



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

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 3 March 2026 at 2.00 pm**

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

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

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Membership

Mr. M. Bools CC (Chairman)

Mr. J. Boam CC Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC Mr. B. Piper CC
Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC Canon. C. Shoyer
Mr. J. McDonald CC Mrs D. Taylor CC
Mr. D. Page CC

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AGENDA

<u>Item</u>	<u>Report by</u>
1. Minutes of the meeting held on 20 January 2026.	(Pages 5 - 16)
2. Question Time.	
3. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 32 (1).	
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 33.
8. Consultation on Expanding Community Based Support for Early Years Children with Additional Needs. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 17 - 36)
9. Building Education Services Together: Programme Plan. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 37 - 42)
10. Oakfield Short Stay School. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 43 - 48)
11. Quarter 3 2025-26 Performance Report. Chief Executive and Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 49 - 58)
12. Date of next meeting.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 2 June 2026.
13. Any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent.

QUESTIONING BY MEMBERS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY

The ability to ask good, pertinent questions lies at the heart of successful and effective scrutiny. To support members with this, a range of resources, including guides to questioning, are available via the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny website www.cfgs.org.uk. The following questions have been agreed by Scrutiny members as a good starting point for developing questions:

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

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

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



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Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 20 January 2026.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Boam CC	Mr. D. Page CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Mrs D. Taylor CC

1. Minutes of the previous meeting.

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

2. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that the following question had been received under Standing Order 34.

Question asked by Mrs Sue Whiting:

“Could the chair please state:

- a) How many care leavers 16-18 are not in education employment or training?
- b) How many care leavers 18-25 are not in education employment or training?
- c) What provisions are available for any care leavers who are not in education, employment or training?”

Response by the Chairman:

- a) There are currently 273 care experienced young people in Education, Employment and Training (EET) and 210 not in Education, Employment and Training (NEET).
- b) There are currently 18 care experienced young people in this age group, who choose to be in contact and have active involvement with the Service, who are EET and 24 who are NEET.
- c) The Department provides a post-16 Personal Education Plan (PEP) for all care leavers who are NEET and maintain a contact list for NEET care leaving young people, to offer options and encourage their return to education or employment. The virtual school works closely with personal advisers and social workers to stay connected with care leavers.

For 18+ care leavers not in employment, education or training, the Service links in with Leicestershire Cares who provide mentoring support to build confidence in returning to work, and for those young people coming out of custody along with the Probation service, this includes volunteering opportunities as well. Connect to Work is the DWP programme which as part of its priorities is to support care leavers into employment. The Service also works with Reed who support interview skills and CV work for care leavers to support them into work.

Mrs Sue Whiting asked the following Supplementary question:

“Thank you for a comprehensive answer to my question. For clarification is it possible to state:

- a) How many of the 24 NEET care experienced young people in the 18-25 age group have been in custody?
- b) Have their learning needs been fully assessed since leaving custody?”

Response to the supplementary question:

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services indicated that this information would be provided to Mrs Whiting after the meeting.

3. Questions asked by members.

The Chief Executive reported that two questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

Question asked by Mr Andrew Innes CC:

“A bid was recently put in by Discovery Trust to Loughborough College to use the existing Melton campus site (which includes the Theatre) as a venue for post 16 special educational needs provision. I understand that LCC has also been in similar discussions about the use of this site with other providers. We do not have adequate facilities in Leicestershire to accommodate post 16 requirements, and therefore we spend a large amount of money moving our residents around county or outside of county. To have such a provision, in a ready-made campus in Melton Mowbray, under these circumstances makes sense, not just commercially, but also to provide high quality services for some of our most vulnerable residents. I would also point out that this could also act as a catalyst to save the popular Melton Theatre that is in serious threat of closure due to Loughborough College withdrawing support, and their wish to sell the site. I would like to ask:

- a) What discussions have taken place, has there been any progress in these discussions?
- b) What is Leicestershire County Council’s view on commissioning post 16 provision?
- c) Should the Council be having serious talks with providers and Loughborough College about the future use of these facilities?

It is our duty to our residents to make sure we have good quality, easy accessible provision, for all of our residents, and I would advocate that we look into these proposals seriously.”

Reply by the Chairman:

- a) The Council continues to recognise the importance of robust and effective planning for post 16 education and training, particularly for young people with additional needs. Leicestershire has a diverse educational landscape, including school sixth forms, colleges, and specialist institutions, and our approach remains firmly aligned with national policy direction and the principle of mainstream inclusion wherever appropriate.

The Council has held discussions with officers and key stakeholders in relation to post 16 SEND provision in Melton, including consideration of the Discovery Trust’s proposal. This included analysis of current and projected demand, cost, long-term viability, accessibility, suitability and sustainability of the proposed venue and alignment with both national policy and local strategic direction for post 16 SEND places.

Following this evaluation, the Council concluded that the proposal could not be pursued, primarily due to the low and stable number of young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) within the Melton area, the existence of alternative provision options and concerns about the appropriateness and sustainability of the site for the proposed purpose. The Discovery Trust has acknowledged that, whilst they accept the Council is unable to pursue a post 16 development, they indicated their intention to bring forward a revised proposal focusing on pre 16 specialist places. Officers will review any such proposal upon receipt and will ensure that stakeholders are kept informed.

- b) The Council remains firmly committed to improving post 16 pathways and outcomes for all young people, including those with SEND. This commitment includes ensuring the sufficiency of high quality, sustainable provision, supporting mainstream inclusion, consistent with national policy direction and strengthening transition pathways into an adulthood of independence, choice, and control. To support these aims, the Council has recently appointed a Post 16 Service Manager whose responsibilities are focussed on understanding and analysing local need, engaging with all post-16 providers, identifying any gaps in provision and leading the development of a county wide Post 16 strategy.
- c) The Council is open to engaging with providers, including Loughborough College, where proposals are viable, sustainable, and aligned with the Council’s strategic direction for inclusive education. While the decision about the future use of the Melton campus rests with the College, the Council will continue to work constructively with partners where this supports improved sufficiency of appropriate local provision, good outcomes for children and young people and long term sustainability of educational pathways. Any discussions about the future of the site must therefore be grounded in demand analysis, strategic fit, and the feasibility of delivering high quality inclusive mainstream provision.

Question asked by Mrs Naomi Bottomley CC:

“I wish to ask a question with regards to the consultation ‘*Plans to provide more SEND nursery places in local communities*’.

The consultation proposals assume that mainstream Early Years settings can absorb specialist SEN provision, despite significant funding constraints, specialist workforce shortages, and an existing loss of childcare and specialist capacity. The consultation materials also appear to give limited visibility of these operational realities and risks.

In this context, how will the consultation process ensure that the feedback gathered is genuinely informed, balanced and valid?”

Reply by the Chairman:

The Early Years service provided by the County Council has a strong track record of working closely with the sector to promote careers in childcare, encouraging and supporting new staff to join the sector. The Service also ensures that new staff are highly skilled and trained, working closely with the Stronger Practice Hub funded by DfE to support professional development for staff working with young children across the County.

As part of the proposals, Early Years settings would be supported with a new, higher band of funding which would enable children to receive a higher ratio of adult to child support, allowing providers to pay staff at an increased rate which would support them to recruit and retain staff. Additional staff within the Early Years team would also provide additional training and support to ensure mainstream settings can meet the needs of those Early Years children with more complex additional needs and work with families in their homes.

The consultation process is open for all interested stakeholders to submit their views on the proposals and all responses submitted will be considered in a report to the Cabinet on 24th March 2026. Officers will ensure that the responses submitted through the consultation are reported in a fair and balanced way which supports members to make an informed and evidence based decision on the proposals.

Mrs. Naomi Bottomley CC asked the following supplementary question:

“While I appreciate that the proposal, and therefore the consultation around the proposal, suggests supporting providers with an uplift of up to £10 on top of the funded hours, what is the evidence that this would cover the costs of providing specialist support in more mainstream settings?”

If there is not robust data to support this, it calls into question the validity and the reliability of the consultation and the proposal as a whole.”

Response to the supplementary question:

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services stated that within Leicestershire there were many children with significant and complex needs who were accessing mainstream early years provisions and that they were thriving in those settings. The proposals included additional offers of specialist training, additional early years staff, and additional funding bands for providers. Most children historically, and at the time, attended a specialist nursery on a dual placement basis where they also attended mainstream provision as well. He stated that this was not a cost saving proposal

and that modelling demonstrated that funding would allow childcare settings to provide one-to-one support where needed in order to ensure the best outcomes for children in those placements. The Department would aim to ensure families were given an equitable offer to use their free early education entitlement hours ways which suited them. This could include longer days or time during the holidays, which many providers also offered. The consultation would give everybody the opportunity to give their views on proposals and would help the Department to plan next steps.

4. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

5. Declarations of interest.

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

No declarations were made.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

7. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

8. Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Director of Corporate Resources which provided information on the proposed 2026/27 – 2029/30 Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) as it related to the Children and Family Services department. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 8' is filed with these minutes.

The Chairman welcomed Mr. C. Pugsley CC, Lead Member for Children and Families, to the meeting for this item.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

Plans to provide more SEND nursery places in local communities.

- (i) Concern was raised regarding an ongoing consultation relating to proposals to create more accessible and inclusive SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) nursery places within communities, with particular reference to the potential loss of dedicated provision. The Director explained that the proposals sought to build local capacity so that children's needs could be met within their communities, and that proposed model would allow for expansion of specialist support through early years services. It was emphasised that the aim was to ensure equitable access to early years SEND provision across the county, as provision was often inconsistent.

- (ii) In relation to funding, the Director emphasised that the proposals were not intended as cost-saving measures and that all existing funding would be reinvested into early years provision in order to improve equity and capacity across the system. Consideration would be given to inflationary pressures, although this would remain subject to national funding decisions.
- (iii) Concerns were raised regarding the ability of mainstream settings to train teachers and support staff adequately, particularly where significant numbers of children had SEND needs but did not have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). A question was asked regarding which providers were being engaged to accommodate additional children with SEND and whether those settings had confirmed capacity to meet all aspects of need, including facilities for activities, resources, and the availability of additional staff. The Director stated that no specific providers had yet been identified to expand or replace provision, as further engagement with providers would be required should the proposals progress.
- (iv) Members remained concerned about the potential loss of dedicated SEND provision and that some mainstream settings could struggle to meet complex needs. The Director acknowledged the concern and reiterated their commitment to high-quality training, appropriate staffing ratios, and robust quality assurance. It was noted that whilst many children's needs could be met locally in mainstream provision, some children would continue to require different or more specialist support, and this would be recognised within the system.
- (v) With regards to the potential for legal challenge from parents relating to the Council's decisions with regards SEND provision, and whether this had been factored into the authority's risk management, the Director advised that the Council had not been challenged legally to date, however, SEND tribunals did occur. The Department was undertaking work to reduce the need for tribunal proceedings, whilst ensuring that decisions remained focused on meeting children's needs. Risk management would continue to form the development of any proposals.
- (vi) In response to a question regarding how growth in disabled children's services aligned with proposals to close a specialist nursery provision for children with disabilities. The Director explained that the disparity was due to different funding streams. Disabled children's services were funded from council resources, whereas specialist nurseries were funded from the High Needs/Early Years Blocks, which the Council was legally unable to supplement. Given increasing SEND demand and fixed resources, proposals aimed to utilise High Needs funding more effectively by moving to an alternative delivery model. This would broaden capacity, provide year round support, and embed specialist provision within local mainstream settings, an approach reported to be welcomed by many parents.
- (vii) In response to a question regarding whether similar proposals were anticipated relating to provision for older children within specialist settings, the Director outlined that mainstream inclusion was expected to be a key theme within the anticipated SEND White Paper and that the early years proposals aligned with this anticipated policy direction. However, it was not clear whether changes would be proposed for specialist school provision.
- (viii) With regards for staff training, a question was asked regarding whether Makaton would be taught in mainstream settings, whether this would be funded and trained for, and whether it would be delivered universally or selectively. The Director stated

that that an extensive training offer would be developed, potentially including Makaton, as well as earlier access to speech and language therapy, and greater flexibility in how support was delivered. This would include both one-to-one support where appropriate and broader system-wide training.

- (ix) It was noted that the consultation was due to run until 22 February 2026 and a report would be presented to the Committee at its meeting on 3 March as part of the consultation process. A detailed risk assessment would be developed for any proposals, including consideration of service pressures and mitigations, before being presented to the Cabinet.

Growth.

- (x) Concern was raised regarding an increase in the number of children entering care and placed in residential provision, a trend which continued to persist each year. The Director acknowledged that the number of children coming into care had increased, alongside rising residential costs driven largely by a national shortage of foster carers and limited availability of suitable family-based placements. The Director emphasised that residential care was not the default option and that foster care, including in-house and external placements, was always prioritised where appropriate. Work was ongoing to support and grow the foster carer cohort, strengthen kinship care through a dedicated strategy, and deliver the Family First partnership reforms to help children remain safely within their family networks wherever possible. It was noted that the development of in-house residential provision through the Children's Innovation Programme, in partnership with Barnardo's, which provided locally based homes exclusively for Leicester children, improved quality and continuity of care, and offered greater control over costs compared to private providers. All of these measures would also go towards supporting increasingly complex needs and higher levels of trauma experienced by children.
- (xi) A member asked a question relating to staff wellbeing within the Department as a result of increased workload and whether a new working arrangements policy for the Council was expected to place additional pressure on frontline staff. The Director stated that a range of support was available to staff, including structured supervision, workload management, training opportunities, clear wellbeing offers, and access to counselling for those working in particularly high-risk areas. It was noted that the proposed new working arrangements policy was not expected to have a significant negative impact, as the majority of frontline children's social care staff worked directly with children and families in the community.
- (xii) A question was asked regarding the cost of home to school transport, which had been identified as a service pressure on the Council's general budget. The Director outlined that funding for transport came from the core Council budget rather than the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and affected the budgets of both the Children and Family Services and Environment and Transport. The pressure had therefore been indicated across MTFS planning relating to both directorates in order to ensure visibility, reflecting that it is a corporate pressure arising from increased demand.

Savings.

- (xiii) Members were in agreement that there was very limited scope remaining for savings to be made within the Department. Similar financial and growth constraints had been present in previous years meaning that there was little remaining capacity for further reductions without impacting service delivery.
- (xiv) In relation to recruitment, which had been identified as a key area for savings, a question was asked regarding how feasible it was to attract high-quality applicants, particularly social workers, given national recruitment challenges and competition from other public sector organisations and the private sector. In response, the Director explained that recruitment challenges were not solely a local issue but reflected a national shortage of qualified and experienced social workers, particularly in frontline safeguarding roles. The most affected areas were identified as the front door and family safeguarding teams. It was noted that the issue was not simply one of attracting candidates but of limited supply nationally, particularly among those willing to remain in frontline statutory practice. The Director outlined that the Department had undertaken a range of actions in order to address workforce pressures.
- (xv) A question was asked regarding departmental goals and efficiency proposals and how far these differed from those in previous years. The Director stated that the areas identified by external advisors Newton Europe were already known and prioritised within the Service. The key challenge and focus of discussions with Newton Europe related to the additionality their involvement could provide, particularly through additional resource and specialist expertise, with the aim of accelerating improvements or increasing the scale of benefits rather than identifying entirely new areas for change.
- (xvi) In response to a question relating to where further efficiencies could be found, or whether service reductions were likely to be considered, the Lead Member advised that work was underway with Newton Europe in order to identify potential efficiency savings. He provided assurances that his priority was to avoid service cuts wherever possible and confirmed that as more information became available regarding efficiency opportunities, this would be communicated to the Committee.

Dedicated Schools Grant.

- (xvii) Members raised concern regarding significant overspend on high-cost placements and that the level of expenditure was unsustainable. The Director acknowledged this concern and emphasised the need for clearer and more decisive government guidance and intervention. It was noted that the Council had limited ability to influence many of the cost pressures presented.

Capital Programme.

- (xviii) A question was asked regarding the Children's Innovation Partnership with Barnardo's whereby in-house residential care services had been designed in, and were delivered through, a partnership arrangement. The Director stated that the work had prioritised bringing existing agreed homes into operation and ensuring they were fully established. It was explained that the Council was pursuing a mixed-economy approach, including agreements with other providers to avoid over-reliance on a single delivery model. Regulated and registered provision offered better value and safeguards than some unregulated alternatives. It was noted that any opportunity for additional funding would be pursued if available.

- (xix) Concern was raised regarding the cost and risks associated with unregulated social care provision and that some providers could be profiting excessively at the Council's expense. Members were in agreement that there was need for a more robust and highly regulated system.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the report regarding the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 – 2029/30 and information now provided be noted;
- (b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Scrutiny Commission for consideration at its meeting on 28 January 2026.

9. Draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026-2029.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services the draft Leicestershire Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 – 29. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the draft policy set out a clear and compelling vision for the Department to support children and families. He placed on record his thanks to officers who had been involved in developed the draft Policy and highlighted the extensive engagement that had been undertaken with children, young people and families.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question asked, the Director confirmed that all of the partners and stakeholders involved in the development of the draft Plan had confirmed that they were commitment to it.
- (ii) The Director outlined that the development of an accompanying action plan, which would be utilised to track progress against outcomes, was near completion. At the request of members, the Director agreed that an update on progress made against the Action Plan would be presented to the Committee at the meeting on 1 September 2026.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft Leicestershire Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 – 29, be noted.
- (b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 3 February 2026.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with an update on progress made against an action plan relating to the Leicestershire Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 – 29, at the meeting on 1 September 2026.

10. School Places Strategy 2026-2031.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Families which outlined the draft School Places Strategy 2026–2031. The Strategy set out how the Council would meet its statutory duties to ensure a sufficient high quality school places in Leicestershire, delivered in the right place, at the right time. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families thanking the officers for the depth of work which had gone into underpinning the Strategy. He emphasised that every child having access to a suitable local school place was one of the Council's most fundamental responsibilities. He stated that the strategy demonstrated clearly, and with an evidence-based approach, that the Council would be able to meet both the mainstream and the specialist. However, he recognised that the Department would face significant challenges in delivering against the Strategy.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A question was raised regarding whether Section 106 funds could be used in order to support SEND schools and dedicated SEND places. The Director stated that a new planning obligations policy was being developed in order to ensure that Section 106 agreements reflected construction cost, including inflation, and allowed greater flexibility in utilising funds alternatively, as demographic demands changed. Increasing flexibility would support the utilisation of funds for SEND provision, including in mainstream settings.
- (ii) With regards to the approach to strategic planning of school places in relation to housing growth, a member asked how the Council planned for demand and whether the Authority, or developers, typically initiated proposals for new schools. The Director outlined that the Department continued to undertake planning by analysing live births, GP registrations, migration data, and ten-year secondary projections. The findings of such analysis were then aligned with local plans which allowed for an early assessment of likely future school capacity needs. Whilst developers often favoured new schools, the Council's priority was to avoid destabilising existing provision, expanding existing schools where appropriate, and focussing on the importance of viable school size. Members noted that it was the Council's strategy that primary schools should not be built below two forms of entry, except where phased, and that secondary schools should be planned for a minimum of 900 places.
- (iii) Concerns raised regarding the sustainability of rural schools with particular focus on any potential closures and the impact on local communities. The Director provided assurance that a School Reorganisation Project was being established in order to assess sustainability across all schools, over a three-year period. It was anticipated that without action, deficits potentially totalling £45m–£50m could occur across vulnerable schools. It was anticipated that the equivalent of approximately 13 schools' worth of primary school capacity would need to be removed over time. However, no specific schools had been proposed for closure at this stage. Members noted that possible mitigation solutions included amalgamations, expansion or reconfiguration, linking infant and junior schools, and brokerage involving Multi-Academy Trusts. The Director agreed to provide the Committee with an update on the School Reorganisation Project, at a future meeting.
- (iv) Concern was also raised regarding secondary school capacity shortfall. It had been reported that around 2,000 additional places would be required within two years.

The Director stated that mitigation included schools expanding without capital works, existing capital projects, and new builds where required. Additional capital funding had been agreed by the Council to support these capacity requirements. The Director agreed to provide members with information relating to mitigation plans.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the draft School Places Strategy 2026–2031, which set out how the Council meets its statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient high quality school places in Leicestershire are delivered in the right place, at the right time, be noted.
 - (b) That the comments now made be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 3 February 2026.
 - (c) That the Director be requested to provide the Committee with an update on the School Reorganisation Project, at a future meeting.
 - (d) That the Director be requested to provide the Committee with information relating to mitigation plans relating to a secondary school capacity shortfall, at a future meeting.
11. Quarter 2 2025/26 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period July to September 2025 (Quarter 2). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families states that the report presented a balanced picture of both a service which was operating under unprecedented financial pressure whilst also continuing to provide for the children and families. He wished to place on record his thanks to all of the staff across the Service for both their hard work and their continued dedication.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Members were pleased with clear improvements which had been demonstrated across the service, whilst acknowledging that further progress could still be made. A member stated that improved outcomes were particularly positive step given ongoing financial pressures and the nature of issues affecting some children and families.
- (ii) Concern was raised regarding Elective Home Education (EHE) as the number of children being electively home educated continued to rise. Particular concerns were raised regarding safeguarding, as home educated children could be less visible to services. The Director acknowledged that EHE remained an area of significant concern. While recognising that many families chose home education for positive reasons, others disengaged from the school system for more complex causes. Covid-19 was still having an impact for some children who had struggled to re-engage with schools. Members noted that increasing levels of need in classrooms nationally and locally presented challenges for schools. Initiatives such as Universal Design for Learning, which encouraged flexible teaching approaches which anticipate diverse learner needs, would go towards addressing this issue. The

Director outlined that a new Education Belonging Strategy would form an overarching framework relating to education improvement strategies. The Strategy aimed to ensure that children felt a sense of belonging within their school and the community. Work completed to date included a planned belonging conference in March 2026 and wider efforts in order to help schools meet a broader range of additional needs.

- (iii) A question was asked regarding the take-up of early years places, in relation to the extent of joint working with health professionals such as GPs and health visitors, who were often the first point of contact for new parents. The Director stated that health services had a duty to notify the authority where a child may have, or may develop, special educational needs, and strong working relationships existed between the Service and health visitors. Work was being undertaken in order to strengthen early years support further, including potential changes to the Service model in order to increase capacity, improve early engagement with families, and promote the benefits of early education.

RESOLVED:

That the update providing relating to the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period July to September 2025 (Quarter 2), be noted.

12. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

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

2.00 - 4.22 pm
20 January 2026

CHAIRMAN



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 MARCH 2026

CONSULTATION ON EXPANDING COMMUNITY BASED SUPPORT FOR
EARLY YEARS CHILDREN WITH ADDITIONAL NEEDS

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee of proposals to create more accessible and inclusive SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) nursery places in Leicestershire communities. This is proposed to be achieved through increased levels of inclusion support and funding for children aged 0-4 with additional needs, to enable greater access to mainstream provisions across the county and remove the reliance on specialist nurseries. The views of the Committee are sought as part of the consultation on the proposals and will be presented to the Cabinet for its consideration, on 24 March 2026.

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 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) aged 0-25. This includes a duty to identify and assess the SEND of children and young people in their areas 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.
4. The proposal outlined in this report is aligned with the ambitions set out in the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26, the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26, and the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
5. In June 2025, the Cabinet agreed the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028, setting out a strategic direction for improvements to partnership SEND services in Leicestershire. These proposals are aligned with the ambition of the strategy that 'all children and young people can thrive and achieve in their community'.

6. The proposals will also ensure that the County Council is able to deliver the mainstream inclusion aspirations expected to be set out in the Government's upcoming Schools White Paper.
7. On 18 November 2025, the Cabinet agreed to a consultation being undertaken on the proposals.
8. At its meeting on 20 January 2026, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30 which noted the significant financial challenges facing the Authority, including a growing deficit in the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG). Members raised concern regarding significant overspend on high-cost SEND placements and noted that the level of expenditure was unsustainable.
9. At the Full County Council meeting on 18 February 2026, the following motion was put and carried:
 - a) That this County Council believes that the four pre-school nurseries currently supported by this County Council that serve children with Special Educational Needs in the County should continue to be supported in their current form;
 - b) That the Menphys Nurseries in Wigston and Sketchley Hill in Burbage and the Oasis nursery in Melton Mowbray and the Lift Beacon in Loughborough provide essential educational support to some of the most vulnerable young children in Leicestershire;
 - c) That many parents have expressed their anguish at the news that the nurseries could close. They offer specialist focused teaching and expert care. To close them would mean the loss of an essential service in the County;
 - d) That this County Council believes that the four nurseries should continue to remain open and urges the County Council Cabinet to listen to the residents of Leicestershire and this Council and keep the nurseries open.

Background

10. The Council's vision for the Early Years sector is for all children aged 0-4 including those with additional needs to be able to access high quality Early Years education that meets their needs within their local community. We believe that families should be able to take up their full entitlement to funded childcare hours in a way that best suits them.

Existing Early Years provision for children with additional needs

11. There is currently inequality of access to early years provision for children with SEND.
12. The Council currently commissions specialist nursery places at four sites across the County: Menphys (Sketchley Hill Menphys Nursery School and Wigston Menphys Nursery School), Oasis Retreat in Melton Mowbray, and Lift Beacon in Loughborough. Specialist nurseries are commissioned to offer 64 places, which are attended by 126 children on a part-time term time only basis.

13. The Menphys sites at Sketchley Hill and Wigston are operated as local authority maintained Early Years specialist nurseries, while two specialist provisions are attached to Private, Voluntary and Independent settings (Beacon Nursery, Loughborough and Oasis Family Centre, Melton Mowbray).
14. Places are allocated within these provisions through a SEND panel of professionals and funded through the High Needs Block. All four specialist nurseries cater for all areas of need for children 2-5 years old.
15. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare service currently supports over 750 children with additional needs, which has increased by nearly 25% over the last four years. Of these, nearly 300 children have additional needs sufficiently complex to require an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to support them, with another 140 children currently under assessment for an EHCP.
16. Specialist nurseries are not evenly spread geographically across the County and there are insufficient places available for all children with complex needs to attend. This creates inequity within the current support arrangements, both in terms of spaces not available to be offered to all children who may benefit, but also in where they are located as some of our most disadvantaged families are less able to travel or to accommodate the travelling time and operating hours of specialist nurseries within their working day. Long periods of travel can also impact negatively on children with additional needs who can arrive at settings dysregulated and not ready to engage with learning.
17. The limited availability of specialist provision also creates a lack of equity in accessing the Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) compared to mainstream provisions. Children accessing specialist nurseries are not offered their full entitlement and are not given the option to use these hours throughout the year and are restricted to term-time only, unlike the majority of mainstream early years providers.
18. As a local authority, Leicestershire is rare in maintaining specialist nurseries, as a large number of local authorities no longer have access to specialist provisions for non-statutory school aged children.
19. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service work with both Public Health Visiting Teams and Early Years Providers to identify and support children with additional needs, working together to put strategies and support in place to ensure children's needs are met. The Service has a strong track record of working closely with the sector to encourage and support mainstream inclusion of children with SEND, and a number of children with complex medical needs such those requiring oxygen or that are tube fed are already supported to attend mainstream nurseries. Specialist SEND advisors support families to access provisions that meet the needs of their children, providing advice and training to providers and enabling children to settle in their settings.
20. The Early Years service provides support to settings and families in developing an Individual Health and Care Plan (IHCP) for children with medical needs where this is needed. Training offered by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service includes bespoke drop-in sessions led by a range of qualified professionals to provide tailored advice and guidance. The local authority also supports providers to access Diana

training for two members of staff per child per setting, enabling children with complex medical needs to attend their local mainstream setting safely. This has been highly effective over a number of years.

21. Ofsted-registered Early Years Providers, who have Leicestershire children with SEND accessing their mainstream nursery, qualify for Inclusion Funding to enable them to create an inclusive environment and provide support for individual children with SEND. This includes children accessing as a dual placement, using their full funded entitlement across two provisions (in this case, specialist and mainstream). The highest rate of Inclusion Funding to support children with significant SEND in the mainstream cohort is currently £5.50 an hour.
22. Additional funding streams are also available to support eligible children to access Early Years provision; the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare service supports families and providers to access Disability Access Funding (DAF) and Pupil Premium funding where appropriate.

Existing costs and future expectations of Specialist Nursery provision

23. The Council currently spends around £1.3m on specialist nursery places which is budgeted to increase to £1.5m in 2026/27. Funding for supporting SEND through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant has not kept pace with demand leading to an increasing DSG deficit position.
24. The specialist nursery model does not provide best value for money for the Council, particularly compared with providing Inclusion Funding and Early Years SEND and Area Special Educational Needs Coordinator support for SEND children to access mainstream provision. The average full-time placement at a maintained Specialist Nursery is £27,184 per annum. Based on providing a £10/hr rate of inclusion funding for children attending a mainstream provision for the maximum 30hr/week free early education entitlement, this would cost £11,400 per annum.
25. Once a child has secured a specialist nursery place there is often an expectation that they will continue to require specialist educational provision, setting a specialist trajectory for the child's entire educational journey. This need not always be the case; for example, if issues such as developmental delay are addressed.
26. Furthermore, parents/carers of a significant number of children currently at specialist nurseries are asking to delay or defer school admission until the child reaches statutory school age and are seeking another specialist setting at this point. Evidence and experience show that the families of children educated in community settings have better understanding of a mainstream offer, are more likely to express a mainstream preference, and benefit from all the positive effects of mainstream inclusion – including academic gains, social engagement, peer acceptance, behaviour issues and participation in school and community groups, greater independence and social skills.

Benefits of Local Community Provision

27. The Schools White Paper is expected to set out the Government's plan to ensure opportunity for all by delivering an inclusive education for every child with a high-quality curriculum and highly trained, expert teachers. This will be based on an

inclusive mainstream system, with specialist support for children that need it, and improved, efficient and effective local delivery.

28. When children have to travel some distance in order to access specialist provision they and their families are more likely to miss the support and connection with their local communities. Children with additional needs can benefit greatly from provision that supports achievement at, and enjoyment of, pre-school in their local community.
29. In developing the proposals, a review of the considerable research around the benefits of mainstream inclusion and belonging for children with SEND was carried out; this included a report of the Education Committee, published in September 2025. The review also considered research papers on the subject, including, for example, from Bath University on the subject of mainstream inclusion for children with Profound and Multiple Learning Disabilities (PMLD).

Proposed Approach to Expanding Local Support

30. Additional Early Years specialist staff capacity and funding would be introduced to support local settings, with changes proposed to staff working hours to ensure more cover for school holiday periods. The proposal includes:
 - Recruitment of 6FTE additional specialist SEND practitioners, creating a team of nearly 40 expert staff. These practitioners will support families through the Best Start in Life Family Hub programme and will provide targeted blocks of support within early years settings. Each practitioner will work within an allocated locality in order to minimise travel for young children and foster strong community relationships with children, families, and providers.
 - An additional Inclusion Funding band created to support Early Years providers supporting children with potentially more complex additional needs of £10/hr. The proposed additional inclusion funding will enable providers to offer increased adult to child ratios, and, in combination with Disability Access Funding for eligible children, to purchase resources to support learning.
 - As a result of additional support in mainstream settings, the Council would no longer need to commission places in specialist nurseries.
31. These proposals aim to ensure children get the right support, in the right place and at the right time. They will support mainstream inclusion within the childcare and early education sector, mitigating the risks of children with additional needs not accessing their funded entitlement due to financial constraints and lack of confidence and experience from Early Years providers.
32. Supporting families and parental choice is an important element of the proposals, as all families are entitled to 15 or 30 hours (for working parents) of free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year through FEEE. Specialist nurseries generally offer places for 12 hours a week over two days during term time only and do not enable families the opportunity to use their funded hours in the way that best suits their circumstances. Mainstream early years providers offer families the choice to stretch their funded hours over more weeks of the year to manage childcare costs over school holiday periods, to use their full entitlement to hours, and offer optional private hours in addition to funded childcare hours for families who need them. The majority of

mainstream childcare providers also offer greater flexibility around start and finish times, which is not offered through specialist nurseries.

33. The proposed model based on a £10/hr rate of Inclusion Funding for children with more complex needs would enable more children to access more hours of supported early education, in their local community, than are available through specialist nurseries, introducing a more equitable offer.
34. The local authority is currently relying on Independent Specialist Providers to provide a number of specialist school places for children aged 5-16 due to current sufficiency issues. Through this proposal, if approved, the Council would work with Menphys and its existing Area Special Schools to consider opportunities for repurposing the existing maintained specialist nursery buildings at Sketchley Hill and Wigston.
35. Subject to the outcome of consultation and further consideration by Members it is intended that the new model would be in place with effect from April 2027.
36. It is recognised that mainstream providers may require additional training and support from the Council's Early Years team and the proposed implementation timelines allow for this support to be put in place.
37. The Government has recently announced a £200 million national SEND training programme, which will include free training focused on inclusive practice, child development and practical SEND strategies for all early years practitioners. This will be introduced alongside the proposed additional support for mainstream providers.

Cost Implications of the New Model

38. The cost of introducing the proposals above has been projected at £1.32m per year, in line with the current cost of providing specialist nursery places. All of the funding currently spent on commissioning specialist placements will be reinvested to support the new proposed delivery approach in mainstream settings. More children with additional needs will benefit from the proposed support model without incurring additional costs to the Council against the already under pressure High Needs Block budget. There may be some one-off costs of around £1.17m through staff redundancies; however, the Council will wherever possible look for opportunities to redeploy staff in order to reduce the impact of the proposals.
39. Assuming agreement to repurpose existing maintained specialist nursery buildings for specialist school places for statutory school age children, it is anticipated that 41 places could be created. This would reduce the need for expensive independent special school places which cost on average around £42k per year more per place than maintained special schools. If agreed, additional special school places are proposed to be available from September 2027 and would enable the Council to offset around £1.7m per year of future High Needs Block expenditure.

Approach to implementation

40. Subject to the outcome of consultation and further consideration by Members, the new model could be in place with effect from April 2027. In order to achieve this timeline, notice would need to be given to existing provider(s) with effect from April 2026.

41. Should the proposals be approved, the remaining children attending the current specialist nurseries would have a bespoke transition plan to support their successful inclusion into a local mainstream provision. The Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service already supports providers to complete EHCP reviews and provides training to build confidence and support in planning. Providers are experienced in working collaboratively with parents and carers and in advocating for the needs of the child. Safeguarding remains of paramount importance within all early years settings.
42. Children's progress will be monitored continuously; advice and support will be provided by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service. Support will be provided, which will also model good practice and strategies to support the children at home and in the setting.
43. For the very small number of children who have the most complex needs, the Council has agreed to invest £30m in a brand-new state of the art special school which can provide early years places should this be required. Officers are also able to commission places, if required, from the current area based special schools across the County. Decision making responsibility will remain with the Special Educational Needs Assessment service.

Consultation

44. A public consultation sought stakeholders' views on the proposed new model of support for Early Years children with additional needs. This was carried out primarily using an online survey, which was also available in accessible print versions on request. The consultation will enable stakeholder feedback to be considered before adoption.
45. The six-week consultation on the proposed new model commenced on 12 January and concluded on 22 February 2026.
46. A further report will be considered by the Cabinet on 24 March 2026, summarising the consultation feedback and making recommendations on the proposals outlined.

Resource Implications

47. The proposed changes to the model of support for Early Years children with additional needs come at a time of unprecedented and growing demand for High Needs support across the SEND system. The financial position of the High Needs DSG is a significant risk to the Local Authority where a financial deficit of £110.5m at the end of 2025/26 is forecast, which could rise to £460m if future demand remains on a similar trajectory to the growth seen in 2025/26. This is clearly an unsustainable position.
48. The Council continues to await the publication of the Schools White Paper which will propose reforms to the current SEND system. Recent announcements of support to clear 90% of existing SEND deficits are welcome, however there is no detail currently on what a local SEND reform plan will need to cover in order to secure the funding, or the overall financial and workforce implications of reforms to the existing SEND system.
49. As set out in paragraphs 38 and 39, the cost of introducing the proposals above has been projected at £1.32m per year, in line with the current cost of providing specialist

nursery places. All of the funding currently spent on commissioning specialist placements will be reinvested to support the new proposed delivery approach in mainstream settings. Additional one-off costs of around £1.17m may be incurred through staff redundancies, but mitigated through redeployment, where possible. If agreed, additional special school places for statutory school aged children would enable the Council to offset around £1.7m per year of future High Needs Block expenditure.

50. The proposal, if agreed, involves the recruitment of six additional Early Years Inclusion and Portage Practitioners to offer direct support for children with SEND, their families and Early Years Provisions, as well as additional Inclusion Funding being allocated to local settings attended by children with additional needs, building capacity and expertise.
51. The Director of Corporate Resources and Director of Law and Governance have been consulted on this report.

Timetable for Decisions

52. At its meeting on 18 November 2025, the Cabinet approved a consultation to be undertaken on the proposals for expanding community based support for early years children with additional needs.
53. As part of the consultation process, the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee are requested to consider and provide feedback on the proposals. The views expressed by the Committee will be included in a report to the Cabinet.
54. It is intended that the Cabinet will receive the further report at its meeting on 24 March 2026, including a comprehensive summary of feedback received during the consultation and setting out proposed next steps for Cabinet consideration.

Background papers

Report to the Children and Families Scrutiny Committee on 20 January 2026 "Medium Term Financial Strategy 2026/27 - 2029/30":

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=8410&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet on 18 November 2025 "Expanding Community Based Support for Early Years Children with Additional Needs":

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7881&Ver=4>

Report to the Cabinet on 17 June 2025 "Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) And Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028":

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7877>

Notice of Motion: SEND nurseries, County Council on 18 February 2026:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=7862&Ver=4>

Report to the County Council on 18 May 2022 "Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026":

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6482>

Solving the SEND crisis: report calls for culture shift and funding to make mainstream education genuinely inclusive:

<https://committees.parliament.uk/committee/203/education-committee/news/209313/solving-the-send-crisis-report-calls-for-culture-shift-and-funding-to-make-mainstream-education-genuinely-inclusive/>

Simmons, B. (2023) 'Mainstream placements for children with PMLD: the perspective of teaching staff and parents', PMLD Link, 35.2 (105), pp. 15-17:

<https://researchspace.bathspa.ac.uk/15660/1/15660.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

55. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Equality Implications

56. The proposals will address the current inequity of provision and improve access to fully funded early years provision for children with additional needs and protected characteristics.

57. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the proposals and consultation approach which can be found at Appendix A. It concluded that the proposals should have an overall positive impact for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. The EIA will be revised following the consultation and submitted to the Cabinet.

Human Rights Implications

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

Partnership Implications

59. The largest partner to be impacted by this proposal is Early Years Providers. The impact and mitigations that are proposed are detailed within this report.

Appendices

Equality Impact Assessment

Officer(s) to Contact

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Renata Chantrill, Head of Service, Education Sufficiency

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Equality Impact Assessment Form

1- Policy details	
Name of policy	Expanding Community Based Support for Early Years Children with Additional Needs
Department and service	Children and Family Services, Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service
Who has been involved in completing the Equality Impact Assessment?	Olivia Dale, Head of Service Education Strategy and Transformation
Contact numbers	01163050287
Date of completion	10 th October 2025

2- Objectives and background of policy or practice change	
<p>Use this section to describe the policy or practice change What is the purpose, expected outcomes and rationale? Include the background information and context</p>	
What is the proposal?	<p>The proposal, subject to Cabinets approval to consult, is providing increased levels of inclusion support and funding for Early Years children with SEND so that they can access mainstream provisions across the county. This would remove the reliance on accessing one of the four specialist nurseries across the county, which in turn are disadvantaging children outside of these districts. A move to this model, would lead to specialist nurseries no longer being required, and additional funding would be made available for children in mainstream nurseries by creating an additional inclusion funding band at £10 per hour. This would increase equity of provision regardless of need and/or where the child lives.</p>
What change and impact is intended by the proposal?	

What is the rationale for this proposal?

As a Local Authority, we are relatively unique in still having specialist nurseries, as many local authorities within our region and further do not have access to specialist provisions for non-statutory school age children. This is evidenced by children accessing Leicestershire’s specialist nurseries from other neighbouring authorities.

Leicestershire currently has 4 specialist nurseries, 1 maintained nursery across two sites and 2 specialist provisions within existing private day nurseries. Specialist nurseries are not evenly spread geographically and there are insufficient places available to meet the needs of all children. A high proportion of specialist nursery children are not from local communities, which not only has travel cost implications, but it also makes it difficult to make ties within their local communities and as such children and families are not embedding a sense of belonging and all the enrichment we know comes from this.

There are also concerns that the children accessing the specialist nurseries are not offered their full funded entitlement (12 hours over 2 days as compared to 30 hours in mainstream provision) and not offered year-round provision options, that working parents of children attending mainstream provisions are often offered. The limited availability and flexibility of specialist provisions creates a lack of equity in accessing FEEE to suit parental need, compared to mainstream provisions.

Currently and historically, once a child has secured a specialist nursery place it creates an expectation that future specialist educational provision is always required, regardless of whether issues such as developmental delay can be addressed without the need for escalation to statutory services. This has significant cost implications on the High Needs Budget.

3- Evidence gathered on equality implications - Data and engagement

What evidence about potential equality impacts is already available?

This could come from research, service analysis, questionnaires, and engagement with protected characteristics groups

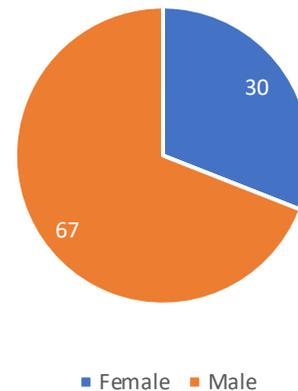
What equalities information or data has been gathered so far?

What does it show?

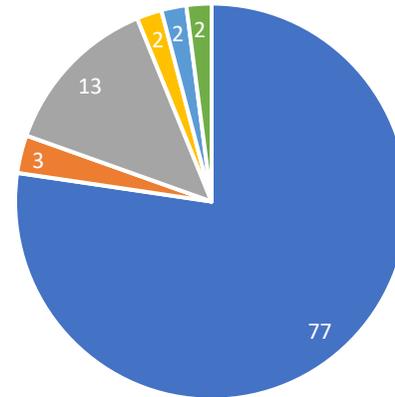
The following data is for the children accessing the Specialist Nurseries in July 2025. This data is not static data, however cohorts will always be 2-5 year old children with Special Educational Needs.

Setting	FTE places	Children accessing				
		2yr	3ry	4yr	5yr	Total
Menphys, Wigston	21	6	19	15 (-2 school age)	6	46
Menphys, Sketchley	24	4	24	21 (-1 school age)	3	52
Beacon	6	0	6	7	0	13
Oasis	8	0	8	7 (-1 school age)	0	15

% Gender Split of Current Cohort at Specialist Nurseries



% Ethnicity of Current Cohort at Specialsit Nurseries



- White
- Black, Black British, Caribbean or African
- Asian or Asian British
- Mixed or multiple ethnic groups
- Other ethnic group
- Refused

What engagement has been undertaken so far?

No engagement has been undertaken due to the nature of the proposal.

What does it show?

4- Benefits, concerns and mitigating action

Please specify if any individuals or community groups who identify with any of the '[protected characteristics](#)' may **potentially** be affected by the policy and describe any benefits and concerns including any barriers. Use this section to demonstrate how risks would be mitigated for each affected group. If a group will not be affected by the proposal please state so.

Group	What are the benefits of the proposal for those from the following groups?	What are the concerns identified and how will these affect those from the following groups?	How will the known concerns be mitigated?
Age	Children 2-5years old with SEND will access appropriate support within their communities, enabling a sense of belonging. They will be able to attend a nursery and access their full entitlement at a time to suit them and their families.	The proposal is ringfenced around Early Education and as such does not consider support for provisions for children aged over 5.	Children over 5 with SEND in Leicestershire can seek support where eligible from Children and Family Services.
Disability	Children 2-5years old with SEND will access appropriate support within their communities, enabling a sense of belonging. They will be able to attend a nursery and access their full entitlement at a time to suit them and their families.	The proposal focusses on support for children 2-5 years old with SEND. There is a risk through this proposal that parents do not feel confident to access mainstream provision or provider do not feel confident or financial able to support children with complex needs.	The Early Years SEND Service will be able to support providers through intensive packages with additionality of staff. There is also an increased funding offer to providers to assist with staff increases to meet the needs of all the children within Leicestershire. This should increase confidence within both providers and parents.
Race	A higher proportion of children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire	None identified.	Not required.

	are White British compared to other ethnicities (aligned with national trends) who are likely to experience a higher negative impact of the proposal as a result.		
Sex	A higher proportion of boys than girls are identified with SEND in Leicestershire (aligned with national trends) who are likely to experience a higher negative impact of the proposal as a result.	None identified.	Not required.
Gender Reassignment	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Marriage and Civil Partnership	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Sexual Orientation	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Pregnancy and Maternity	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Religion or Belief	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Armed Forces (including veterans)	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
People with lived care experience	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.
Other groups: e.g., rural isolation, deprivation, health	No direct impact identified	None identified.	Not required.

inequality, carers, asylum seeker and refugee communities, looked after children, deprived or disadvantaged communities			
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5- Action Plan			
Produce a framework to outline how identified risks/concerns identified in section 4 will be mitigated.			
What action is planned?	Who is responsible for the action?	Timescale	Expected outcome
Seek approval to consult on the proposal	Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service	Cabinet – 18/11/25	Ensuring priorities are agreed with elected members prior to wider consultation.
Public consultation on the proposal following approval to consult by Cabinet	Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service	December-February 2025	Feedback on proposal through consultation to ensure all parental and professional voice and opinion is sought and heard and feeds into decision post consultation, including how we support a vulnerable cohort.
Following consultation, if agreed, ensure there is an adequate transition period for children currently accessing specialist nurseries	Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service	March 2026-April 2027	Due to the timescales and current attendance at specialist nurseries, majority of children will move onto school provision in September 2026. This is a planned mitigation to reduce disruption for this cohort. As the children accessing specialist

			nurseries changes throughout the year, a full analysis of those that will be affected will need to be understood and carefully planned with families and providers.
Following consultation, if agreed, ensure there is clear communication with mainstream providers to deliver clarity on the additional inclusion funding band (increased) and Early Years SEND Service delivery model to provide intensive support in transitioning all children with complex needs into the mainstream settings.	Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service	March 2026-April 2027	Ensure training needs are understood and any gaps in skills filled by the LA service through training and direct support. Recruit additional Inclusion Practitioners to offer direct support to mainstream providers. Roll out an increased Inclusion Funding band to enable mainstream providers to support children with complex needs.

6- Approval Process	
Departmental Equalities Group	Agreed electronically by Chair of C&FS DEG on 27/12/25 noting the EIA indicates a positive overall impact.
Corporate Policy Team	The Equality Impact Assessment indicates an overall positive impact. It sets out the proposal and intention to consult clearly. There is good data about the current cohort of children accessing the specialist provision. It could say more about how the consultation will take place,

	<p>particularly engaging with parents. Could also note that the normal process would be for the EIA to be considered by the Departmental Equalities Group. It is further recommended to continuously monitor throughout implementation. Any emerging impacts should be promptly identified and addressed as they arise.</p>
<p>Sign off by the Senior Responsible Officer for the Project.</p>	

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 MARCH 2026

BUILDING EDUCATION SERVICES TOGETHER: PROGRAMME PLAN

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF EDUCATION, INCLUSION AND
ADDITIONAL NEEDS

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of the Building Education Services Together (BEST) programme plan and provide information relating to the development of a Belonging in Education Strategy.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The programme outlined within the report will adhere to corporate policies and plans.
3. 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).
4. 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).
5. 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.

Background

6. In March 2022, the Government outlined its ambitions for changes to the SEND system and opened a period of consultation on the proposals which the Council 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 Alternative Provision 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.

7. Local Authorities are due to be consulted on revised Education/SEND Reforms from the Department for Education, that may lead to changes in the statutory duties for Local Authorities. The Department understands the focus of the reforms will be on 'mainstream inclusion', which have been subsequently embedded within the programme plan.
8. The Upcoming SEND Reforms will focus on five key areas:
 - Early: Children should receive the support they need as soon as possible. Intervening upstream, including earlier in children's lives when this can have most impact, will start to break the cycle of needs going unmet and getting worse.
 - Local: Children and young people with SEND should be able to learn at a school or college close to their home, alongside their peers, rather than travelling long distances from their family and community. Special schools should continue to play a vital role supporting those with the most complex needs.
 - Fair: Every school education setting should be resourced and able to meet common and predictable needs, including as they change over time, without parents having to fight to get support for their children. Where specialist provision is needed for children and young people in mainstream, special or alternative provision, the Service will ensure it is there, with clear legal requirements and safeguards for children and parents.
 - Effective: Reforms should be grounded in evidence, ensuring all education settings know where to go to find effective practice that has excellent long-term outcomes for children and young people.
 - Shared: Education, health and care services should work in partnership with local government, families, teachers, experts and representative bodies to deliver better experiences and outcomes for all children and young people.
9. Challenges presented within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2026/27-2029/30 report in relation to increasing demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) and subsequent decisions on placements that that child or young person attends, including high-cost placements, was presented to the Committee on 20 January 2026. The priorities identified within the BEST programme plan is as a result of the challenges presented within the MTFS report to support financial mitigations and sustainability.
10. In 2025, the Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs services within Children and Families Department, launched a refreshed brand for all of the services. The new identity of BEST unifies services under one recognisable look, making it easier for families and partners to connect with those services.

11. The BEST programme aims to support the 2026–2030 departmental plan, helping to make Leicestershire a place where every child is safe, feels they belong, builds strong foundations, and can enjoy and achieve.
12. The Department is currently developing a new Belonging in Education strategy for Leicestershire, in order to support all Children and Young People to have a sense of belonging in their school and provision environment as well as in their community. This is due to go live in April 2026. The Strategy aims for partners to work together in order to ensure a commitment to belonging, where all Children and Young People feel a sense of belonging in Education, so they can live their best lives and be the authors of their own life stories. The Strategy will serve as the Department's overarching strategic framework for education, under which will be all subsequent development and improvement initiatives.
13. In 2021, the Department embarked on a programme plan previously titled 'Transforming SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion in Leicestershire'. 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. Using the evidence and data from the diagnostic, 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.
14. Reports relating to a summary of the work and impact of this programme were presented to the Committee regularly between 2022 and 2025, including achieving its annual financial targets. To ensure continued progress and enhancement, the implementation of a revised programme is required to initiate the next phase of service development, quality assurance, and mitigation strategies.
15. A unified BEST programme plan will offer clear visibility into priorities, implementation, and cost savings. The Plan also incorporates governance measures to ensure that risks, issues, and progress are effectively monitored and progressed. The existing governance structures from the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire programme will remain for the revised programme.
16. The Programme aims to strengthen inclusive practice by improving service performance and ensuring a sense of belonging in all educational settings. It also focuses on early support for children and young people with Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs to prevent escalation, improve outcomes and seek to enhance the financial sustainability of the High Needs Block by achieving MTFs savings and reducing long-term costs.
17. To achieve its objectives, the Programme will introduce and implement new initiatives within mainstream schools to provide enhanced early support, particularly for students with SEMH needs and Communication and Interaction needs, and to

increase the effectiveness and consistency of internal services. This will involve establishing high standards and ensuring alignment across processes, decision-making, and support pathways. Additionally, the Programme is committed to delivering sustainable, system-wide improvements by capitalising on opportunities identified in previous programmes and by aligning with national reforms targeting inclusive education, as detailed above. The new initiatives that we are proposing as part of this, have been designed following feedback from school leaders and fed back to schools as part of informal consultation.

18. For long-term financial viability, six BEST strategic priorities have been identified as key drivers for change. The six strategic priorities project a savings target of £48m over the next four years, with a stretched target of £66m, based on further mitigations aligned to the placement mix of children and young people. Calculated savings range from £15m to be achieved by March 2027, rising to a stretched target of £66m by March 2030. Details regarding the £66 million mitigations are outlined below against the cumulative High Needs Funding gap.

High Needs Financial Forecast - January 2026				
	2026/27 £,000	2027/28 £,000	2028/29 £,000	2029/30 £,000
Annual Funding Gap Pre Mitigations	87,880	111,799	141,251	174,182
Total Planned Mitigations	-15,363	-33,403	-49,634	-66,146
Annual Revenue Funding Gap Post Mitigations	72,517	78,396	91,617	108,036
2019/20 Deficit Brought Forward	7,062			
2020/21 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward	10,423			
2021/22 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward	11,365			
2022/23 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward	6,683			
2023/24 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward	5,650			
2024/25 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward	23,215			
2025/26 High Needs Deficit Brought Forward forecast	47,482			
Cumulative High Needs Funding Gap	184,397	262,793	354,410	462,446

19. This Programme is designed to improve financial forecasts while maintaining consistently high performance across all services within the Education, Inclusion, and Additional Needs directorate. It seeks to realign resources in support of early intervention wherever feasible, in alignment with the National Government's priority of Mainstream Inclusion. The initiatives will systematically measure the impact of designated workstreams whilst ensuring that sustainability is integrated throughout design and implementation stages, including embedding robust financial mitigations

Summary of Six Strategic Priorities

20. As part of the programme plan, the Department is establishing six initial priorities that are aligned with the aims and objectives outlined above. These priorities will continue to evolve as the programme develops, ensuring they effectively support early intervention, uphold quality of service delivery, and contribute to financial mitigation efforts. The priority areas are outlined below:

- **Enhanced Graduated Offer with Outreach Support (Early Intervention):** This focuses on strengthening SEMH provision within mainstream schools through a

graduated response supported by outreach services. The intention is to promote school retention, improve attendance and behaviour, and cultivate a sense of belonging, thereby reducing escalation to statutory EHCPs.

- **Ceasing EHCPs Where Provision Ceased:** The introduction of a systematic review process designed to identify and cease EHCPs for children no longer accessing education, ensuring that resources are allocated efficiently.
- **Expansion of Specialist Provision and Resource Bases:** This involves utilising data to assess needs and planning for additional special school places and enhanced resource bases, aiming to decrease reliance on high-cost Independent Specialist Provision and sustain local placement options where feasible.
- **Review of the Early Years SEND Support Offer:** A further priority involves analysing national developments in the childcare market and determining an appropriate local response. This will include evaluating optimal methods to support the increasing number of Early Years children accessing provision, as well as those known to the Early Years Service, as part of Leicestershire's Early Years Service Review and Commissioned Early Years Provisions.
- **Reviewing the Educated Other Than at School (EOTAS) Policy,** ensuring implementation of the policy is consistent in every current and new EOTAS Package: This is to ensure that EOTAS packages align with educational outcomes and exploring the potential to bring delivery in-house where possible, with the goal of improving outcomes, quality, safeguarding, and cost efficiency.
- **Advancing Smarter Commissioning, Procurement, and Demand Management:** This includes collaborating with Leicestershire mainstream schools to reduce direct transitions to Independent Specialist Provisions and conducting regular reviews to ensure placements remain suitable and cost-effective.

Proposal

21. Details for each workstream will be explored as part of the Programme development and in line with national announcements. From initial programme planning, there are 24 workstreams which are being explored, feeding into the delivery of the six priorities detailed above. A considerable amount of the workstreams are ready to report on. However, further development is needed for some of the workstreams to ensure adequate reporting is in place. These will likely take up to six months to be in a position to start reporting on in the second quarter of 2026/27 financial year.

Resource Implications

22. Resource implications will be developed as part of the ongoing development of the Programme. Information will be included in reports which will be presented to the Committee as the programme develops.

Conclusions

23. It is the considered view of Children and Family Services that the BEST programme, aligning to the six priorities detailed in this report, will embed quality assurance of the

service areas within the directorate, improving outcomes for Children and Young People, whilst also providing the £66m mitigations against the combined High Needs Block deficit.

Background papers

24. Medium Term Financial Planning, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 20 January 2026:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=8410&Ver=4>
25. 'Transforming SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) and Inclusion in Leicestershire' Programme, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2 September 2025:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7892&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. None

Equality Implications

27. The Council will develop this as part of the ongoing Programme development and will be included in future iterations presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, the programme actively seeks to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for all.

Human Rights Implications

28. Human rights implications will be considered as part of the ongoing Programme development. This will be included in future iterations presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 MARCH 2026

OAKFIELD SHORT STAY SCHOOL

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 changes to the Oakfield Short Stay School, and how the Council will meet its statutory duties to ensure that there are sufficient high-quality places in Leicestershire for excluded pupils or pupils who are at risk of exclusion from mainstream education.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. Local authorities have a statutory duty under section 19 of the Education Act 1996. S.19(1), states that local authorities must arrange suitable and (normally) full-time education for children of compulsory school age who, because of exclusion, illness or other reasons, would not receive suitable education without such provision being arranged. This duty is referred to as 'the S.19 duty'
3. Placement Planning: Local authorities have a duty to ensure there are sufficient school places for all children, including those in need of alternative provision. If the local authority identifies a shortage of alternative provision places for children, resulting in a significant number having to travel considerable distances to a suitable placement or being placed in inappropriate provision, local authorities should consider creating or expanding provision.
4. Local Policy Statement: Local authorities should have processes or policies in place which support a child in getting the right and appropriate type of provision and a good education. Local authorities should also have processes and policies in place on how they support children and young people under and over compulsory school age to access appropriate education.
5. Local authorities should have robust criteria, shared and agreed with all local schools, on how and why they would place children in alternative provision. Strategies should clearly set out the roles and responsibilities of each partner involved in the placement to ensure there is rigorous oversight and a continuum of support surrounding every child placed in alternative provision.

6. Alternative provision and the framework surrounding it should offer good quality education equivalent to that provided in mainstream (or special) schools. The provision must be suitable to the child's age, ability and aptitude, and any Special Educational Needs they have. Provision should also support the child to overcome any individual barriers to attainment and achievement, giving equal consideration to their pastoral needs, and enabling them to thrive and prosper in the education system. Provision should address a child's physical or mental health needs as well as personal, social and emotional needs, alongside their educational needs. For example, ensuring that the child feels like they belong to their home school community, and are able to stay in contact with classmates, and where reasonably practicable have access to the same opportunities enjoyed by their peers. The education offered by alternative provision settings should be of a good quality, delivered by high quality qualified staff who have undertaken suitable training, and have relevant experience and safeguarding checks.
7. Oakfield Short Stay School's satellite site locations are aligned to the ambitions set out in the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26 by wanting 'children to have access to first-class local childcare and schools' and the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26 through both the 'best start in life' agenda and the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
8. Oakfield Short Stay School will also ensure that the Council is able to deliver the mainstream inclusion aspirations of the Government's imminent Schools White Paper.
9. The Secondary Education Inclusion Partnerships ceased operation on 31 July 2025, after Headteachers gave notice in December 2024 to Leicestershire County Council. In March 2025, the Cabinet approved the commencement of a consultation on an age range change for Oakfield School. The Cabinet also agreed to give delegated authority to the Director of Children and Family Services to approve the age range change for Oakfield School following the consultation subject to no significant issues/concerns having arisen. The change was implemented and extended the age range of the Oakfield Primary Short Stay School (the Leicestershire Pupil Referral Unit - PRU) to also provide education for Secondary aged pupils. The Primary phase of Oakfield Short Stay School already operated over two provisions in the County, providing a five-day provision for excluded pupils alongside an outreach model for pupils at risk of exclusion.

Background

10. During the transfer process referred to above, the council conducted a review of the buildings that the Secondary provisions operated out of, and due to the recent changes in Alternative Provision guidance and the changing educational landscape, it was recognised that the sites would not meet the growing and changing demands that would be required to meet the needs of Leicestershire pupils. In August 2025

temporary arrangements were put in place to replace these sites. Additionally, Oakfield were served notice on one other site in December 2025. All these provisions have consequently been rehoused in temporary accommodation. The Secondary Oakfield estate is currently being reviewed to ensure children have access to high quality buildings that serve the needs of pupils now and into the future.

11. During recent years, an increasing number of children and young people in Leicestershire with SEND have been supported by Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), with significant numbers requiring a special school place or enhanced resource bases/Special Education Units. This reflects the national picture and is reflected in the changes that the DfE and wider government are making, in relation to policy and the upcoming Schools White paper. Place sufficiency, locally and nationally has struggled to keep up with demand. 23.41% of pupils that attend Oakfield Short Stay School have an EHCP with Special School named. 48.8% of pupils who attend Oakfield Short Stay School have Special Educational Needs.
12. Under the previous Secondary Partnerships model, pupils at risk of exclusion, or pupils who had been excluded, attended a mix of provisions across the school week. Due to updated statutory guidance, this model was no longer fit for purpose and consequently a new way of supporting Secondary pupils across Leicestershire was developed.
13. Across all Secondary sites the Council has reviewed staffing, capital and education resources required to deliver a high-quality education to ensure that the provisions are able to meet the changing requirements as set out in the Ofsted Framework, Alternative Provision Frameworks and Keeping Children Safe in Education Framework.
14. Previously, each of the distinct (five) partnerships operated independently of each other, with different Academy Trust schools acting as the lead and employer for the single secondary partnership cluster. This meant there were no common and agreed practices across the County and pupils had different experiences depending on their postcode.

The Oakfield School Offer

15. The Council aims to provide high quality school places for children and young people within their communities, close to where they live, and to support re-integration back into mainstream education.
16. The Oakfield Short Stay School will ensure Leicestershire meets its statutory duties by delivering the right number of high-quality school places within Oakfield Short Stay School, in the right place, at the right time, delivering interventions that support children to remain in education or return to a school in their local area. Developments are informed by robust data analysis incorporating demographic trends and predicted

growth, alongside impact measures that clearly set out, how each layer of the Graduated Offer of support enables children to remain in mainstream education.

17. The Oakfield Short Stay School has developed a graduated approach, that delivers preventative advice, outreach, two-day a week placement and a five-day provision for pupils who have been permanently excluded from mainstream education. This is a consistent offer across Leicestershire, ensuring equity for all pupils across Leicestershire, which is responsive to changing patterns of identified need.
18. Data systems have been developed that draw together data metrics for all pupils across Primary and Secondary phases across Leicestershire who are at risk of exclusion, or who have been excluded from mainstream education. This will inform actions, targeted schools-based work and build intelligence to support the delivery of education services.
19. A staff model has been developed, and a successful recruitment drive has been conducted that has established highly qualified and experienced workforce, to deliver a formal education that provides breadth and depth of curriculum and closes gaps in learning, supporting pupils to return to a permanent educational placement.

Consultation

20. Chief Executive Officers from Leicestershire Multi-Academy Trusts, Headteachers, Senior Leaders and Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCo) have attended several face-to-face sessions as part of the development and consultation process. This sought to confirm that the Oakfield Graduated Offer reflected local needs and enabled stakeholder feedback to be considered before adoption. These took place between the dates of 2 June and 14 November 2025.
21. The strategy was developed and presented in paper form and through presentation to colleagues across the Council, Senior Management Team, Directors Management Team and stakeholders in mainstream education settings.

Resource Implications

22. The core funding for the school element of Oakfield Short Stay School is £5,482,674 each year, combined with the Average Weighted Pupil Unit costs for each pupil and any additional funding that the pupil receives because they are in receipt of either an Education Health Care Plan or Special Educational Needs Inclusion Fund. The additional cost of the outreach and preventative offer to schools has been met through the additional money allocated through the Alternative Provision Specialist Taskforce (APST) £574,396 and the SEN Investment Fund, £1,640,000.
23. The sites within which the Secondary provisions operate within are no longer fit for purpose. Changing demands on the school and the outreach service continue to grow because of new statutory guidance, such as the recent changes to the Ofsted framework brought in in November 2025, the updated Alternative Provision Statutory

guidance and the ongoing changes being announced, linked to the upcoming White Paper such as the changes to Suspensions and Exclusions announced on 29 January 2026. Consequently, the onward provision will require investment from the capital programme to deliver the property resources needed to deliver the school places in the locality areas around Leicestershire. Utilising property within the Council's estate will support cash flow whilst minimising additional pressure on available capital.

24. Funding for the outreach and preventative work, delivered by Oakfield Short Stay School has been met in part by the SEN Investment Fund. Impact measures have been agreed with Headteacher representatives in relation to the Oakfield outreach offer. Future financial contributions will be developed through a per pupil contribution model, which is being developed in conjunction with Primary and Secondary Headteacher representatives. The ongoing need for the Oakfield Graduated Offer is reflected in the current and growing demand from schools. In January 2026, Oakfield Short Stay School had 252 pupils on roll. 19.8% of pupils are single registration, compared to 55.9% who are dual registered with another school. An additional 22.2% of pupils are supported in their schools as part of the outreach and preventative work with schools. Data for Leicestershire for this academic year indicates that there have been 2536 less suspensions in the period from August 2025 to January 2026 when compared to the same data point from August 2024 to January 2025. Permanent exclusions in the period from August 2025 to January 2026 are 3 fewer than at the same data point from August 2024 to January 2025. The greatest demand for the support from Oakfield Short Stay School for pupils, is in Year 11, whereby 33.7% of the cohort is in this year group, compared to 16.2% in Year 10, 13.4% in Year 9 and 8.7% in Year 8. Oakfield will monitor the impact on the cohort statistics, to support targeted work at an early entry point, to prevent the breakdown of education placements for children.

Background papers

25. Report to the Cabinet on the 18 March 2025 'Proposed Expansion of Age Range Destination for Oakfield Short Stay School'
https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s189169/oakfield_cabinet_report_27_Feb.pdf

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

26. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Equality Implications

27. The work of Oakfield Short Stay School actively seeks to reduce inequality and improve outcomes for pupils.

Human Rights Implications

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

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

29. Health implications: The Strategy supports access to education, which is a key determinant of health and wellbeing.
30. Environmental implications: The Strategy considers the location of new sites and travel arrangements to minimise environmental impact.
31. Partnership working: The Strategy has been developed in partnership with schools, academies, and other stakeholders.
32. Risk assessment: Risks associated with school place planning, funding, and delivery are identified and mitigated within the Strategy.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 MARCH 2026

QUARTER 3 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 October to December 2025 (Quarter 3).

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 3.
4. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.
5. From 5 measures reported that have a national benchmark, 2 are in the top quartile, 2 are in the second quartile, and 1 is in the bottom quartile.

Tableau Dashboard Usage

6. Across the Children and Family Services department in Quarter 3 2025/26 there were 547 active Tableau Server users, a decrease from Quarter 2 (609). Across the department there were 40,601 views, down from 42,314 views in the previous quarter, at a rate of 74 views per user, up from the previous quarter (70).
7. Across the two main service areas, in Quarter 2 2025/26 there were 284 users and 21,453 views in Targeted Early Help and Social Care at a rate of 76 views

per user. In Education, Inclusion and Additional needs there were 158 users and 7,783 views at a rate of 49 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 2024/25.
9. The percentage of children becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time in the year to date increased to 22.6% at the end of Quarter 3 compared to 20.2% at the end of Quarter 2. In the most recent quarter 70 children began a second or subsequent child protection plan. Leicestershire continues to be placed in the second quartile of local authorities compared to most recent national results published for 2024/25. 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 23.2% at the end of Quarter 3 which is a small increase compared to 23.0% at the end of the previous quarter; 489 children were 're-referred' within Quarter 3. Leicestershire is now placed in the fourth quartile of local authorities. Work continues to further enhance the Front Door process to reduce repeat referrals and streamline work across Children's Social Care and Targeted Early help. Work with partner agencies is advancing to design a more integrated front door which aims to further strengthen multiagency information sharing and link more closely with community resources as part of the Family First reform programme.
11. The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days to the end of Quarter 3 was 88.1%, similar performance compared to the end Quarter 2 (87.9%). Within Quarter 3, 1,714 assessments were completed, with 1,517 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 96.2% at the end of Quarter 3 (354 out of 368 young people), similar to the end of the previous Quarter (96.3%). Leicestershire continues to be in the top quartile of local authorities using available comparisons with consistently strong performance embedded.
13. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Education, Employment or Training improved to 63.3% at the end of Quarter 3 (233 out of 368 young people), similar to the end of the previous Quarter (63.6%). Leicestershire continues to be placed 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 3 who had a dental check in the preceding 12 months was 69.8% (542 children), a decrease from 71.7% reported for the previous quarter. Work with health partners continues with oversight of the Corporate parenting board to bring improvements.
15. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 2 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months was 82.9% (644 children). This is a small increase from 81.1% reported for the previous quarter.

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

16. The Children and Families Services Departmental Plan states the intention to ensure that the needs of young people are identified as early as possible so that timely and appropriate support is provided in the right setting, therefore reducing the risk of needs escalating at the same time as ensuring children and young people's best outcomes are achieved.

People are safe in their daily lives

17. Local Youth Justice statistics are regularly reported to the Youth and Justice Partnership Board. The latest report was presented at the December 2025 board and the figures presented were included in the Q2 2025/26 Performance Report.

Help every child to get the best possible start in life

Early years

18. The latest figures on Free Early Years Entitlement (FEEE, Summer term 2025) were presented in the Q2 2025/26 Performance Report. Updated figures will be available later in the year.

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

19. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 1,320 at the end of Q3 2025/26. This is an increase of 142 students (12%) compared to the end of Q3 2024/25 (1,178 students).
20. Between August 2025 and December 2025 there have been 276 young people join the EHE cohort, 131 of these young people (47%) were aged between 12 and 15 years of age. There have also been 138 that left the EHE cohort, with 111 (80%) of these young people returning to school or an alternative provision. The average length of EHE for these young people returning to school or an alternative provision was 389 days, with the median length 231 days.
21. Trends show an increase since 2023/2024 in the number of young people with who have attendance difficulties due to mental health and social anxiety, changing cultural lifestyle choices and for some, a feeling that a traditional school does not meet their child's needs. This, coupled with the number of families and young people electing to access their education outside of a traditional school

setting due to their individual needs being met in a more bespoke manner, points to an increasing number of families choosing a more flexible approach to learning. This fits with the trends being seen nationally with increasing EHE figures within most Local Authorities.

22. The percentage of young people (16-17) in Leicestershire not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at the end of Q3 2025/26 was 1.2%. This rate was 0.4 points higher than at the end of Q2 2025/26 but remains below the target of less than 2.1%.

Conclusion

23. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of Quarter 3 2025/26, covering the period October to December 2025.
24. 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

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

None.

Appendix

Children and Family Services Department Performance Dashboard Quarter 3, 2025/26

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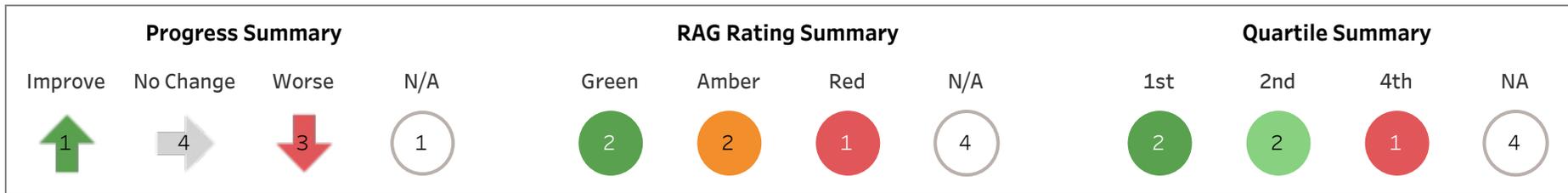
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CFS Overview & Scrutiny Dashboard Q2 2025/26



Strategic Plan Outcome

All

Area

All

Search Indicator

All

Area	Indicator	Latest Data	Period	Previous Data	Perform. DOT	Target	RAG	Quartiles
Education	Children Electively Educated at Home	1320	Q3 2025/26	1178		NA		NA
	NEET young people aged 16-17	1.2%	Q3 2025/26	0.8%		<2.1%		NA
Social Care	Assessments completed within 45 days	88.1%	Q3 2025/26	87.9%		>90.3%		2nd
	Care leavers EET	63.3%	Q3 2025/26	63.6%		>54.0%		1st
	Care leavers in suitable accommodation	96.2%	Q3 2025/26	96.3%		>92.0%		1st
	Children becoming subject to a CPP for second or subsequent time	22.6%	Q3 2025/26	20.2%		<20.8%		2nd
	Children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	69.8%	Q3 2025/26	71.7%		NA		NA
	Children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (..	82.9%	Q3 2025/26	81.1%		NA		NA

Re-referrals to CSC within 12 mths

23.2%

Q3 2025/26

23.0%



<18.7%



4th

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