covered in 2024-25 included the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway, delivered by a guest speaker from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse; Healthier Screen Time; and resolving safeguarding disagreements and how to escalate concerns.
- Received assurance from each Local Authority around the local picture regarding Electively Home Educated children. In May 2024, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published a [Panel Briefing on Safeguarding children in Elective Home Education](#), which highlighted that *“figures from the Department for Education show that as many as 92,000 children were taught from home at the date of the census in England in autumn 2023. This is an increase from an estimated 80,900 in the previous autumn term. It also represents a 67% increase to the estimated 55,000 highlighted in the Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) 2019 Elective Home Education Survey.”*<sup>26</sup> The recommendations from the Briefing helped to structure the assurance questions posed to the Local Authorities.

A presentation on Electively Home Educated Children was given at Safeguarding Matters Live in July 2024 and referenced this national report.

In response to national and local learning, in September 2024, the Policy and Procedures Group published new guidance entitled [“Elective Home Education: An Approach to Safeguarding for LLR”](#). Four training briefing sessions were delivered by the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group, with the last one taking place in February 2025. A [video of one of these sessions](#) has been made into a learning resource.

- Following publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s report on [“Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings”](#) (October 2022 and April 2023), the Local Authorities provided the Department for Education with assurance that children within this cohort were safeguarded in their accommodation. In 2024-25, Health audited records of out of area children living in educational residential settings. The audit was undertaken to further this assurance via a review of health records of those children previously audited by the 3 LLR Local Authorities. The outcome was a good piece of assurance in that ongoing review of these children’s health files is now taking place. For further information on this work, please see the section on National Reviews.

<sup>26</sup> [“Safeguarding children in Elective Home Education: Panel Briefing 3”](#), Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel (May 2024), page 2.

**Outcomes and Impact:**

- In line with Working Together 2023 and its guidance on working with schools, colleges, early years, and other education providers, as well as voluntary, charity, social enterprise (VCSE) organisations and sports clubs, the updated local [Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) enhance the systems to engage and collaborate at both the operational and strategic level with these organisations.

The Independent Schools Forum is no longer required, as all local schools (including independent schools, academies, and free schools), colleges, early years and childcare settings, and other educational providers (including alternative provision) are recognised as relevant agencies for the purpose of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements and come together as part of the LLR Education Group. The formation of the subgroup enhances the scope of engagement to encompass awareness raising and operational and strategic influence.

The Voluntary & Community Sector Forum has encouraged and provided better links and increased engagement with faith organisations, sports groups and community organisations. The Forum dedicates time to hearing feedback and input from those organisations about their experiences and knowledge of helping, protecting, and promoting the welfare of local children.

**Moving Forwards:**

It is evident that this business priority has achieved a good level of assurance and has led to the embedding of key, and ongoing, forums and so it will not be carried over to the 2025-27 Business Plan.

The role of Local Authorities around safeguarding and supporting home educated children is due to increase, in light of the new duties and responsibilities to be introduced through the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. This includes the creation of a Children not in School Register. These national changes will inform any required changes to local policies and procedures.

**Transitional Safeguarding:** Seek assurance that Transitional Safeguarding is being managed appropriately across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

**What we did in 2024-25:**

- The Task & Finish Group formed to consider if transitional safeguarding is being managed in the most appropriate and effective way continued to meet. To improve governance, the Terms of Reference and membership were refreshed and the group includes representatives from both children's and adults' services. It has been agreed that the group will map the progress made in response to the work plan produced following a previous report on transitional safeguarding.

- Due to issues around the remit of the group and what would be required for an overarching Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland strategy/policy for transitional safeguarding, the work has not progressed as intended.

### **Moving Forwards:**

Transitional safeguarding will be carried forward to both the [SCP Business Plan for 2025-27](#) and SAB Business Plan for 2025-27. It will be incorporated into a thematic priority, on “Belonging” for the SCP and “Equality, Diversity and Inclusion” for the SAB, so that the cohort of children and young people to be addressed can be clearer and more targeted.

Further information on assurance processes, procedures and training, informed by the business priorities, is outlined in the following sections of this report.

### **Analysis of areas with limited progress**

It has been acknowledged above that three existing business priorities will be carried forward to the 2025-27 Business Plan. This is due to both progress locally and additional national learning and reform. Transitional safeguarding saw limited progress. The issues were escalated and the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Boards and the Independent Scrutineer of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships have been engaged to support this work.

## Quality Assurance and Service Improvement

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership has a Performance and Assurance Framework shared with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership. This can be found here <https://lrsb.org.uk/lrscp>. This has been updated in the last year to reflect Working Together 2023.



## Performance data

Indicators of performance in multi-agency safeguarding have been identified by the Assurance and Audit Group to monitor effectiveness of the operation of the multi-agency safeguarding system. Data is reported by agencies with analysis, utilising existing reports where possible.

### Leicestershire

Snapshot at end of year 2024-25	Leicestershire
Number of Early Help assessments	1371
Number of Children in Need	3302
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Education	1071
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Health	1171
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Housing	61
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Police	1841

<b>Snapshot at end of year 2024-25</b>	<b>Leicestershire</b>
Number of Strategy Meetings	2961
Number of Section 47 enquiries	1778
Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs)	389
Number of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs)	683
Number of Child Protection Plans	506
Number of Children Looked After	694
Number of Care Leavers	711

### Design to make the data above into an infographic

The number of referrals and requests for information from different sectors evidence strong information sharing across partners.

The number of Strategy Discussions rose from 2560 in 2023-24 to 2961 in 2024-25. This was matched by an increase in Section 47 enquiries, from 1660 in 2023-24 to 1778 in 2024-25. Work with partners to provide robust oversight to the quality of strategy discussions has continued to be in place with oversight of the operational partnership meeting and the regular audit and oversight of threshold and agency contributions.

In 2023-24, the numbers of children in care increased. There were 726 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024, an increase of 45 children (6.6%) from 681 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2023. This was the first annual increase of children in care in Leicestershire since 2021. In 2024-25, the number decreased to 694 to be more in line with the 2022-23 figure.

There has been a further drop in early help assessments – from 3677 in 2021-22, to 2673 in 2022-23, 1415 in 2023-24 and to 1371 in 2024-25. This demonstrates the impact of the measures undertaken by the Family Help Service to support the management of demand and ensure families received the most appropriate support according to their needs. Initiatives, which may have had an impact on the number of early help assessments completed, have included: changes to process on case recording systems; the role of the “Early Responder” at the front door; enhanced provision of information, advice, and signposting to families at the front door, including sending out information packs and onward referral to other agencies; and the embedding of Teen Health, which may have provided alternatives to early help assessments.

Leicestershire have a strong focus on children and families who access their service, with a clear commitment to their experience set out in their Achieving Excellence Plan. This includes their pledge to put children at the centre of everything they do, celebrating their uniqueness and diversity.

During the year 2024-25, Leicestershire have continued to embed specific questions focused on children’s diverse cultural and identity needs, including how ethnicity is

considered in delivering their interventions, as part of a quarterly audit programme. In addition, they have developed specific pieces of work for their children in care who are seeking refuge in the UK to ensure their trauma and specific needs are represented in strategic planning and in their case work. This group of children is overrepresented in their care leaver population and forms 8% of their children in care. To meet this objective, Leicestershire have piloted specific engagement work focused on hearing the voice of children escaping war. This includes both children in care and care leavers who are unaccompanied and children being hosted locally with their families from Ukraine.

Leicestershire know that they have gaps in their ability to report routinely how children from different ethnic groups are represented in service provision beyond these specific groups, who have defined service delivery embedded into their structures. They acknowledge that some groups of children from global majority groups are underrepresented in their Targeted Family Help service, whilst being slightly overrepresented in those children subject to child protection planning. This is particularly the case for children from dual heritage background. Most children in receipt of services are from White British backgrounds.

To support challenge in their approach to meeting children's diverse needs, Leicestershire have established the Race Ethnicity and Excellence Forum (REEF), which provides support and challenge to practitioners, using the expertise based on the lived experience and professional expertise of the panel. Going forwards into 2025-26, they are engaging in the national reform agenda (Families First Programme) and will use specific data from local needs assessments and feedback from families to inform their services offer and structure, to build services that are responsive to the diverse needs of children, young people and families in the county.

#### Rutland

<b>Snapshot at end of year 2024-25</b>	<b>Rutland</b>
Number of Early Help assessments (episodes)	47
Number of Children in Need	58
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Education	81
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Health	42
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Housing	3
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Police	92
Number of Strategy Meetings	149
Number of Section 47 enquiries	94
Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs)	41

<b>Snapshot at end of year 2024-25</b>	<b>Rutland</b>
Number of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs)	72
Number of Child Protection Plans	28
Number of Children Looked After	33
Number of Care Leavers	39

### Design to make the data above into an infographic

The number of contacts received in Rutland Children's Social Care has increased in 2024-25 to 1098. The increase in contacts is not of concern to Rutland but is in line with what they would expect. Across the board, they saw more contacts from partner agencies. They saw fewer individuals making referrals and a slight decline in anonymous referrals.

In 2024-25 Rutland progressed more to referral. The number of referrals has begun increasing with 381 referrals. This was in line with a greater complexity of need. They have seen ongoing and increasing concerns regarding mental health and emotional wellbeing for parents and young people. Domestic abuse features widely in the referrals received. Through 2025-26, Rutland will be recruiting a domestic abuse specialist worker and will be looking at what their support offer is around these areas and question what they could do differently to support families earlier who have these presenting issues.

There have been gradual increases in 2024-25 in numbers of children on child protection plans and children looked after.

Again, there has been an increase in care leaver numbers. This is, in part, due to the consistent number of young people from overseas seeking asylum via the national transfer scheme.

There has been a further decrease in Early Help assessments, from 63 in 2023-24 to 47 in 2024-25. This, again, is due to more focus on targeting support on solution focused approaches to referrals at Tier 1 and 2 and through groupwork solutions based on analysis of data and trends in relation to referral needs.

Most of the families Rutland work with (86%) are White British. As per the census, 94.8% of their population is White British. The data includes children seeking asylum via the national transfer scheme. Rutland have identified that the proportion of children/families accessing their services in terms of ethnicity is representative of the local population; although more can always be done to engage families from global majority groups.

### Use of data and information sharing

Quantitative data and qualitative information are shared to evidence that safeguarding arrangements are effective. An Annual Assurance Statement is delivered to the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships, in line with the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework, to enable the Safeguarding Children Partnerships to hold local agencies to account for their safeguarding work,



including prevention and early intervention. The Safeguarding Children Partnerships can request additional data and narrative from partners to strengthen assurance, where required.

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards have a local [Information Sharing Agreement \(ISA\)](#).

An example of how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes in 2024-25 are the changes to how Domestic Abuse notifications are screened in Leicestershire. There was consultation between Leicestershire Children's Social Care and Leicestershire Police, particularly in relation to developing a standard response to stalking, harassment and coercive control in the context of potential harm to the child. Leicestershire Children's Social Care routinely have all Public Protection Notices (PPN) from the Police in response to Domestic Abuse incidents which have DASH risk assessment.<sup>27</sup> They have a strong response to standard risk incidents which have proactive preventative response. Leicestershire Children's Social Care has also started the process of building DASH and S Dash into their standard recording process – the S DASH specifically addresses the risk of stalking. Leicestershire Children's Social Care has developed new guidance for staff, which includes reference to stalking and harassment, and has run "Lunch and Learn" events. Leicestershire Children's Social Care and Leicestershire Police are satisfied that they have a strong screening process. They are sighted on similar issues and can identify issues together to resolve and develop joint approaches.

### Self-Assessment

Section 11 self-assessments are undertaken by agencies as part of their duties under Working Together 2023.<sup>28</sup> In previous years, the safeguarding partners and specific relevant agencies have carried out a Section 11 self-assessment audit of their safeguarding effectiveness. For 2024-25, to enhance the process of obtaining safeguarding assurance from agencies, it was agreed to undertake Section 11 self-assessments using a different methodology.

A survey of frontline staff and managers was carried out to enable the Safeguarding Children Partnerships to obtain assurance of the impact of recommendations and actions resulting from safeguarding reviews and multi-agency audits.

- There was a total of 344 responses to the Section 11 online practitioner survey.
- A further 62 GP Practices participated in the Integrated Care Board (ICB) managed process.
- There was a good mix of responses across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland agencies and departments.
- Schools throughout the sub-region were included for the first time in this Section 11. Their inclusion was managed by Local Authority School Liaison departments.

<sup>27</sup> DASH = Domestic Abuse, Stalking and Honour Based Violence.

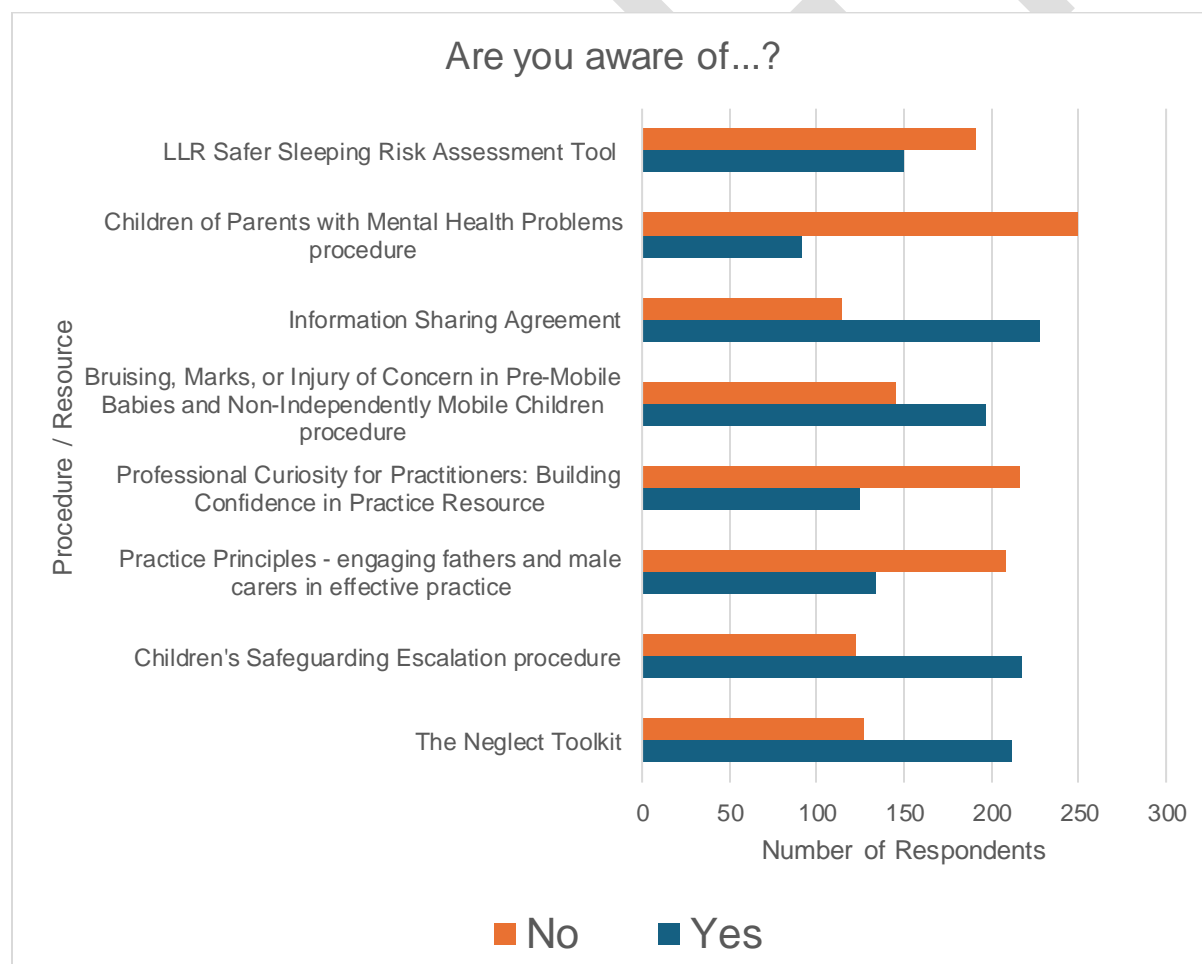
<sup>28</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), Chapter 4, pages 104-107.

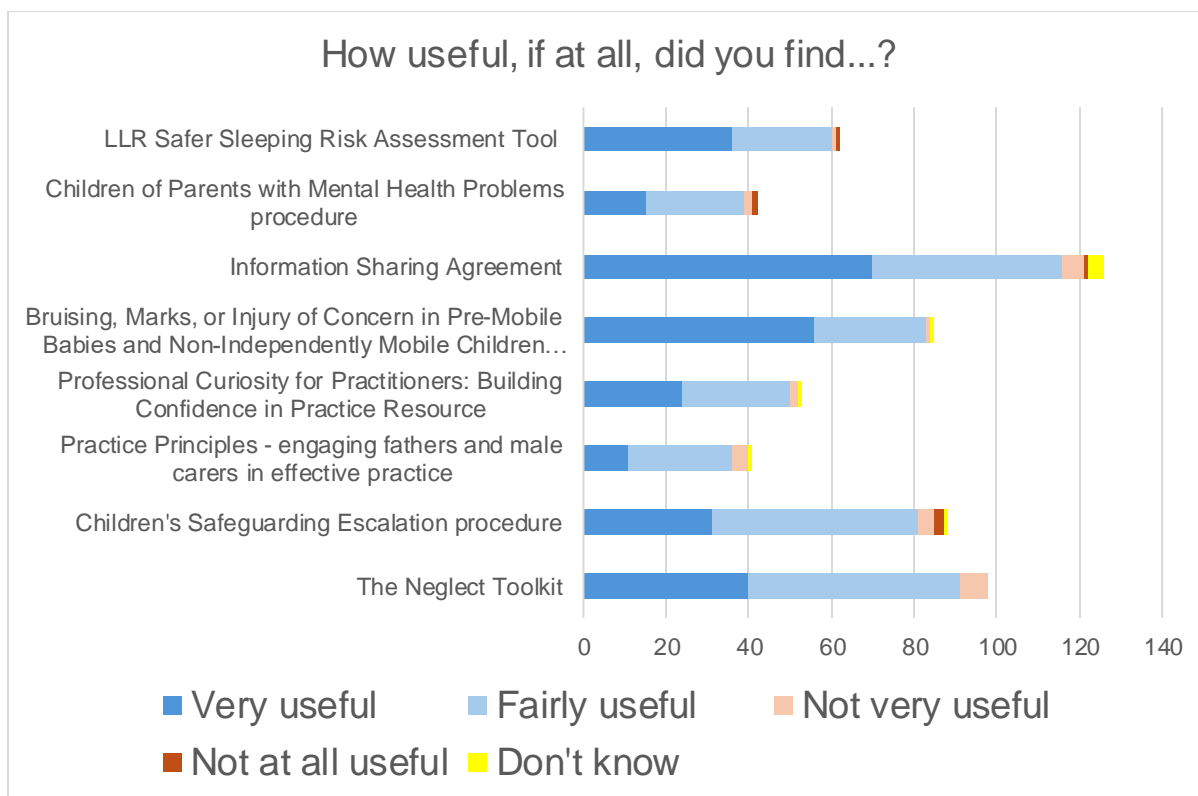


- The survey was used as an awareness raising tool by including links to the relevant resources within the questions.
- Questions were asked about awareness, use and usefulness of key resources and procedures.

The majority of online respondents were aware of the Neglect Toolkit (63%), the Escalation procedure (64%) and the “Bruising, Marks or Injury of Concern in Pre-Mobile Babies and Non-Independently Mobile Children” procedure (58%), and the Information Sharing Agreement (67%). Less were aware of the “Practice Principles on Engaging Fathers and Male Carers in Effective Practice” (39%), the “Building Confidence in Practice Resource on Professional Curiosity for Practitioners” (37%), the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool (44%) and the “Children of Parents with Mental Health Problems” procedure (27%).

The awareness of some of these resources was less than expected. Positively, though, where these figures were lower, the majority of people who used the procedure/resource stated that they found it useful.





The Planning and Delivery Group considered the results, in terms of identifying areas to inform the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' priorities for 2025 onwards and if any further partnership action was required across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

Whilst the majority of online respondents were aware of the Neglect Toolkit, the percentage of people still seemed low considering the Toolkit was originally launched in July 2016 and was updated and re-launched in 2021 to include adolescent neglect. A lack of awareness of the Toolkit has also been identified in multi-agency audit learning. Moving forwards, Neglect is a business priority for 2025-27 and further work will be completed on promoting the Neglect Toolkit.

We will continue to raise awareness of the suite of resources available to practitioners through learning and development.

### Audits

Learning from audits leads to recommendations and actions that are progressed and monitored. The learning is disseminated and informs changes required at both a system and practice level. The impact of action outcomes is analysed once the outcomes have been embedded.



### Repeat Contacts Spotlight Audit

In 2022-23, the Safeguarding Children Partnerships carried out a dip sample audit of referrals to Children's Social Care (CSC) across the three Local Authorities. The audit was focused on children with more than one contact recorded by Children's Social Care.

The aim of this 2024-25 spotlight audit was to understand improvements to responses to initial contact, following the learning identified from the previous audit on this theme. Ten cases were audited: four from Leicester City Council, four from Leicestershire County Council and two from Rutland County Council.

#### The audit found that:

- There was evidence that LLR procedures had been applied in all the cases and that the intervention made a difference for the child and family.
- There was appropriate intervention and Local Authorities, in most cases, completed appropriate children and family assessments.
- In some cases, children and family assessments were not as thorough as they could have been, and this led to the re-referral.
- The Local Authorities demonstrated contact with the family and network to explore issues; more needs to be done, though, to strengthen this through seeking the voice of the whole family and child, and in particular separated partners.
- There was evidence of multi-agency collaboration, but there were pockets where this could be further strengthened. For example, professionals were not always sharing information in Health services around Adult Mental Health, resulting in gaps, incomplete information and impact on assessments and planning.

There is continuous work to improve the quality of assessments and to promote the recording of the voice of the child and whole family. Regarding the learning around health information sharing, “Best Practice Guidance for Health Staff: Sharing health information with Children’s Social Care and partner agencies” is due to be published in 2025-26.

#### Babies under 1 year on a Child Protection Plan Spotlight Audit

Linked to the Safeguarding Babies business priority, a spotlight audit was carried out looking at cases involving babies under 1 year on a Child Protection Plan. Ten cases were audited: four from Leicester City Council, four from Leicestershire County Council and two from Rutland County Council.

Pre-birth planning was a feature of six of the cases. Four cases had not had a pre-birth plan; in some cases, the foetus/infant was referred just prior to birth or soon after birth. For six of the cases, the category of abuse for the Child Protection Plan was Neglect; for two of the cases the category was Physical Abuse; the category for one case was Sexual Abuse; and Emotional/Sexual Abuse was the category for the final case.

The audit found that:

- All the babies were deemed to have been safeguarded and the intervention had made a difference for the child and family with progress being made, leading to many of the families being closed to Social Care.
- There was evidence in many of the cases that the intervention was timely and ensured the child has the right service at the right time without delay.
- There was good information sharing across agencies, particularly Children’s Social Care and Health, in many of the cases, with relevant agencies attending meetings or providing reports.
- There was consistent and timely use of the procedures, thresholds and plans were noted in most of the cases.
- There was evidence of consistency in speaking to mothers and including mothers and the wider family network in processes.
- There was poor use of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool. There was too much reliance on Health staff, either the Midwife or Health Visitor/Public Health Nurse talking to parents and carers about safer sleep.
- The voice of the child was not consistently evidenced and/or captured.
- Although there was evidence of the father of the baby being known in many of the cases audited, there was a lack of consistency in them being engaged and involved in the processes and plans.

Work continues to embed use of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool and Practice Points on Engaging Fathers in everyday practice. To extend the training already offered, as well as the resulting learning and development videos, there

will be further training on the Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure in 2025-26.

## **Other assurance work**

### LLR Safeguarding Keep in Touch Meeting

There is direct governance between the Safeguarding Keeping in Touch meeting and the Assurance and Audit Group.

The Safeguarding Keeping in Touch meetings bring together senior safeguarding leads to share intelligence and joint oversight of the ability of LLR multi-agency children's safeguarding services to maintain statutory functions in relation to safeguarding children. They share information and data and provide a timely response to emerging safeguarding issues with partnership support.

Discussions in 2024-25 have included how each agency has managed significant workforce issues and how these are being resolved. For example, there has been successful recruitment of qualified international social workers in Children's Social Care in Leicester City Council and Leicestershire County Council, which has had a positive impact on providing stability of staffing and decreasing the need to employ agency Social Workers. Other positive messages communicated include the Looked After Children Nursing Team managing to deliver all review health assessments within timeframes. They have also managed to add in an additional keeping in touch point at 6 months for children.

Each agency has provided monthly assurance that safeguarding work is prioritised and they have maintained full engagement with required safeguarding processes.

### LLR Operational Group Meeting

The LLR Operational Group is a standalone group that feeds into the LLR Assurance and Audit Group.

The remit of the Operational Group is to allow managers, responsible for safeguarding children from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, a forum to discuss and work through identified issues.

### Internal Quality Assurance Processes

The Assurance and Audit Group seeks annual assurance from partner agencies around their internal quality assurance processes. The aim is to provide a picture of activity that agencies have completed over the previous twelve months, giving an overview of what the key successes have been, what are the areas for development and any key actions for the forthcoming year linked to the business plan priorities.

## Safeguarding in Education

### **Leicestershire**

Safeguarding in Education Leicestershire County Council support schools with all safeguarding concerns and signposting to Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures.

They deliver:

- Initial Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training and Refresher DSL training in partnership with Leicestershire County Council First Response
- The Safer Recruitment Consortium – Safer Recruitment training
- Allegation Management training in partnership with the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

Additionally, they:

- Host the Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum once a term to share local and national safeguarding updates to include learning from case reviews
- Create termly safeguarding newsletters
- Co-ordinate Designated Safeguarding Leads drop-in sessions at the Family Hubs
- Undertake safeguarding audits of schools
- Advocate for schools in multi-agency meetings
- Deliver safeguarding conferences for Leicestershire with specific focuses, such as Cyber Security
- Respond to Ofsted complaints about Leicestershire schools
- Undertake new Headteacher safeguarding visits
- Speak at the DSL conference for educational trusts.

### **Rutland**

At Rutland County Council, they deliver training to the Education Sector throughout the year. The following events have taken place throughout 2024-25:

- Safeguarding Information Briefings (three times a year) – the Safeguarding Information Briefing is delivered by Rutland County Council Children's Social Care Team. The purpose of the briefing is to deliver key safeguarding updates and develop a Signs of Safety approach to practice.
- Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum (three times a year) – the Safeguarding Leads Forum is delivered by Rutland County Council Children's Social Care Team. These sessions are attended by Designated Safeguarding Leads based in schools or early years settings. The purpose is to deliver safeguarding updates and present information from a range of professionals including the Virtual School, Fostering Team and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).

The SEND, Inclusion and Learning Service send regular updates to the education sector around safeguarding through regular bulletins. These updates happen on a weekly basis.

## **Moving forwards**

It has been acknowledged that the remit of the Assurance and Audit Group is very large. To address this and to reflect the structure successfully employed by the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Adults Boards, from 2025-26, two new groups will be implemented to replace the Assurance and Audit Group. There will be a Performance Group and an Audit Group, which will fulfil the requirements of the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

The Performance Group will analyse performance data; plan, scope and task multi-agency assurance processes; and analyse findings from multi-agency assurance processes, including findings from agencies' internal assurance processes and Section 11 audits. The LLR Safeguarding Keep in Touch Meeting and LLR Operational Group Meeting will feed into the Performance Group.

The Audit Group will complete multi-agency audits as informed by the Performance Group and Business Plan priorities, learning from case reviews, national learning and Section 11 audits and analyse the findings from multi-agency case file and spotlight audits.

It is anticipated that this change will allow for more audits to be completed and improve our ability to evidence how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes.

## **Multi-Agency Safeguarding Procedures**

Together, the Leicestershire & Rutland and Leicester Safeguarding Partnerships ensure that procedures are in place for multi-agency safeguarding in line with Working Together 2023.

Throughout 2024-25, the Policy and Procedures Group has revised procedures and created new guidance in response to learning from local and national reviews and assurance processes.

The Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Procedures Manual can be found online: <https://llrscb.trixonline.co.uk/>

A full list of amendments made can be found on the '[Amendments](#)' page of the manual. Individuals who want to sign up for alerts regarding the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' procedures can [register for updates](#).

## Workforce development through multi-agency learning and development and training

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership's training co-ordination and delivery function is shared with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership to support consistent and effective partnership working.

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships provide:

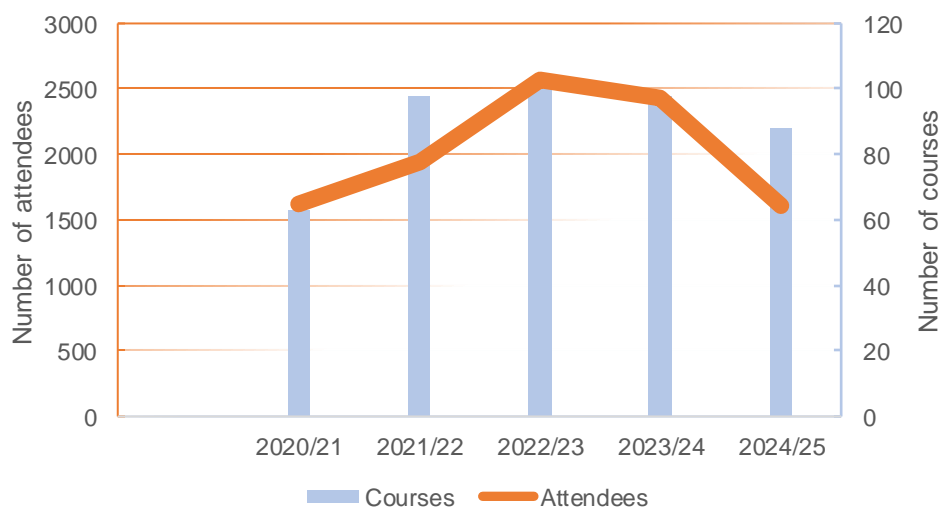
- A [Multi-Agency Training Programme](#), which offers high quality training, with a core programme focusing on basic safeguarding / business as usual training, supplemented by commissioned training on key safeguarding themes and specific types of abuse/neglect, as well as large scale events
- A [Competency Framework](#) to support individuals and organisations to undertake their safeguarding roles and responsibilities in a confident and competent manner
- A [Trainers Network](#) that offers regular meetups between trainers to share knowledge, skills and to help develop the delivery of safeguarding children training.

A blended approach to learning is taken, incorporating video resources and resource packs alongside online and face-to-face training sessions.

### Training Delivery

The Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group (MALDG) are responsible for the sharing of learning across the children's workforce in support of the Business Plan Priorities and learning from reviews.

Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland  
Safeguarding Training Attendees and Courses



This year the Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Programme delivered 88 courses to over 1609 attendees. There are events where data is not available. Firstly, because of a cyber-attack in April 2024, impacting on the systems and ability to



collect information, and also because, when sessions are commissioned, the data is not always effectively shared. It is fair to say that there must have been over 2,000 practitioners who were able to attend events from the multi-agency safeguarding children programme.

The 88 courses included a Conference on Child Sexual Abuse which was hosted by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and delivered by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse in May 2024. Over 180 practitioners attended this event from agencies across the partnership including Police, Health, Early Help and Social Care and aligned services in the Voluntary and Community Sector (VCS). In support of this area of work, there was also a session delivered on disclosure of child sexual abuse by The Reign Collective, which was attended by 43 practitioners. The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group is looking to include sessions on sexual abuse in their programme moving forward.

Also, four sessions were delivered to 102 people to inform them of the new Elective Home Education guidance uploaded to the local procedures.

Training has been delivered in person and online. Obviously, online it is possible to share information with greater numbers, as there is no room space barrier; however, evaluation has shown that participants welcome a return to in-person sessions.

#### Training linked to the Business Plan Priorities

- Safeguarding Babies

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group supported the delivery of Baby Fortnight in April 2024. This was a series of events for practitioners working with those expecting and new parents to support the first critical 1001 days of life. In particular, there were sessions on “Involving and Supporting Dads and Partners”, “The Voice of Babies and Non-Verbal Children”, “ICON”, and “Safer Sleeping for babies in LLR”, all of which reflect learning locally and nationally. The event had sessions for expectant and new parents that ran alongside and was a great success.

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group supported the launch of the new “Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning” procedure, providing two launch sessions in June 2024 for 51 participants and a further session in September where 13 people attended.

In addition, for this priority, to support the ICON message and in support of working with fathers, films were commissioned which are a collection of experiences of new fathers. The films are called “Father Stories” and are available in short or long format. There was a launch of the films at the Phoenix Cinema which some of the dads who shared their stories were able to attend with the actors who committed them to film, as well as practitioners.

- Child Mental Health & Emotional Wellbeing

To support this business plan priority, the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group shared the training that is available from CAMHS and agencies such as Papyrus with the wider workforce.

It is also an area that is covered in other sessions, such as “Hidden Sentence”, “Child Exploitation” and core safeguarding courses.

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group worked with ADHD Solutions to deliver sessions on how to work with and understand children with ADHD. This will continue even though the charity ceased to exist from the end of 2024. Over this period, 3 sessions were delivered with 48 participants.

- Keeping Adolescents Safe/Supporting Safe Adolescents

The programme of safeguarding children training offers a session on “An Introduction to Child Exploitation” and two courses were delivered on this topic in the last year for 38 attendees.

- Safeguarding Children from diverse backgrounds

This priority had a specific action for the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group which was to “provide multi-agency learning and development around immigration status, culture, faith, and parenting.” To help meet this action point, a Task & Finish Group has been established and a proposal with an action plan to fulfil this action by the end of 2026.

- Effective Safeguarding in independent and out of school settings

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group, in support of this Business Plan Priority, has been trying to extend its reach by using social media and voluntary sector networks to encourage agencies to book onto training. Twilight and evening sessions have been delivered too to reach a different audience.

In addition, there have been more Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) sessions because every agency that works or volunteers with children must have a Designated Safeguarding Lead, who would need to complete this training. The programme has delivered 16 sessions, including refresher sessions, to 268 participants in a mixture of different formats such as online, in person and 2-part with e-learning. This should help to keep children safe who are attending out of school settings.

#### Safeguarding Matters Live

In addition to the 88 courses, the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group also supported the delivery of Safeguarding Matters Live events. Two [Safeguarding Matters Live](#) are held each year. These are live online briefings for staff across the children and adults multi-agency partnerships. They share learning from reviews and audits, procedure and guidance updates, resources to support practice, and share messages around key national issues and from key national reports. The slides from the events are made available via the website and sessions are available to watch on the [YouTube Channel](#).

Over the 2 events delivered in 2024-25, with one in June and one in December, 795 practitioners attended.

Topics covered in July 2024 included the Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure, Child Sexual Abuse and Electively Home Educated children. The

December 2024 event focused on safeguarding and the internet, with presentations including the impact of social media on children and Prevent.

### Trainers Network

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships co-ordinate a Trainers Network to look at development/practice issues in this area. The focus of the network is to look at the trainers' support needs and offer regular meetups between trainers to share knowledge, skills and to help develop the delivery of safeguarding children training.

### Training Impact

The link between training and change in behaviour is difficult to measure although we do try to do this through evaluation.

The evaluation returns from the multi-agency safeguarding children programme have been much poorer this year, with only 288 completed forms. Although the Conference on Child Sexual Abuse and Safeguarding Matters were evaluated separately, this equates to roughly one fifth (20%) of training being evaluated which is down from a third last year. This could be because there have been more in-person courses and the evaluation is online. There was also a pilot where certificates were linked to the evaluation form but this was unsuccessful and so a return to a manual system was required.

The evaluation asks participants to assess their level of knowledge, skills and confidence before and after the training session. The results are as below:

Average Scores of	Knowledge	Skills	Confidence
Before	6.4	6.4	6.2
After	8.5	8.4	8.4
Average Increase	2.1	2	2.2

It can be seen that, for every area participants assessed, their knowledge, skills and confidence had increased by at least 2 points. There is also feedback that supports this data.

*"The trainer was very knowledgeable and I enjoyed the interactive elements. It was a very engaging workshop, thank you."*

*"I am from a very small, independent organisation. It was good to share this training with more skilled and experienced practitioners from social care settings. I learnt from their knowledge during the case study section."*

*"The use of real life examples enhanced my understanding."*

Feedback from participants of Core Awareness training

*"I liked the fact that it was held in the evening, so it was more inclusive for people who work during the day. Online at night did help for those who can't travel to a*

*venue. More short courses, e.g. the signs of safety, would be very useful if was held online of an evening."*

*"The case studies (although difficult due to the nature of the content) made the training relevant and brought it to life."*

Feedback from participants of Designated Safeguarding Lead training

*"Fantastic, really interesting and inspiring. A subject that hasn't had the time or acknowledgement that it needs. Lots of food for thought and definitely the start of an ever-growing conversation."*

*"Such honesty and sharing from a place of knowledge and experiences creates a culture of confidence to make changes."*

*"The talk from [the expert by experience] was incredibly insightful. It's very rare that you would have the opportunity to hear first-hand from a survivor of sexual abuse."*

Feedback from attendees of the Conference on Child Sexual Abuse

*"I found the course to be very informative especially the facts and figures which were quite astounding."*

Feedback from attendee of Pre-Birth and Post Birth Planning procedure launch

*"Really interesting session in which I increased my knowledge and skill set in relation to ADHD. Makes me reflect and reevaluate some of my practices for the better. Thank you to the trainer who made the training enjoyable, manageable and accessible."*

Feedback from participant in Practitioners ADHD Toolkit training

Of respondents that completed a survey on the Conference on Child Sexual Abuse, 80% felt it would lead them to do things differently in their role. Several described improving their own practices in relation to child sexual abuse, increasing awareness amongst their own and other teams, and supporting colleagues to use the CSA Centre's resources.

During 2024-25, more than 80 people requested they be added to the Safeguarding Matters distribution list, with nearly 800 people now signed up.

*"Some of the content may be helpful for safeguarding training. I can merge it into my existing content, update, review, refresh etc. I can also cascade to staff using our comms channels for awareness raising."*

*"The presentations were brilliant. It's made me aware of services available."*

*"Really great information – find these really useful to share with providers/settings."*

*"Really useful categories, mixed content and very relevant in trend topics – will share through safeguarding effectiveness meetings."*

## Feedback from Safeguarding Matters Live Events

Also, the Safeguarding Children Partnership Learning & Development homepage on the Leicestershire & Rutland website was viewed over 1400 times, with the Competency Framework webpage being viewed nearly 2300 times.

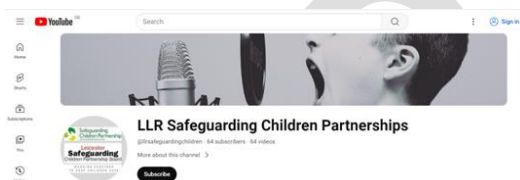
### Learning and Development Resources



During 2024-25, three print issues of the [Safeguarding Matters newsletter](#) were published, including special issues on [Learning from Safeguarding Children Reviews and Audits](#) and the [Mental Capacity Act](#). The Safeguarding Matters newsletter focuses on disseminating local and national safeguarding learning and promoting procedural updates.

Updates on local and national safeguarding information are also delivered in a concise email format via the Safeguarding Matters Digest.

The Safeguarding Matters newsletters and Live PowerPoints and videos are available via the website and YouTube channel. Individuals can request to be added to the distribution list so that they are informed of publication and event dates by emailing [lrsbpo@leics.gov.uk](mailto:lrsbpo@leics.gov.uk). The Safeguarding Matters Digest is disseminated via email to those that have signed up to receive it. To be added to the distribution list, individuals can email [lscpb@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:lscpb@leicester.gov.uk).



The [LLR SCPs' YouTube channel](#) provides a bank of safeguarding videos that capture presentations from multi-agency training events and other resources that can be utilised by partners for learning and development – for example, in single agency training and supervision.

The Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards also offer a set of [Building Confidence in Practice Resources](#). These resource packs aim to focus on often complex issues that arise for practitioners when they are working with people whether they are children or adults.

### Moving forwards

Commencing in June 2025, the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships will be extending their Trainers' Network to include colleagues who are in safeguarding supervisory roles. It will then be known as the SCP Supervisors' and Trainers' Network. Meetings will take place three times a year. Membership will be by invitation, and only available for staff who are named in their agency as a Safeguarding Trainer or a Safeguarding Manager/Supervisor.

The reason for the change is to ensure that those who are in responsible supervisory positions are fully briefed about the learning from the children's Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, audits, national safeguarding

recommendations and the work that underpins the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Business Priorities.

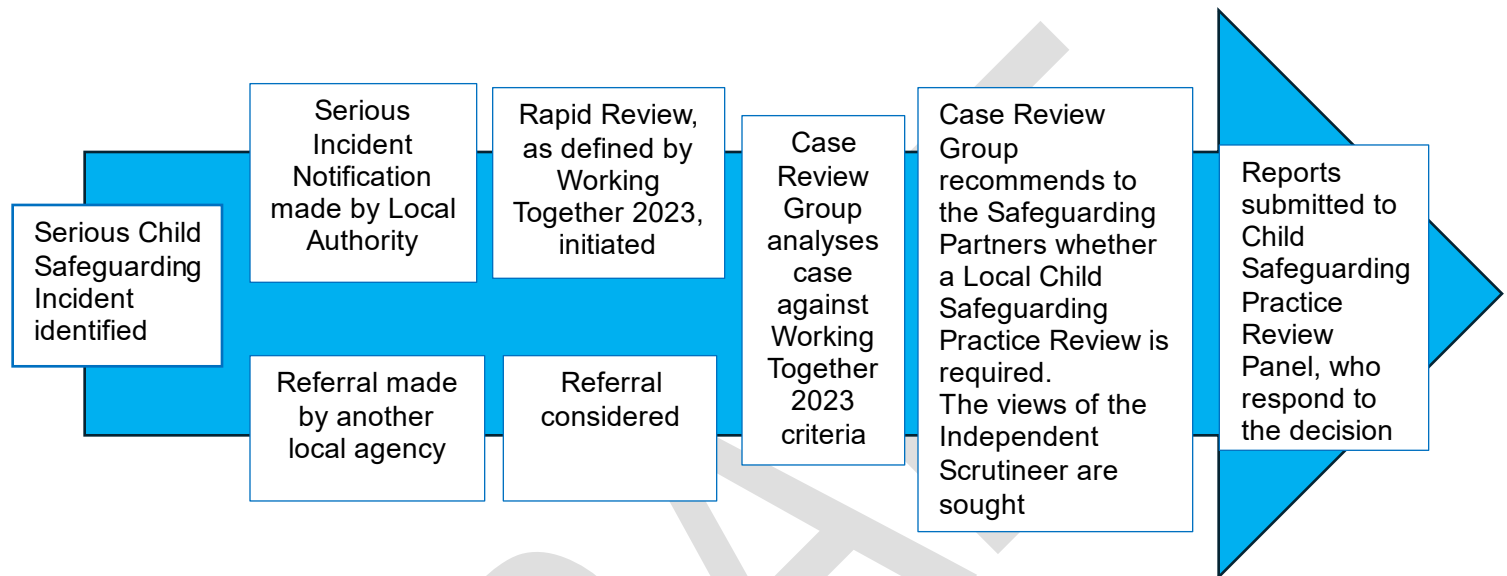
It is anticipated that having the opportunity to discuss and explore the learning will facilitate the sharing of this information during supervision, team meetings and when advising on specific safeguarding issues.

DRAFT

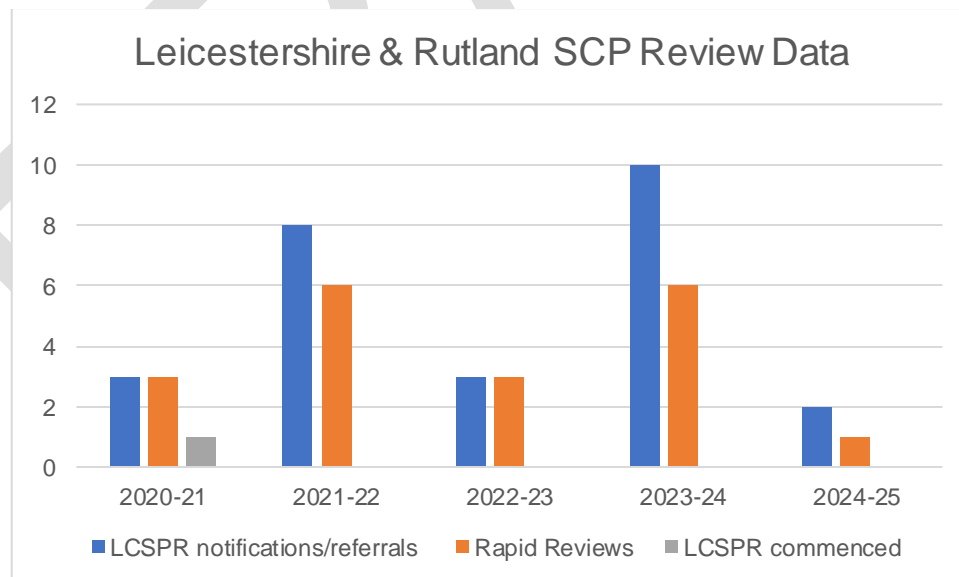
## Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

### Local Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Responsibility for how a system learns lessons from serious child safeguarding incidents rests at a national level with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and at a local level with Safeguarding Partners. The Safeguarding Children Partnership assesses serious safeguarding incidents, as defined by Working Together 2023, in cases where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected, and the child has died or been seriously harmed.



### Key decisions and actions taken



During 2024-25, two notifications/referrals for potential Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs), both in relation to Leicestershire children, were received by the Leicestershire & Rutland Children's Case Review Group (CRG), down from the 10 in 2023-24 and more in line with the 3 in 2022-23.



One case was referred by the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). Subsequently, Leicestershire Children's Social Care (CSC) made a serious incident notification.

With the other case, Leicestershire Children's Social Care made a notification regarding the death of a care leaver.<sup>29</sup> The case is currently sat with the Joint Case Review Group, which includes representatives from both adults' and children's safeguarding teams.

Therefore, the Partnership carried out one Rapid Review following a serious incident notification, in line with Working Together 2023, in the period of this report. This is a significant reduction from the six Rapid Reviews carried out in 2023-24.

One Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR), commissioned in 2020-21, remains on hold with an interim report because of an ongoing criminal process. Learning from the review has been progressed and has influenced procedural change and awareness raising.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are published on our website for 1 year. Past reviews are still available and accessible via the [NSPCC's National Case Review Repository](#).

#### Themes and learning identified from Rapid Review completed in 2024-25

The Rapid Review completed involved a White British premature baby girl. It included agencies from the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership and out of area agencies. Themes included pre-birth work around the child and family, including out of area, and non-engagement and resistance in light of a complex safeguarding history.

The Rapid Review discovered:

- Examples of good single and multi-agency working to prioritise, see and respond to the risk of harm
- Non-engagement from the parents was identified and there was information gathering between the two areas
- Some agencies were proactive in following up with the mother when she was avoiding contact. Support was offered with appointments and suitable adjustments considered
- Risk was identified as high and there was a plan for a strategy discussion emerging, involving both of the involved areas, at the time of the baby's death.

The Rapid Review did not result in a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR), with the case meeting the criteria but the decision being taken that an appropriate level of learning had been established as a result of the Rapid Review,

<sup>29</sup> [Working Together 2023](#), page 133, paragraphs 331-332. Working Together 2023 states that "The local authority must notify the Secretary of State for Education, and Ofsted of the death of a looked after child. The local authority should also notify the Secretary of State for Education and Ofsted of the death of a care leaver up to and including the age of 24. [...] The death of a care leaver does not require a rapid review or local child safeguarding practice review. However, safeguarding partners must consider whether the criteria for a serious incident have been met and respond accordingly, in the event the deceased care leaver was under the age of 18."



meaning a LCSPR was not required. Both the Independent Scrutineer and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel agreed with this decision.

It was agreed to:

- Disseminate a reminder to practitioners that a pre-birth referral should be made as early as possible to give maximum time for building relationships and providing optimum support in the context of significant safeguarding history.
- Produce a 7-Minute Briefing, focused on working with non-engagement and resistance.

### Actions from reviews

Action plans are in place to respond to and monitor areas of learning from previous reviews.

In the last year, the Partnership has completed 6 of the 10 review Action Plans in place. Overall, only 7 multi-agency actions, which represents 19% of actions from these 10 plans, are ongoing.

In 2023-24, the Safeguarding Partners recognised the increased number of notifications/referrals and Rapid Reviews. Learning from these Rapid Reviews has been implemented across 2024-25:

- It influenced numerous procedural updates, including to the “Self-Harm and Suicidal Behaviour” and “Working with Sexually Active Children and Young People Under the Age of 18” (previously called “Underage Sexual Activity”) procedures.
- It led to the publication of seven new 7-Minute Briefings, based on review learning.
- It is informing a system change, which is in progress, around how Health shares more detailed health information with Children’s Social Care and details the impact / potential impact of abuse and neglect upon a child’s health needs. The guidance for this will be detailed in the forthcoming new LLR SCPs procedure on “Safeguarding children with Long-Term Chronic Health Needs who require ‘additional child safeguards’”, which will be supported by a suite of three pro formas and some “Best Practice Guidance for Health Staff: Sharing health information with Children’s Social Care and partner agencies”, which will be published on the LLR SCPs Procedures Manual.
- It informed the “[Pick up the Phone](#)” campaign, launched regionally by Health in September 2024. All practitioners were requested to go “back to basics” and “pick up the phone”, including to out of area colleagues, to share information about emerging concerns and referral to children’s and adult social care.
- It fed into work completed around Child Sexual Abuse. A training course, entitled “Following the Breadcrumbs: Understanding and working with disclosures of child sexual abuse”, continued to be delivered. It is designed for any adult with a role to play in protecting children and is about the

disclosure of abuse, and potential responses that would support children. It is delivered by The Reign Collective, who are survivors of child sexual abuse. Also, the LLR Safeguarding Children Partnerships worked with the Centre of Expertise for Child Sexual Abuse to deliver a Conference/‘Roadshow’ on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2024. This event was attended by over 180 people from over 15 agencies across LLR

### Ongoing work

Following the Conference/Roadshow delivered in 2024-25 and the publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s National Review on Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment, the Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group has been looking at how they can include an offer of multi-agency child protection training focused on sexual abuse as part of their regular offer. This analysis is being informed by work with the NSPCC (funded by the Home Office) that the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland SCPs have signed up to for 2025-26 to undertake a local system-wide child sexual abuse (CSA) snapshot.

Until June 2024, Trauma-Informed Practice training was delivered by Barnardo’s, on behalf of the Violence Reduction Network (VRN), but this commissioned training has now ended. Discussions about a long-term, sustainable training model moving forwards are ongoing and the issue has been escalated to the LLR SCP Planning & Delivery Group (PDG).

The new procedure on “Safeguarding children with Long-Term Chronic Health Needs who require ‘additional child safeguards’” will be launched in the latter part of 2025.

### Dissemination of learning

Learning is shared with practitioners across organisations through single and multi-agency training, briefings and learning events, including to communicate updated guidance and changes in procedures. Also, the Safeguarding Children Partnership communicates learning to the workforce through:

- The [Safeguarding Matters newsletter](#) and [live events](#) and the Safeguarding Matters Digest
- ‘[7-Minute Briefings](#)’, which are designed to convey key messages from reviews and encourage managers and workers to reflect on their practice.
- The Leicestershire & Rutland “[Practice Points – Learning from Safeguarding Children Partnership \(SCP\) Reviews and Audits](#)” document, which was launched and published on the website in October 2023. It provides key learning points for all practitioners and managers from audits and reviews, both local and national. This is a live document. The latest version was published in March 2025.
- An end of year “Learning from Reviews” document that summarises learning from local cases, including anonymised case details/context, and Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel publications. This can be used as a PowerPoint for guided discussion, for example, in team meetings or turned into a PDF for individual practitioners to read through in their own time. It was first agreed in 2024 that this would be provided on an annual basis.

In recognition of the increased number of notifications/referrals in 2023-24, the Safeguarding Children Partnership published a [Special Issue of Safeguarding Matters on Learning from safeguarding children reviews and audits](#). It also ran Curious Practitioner training in August 2024 to share some of the Rapid Review learning that had been similar or the same across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland (LLR). It was open to anyone who works with children and families across LLR. A [video of the training](#) is available via the LLR SCP YouTube channel.

#### How we are measuring impact

The Section 11 in 2024-25 was completed using a frontline practitioner survey. Some of the questions posed related to learning from Rapid Reviews and resources linked to learning, such as the “Practice Principles – Engaging fathers and male carers in effective practice”, the “Bruising, Marks, or Injury of Concern in Pre-Mobile Babies and Non-Independently Mobile Children” procedure, and the LLR Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool.

The Curious Practitioner Training was attended by 168 practitioners from across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. At the end of the training, attendees were asked “In your opinion what went well and what impact will this have in your work”. Some of the responses are listed below:

*“Really good information. Will make me think more when doing assessments.”*

*“The session was very informative. It was good to take time to reflect and hear other agencies’ views. Very useful to hear the learning from rapid reviews.”*

*“This was informative training and hearing the examples of using professional curiosity will help me to gain the confidence to ask further questions.”*

*“Gave me lots of thinking for the team I manage and how in a very brief intervention we still ensure we work in-depth.”*

*“It made me think about triangulating information, which I did after the training; contacting the school to ask if the information mum reported was correct.”*

Agencies were asked to document how they disseminated the Learning from Reviews resource. All agencies responded and there was positive feedback. For example, one agency stated that the format of it really helped their practitioners understand the wider picture. Education reported that it had a really good impact, particularly with the reference to actual cases.

#### **National Reviews**

We continue to incorporate the learning from national reports and out of area reviews into our work. For example, they are considered during our Rapid Reviews; key learning from them is included in our Practice Points; and other SCP subgroups continue to incorporate their learning into their work. National reviews are used for benchmarking and ensuring best practice.

Date	Publication	How national learning has been considered in local work
May 2024	Serious Incident Notifications	A report allowing for comparison of Leicestershire & Rutland notification data with that of other areas for 2023-24 was produced and shared with the Case Review Group.
May 2024	Safeguarding Children in Elective Home Education: Panel Briefing 3  Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	A presentation on Electively Home Educated Children was given at Safeguarding Matters Live in July 2024 and referenced this national report.  The new LLR SCP <a href="#">“Elective Home Education: An Approach to Safeguarding for LLR” guidance</a> was published in September 2024.  Four training briefing sessions have been delivered by the LLR SCP Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group (MALDG), with the last one taking place in February 2025. A video of one of these sessions has been made into a learning resource.
November 2024	“I wanted them all to notice”: Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment – National Review  Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	A report on how the recommendations for SCPs are going to be addressed locally was presented to the Case Review Group in February 2025.  For 2025-26 Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland SCPs have signed up to work with the NSPCC (funded by the Home Office) to undertake a local system-wide child sexual abuse (CSA) snapshot.  There was a presentation on the report in Safeguarding Matters Live in December 2024, with a follow up article in the April 2025 print issue.  The Briefing for Practitioners was shared via the Learning from Reviews 2024-25 resource.
December 2024	Annual Report 2023/24: Patterns in practice, key messages and 2024 to 2025 work programme	A paper on key points from the Annual Report was presented to the Case Review Group in their February 2025 meeting.  The Briefing for Practitioners is to be shared via the April 2025 print issue of Safeguarding Matters and was shared in the Learning from Reviews 2024-25 resource.

Date	Publication	How national learning has been considered in local work
	Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	
March 2025	<p>“It’s Silent”: Race, racism and safeguarding children: Panel Briefing 4</p> <p>Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel</p>	<p>The Briefing for Practitioners is to be shared via the April 2025 print issue of Safeguarding Matters and was shared in the Learning from Reviews 2024-25 resource.</p> <p>Further guidance is awaited from the LLR SCP Planning &amp; Delivery Group (PDG) regarding further work.</p>

### Spotlight on “Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings”

With the publication of the Phase 1 report by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel on [“Safeguarding children with disabilities and complex health needs in residential settings”](#) in October 2022, all Local Authorities were required to act on recommendations to provide reassurance in response to learning. This included undertaking audits of the circumstances of all children living in these settings and providing assurance in respect of the process of managing allegations in the role of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO). These actions aimed to provide immediate assurance about the welfare and safety of some of the most vulnerable children and prompted all Local Authorities and Health commissioners to strengthen their assurance system for children in residential settings.

### Leicestershire

In Leicestershire, in November 2022, the Departmental Management Team were provided with an overview of the local audit activity, confirming that the local audit was submitted nationally and had provided reassurance that all children placed by Leicestershire were safeguarded; no further actions were required; there was evidence of participation, parental engagement and regular reviews in place. A further audit on all children with a disability living in residential care was undertaken in 2023. The findings were shared at the Planning and Delivery Group and Health colleagues (Integrated Care Board) carried out a similar audit of these children across the 3 Local Authorities (Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland) to ensure that the health needs of the children were being met.

Additionally, as the host authority, the Allegations Management Service had completed checks for each of 3 establishments located in the area, including a review of all information linked to LADO referrals, complaints and concerns over the last 3 years relating to the workforce in these establishments, and have assurances that everything has been appropriately actioned.

Since the response to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel’s report, further assurance has been embedded into standard processes. In August 2023, further

peer audits were completed between Leicestershire, Leicester City and Rutland in LADO teams. The aim of the audit was to consider the LADO input in relation to allegations made about people working/volunteering with children who have disabilities and responses to organisational culture. This provided further confidence to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships in threshold application for LADO and safeguarding procedures being applied including reporting to regulatory bodies.

The Leicestershire LADO Service continues to work closely with the Service Manager for the Disabled Children Service and commissioning and has strengthened liaison with LADOs in neighbouring authorities where Leicestershire children are placed under Section 20/Care Orders, with consideration to organisational harm and complex mapping where repeat referrals are made. There are LADO checks for agency or bank workers in residential care for employment history. If the LADO is contacted about a Leicestershire child by LADO outside of the area, following the investigation, information should be recorded on the child's record and shared with commissioning for quality assurance processes. Leicestershire LADO notify the placing authority LADO of the outcome of the allegations process.

Commissioning have embedded quality assurance processes for all provisions providing care to children, which includes a minimum of an annual visit. Any new provision is quality assured within 9 weeks of placing the young person so that record keeping can be checked and also, where possible, this allows for the capture of the voice of the young person. Before placing with an unknown provider, Leicestershire would seek references from placing Local Authorities and also check their latest Ofsted report.

In 2024, a further audit was completed to consider children's specific circumstances with no identified concerns raised. This audit is intended to be an annual piece of assurance work and is being repeated in summer 2025.

In September 2024, an implementation plan was shared with the Children and Young People Partnership Group to provide multi-agency perspectives. The progress of the plan is being considered as an outcome of the audit work taking place in 2025.

### Rutland

Rutland were part of the assurance work and the learning activity but did not have children that met the criteria for the audit. They played an active role in audit activity and learning across LLR and have taken the learning to ensure safeguarding of their children with disabilities and complex health needs placed in residential settings and to ensure they have robust safeguards and assurances in place to safeguard their welfare.



## Future planning

Throughout the Yearly Report, future changes to be implemented have been highlighted around scrutiny, engagement with children and families, quality assurance and training.

### **Priorities for 2025-27**

Having reviewed learning from local and national reviews, and from local assurance and engagement work, as well as considering the impact of the 2023-25 priorities, the Safeguarding Children Partnerships have determined that its priorities for 2025-27 will be:

- Child Sexual Abuse
- Neglect
- Harm Outside the Home
- Belonging

For each of these areas, we have set out our rationale for prioritising the topic, and presented the key deliverables, leads, timescales and impact measures. This will enable us to monitor progress and secure assurance that our actions are making a positive difference to the lived experience of our children and families. The [Joint Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Business Plan for 2025-27](#) is published on our website.

## Conclusion

In 2024-25, we have achieved a lot both strategically and operationally in light of significant national reforms, changes to statutory guidance and pressures linked to workforce capacity. Agencies have reported that, despite challenges with workforce capacity, safeguarding children has remained a priority. Our approach is system-led but child-focused. We are improving how we adapt to and adopt changes required as a result of both national and local learning. Moving forwards, we are aware of our strengths and the challenges we face. We have initiated implementation of changes to address some of these challenges. In particular, in the future, we believe that our quality assurance processes will be both increased and have more of an impact on our decision making and priority identification. Our new Young Person Scrutineer and Communications and Engagement Subgroup will make sure that we are driven by the views and wishes of the people we work to support and see thrive.

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:**  
**2 SEPTEMBER 2025**

**INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT**  
**2024 - 2025**

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

**Purpose of report**

1. This report is to provide a summary of the Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report for 2024 – 2025. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service provides oversight, review and challenge to care planning of children in care. The Service ensures that the Local Authority is meeting its statutory duties and responsibilities to children in care.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

2. The Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service and works to bring a consistent approach to planning and implementing practice standards, for the most vulnerable children. Whilst the service sits within the Children and Family Department and is part of the management structure of Children's Social Care, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams. The independence of the IRO ensures that they can advocate and challenge on behalf of children and families to ensure that they receive the right service at the right time to both protect and support them.
3. The legal framework and statutory guidance for the IRO role for children in care is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010. The Handbook requires an Annual Report to be written and is prescriptive as to content and format (which the report follows). The appointment of an IRO is a legal requirement under S118 of the Adoption and Children Act 2002, their role being to protect children's interests throughout the care planning process, ensure their voice is heard and challenge the local authority where needed in order to achieve best outcomes.
4. This annual report does not recommend or involve any changes to key policies or procedures.
5. The role of the IRO supports the Department's delivery of the commitments set out in the Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025 in championing what is in the best interest of children in care and their care planning. It also aligns with the Achieving

Excellence Through Purposeful Practice 2024 -2027 plan, and the Children and Family Departmental Plan 2024 – 2026.

6. This matter was previously considered in respect of the 2023 – 2024 annual report.

### **Background – Key Information from the Annual Report**

#### **Key Statistics**

7. As of 31 March 2025, there were 694 children in care, representing a 4.4% decrease compared to the previous year. During the reporting period, a total of 1,989 review of arrangements meetings were held, with 98.1% completed within the required timeframe.
8. Children's participation in their reviews remains strong, with 92% of children aged four and above contributing to their review meetings. Face-to-face reviews accounted for 64.2% of all meetings, an increase from 55.1% the previous year, with the remainder conducted virtually or in a hybrid format.
9. Health and wellbeing outcomes continue to be prioritised, with 91.2% of children and young people receiving timely health assessments and 93.1% undergoing dental checks. Personal Education Plans (PEPs) were completed each term for between 95% and 98% of children and young people.
10. Long-term planning is well embedded, with 92.1% of children and young people having a long-term plan in place. Notably, 8% had their plan agreed prior to their second review.

#### **Key Achievements**

11. In April 2024, Ofsted rated Leicestershire's Children's Services as Outstanding, specifically commending the positive practice of IROs in supporting care planning.
12. All IRO posts are now permanently filled, significantly reducing reliance on agency staff and contributing to service stability. Creative approaches to engagement have been evident, supporting children in expressing their views and participating meaningfully in their care planning.
13. The use of the 'My Review' booklet has increased, with 227 submissions received from children and young people prior to their review meetings, compared to 128 the previous year. The service has also supported the launch of the 'Language that Cares' Toolkit, which promotes child-chosen language and has been actively embedded into practice.
14. IROs raised 244 quality assurance alerts during the year, demonstrating strong advocacy for children and young people and a commitment to improving their support and care planning. The Service continues to celebrate children's achievements through dedicated events and awards.

#### **Plans and focus for 2025 – 2026**

15. The Service aims to further increase the use of 'My Review' consultation documents to enhance child participation in review meetings. Further focus will be given to embedding and ensure consistent application of the 'Language that Cares' Toolkit across all aspects of practice and reviews.
16. Improving health and education outcomes remains a priority, with a focus on enhancing assessments and support mechanisms. The Service will also promote the development of networks and connections through tools such as cultural genograms.
17. Finally, there will be a continued emphasis on improving data collection and streamlining administrative processes to support the timely completion and recording of review documentation.

### **Consultation**

18. The annual report includes feedback from children and young people regarding their IRO, alongside feedback from professionals, family members, and carers. Feedback requested directly after each reviewing of arrangements meeting.

### **Resource Implications**

19. There are no specific resource implications as part of the annual report. The Service is fully resourced and is operated within its financial budget.

### **Conclusions**

20. Overall, the annual report highlights the achievements of a strong Independent Reviewing Officer which brings scrutiny and quality assurance to the care planning and support given to children and young people in care by the Department.

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

21. None.

### **Equality Implications**

22. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

### **Human Rights Implications**

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

### **Appendices**

Appendix A - Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025

Appendix B - Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report 2024 – 2025 (one page version)

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

Hollie Martin – Service Manager Safeguarding & Practice Development

Telephone: 0116 3053718

Email: [hollie.martin@leics.gov.uk](mailto:hollie.martin@leics.gov.uk)

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

Telephone: 0116 3955479

Email: [Sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk)

Jane Moore – Director Children and Family

Telephone: 0116 3052649

Email: [Jane.moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.moore@leics.gov.uk)

# Safeguarding and Performance Independent Reviewing Officer Service Child in Care Annual Report 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 – 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025



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7. What is the impact for our children and families?
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9. What we have achieved against our aims over the past 12 months?
10. What are our plans over the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

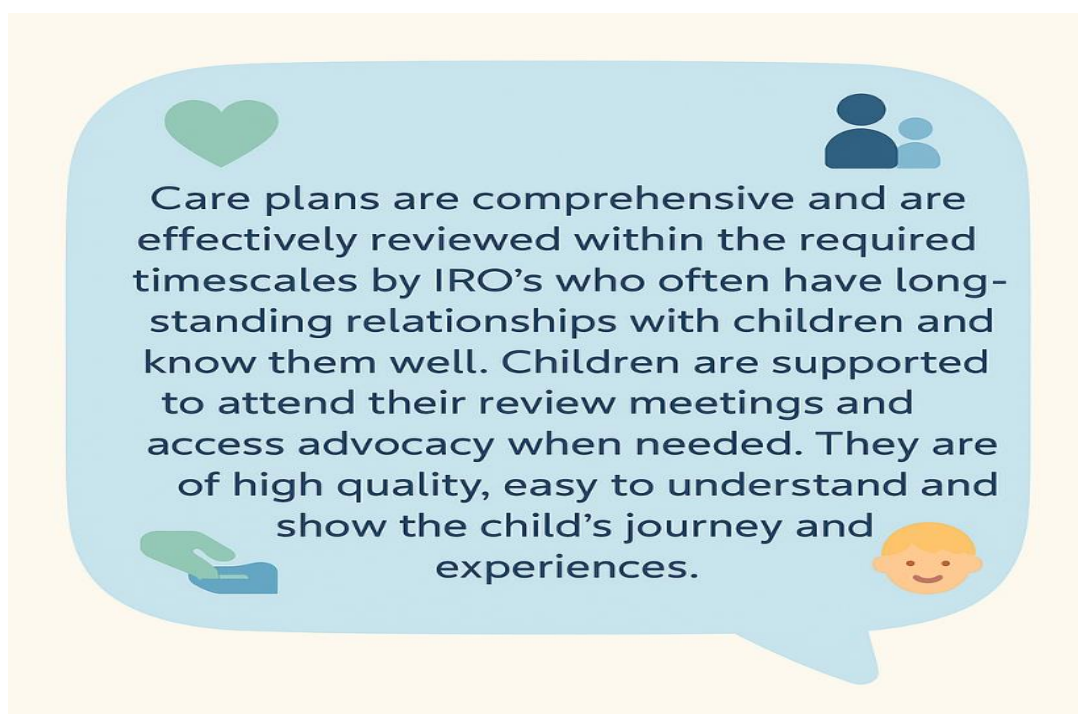
## 1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service provides an overview of service performance in 2024-2025 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook sets out the statutory requirement for an annual report on the delivery of services and the impact of the Independent Reviewing Officer service on the outcomes for children in care.

For the purpose of this report, the term Looked After Child will be used for statutory related references to children looked after by the Local Authority and all other references will refer to Children in Care.

As we reflected in our last annual report for 2023/24 that was a year to reset and regroup, and 2024/25 has been a year of embedding this into our practice, whilst ensuring we keep children at the centre of their care planning.

We welcomed Ofsted for our full inspection in April 2024 resulting in Children Services in Leicestershire being rated as Outstanding. This included an Outstanding judgment for our children in care services. Ofsted provided a strong objective measure of the IRO service as part of the inspection, and this judgement is particularly important given it is based on external scrutiny. OFSTED told us :-



During the year we continued to use our Independent Reviewing Officer 'bottom lines' which were updated in October 2024. These reflect key issues from discussions from our development day and include a focus on the timeliness of social work reports shared in preparation for the review meeting.

Whilst all review meetings went ahead with a social work report and updated care plan available to the meeting, the Independent Reviewing Officer's had identified that reports were not always available with sufficient time to provide for preparation and reflection. Our bottom lines have restated the required 3-day timescale for reports being shared as our expected standard. This has had a positive impact on the quality of preparation for review meetings. Meetings are more purposeful, based on everyone being and feeling prepared for the meeting.



This provides more focus on progressing care plan actions to deliver outcomes of our children in care.

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to embed the use of their 'one page profile', which is sent out in preparation for a first review meeting. This introduces the reviewing officer to the child and is designed to be kept by the child to establish and promote the relationship with their Independent Reviewing Officer going forwards.

During 2024 we had a positive team development day in September 2024. This provided an opportunity for the whole team to come together, including 2 new members of the team who joined the service in summer 2024. Filling our vacant posts fulfilled a key ambition for the service to fill all our established posts to offer stability and consistency in our work with children. This is particularly important given the importance of relationships in the IRO offer to children so that the role is meaningful and impactful.

**BELIEVE IN YOURSELF**

**Name:** Rebecca Peters

**Job:** Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO)

**Tel:**

**e-mail:**

**What people like and admire about me:**

- I am a kind and approachable person
- I like to support my colleagues and enjoy being part of a team
- I have a good sense of humour

**What is important to me for you:**

- That you feel listened to
- That you have yourself about your life and decisions made for you
  - That you have somebody in your life that you trust
- That you recognise your potential and feel supported to follow your dreams
- That you feel valued, important and cared about

**My role in supporting you:**

*I check that everyone involved in your care is doing the best job they can to make sure that you are safe, happy and all your needs are met.*

**BE A PINEAPPLE**  
STAND TALL, WEAR A CROWN  
AND BE SWEET ON THE INSIDE

**ANYTHING IS POSSIBLE**

Whilst we had changes in our senior management team towards the end of our last annual report year, this provided opportunities for a greater connection to the Practice Excellence Team and Quality Assurance and Improvement Team, who now form part of a unified service. The new service structure was successfully implemented and launched in June 2024, with Hollie Martin recruited to Service Manager position and providing leadership to the service.

The new service structure has allowed for closer working relationships across the service to support learning and development and has brought further focus to the quality assurance work the Independent Reviewing Officers complete. There is also a closer working relationship between the team and the Principal Social Worker in Leicestershire providing a link to practitioner's voice and supporting the impact of learning across the authority. This had made the role of the independent reviewing officers more visible in learning and improvement work during this year.

New recruits to the service have benefited from a strong induction plan, which means that the new Independent Reviewing Officers have settled into their role, with strong support from their peers. This has meant that use of agency workers has significantly decreased during 2024/25. This stability in the team has allowed our commitment to purposeful practice to progress. We can also see significant improvement in our key performance measures including timeliness of review meetings, stability of meetings held per month as well as children participating in their review meetings.

It has however also meant that some of our more variable data such as our quality assurance work has been less consistent as our 5 new Independent Reviewing Officers settle into their roles.

Over this year, we have been working with our Corporate Parenting Team to support their launch of the Language that Cares Toolkit which was developed in partnership with our Children in Care Council.

This launched in June 2024, and the Independent Reviewing Officers have worked to embed this into practice by ensuring it is referenced in each child's review and the child's views captured in the record.



We continue to write the children's review summaries to them, and this is now a key focus of delivering the language and terminology that the child has identified for what they call where they live, the adults around them and the time they spend with their family and friends.

After recent audit work in January 2025, we can see the positive impact this has had to date but we need to continue to embed this further into social work practice for children in care over 2025/26.

During the year we have continued to return to a more business-as-usual service delivery model, whilst retaining a level of flexibility using new ways of working developed through the pandemic. We have recognized that for some of our young people, they prefer their review meeting to be in person, whilst others prefer them to be virtual – their views are central to how we manage our meetings so that we can get the best participation possible. Importantly we have seen an increase in our meetings being held face-to-face this year.

We have continued to successfully embed changes to recording in the Mosaic system which started in May 2023. This significantly changed how reports and care plans are completed for our children, including providing timely 5-day recommendations and a clear Independent Reviewing Officer summary. We are now satisfied that we are using this approach effectively. These extensive changes affected how data is gathered for reporting and whilst most gaps in our reporting have now been resolved, we are still using some manual tracking for our informal quality assurances alerts. We have worked with our ICT and Business intelligence teams to add the necessary details into the forms, to pull the correct data forwards but are waiting for these enhancements to be built and launched. We aim for this to be delivered in 25/26.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service has been committed to further strengthening practice around Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in terms of developing our knowledge and understanding and becoming more culturally competent in our practice. This has included training for the team, undertaking individual learning, having guest speakers and reflecting in team meetings and supervision about how we can best ensure that the diverse needs of our children in care are being met in the care planning process.

Key areas of development this year remain focused on delivering our aspirations as set out in our Continuous Improvement Plan (2024-2027), Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice. This, alongside Our Promise to our Children in Care, provides the aspiration, vision, values and behaviours which embody the Independent Reviewing Officer service.

We are also mindful of the Social Work National Reforms taking place across England published in 2024 and informing a programme of work into 25/26. The aims of the reforms were set out in the children's social care national framework, published by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023 as statutory guidance for local authorities. The framework established four overarching outcomes for the children's social care system:

- children, young people and families stay together and get the help they need,
- children and young people are supported by their family network,
- children and young people are safe in and outside of their homes,
- children in care and care leavers have stable, loving homes.

These four outcomes are underpinned by three “enablers”, which are designed to support councils and their partners to achieve the outcomes. These are:

- **Multi-agency working is prioritised and effective.**
- **Leaders drive conditions for effective practice.**
- **The workforce is equipped and effective.**

Whilst there are no significant changes proposed to the Independent Reviewing Officer role, there is to the Child Protection Chair role which may have an indirect impact for our involvement and activity.

A framework of quality assurance and learning improvement activity continues to tell us how we are doing as a service and forms a key part of understanding the lived experience of children in care, the quality of social work services they have in place, arrangements for their day-to-day care, time with their families and achieving permanency.

The service has continued to conduct regular audit of its own service but also to provide a key role as a critical friend to operational colleagues by the implementation of the informal and formal quality assurance process. Key to this is having a strong Independent Reviewing Officer footprint in our records so that our role in achieving best outcomes for children including where appropriate to achieve permanency is visible.



## 2. Introduction

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer sets out the performance for the service in 2024-2025, identifying our key achievement and setting out priorities for the forthcoming year.

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

We recognise the role of the service as central to driving forward the Continuous Improvement Plan 2024-2027, and promoting the key goals and behaviours set out in Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice.



The Independent Reviewing Officer Service in Leicestershire sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service and works closely with our Child Protection Chairs to bring a consistent approach to planning and implementing practice standards for our most vulnerable children.

Whilst the service sits within the Children and Family Services department and is part of the management structure of Children's Social Care, it remains independent of the line management of resources for children in care and the operational social work teams.

The independence of the Independent Reviewing Officer ensures that they can advocate and challenge on behalf of children and families to ensure that they receive the right service at the right time to both protect and support them.



The Safeguarding and Performance service continues to have two focused teams of Child Protection Conference Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officer's for children in care. The two teams have specialised expertise and drive forward the development plan for that area resulting in a robust, efficient Independent Reviewing Officer Service.

The quality assurance role of Independent Reviewing Officer's is critical to the development and improvement of the intervention that we provide to children and families and the impact that we have on the outcomes we achieve. Independent Reviewing Officers have key duties that scrutinise and support the quality, safety and effectiveness of safeguarding practice and policy, care planning and achieving permanence. Independent Reviewing Officers are central to

identifying and sharing good practice and checking the quality and consistency of provision across the areas of Looked After Children.

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

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

This report outlines the contribution made by the Service in Leicestershire, to quality assurance and the improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2024 to March 2025.

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

### 3. Context

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

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

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

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

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



The proposed Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill does not currently suggest changes to the statutory requirements for this role.

#### 4. Profile of the Service

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

1x FTE Service Manager (covers both focus teams)

1x FTE Safeguarding Manager- Looked After Children

12.01 x FTE IRO

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

To be successful, the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer must be valued by senior managers and operate within a supportive service culture and environment. It is not the responsibility of the Independent Reviewing Officer to manage the intervention and support or supervise the social worker or devise the care plan, but to have oversight to ensure that the child's plan is achieving change and creating positive outcomes for children and families. In circumstances where this is not being delivered it is their role to challenge to make a difference.

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

The Safeguarding and Performance Service continues to be very well supported by senior leaders, and this is evidenced by the continued effort to recruit and retain our workforce. This is recognition of the pivotal role the Independent Reviewing Officers have in undertaking statutory duties such as chairing meetings and the broader quality assurance role which supports driving and improving practice.

The quality assurance role of the Independent Reviewing Officer is central to strengthening the implementation of Signs of Safety and Trauma Informed practice approach. Independent Reviewing Officer's are Practice Leads, role modelling and applying the Signs of Safety approach in practice, delivering our identified values and behaviours and being experts in planning. This includes promoting the use of networks to strengthen support and protection to our vulnerable children and enhancing how we build the wellbeing of our Children in Care. This is alongside recognizing the impact of trauma on the lives of children, young people, and families.

Independent Reviewing Officers play a significant role in the development and delivery of high-quality interventions to children in care and in need of protection. The Independent Reviewing

Officer Service in Leicestershire remains committed to this responsibility. This commitment is supported by the implementation of a service specific Learning Audit Framework which highlights areas of need and provides a framework of observation, peer audit, and audit analysis to inform learning and drive forward best practice. In addition, the service has monthly Improvement Cycle meetings to challenge and evaluate service performance data to support rigorous responses to emerging performance trends and direct action for improvement. This is reported to the Senior Management Team, chaired by the Assistant Director in monthly performance meetings for challenge and oversight.

### **Challenge Meetings**

The Service Manager for the Safeguarding and Performance Service, Safeguarding Managers, and the Agency Decision Maker meet each month for a Pre-Challenge Tracking Meeting. This provides an opportunity to discuss cases and explore themes of concern.

Consideration is given to these cases / matters being taken to the formal Challenge Meeting with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, or if further actions can be taken in the first instance.

A tracking spreadsheet is kept with a log of these discussions and the cases / themes are followed up with the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer during supervision or during Team Meetings. Given the quality assurance role of the Agency Decision Maker, particularly in respect of permanence, this forum is key to jointly identify themes and areas of practice which need further development at the earliest opportunity. The terms of reference for this meeting were further developed and strengthened in March 2024 to support this process.

The formal challenge meeting is then held with the Assistant Director monthly as part of this process, to discuss identified areas of concern, identified in the pre-challenge meeting. Cases discussed in this forum are cases which have followed the full escalation process.

This formal challenge meeting also provides a chance to review and consider data linked to quality assurance alerts completed in that month and themes identified.

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

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

It is positive that CAFCASS management has expressed a strong commitment to continuing to build productive working relationships between Independent Reviewing Officers and Guardians. The Assistant Service Manager who oversees the line management of the Independent Reviewing Officers attends meetings with the managers from CAFCASS to discuss any identified themes and to ensure that there is a strong partnership in place. 6 monthly meetings are being arranged between Independent Reviewing Officers and Cafcass Guardians, including managers, to review and support working relationships, share information and updates and ensure any matters arising can be dealt with. During the last quarter of 23/24 a learning session was planned

between CAFCASS and Independent Reviewing Officer's for City and County, which then took place in June 2024.

Feedback and learning from the service is fed into the routine Family Justice Board meetings and in turn the service is kept up to date with any issues arising from the Public Law work that in turn influences Independent Reviewing Officer practice. This supports timely care planning and better outcomes for the children based on collaborative learning.

### **Regional Independent Reviewing Officer Forums**

The Service has continued to engage in the East Midlands Regional Independent Reviewing Officer forums and has had the benefit of quarterly tailored training and networking days over 2024/25. Each Regional Day has a key theme with a variety of speakers delivering presentations, as well as there being opportunities to work in small groups with colleagues from other areas, to share good practice and reflect on ways to improve services for children and their families. The engagement promotes the sharing of learning and development to strengthen our local service offer.



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

### Being a Corporate Parent

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

Independent Reviewing Officers are represented at the Corporate Parenting board by the Assistant Service Manager and Service Manager. Going forwards for 2025/2026 we plan to grow and strengthen our links to the Corporate Parenting team further.

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Corporate Parenting Strategy sets out the responsibilities of Leicestershire County Council as corporate parent to children in care. The Strategy outlines the expectations and key principles that provide the framework for a cohesive and effective corporate parenting response for children in care and Care Leavers. To hold ourselves to account to achieve this Leicestershire developed 'Our Promise' (April 2024) with our children and partners and this underpins the expectations for all.



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

During 2024/2025, the service has continued to use data to review its own performance and to understand Children's Service's intervention and services to children. Over this 12-month period, we have had to change and develop a number of ways to collect data; and there is further improvement planned to continue to strengthen and develop how data is gathered to underpin service development. Data is collected from a number of Tableau dashboards which pull information directly from mosaic, alongside the meeting diary spreadsheet. We are continuing to develop further tableau dashboards to include informal quality assurance process of challenge which we aim to deliver in 25/26 subject to the mosaic and reporting prioritisation plan.

### Children in Care

There were 694 children in care on the 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, this is a decrease of 31 children from 726 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 (-4.4%).

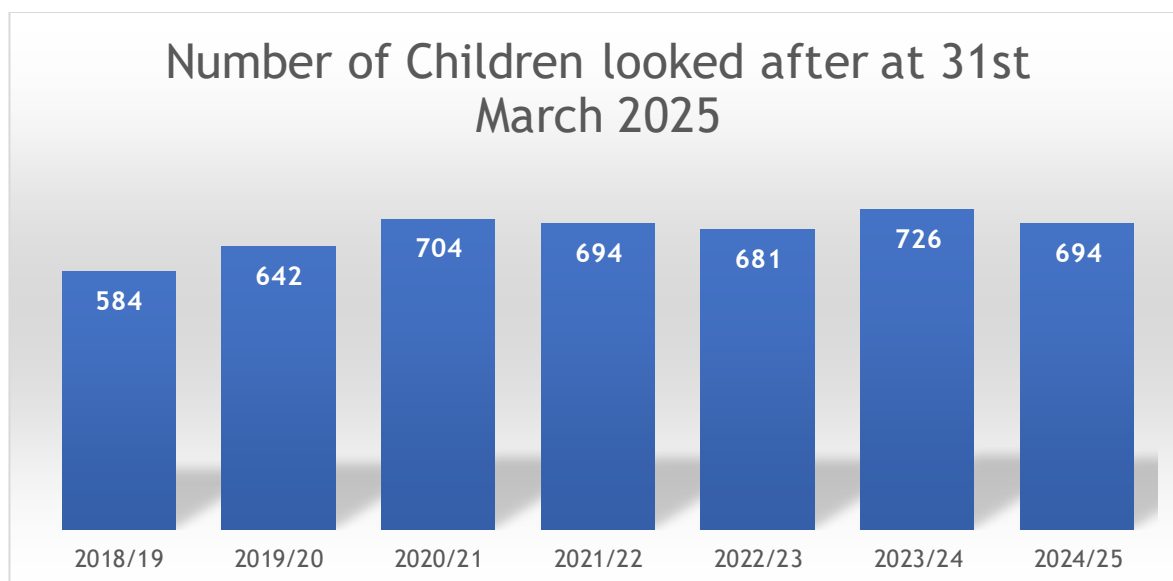
694 children is equivalent to 47.8 children per 10,000 population aged 0 to 17 in Leicestershire.

This compares positively to an average of 61 children in care per 10,000 children in Statistical Neighbour authorities, 65 for East Midlands and 70 for England based on the most recent national figures available from 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024.

We have a robust review of our threshold decisions for children becoming looked after and work hard to maintain and strengthen family networks including by seeking permanency to reduce the length of time a child may remain in care.

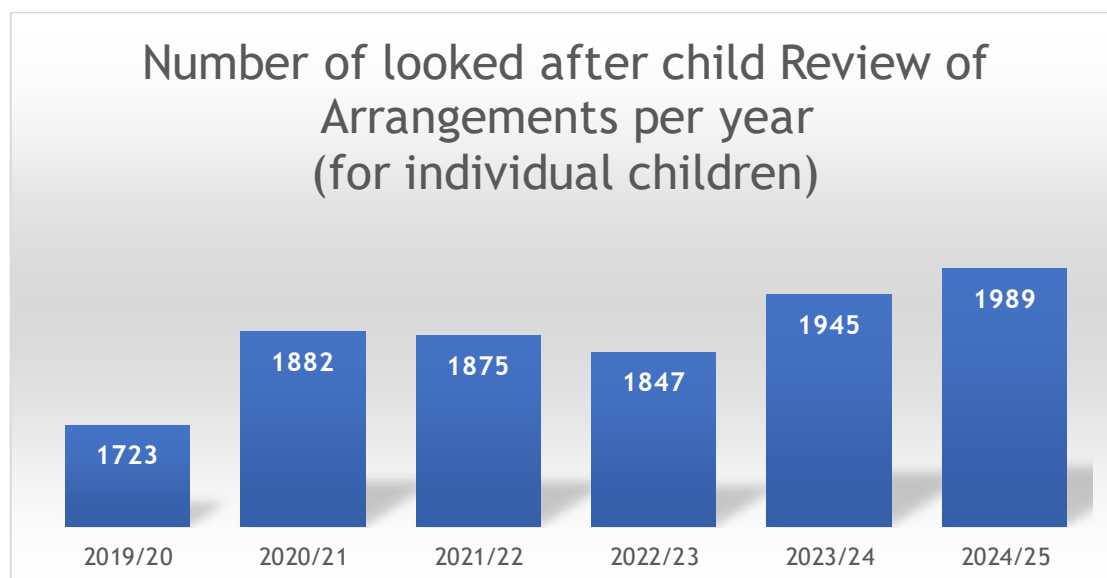
Of the 694 children in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, 413 (59.5%) were male and 281 (40.5%) were female. This represents a decrease of 41 males compared to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2024 (454, 62.5%) and an increase of 9 females (272, 37.5%). Most notably, the number of males in care aged 16 to 17 has decreased by 30 to 137. By comparison, the age profile of females in care on 31<sup>st</sup> March has seen an increase of 12 young people aged 16 to 17, and a decrease of 10 aged 10 to 15.

### Number of Children looked after at 31st March 2025

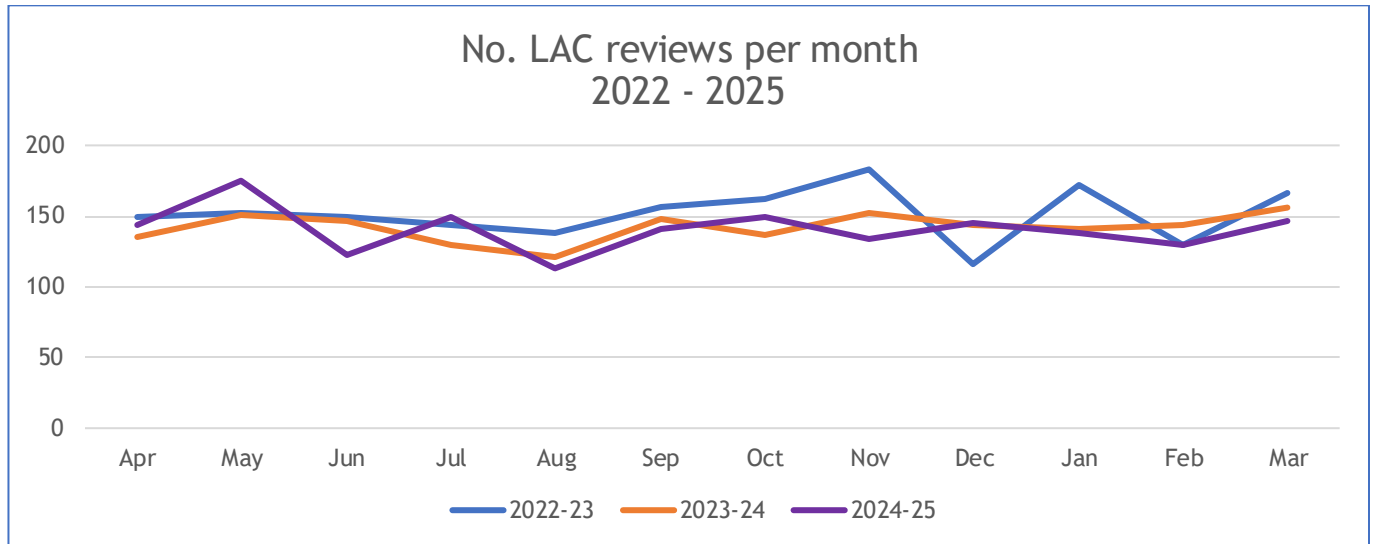


There were 1,989 Review of Arrangement Meetings for individual children completed over the last year which equates to 1,686 meetings, taking into consideration review meetings held for siblings where only one meeting would be counted. This compares to 1,945 review meetings for individual children over 2023/2024, which equates to 1,702 meetings taking into consideration meetings held for siblings where only one would be counted.

### Number of looked after child Review of Arrangements per year (for individual children)



On average there were 141 reviews chaired each month, with peaks of 175 in May and 149 in July and October. August, with 113 meetings and February with 129 meetings, have been quieter months for review meetings. Over this review period there has again been a more consistent number of reviews per month compared to significant highs and lows towards the end of the 2022/23 annual reporting year- see below graph for the last 3 years of tracking the number of review meetings per month.



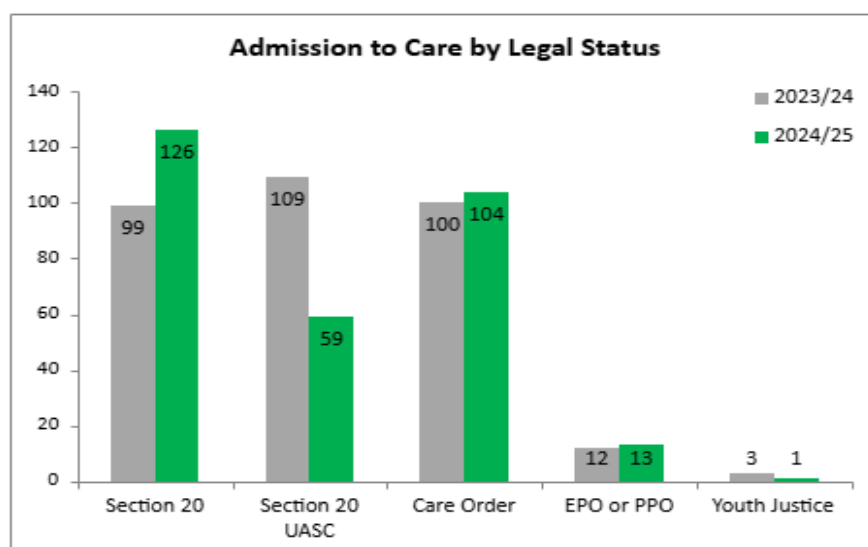
Whilst there has been another increase in review of arrangements meetings being held when looking at individual children, there has been a decrease in children coming into care over the year. It can be surmised that we are seeing an increase in the number of sibling groups coming into care, however we are currently unable to analyse data via group ID's on mosaic to test this. Over this next year this is something we would like to further analyse. The actual overall number of review meetings completed has again decreased by 16 (decrease of 113 meetings over 23/24) in this last year which is positive and again points to the increase in sibling groups whereby one meeting is held for all children within the sibling group.

In June 2023, we introduced our bottom lines for review of arrangements meetings taking place, which supported a significant reduction of meetings held in two parts. Our bottom lines were reviewed and updated in October 2024, and we have continued to see a positive change in culture to how review meetings are managed.

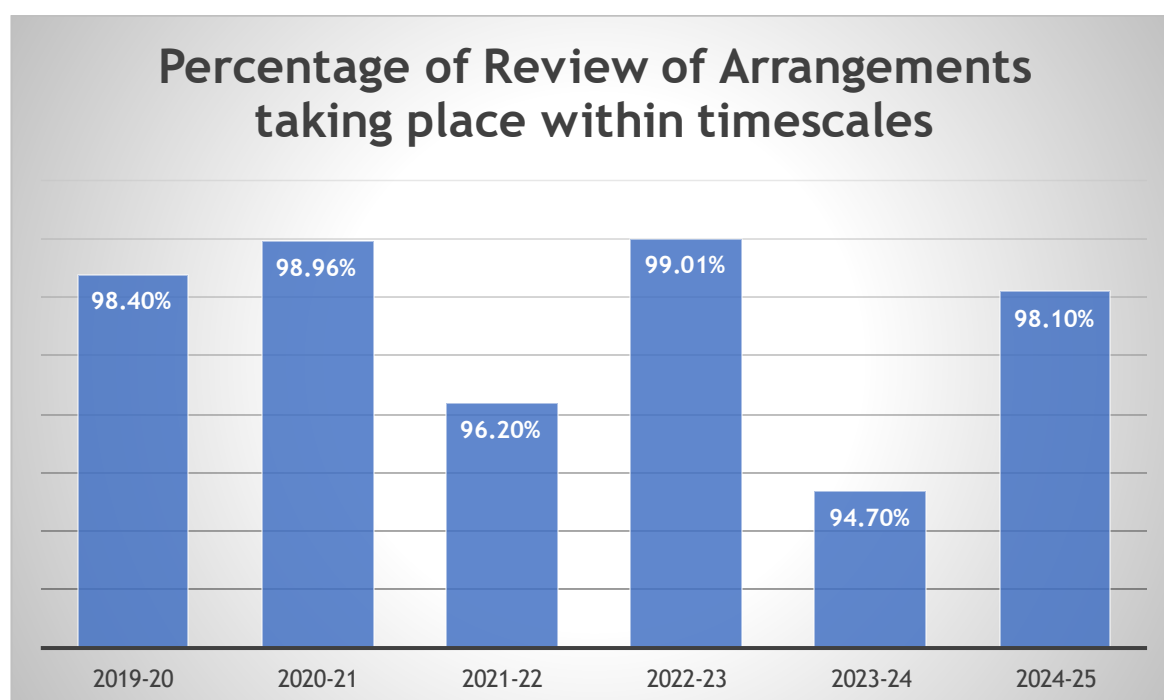
Over this year, we have continued to embed the midway review which takes place between review meetings for the Independent Reviewing Officer to have oversight of a child's care plan and this can also take place at other points over the review period if the Independent Reviewing Officer sees there is a need to formally track the child's care plan more often.

At the midway review, any concerns regarding a child's care plan are raised and resolved and only when the Independent Reviewing Officer considers there needs to be an additional review of arrangements meeting will this be arranged, but generally, all issues can be dealt with at the midway review. This aims to both improve quality and avoid drift and delay in planning permanency for children which remains a key focus for the service in this period. Early reviews may still be held for children in specific circumstances as outlined in the Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook.

The number of admissions of children into care during 2024/25 was 303, 20 (-6%) lower than the previous year of 2023/24, which was 323. This was 67 (26%) higher than the 257 recorded in 2022/23. Comparing admissions to care under each legal status within each year shows a notable decrease of young people UASC (-46%), with an increase in non UASC section 20 admissions by 27% to 126 in 2024/25.

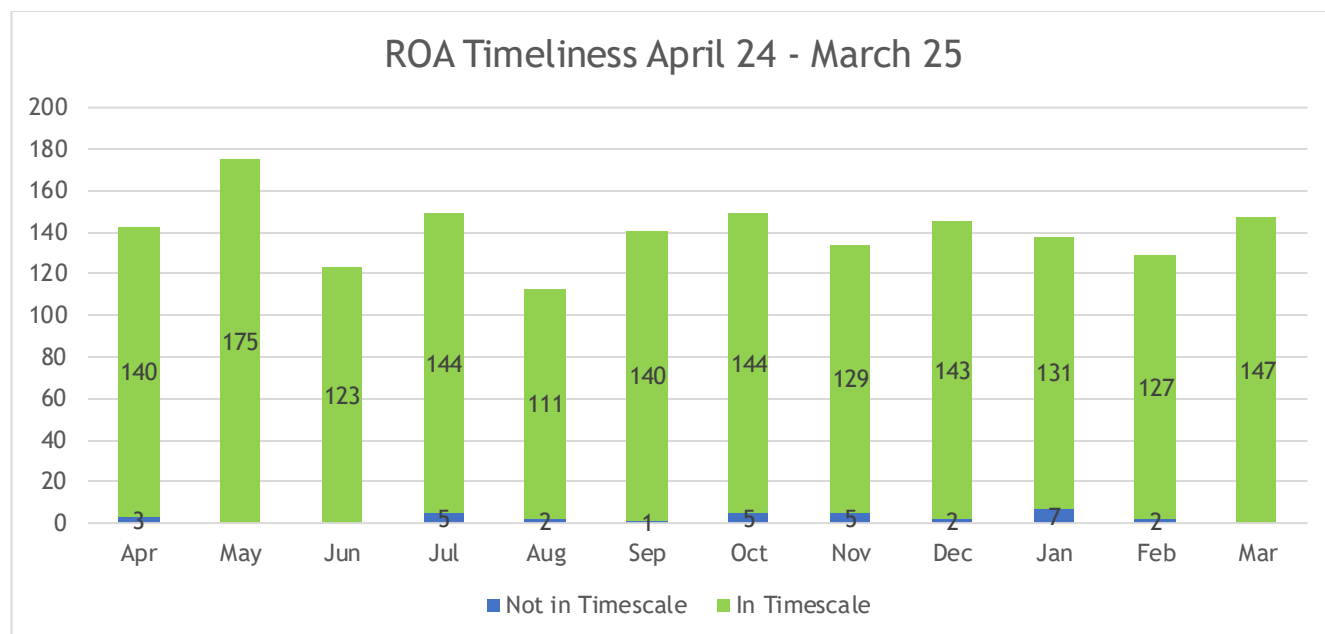


All children that enter care must have a Review of Arrangements Meeting within 28 days and a further review at three months, it is also important to have an additional review as a child leaves care, particularly prior to reaching 18 to ensure that all the necessary services are in place to support them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



At the year ending 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, the service had completed 1,686 Review of Arrangement meetings (per sibling group/ not individual children) of these 98.1% were completed within timescale and 1.9% (32 reviews) took place out of timescale. This is a positive increase from 2023/24 where we worked hard to re-set our meeting expectations, progressed our bottom lines for review meetings. The positive impact of this work is reflected in our timeliness data over this year. The Service continues to ensure one good quality meeting is being held for the child which is in their best interests.

In our previous Annual Report, there was a concern noted regarding review meetings being held in two parts, and in January 2023 noted that 27% (41) of reviews were held in two parts between 12.12.22 and 20.01.23 and over that year 28% of review meetings were being held in two parts. Over 2023/24, we successfully reset the culture of review meetings held in two parts and reduced it to 7.4% which has continued into 2024/25 with 6.1% being held in two parts in line with our identified ambition



We have also successfully embedded our monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings to review our data for the previous month, this considers the number of meetings completed, timelines, whether face to face, stepped down or out of date. This is key to keeping performance on track.

## Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to care planning. As always, Independent Reviewing Officers continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. Over this year we have continued to hold reviews in line with the child's expressed views, recognizing that for some children they prefer their reviews face to face, and for others they prefer virtual reviews.

We have also recognized that hybrid meetings have been beneficial, allowing for those unable to attend face to face, to dial into the review meeting. This includes parents, family members, or other professionals, and improves participation more generally. Having this level of flexibility has allowed us to hold review meetings in the way children would like them to be held, and with those they would like to be present.

Over this review year, we have seen 64.2% (1082 meetings) of reviews held face to face, 0.9% (16 meetings) held as hybrid, and 34.8% (587 meetings) held virtually. This is a significant increase in face-to-face meetings compared to 2023/24 where 55.1% (938) of meetings were held face to face, 4.2% (71) as hybrid and 40.7% (693) virtually.

We can see our participation numbers have remained high over this review period, and for children aged over 4, we can report that 92% of children contributed to their review. This is a slight decrease from last year, when 93.056% of children contributed. However, compared to 90.84% in 2022/23, this high and consistent performance over the last 2 years, which shows children have



engaged in their review this year either directly or indirectly. This is very positive as part of our drive to have the child at the center of their planning.

In every year it is acknowledged that not all children will want to attend their meeting, and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways. Over this review year, the Independent Reviewing Officers have been creative in how they gain their children and young people's views. For one young person with disabilities, photographs are used to share his experiences, and his progress in independence skills. Another young person, who is a selective mute, is supported to share her views by her Children's Rights Officer and for other young people, their network of trusted adults has been used to share views, achievements and thoughts on how things could improve.

For another young person who enjoys being in nature, her Independent Reviewing Officer took her up on an offer of a walk around the local area for a catch up ahead of her review meeting.

We also had an Independent Reviewing Officer who had a sparring boxing session with his young person before his review, and he felt it positively supported his engagement and contribution to his review. We also encourage our children to chair their review meetings which supports them to feel empowered and in control of their care plan.

One professional gave the following feedback after a young person chaired their review meeting:



We have continued to progress our purposeful practice within review meetings, making sure they are a space whereby children and young people would want to attend, ensure discussions are held in a trauma informed way and that discussions are held in a proactive and meaningful way to produce clear outcomes. The Independent Reviewing Officers get to know their children, their families, networks, and professionals around them, and adapt their style of chairing review meetings to best suit the young person and their situation. This may mean emphasis on the strengths first, and a more solution based discussion to some of the worries, it may mean the young person's review is more like a discussion covering all the key areas or some discussions take place outside of the main meeting if it isn't appropriate for the child to hear some of the more adult discussions needed. We have found being more purposeful in our review meetings continues to place children and young people at the center of their planning.

For 2024/25, the table below shows types of participation of young people:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
<b>Children who are under the age of 4</b>	363	370	404	405	367	329	332	386
<b>Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves</b>	554	632	659	561	590	714	855	863
<b>Children who attend but communicate via an advocate</b>	4	10	7	18	23	48	66	31
<b>Children who attend and convey their views non-verbally</b>	2	3	0	4	3	4	4	6
<b>Children who attend but don't contribute</b>	11	10	11	7	4	14	22	23
<b>Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf</b>	52	98	87	81	118	104	76	38
<b>Children who do not attend but communicate their views by another method</b>	415	296	450	636	623	495	478	515
<b>Children who do not attend/convey their views in any other way</b>	87	163	103	118	147	139	112	127

Another important area within children and young people's participation is the use of the 'My Review' booklet. This is a document written and designed by the Children in Care Counsel to help children and young people prepare for their review or be submitted to the Independent Reviewing Officer as a written record of their views.



This continues to be sent out electronically to the social worker who will either complete the booklet with the young person or to share this with the young person so that they are able to complete their independently or with support. Over this year, 227 booklets have been returned which is a positive increase from 128 booklets over 2023/24. There is more work required to improve the visibility of this document, and the Independent Reviewing Officers continue to promote this being completed.

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

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

## Participation Driving Service Improvements

At the start of 2023, the Children in Care Council developed a survey regarding the language of care to be completed by their peers in care, seeking to gain their views on professional language used.

Over 2023/24 year, the Language that Cares toolkit was developed from this as a further support to practitioners who have important conversations with children and young people about being more aware of the language they use in these conversations and the importance of this for our children and young people.

The toolkit was launched in June 2024, and the Independent Reviewing Officers have played a pivotal role in this ensuring at each review meeting that practitioners are using this toolkit. This ensures that we capture what the child calls the place they are living, what they call their carers, what they call the time they spend with their family alongside any other importance language or words they would prefer to us to use.

This will then be reflected in the child's record of the meeting, and it would be expected to be seen across all recording for the young person. For non-verbal children, we will ensure we consider how they communicate and which words they prefer to use and for babies/toddlers the use of sensitive language and ensuring we are having open discussions within reviews with parents/ carers about promoting language that cares.



This toolkit has been sent to our Local Authority foster carers as well as shared with our commissioning team, so providers are aware of it, as well as being promoted by our participation officers, children in care teams and safeguarding teams who work with children who have recently come into care.

### Home

Where a child currently lives – this can be confusing as a child might call their home the place where their parents live

Alternatives:

**This Country**

**New home**

**Current home**

**Where I live now**

**Means home country (UASC)\***

**Where they lived with their family before they came into care\***

**Ask the Young Person what they wish to call 'home'**

**Residential home**

**Safe place to call home**

It is essential for a young person to decide what they want to call the place they live in Care

## Care Plan

All children who are looked after in the care of the Local Authority have a Care Plan which sets out what the child needs to keep them safe and provide support with someone identified to carry out tasks and dates when they will be finished

Alternatives:

Young Person's Plan

My/Your Plan

Independence Plan

Future Plan

Over 2023/24 in preparation for this being introduced we updated our bottom lines regarding recording, including no abbreviations and to be considerate about children looking back at their records so that they will really understand their situation and why decisions were made for them. Using language that shows our care for them and achieving the right outcome for them is a key part of this commitment.

Over this year it has been introduced, and it has generated some interesting discussions around children's preferences, supporting children's sense of belonging and making reviews feel more personal using their chosen language. The following are two examples:



We have also launched our Coming Into Care Pack this year which is a document created by the Children's Rights and Participation team providing helpful information for children in care.

This includes a range of important information, from why children may come into care, health and education information for children in care, the review of arrangements meetings process and who key people are in the process, information about advocacy and Children's Rights Officers as well as information regarding their rights and many other areas.

This document has been designed so they can refer to the specific information at the time they need it. Like with the toolkit, this has also been shared with those working with children in care including foster carers and providers.



## Permanence

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

<b>Permanence Plan (at second review)</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to family	49	7.6%
Adoption	60	9.4%
SGO/CAO	20	3.1%
Supported living in the community	111	17.3%
Long-term residential placement	57	8.9%
Long-term fostering	265	41.3%
Twin Tracking	79	12.3%
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0.0%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

<b>Plan agreed before 2nd review</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>8.0%</b>
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Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. Positively, we have again seen an increase for children having their care plan of permanence agreed before their second review, to 8%, compared to 5.08% in 2023/24 and 3.25% during 2022/23. The Independent Reviewing Officers continue to place strong emphasis on permanence being agreed at the earliest opportunity which reflects departmental ambitions.

The Independent Reviewing Officers are raising questions about permanence and longer-term planning at the first 28-day review meeting and there has been a greater increase in children having permanence by their second review meeting.

<b>Permanence Plan (ALL LAC)</b>	<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>%</b>
Return to family	49	7.0%
Adoption	60	8.6%
SGO/CAO	20	2.9%
Supported living in the community	111	15.9%
Long-term residential placement	57	8.2%
Long-term fostering	265	38.1%
Twin Tracking	79	11.4%
<b>Total without permanence agreed</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>7.9%</b>
<b>Total with permanence agreed</b>	<b>641</b>	<b>92.1%</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>696</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

In 2024/25, the data has been used from the full cohort of children in care and 92.1% (641 children) of children had a permanence plan agreed, with 7.9% (55 children) without permanence agreed. These children had not had their second review by 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 and there are a further 11.4% (79 children) who have twin tracking as their care plan as their assessments have not concluded to determine their recommended final care plan within care proceedings. Therefore, all children who have had their second review, and where assessments to determine their permanence plan have been finalised, have a permanence plan.

## Independent Reviewing Officer Challenge & Escalation

Practice improvement and quality assurance is a significant role for the service. The service uses two quality assurance processes; challenge which is an informal quality assurance process, and escalation of professional concerns which is a formal quality assurance process.

As noted already, this was previously called positive challenge however after consultation with the teams that receive these, it was agreed they would be called challenge. We routinely review Quality Assurance Alerts to help identify any key themes or areas which need to be addressed; this is then shared within the Senior Management Group.

In last year's Annual Report, it was noted that over the previous review period, 2022/23 there was a change to how our Quality Assurance Alerts were completed and the new Mosaic system implemented in December 2022 had given the opportunity to review how our challenge and escalation is recorded. Over this review period, the management information system has continued to record our formal escalation alerts and responses, and progress has been made with amendments completed on the form used so challenge data can be tracked manually, we continue to wait the build of this within the system and the data base to allow our positive challenges to be reported and this has not yet been finalised, our Safeguarding Administration team continue to hold these on Excel.

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

From 1<sup>st</sup> April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 there have been 244 Quality Assurance Alerts completed in respect of Children in Care, including 76 formal escalations, 168 challenges and 16 for outstanding practice. This is an increase in escalations compared to 2023/24 whereby it was noted that 39 formal escalations and 103 positive challenges were completed. However, for this year we have seen a decrease in good practice feedback with 94 being completed last reporting year, which we are reviewing further over 2025/26 to ensure we remain consistent in recognising and providing positive feedback.

All formal escalations are reviewed on a monthly basis and consideration given to patterns or themes emerging from service areas or specific teams, leading to discussions being held with relevant managers or services, and training and support identified as needed to help support the improvement of practice. For the formal escalations completed, we have seen 66 resolved at Team Manager level, 8 resolved at Service Manager level and 2 resolved at Head of Service level.

One example relates to the provision of service supporting a young person with therapy that was recommended at the conclusion of her care proceedings and due to her situation, she did not feel ready to access at that time. The Independent Reviewing Officer has kept this under review at each review meeting, and as time has passed questions were being asked about whether further assessment was needed for neurodiversity for the young person. This was reviewed by the local Child and Adolescence Mental Health Service (CAMHS) and concluded this did not need to progress first and that her therapy could progress which was explored in the review. The young person was feeling ready to start her therapy however there was a delay in the Local Authority

progressing this which was successfully challenged by the Independent Reviewing Officer and has now been resolved, and therapy is being provided. Through the challenge being completed, the Independent Reviewing Officer was able to advocate on behalf of the young person and resolve the delay in this being provided with a positive outcome for the young person.

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

Operational managers continue to work from their own dashboards of data which is reviewed monthly on compliance matters. Whilst Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to send challenge for compliance matters; this has been more refined to where drift and delay has been identified. This has allowed the Independent Reviewing Officers to focus on more qualitative matters relating to children's care planning rather than quantitative.

For positive feedback, there is no requirement for a manager to provide a response however for escalation of concerns it is necessary for a manager to respond and the Independent Reviewing Officer to be satisfied with the response before the QA is formally resolved. Stage one resolution is with the Team Manager, Stage two with the Service Manager, Stage Three with the Head of Service and Stage four with the Assistant Director. A final stage would be with the Director of Children's social care, although no cases were required to be escalated to this level during the year 2024/25.

Additionally, as part of the escalation process, if an Independent Reviewing Officer has sufficient concern in relation to a child or young person's care planning, they can refer the case to either Cafcass or request independent legal advice, neither of which was required during 2024/2025.

### Personal Education Plans

From April 2024 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025, on average 95% of all children in care have had a PEP meeting completed, with 98% of school aged children having had their PEP completed. Below is the breakdown per term:

	All children:	School aged children:
Summer term 2024	97%	99%
Autumn term 2024	94%	97%
Spring term 2025	95%	98%

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

Children and young people's education continues to take a high priority within the Independent Reviewing Officer service. In each Independent Reviewing Officer's supervision all cases are reviewed whereby the child has been identified as not in being in education, employment or training (NEET). This process was implemented some years ago due to concerns that as children



moved placement there may be delays in identifying suitable education provision. For those children in mainstream statutory education this has not been identified as an area of concern for some time, as the Virtual Schools are proactive in working with schools and colleges to ensure that young people's needs are met.

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

In 2024/25, 91.2% of children had their annual health reviews completed within timescales, which positively is an increase of 8.9% compared to last year.

Audit work continues in this area with our Designated Nurse for Looked After Children in Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR). Our last audit started in December 2023, concluding in 2024 which then informed targeted work focusing on children and young people's health during 2024/25.

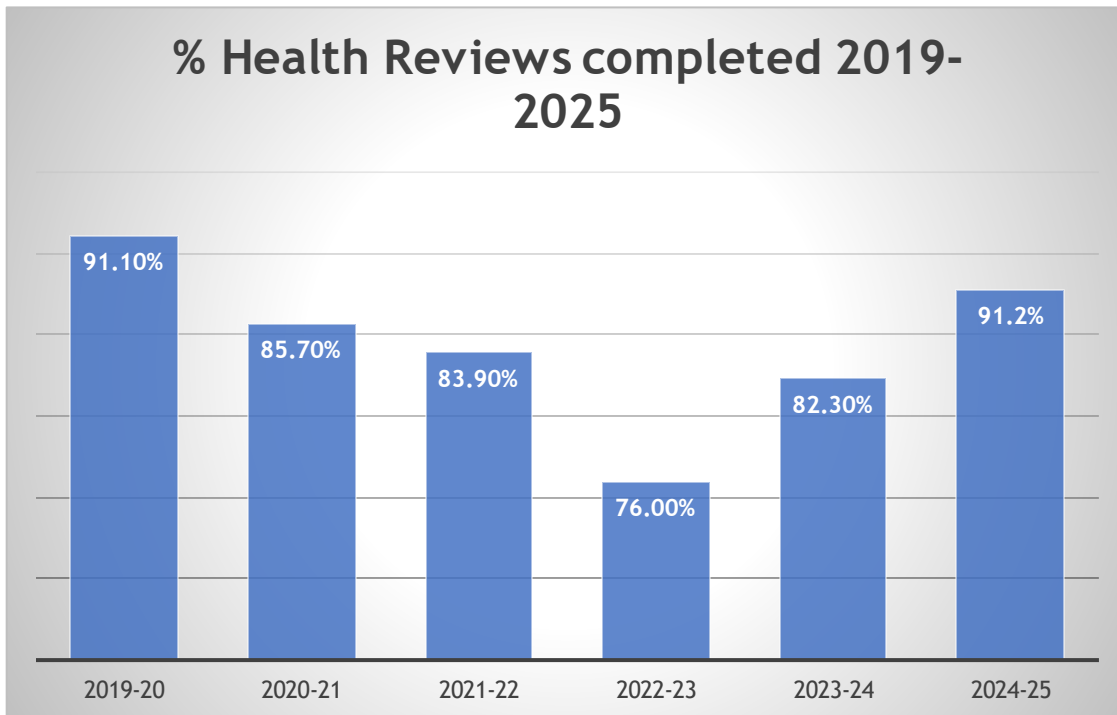
For Leicestershire, this audit looked at 60 children in total with 20 children from each age range (0-5, 6-15, 16-18) to examine children's files in detail to determine how well the health assessment and plan is integrated into the Review of Arrangements meetings, and that the timeliness of the health assessment fulfils the Statutory Guidance (2015) and strength and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) is available to inform the health assessment. The findings have been received and positively show that most young people had a current in-date health assessment and that nearly all young people were having their health needs met as the time of their Review Health Assessment. Rates of seeing a dentist and an optician within appropriate timescales have increased since the last audit and that all young people, where engaged with a health assessment were permanently registered with a local GP or (for an Initial Health assessment) in the process of registering. Review meetings had identified new health needs in the meeting for 11 young people within the audit sample showing an ongoing review of needs.

There are areas to continue working on, including ensuring Enduring Consent is in place for all children, and it was noted that there is inconsistent practice in ensuring a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is in place 3 months prior to the review health assessment date. It also noted that the review minutes do not consistently evidence whether all areas of the health care plan were reviewed or whether a health representative was present in the meeting. The audit also noted that the voice of the young person is not always evident in the Review Health Assessment and a lack of consistency in offering the young person the opportunity to be seen alone.

The audit has evidenced some areas of good practice with both the Leicestershire Partnership Team (LPT) Looked After Children's Health Team and Leicestershire Children's Social Care Teams, including the work of the Independent Reviewing Officers. The key areas of improvement identified have recommended actions to address these areas, and there is a review meeting held monthly to share progress updates.

The Looked After Children's Health Service have been continuing to provide health assessments for children in care.

Independent Reviewing Officers monitor this via review of arrangements meetings have been raising and concerns directly with the service and the allocated team if assessments have not



been completed. Health colleagues attend the Corporate Parenting Board and are held to account for service delivery for children in care.

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

As with health reviews, dental checks are viewed with high importance in contributing to children and young people's well-being. Over this reporting year, 93.1% of children had their teeth checked by a dentist.

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

### Well managed meetings

Over this review period the reduction of meetings held over two parts has been maintained and continued to improve the quality of meetings being held, alongside a greater focus on meetings being held in a timely manner with an updated quality report and care plan. This has been further supported by the implementation of the updated Independent Reviewing Officer bottom lines providing clear guidance to the social work teams for the standard expected for a review meeting to go ahead. It is positive that this has been received well improving the meeting quality for children and their families.

Over this review period we have had a mix of face to face, hybrid and virtual review meetings, although we can see our face-to-face reviews have increased over this year. Independent Reviewing Officers have been visiting the children that they are working with and are thinking of creatively and proactive ways of including children and young people in their reviews. The Service has continued to have clear guidelines that review meetings should take place in the children's best interest and we have seen participation levels increase in line with following a young person's wishes regarding the way their review is to be conducted. The individual profiles of each Independent Reviewing Officer is shared consistently to ensure that children know their reviewing officer as the basis for strong relationships to be established.

### Permanence

The service has continued to focus on permanence and timely planning for children being essential. The service continues to robustly monitor this through review meetings and through monitoring of children's records and seeking updates between meetings. Independent Reviewing Officers give professional challenge to teams if there are concerns about drift and delay for children. The number of permanence plans at second review has continued to increase, showing the ongoing focus on achieving permanence for children.

### Celebrating success

The Independent Reviewing Officers are committed to highlighting and sharing our children's successes and sharing these with senior managers including the Head of Service for Children in Care, Assistant Director and Director.

There are numerous positive examples to share, I have highlighted some people:

- A young person who completed his GCSEs after a difficult period of moving in an unplanned way from his kinship carer back to his mum's care and then moving to another family member in a more planned way. His social worker sent his professional network the pictures of him in his academy football kit where he will complete his further education after successfully completing all of his GCSE's.
- A young person became a wellbeing ambassador at her school
- Art work had been completed by a young person, and she won Artist of the Team at her school for her work. Pictures were sent to Head of Service for Children in Care and the Assistant Director.
- A young person turning 18 had a birthday dinner out and the young person choose who she would like to attend who she felt were most significant to her, including her Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer, her Children's Rights Officer, family time supervisors and lead children in care choir support worker.



Whilst our children's successes continue to be significant, we have also recently celebrated a 16+ provider who have gone above and beyond to support their young people with their identity and culture by arranging a cultural cooking day which was positively received. The staff, young people and social workers for the young people got together and cooked their cultural dishes and shared these together.

In March 2025, we held our Celebration of Achievement Awards celebrating our Children in Care and their successes, organised by the Corporate Parenting Team.

There were three events this year to better accommodate the different ages groups. For the 5–10-year-olds, they spent a day at Twycross Zoo with their carers. They had their award ceremony and then were able to tour the zoo. This was a family friendly event supporting the connection between the children and their carers. There was face painting, glitter tattoos and a great time was had by all.



For the secondary school children aged 11-16 and the children aged 16+ they had their events on separate nights, but enjoyed a silent disco, photobooth, glitter tattoos and buffet food as well as their awards celebration. There were performances from Beacon Choir, (our Children in Care choir), as well as a performance by Care to Dance. There were also two guest speakers, both care leavers from Leicestershire, who shared their journey and experiences, and what they have achieved to date to inspire other young people at the event.

### Visible Footprint of the Independent Reviewing Officer

Over this year, the Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to show a high visibility of their work and involvement on children's records. They record their involvement on the IRO Activity Log which is a running record on activity over the child's review period, including their preparation for the review, contact with the child and/or their network prior to their review meeting, meeting with the child and any other case work that they complete. The recording of challenge is also included in the Activity Log, and positively the date of conclusion and level it was concluded at have been added in preparation for formal reporting being completed on this.

### Feedback from children

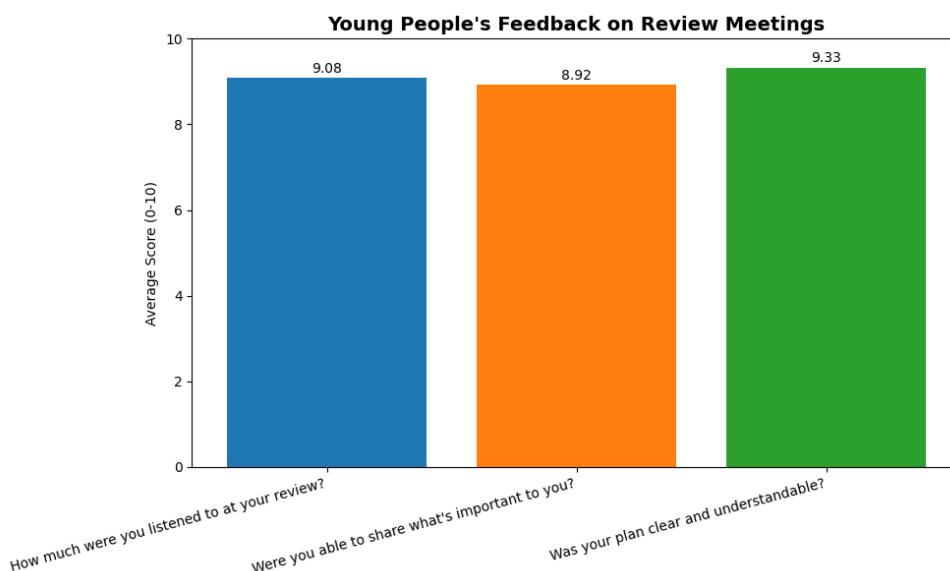
One of the main ways the Service has had feedback from children, has been via the Children in Care Council (CICC). Over this year, the key focus for them has been the launch of The Language of Care Toolkit, which recognises how important language is to our children and young people in care, it matters to them what language is used and that every child is different in their language preferences and they must be treated as individuals. The toolkit has been developed with Leicestershire's partner agencies and a feedback session held at the Corporate Parenting Board which supported our partner agencies to consider how they may implement something similar within their own areas and language that is used.

This launched in June 2024 and since launching, there has been positive feedback received as to the document and it has supported children and young people feel listened to using the words they prefer to describe their situation. Independent Reviewing Officers have been raising this in their review meetings and taking it into consideration in their preparation for review meetings.

In reviewing the implementation of this, an audit was completed in January 2025, and a deep dive of young people's records were reviewed by the Service Manager for Children in Care, Practice Excellence Team and IRO service. There were 20 children's files selected across the 4 children in care teams. The audit positively found that 65% of Care Plans/ Pathway Plans and Review of Arrangements meetings reflected the 'Language that Cares' and that abbreviations were generally avoided or fully referenced. In the early stages of this toolkit being implemented the audit found that there was further work to be completed with social workers using this with their children and ensuring that all IRO's are reflecting these discussions in their review summaries. Next steps and actions were implemented from this to ensure that this remains a focus within practice and utilised in the way it was intended. A further audit will be undertaken over the next review period.

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to endeavour to consult with children before their reviews take place to ensure they can decide where and when they want their review to be held, who attends and key issues to discuss. The Independent Reviewing Officers also encourage the children to chair their own reviews. The Independent Reviewing Officers do develop and have longstanding relationships with the children they are allocated to, so over time develop a relationship whereby they may message, call or visit them to gain their views. This is captured on the Activity Log as well as in the child's review of arrangements summary.

Children continue to be involved in their care planning and their review meetings as shown on the participation table and the Independent Reviewing Officers continuing to be positive and proactive about their children's involvement in review meetings. Over this review period we have implemented feedback forms, one for a young person if they have attended their review, one for a young person who hasn't attended and then another one for adults who have attended which is suitable for both family and friends and professionals. For the young people that attended the following has been provided:



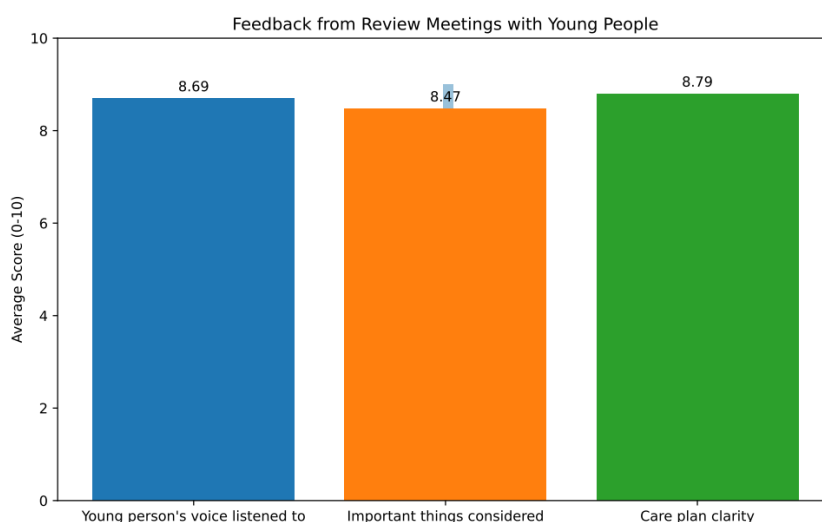
We continue to review our feedback forms within team meetings and use them to grow and learn as a team taking on board the advice provided through the feedback.

### Feedback from professionals

The Service values feedback from professionals and acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with colleagues to get the best outcomes for children.

Alongside feedback form from children and young people detailed above, we have also developed feedback forms for the adults who attended review meetings which include parents and professionals, who shared the following.

We continue to review our feedback forms within team meetings and use them to grow and learn as a team taking on board the advice provided through the feedback.



## 8. What can we do better?

### Participation

Leicestershire Independent Reviewing Officer Service has for a long time been proud of its participation work and we have worked closely with the Corporate Parenting Team, both the Participation Officers and the Children's Rights Officers to this end. Good communication with our children and young people is essential and the Independent Reviewing Officer Service will be striving to improve this even further in the coming year.

With our new service structure embedded, we have built strong connections with the corporate parenting team, practice excellence team and quality assurance and improvement team. This has helped to strengthen participation and how we use children's voices in our work and service and we have seen an increase in our consultation document being used, however we would like to see this use increased further over this next year.

We want to continue to increase the use of the consultation documents for children to give their views on their review meetings and how they wish to participate. We have seen a very minimal decrease in our participation number this year and our focus remains to ensure that children are able to give their views in a way that feels comfortable for them to inform their care planning. This will be reviewed during 2025/26 and we will be working with the Children in Care Council to assess their impact.

### Timeliness of meetings

The timeliness of review of arrangement meetings being held will be a focus to ensure continued improvement remains over 2025/26. Whilst it is positive that this has returned to over 98%, this needs to be maintained going forwards.

## Quality Assurance

Whilst our data for sending Quality Assurance alerts in respect of challenge has increased, we have not seen the same increase in sending good practice feedback in the same way. One of the areas to focus on over 2025/26 will be recognising positive practice, and ensuring good practice is recognised and commented on with the social workers as well as their managers.

## Health

The meeting of health needs for our children in care is incredibly important. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service wants to support the continued improvements of ensuring all health needs are met in a timely manner. The findings from the health audit are being progressed and reviewed monthly at the meeting held between Health and Children's Services. The main areas identified are ensuring Enduring Consent is in place for all children as well as ensuring a Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) is in place 3 months prior to the review health assessment date. As a service we have been working on improvements to the co-ordination of SDQ's, and have seen a promising increase from 60.1% in 2024 to 88.4% in 2025 and work will continue in this area. It also noted that the review minutes do not consistently evidence whether all areas of the health care plan were reviewed or whether a health representative was present in the meeting which is an area for Health improvement.

## Family networks

We know that a child and young person's network is important during their time in care and for their future. The Independent Reviewing Officers want to support the wider service focus on considering family networks at the earliest opportunity, involving networks in planning, and the use of tools such as cultural genograms to explore family and network with young people. Family, friends and professional networks are critical to supporting young people and we need to continue to promote this further.

## Performance data

We need to continue to enhance our access to data and use the new forms and workflow within our improved recording system to further enhance our measure of impact of our service.

### 9. What we achieved against our aims over the past 12 months?

The 2023/2024 annual report set out our plans for 12 months going forward. Below is how we have address and achieved those aims:

- Implementation of the Language that Cares Toolkit - this has now been implemented across the service and Independent Reviewing Officers have been committed to ensuring a successful implementation. They see this as a natural next step in ensuring children's records continue to be personalised to them including their preferences in language and how they refer to where they live, who they see, the adults around them. The audit completed in January 2025 which is referenced above shows whilst we have made a positive start, we need to continue to focus on embedding this into the service further and ensuring the language children prefer to use is championed across the service.
- We have demonstrated that we are a service that focuses on the needs of children and young people being met, represented and addressed with their care planning. We can see this through the use of our quality assurance process when needed.

- We have progressed our purposeful practice approach within review meetings ensuring children's reviews are best suited to them, they are supported to contribute in the way that best suits them and their care plans are understood. Our team development day supported this approach across the team. Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to support children to take part in their review meetings and sharing their views for care planning.
- We have progressed in our focus on the child's network around them and who their trusted adult is by discussing this area in review meetings to support the child's sense of belonging and connection. This will continue within children's reviews meetings.
- We have seen particularly emphasis on understanding the trauma that children in care are likely to have suffered both in their experiences before becoming looked after but also in their experiences in care when they are separated from their family networks. Our Independent Reviewing Officers continue to access necessary training to underpin trauma informed approaches to supporting children and in particular to inform how they coordinate and manage meetings and support the participation of children and their families. Over this year, all of the Independent Reviewing Officers have attended the Foundation to Trauma Training which they found incredibly insightful, and we reflect on in our team meetings the significance of this. By attending this training, they are now able to attend more advanced training around trauma to support their development.
- We are continuing to progress work around the recording of review of arrangements meeting to consider the benefits of IT support and the use of AI to enhance admin productivity. We have recognised that we want meetings that follow the wishes and needs of young people, and these have been a mix of face to face, virtual and hybrid. This is something we will continue to consider in the upcoming year.

## 10. What are our plans for the next 12 months to maintain or improve practice?

### Social Work Reforms

National social work reforms are underway across England, and Leicestershire is progressing its own plan in line with government recommendations. While the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer remains unchanged, the responsibilities of Child Protection Chairs—who are also part of our service—may evolve. We expect greater clarity on these changes in the coming months and will continue to assess their impact on our service.

### Embedding of the Language of Care Toolkit

Our Independent Reviewing Officers are committed to using the *Language that Cares* toolkit, which was launched in June 2024. This toolkit plays a vital role in ensuring that the language used in review meetings reflects the preferences and voices of children and young people. IROs write records directly to the child with care and clarity, helping them understand their circumstances and the reasons behind decisions. The toolkit supports this approach and strengthens our commitment to respectful, child-centred communication across all aspects of care planning.

### Consistent Practice: Our bottom lines

Following our service day on Purposeful Practice in November 2024, we updated our bottom lines for consistent practice. Over the next year, Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to apply these standards to ensure care planning remains consistent and effective. Supported by the Mosaic recording system and our quality assurance processes, these bottom lines help Independent Reviewing Officers ensure that interventions are appropriate and timely, and that any concerns are addressed promptly and robustly.



## Utilising data to improve practice

In the coming year, we will enhance how we use data to better understand service performance, inform quality assurance, and identify key themes affecting children and young people in care. This will support more informed decision-making and continuous improvement.

## Improving Administrative Processes

We will review and refine our administrative processes for creating records of review meetings. By making better use of technology, we aim to improve efficiency and ensure records are shared more consistently and in a timely manner—freeing up Independent Reviewing Officers to focus on leading purposeful review meetings that have a positive impact on children and young people.

## Promoting Participation of Children and Young People

We remain focused on ensuring that children and young people are actively involved in their review meetings and that their views shape their care plans. Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to build strong relationships with children between meetings and encourage the use of the “My Review” consultation document to help young people prepare and share their thoughts.

## The importance of networks

We will continue to prioritise the role of family, friends, and professional networks in review meetings and in Independent Reviewing Officer oversight between reviews. The use of cultural genograms will support a deeper understanding of each child’s identity and background, helping to inform future planning and transitions. Independent Reviewing Officers will also ensure that diversity, equality, and inclusion are central to care planning, and will challenge any gaps in support where needed.

## Supporting effective use of the public law outline

Independent Reviewing Officers will continue to advocate for children’s needs within care planning, particularly for those in pre-proceedings or care proceedings under the Public Law Outline. They will challenge any delays and promote best practice to ensure timely and appropriate decisions are made for children, supported by our quality assurance processes.



**Authors:**

**Hollie Martin**

Service Manager, Safeguarding and Practice Development Service

**Rebecca Peters**

Assistant Service Manager: Safeguarding & Performance

**Date: 31<sup>st</sup> July 2024**

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## Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2024 – 2025

On 31<sup>st</sup> March 2025 there were 694 children in the care of Leicestershire County Council, this is 31 children less than in 2024

This year the Independent Reviewing Officer Service chaired 1989 Review of Arrangement Meetings.

We support:  
413 boys  
4281 girls

We are really proud of the work that IROs do to have oversight of quality of the service you have. This year IROs did 244 alerts for worries to bring improvements

98.1% of your Review of Arrangements meetings took place within timescale



92% of children who are aged 4 and above took part in their review meeting either in person or by sharing their views. This is important to keep your views at the centre of everything we do

92.1% of our children have a permanence plan agreed within 4 months which means they have a sense of belonging.

91.2% of our children had timely health assessments; 93.1% had dental checks. 95–98% had Personal Education Plans completed each term.

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### Our focus in 2025 – 2026 will be on the following:

1. Support further increased use of consultation documents to support child participation.
2. Continuing to embed the 'Language that Cares' Toolkit
3. Continue to improve health and education outcomes with better assessments and support.
4. Promote networks using tools like cultural genograms.
5. Streamline administrative processes.

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