



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

Date/Time: **Tuesday, 1 September 2026 at 2.00 pm**

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

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

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

Membership

Mr. M. Bools CC (Chairman)

Mr. J. Boam CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC	Canon. C. Shoyer
Dr. D. North 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 2 June 2026.	(Pages 5 - 16)
2. Question Time.	
3. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 32 (1).	

Democratic Services ◦ Department of Public Health, Communities, Law and Governance

Leicestershire County Council ◦ County Hall

Glenfield ◦ Leicestershire ◦ LE3 8RA ◦ Tel: 0116 232 3232 ◦ Email: democracy@leics.gov.uk



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. Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026/29 Progress Update. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 17 - 24)
9. Leicestershire Music Overview Report. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 25 - 30)
10. Quarter 1 2026/27 Performance Report. Director of Children and Family Services and Director of Corporate Resources (Pages 31 - 42)
11. Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2025/26. Director of Children and Family Services and Director of Corporate Resources (Pages 43 - 90)
12. Draft Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2025/26. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 91 - 174)
13. Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2025/2026. Director of Children and Family Services (Pages 175 - 244)
14. Date of future meetings.

The next meeting of the Committee is scheduled to take place on 3 November 2026 at 14:00.

Meetings of the Committee in 2027 are scheduled to take place at 14:00 on the following days:

19 January
2 March
8 June

7 September
9 November

15. 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, 2 June 2026.

PRESENT

Mr M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Boam CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC
Dr. D. North CC

Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. B. Piper CC
Mr J. Poland CC
Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mrs D. Taylor CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that Mr Mark Bools CC has been appointed Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Rule 6(a) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4E of the County Council's Constitution).

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman.

It was moved by Mrs K. Knight CC and seconded by Mr Kim Robinson CC:

"That Mr Bill Piper CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council."

It was moved by Mr Poland CC and seconded by Mrs Seaton CC:

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

The Chief Executive advised that there had been an equality of votes (five votes for Mr Piper, five votes from Mrs Taylor and two abstentions). At the request of the Chairman a second ballot was held.

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

Six votes for Mrs Taylor CC, the Chairman having used his casting vote, five votes for Mr Piper CC, and two abstentions. The motion "That Mrs Deborah Taylor CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council" was carried.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2026 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 32.

5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 32(1).

The Chief Executive reported that the following question had been received under Standing Order 32(1) from Mr Innes CC:

“It has come to my attention that a number of homes across the County have had their use changed from a dwelling to other uses (for example a children’s home) through a certificate of lawfulness, issued by borough councils. Specifically, there is a home that has been given this certificate in Melton Mowbray, where the location is unsuitable for a number of reasons. Local residents have no say in the placing of these homes, and this is causing stress and anxiety for these residents.

Is it possible for the County Council (LCC) to put in place a policy that only residential care homes, that have gone through full planning consent, can be considered for placing children and adults that are ultimately under the care of LCC?”

Reply by the Chairman:

“Planning applications for children’s homes are dealt with by the relevant Local Planning Authority (LPA) The LPA for the area in question is Melton Borough Council. You refer to a certificate of lawfulness. These are in fact called a Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) These are administered by the relevant LPA and are a legal and binding confirmation that a change is already lawful and does not need planning permission. They are issued as confirmation that planning permission is not necessary, not as an alternative to planning permission. Leicestershire County Council has no control over this process. Providers of children’s homes services are regulated by law by Ofsted, again something the Council has no control over.

Provided LDC’s are obtained by providers then the use of the property by the provider as a children’s home is entirely lawful. Therefore, it is not possible for the council to adopt a blanket policy of only placing children in homes where the provider has obtained planning permission. It would have the effect of penalising and discriminating against providers who have used a lawful and correct process. It would very likely be considered by the courts as being an irrational and unreasonable decision by a public body.”

Supplementary question

Mr Inness asked on the response to the question if the Council took into consideration the views of local people living within the area where homes such as these were put in place because of the potential impact on the residential area. Mr Innes cited an example, of a home in Melton where additional traffic flow into a small cul-de-sac where a home had been located had created significant issues.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Interim Director of Children and Family Services responded and advised that the County Council was not approached and did not have any powers to comment on or contribute to decisions made by local planning authorities regarding planning applications of this nature. Such decision were taken by district councils in accordance with planning legislation.

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest.

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

No declarations were made.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 33.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 33.

10. Leicestershire School Term Dates Autumn 2027 to Summer 2032

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its views on proposed Leicestershire school term and holiday dates covering the period from autumn 2027 to summer 2032 for schools maintained by the local authority. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A member queried the way in which the consultation options had been presented, noting that one option was described as maintaining the existing pattern, but would nevertheless alter the timing of the October half term to align more closely with other areas. It was explained that the two options retained the valued July fortnight which it was recognised as being important to parents. Both options were therefore aligned in this regard with current holiday patterns. However, residents' views were also being sought on the opportunity to have a two-week October half term which is where dates differed. Officers emphasised that the consultation was intended to gather views on the relative importance of both options before any recommendation would be made.
- (ii) Members welcomed the fact that both options retained the Leicestershire fortnight, recognising the benefit this provided for families in relation to holiday costs and noting that it provided certainty for parents and carers.
- (iii) Members discussed the importance of alignment with Leicester City Council, particularly for families with children attending schools in both the city and county. It

was noted that the County Council had attempted to work with the City Council and remained keen to align term dates where possible, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation. However, each authority would ultimately make its own decision. It was noted that at the time the County Council's consultation had been prepared, the City Council's position had not been sufficiently clear to include this within the consultation material.

- (iv) A Member asked whether the consultation should have been delayed so that information about Leicester City Council's proposals could have been included, as this could influence how residents responded. The Director advised that there had been considerable dialogue with the City Council and he did not consider the omission to be a flaw in the consultation. It was reported that over 5,000 responses had already been received. The Member suggested that the consultation should specifically capture how important alignment with Leicester City Council was to residents, so that this could be taken into account alongside the other consultation responses.
- (v) The Committee was advised that Leicester City Council's proposals differed from the County Council's options only by a small number of days in some years. For 2027/28, the City Council was proposing to finish a week later than the County Council, but by 2028/29 the difference between the patterns was expected to reduce to approximately two days. It was also noted that the County Council did not set school inset days, which were determined by headteachers and academy trusts, and that this provided a degree of local flexibility around the start and end of term dates.
- (vi) Members questioned what issue the second model allowing for a two-week October half term were intended to address, given that the existing pattern was understood and valued by many residents. The Director reported that educational considerations associated with the length of the autumn term, including the potential impact of staff and pupil illness was a factor. There was also evidence that some children regressed during the long summer term. Members noted that it was thought that an additional week in October could also provide families with an opportunity to further access holidays at a less expensive time of year.
- (vii) While the Leicestershire fortnight had been heard consistently as the most important factor for parents, there was also evidence of an appetite for a different pattern, including the two-week October half term. Members noted that responses to the consultation so far were broadly equally split between the two options.
- (viii) In relation to safeguarding, a member asked whether there were implications arising from the length of school holidays. It was explained that referrals tended to increase before the summer holidays as schools raised concerns ahead of the break, and that the Council also saw an increase during the summer period. This was considered to be linked to the length of the summer holiday rather than to the specific term date option under consideration.
- (ix) The Committee discussed whether schools could be encouraged to group inset days together to provide families with additional flexibility. The Director advised that schools had autonomy to determine inset days and that clustering them into week-long blocks could have a detrimental impact on the quality of education and on staff development, as intensive blocks of training were not always the most effective approach. It could also result in pupils having longer blocks away from school,

which could have a greater impact than individual inset days spread across the year.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made by the Committee on the proposed Leicestershire school term and holiday dates covering the period from autumn 2027 to summer 2032 for schools maintained by the local authority be taken into account as part of the consultation and presented to the Cabinet for consideration.

11. Elective Home Education in Leicestershire

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of elective home education in Leicestershire, the County Council's statutory duties in this area and how these were discharged by the Inclusion Service. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Members expressed concern about the reasons why some families chose to elect to educate their children at home, particularly where this was not a positive or freely chosen decision but a last resort following difficulties within mainstream education or where a child's needs had not been met.
- (ii) Members raised concerns about the breakdown of relationships between families and schools, which was identified as a key reason why some parents withdrew their children from school. It was suggested that more could be done to intervene earlier, before relationships reached crisis point. The Director advised that work was undertaken to support and repair relationships where possible, but that the issues were often complex and required work from both schools and families.
- (iii) Members noted that there was no statutory requirement for the Council to provide education to children who were electively home educated. The Inclusion Service undertook valuable work with families before a decision to home educate was made, but thereafter parents were signposted to other sources of support. Members queried whether more could be done to provide ongoing support once a child was being educated at home. The Director emphasised, however, that any further support offer would need to be considered in the context of the Council's statutory responsibilities and the limited resources it had available to go beyond that.
- (iv) Members queried how the Council monitored the standard of education being provided at home and whether parents were equipped to provide suitable education. It was noted that there was no requirement for children who were electively home educated to take formal examinations. The legal test was whether the education was suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs, and this could cover a wide range of educational experiences.
- (v) It was emphasised that the Council's role was to signpost families to resources and support, and to only intervene where there were concerns about the suitability of education or safeguarding.

- (vi) The Committee recognised that many families provided good quality education at home, and members asked how the Council could better learn from those positive examples and share effective practice, while continuing to support families where appropriate.
- (vii) Given the number of children being electively home educated had increased, additional capacity had been allocated to the Inclusion Service. However, the number of vulnerable children had also increased, and resources therefore had to be targeted and prioritised according to need. The Director indicated that they were not currently concerned about capacity but acknowledged that this would need to be monitored as numbers continued to rise.
- (viii) The Committee raised concerns about the current lack of data on outcomes for children who were electively home educated. Members noted that positive outcomes were not always captured, as families were not required to inform the Council if a child achieved qualifications such as GCSEs. Members commented that proposed Government plans for a register of children not in school would be important in improving data collection and enabling local authorities to identify concerns and take appropriate action.
- (ix) Members asked about the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) that had been home educated. It was noted that because families were not required to register all outcomes, robust data was not available. However, a recently recruited post-16 manager was looking at NEET young people and how they could be supported back into education or training, drawing on good practice from other areas.
- (x) A member raised a concern about fairness, noting that parents of children attending school could be fined for unauthorised absence, whereas children educated at home could have more flexibility and were not subject to the same monitoring, testing or attendance requirements.
- (xi) Members welcomed the proposal for the item to return to the Committee, noting the increasing interest in elective home education and the importance of improving the available data. It was suggested that the Council should seek to reduce any stigma which might prevent parents from sharing their reasons for choosing home education and should engage with families in order to learn from their experiences.
- (xii) Members suggested that possible ways of improving engagement with home educating families, could include use of the Council's website and the gathering email addresses so that officers could communicate directly with families and seek further information.
- (xiii) A member raised concerns that some home educated children might fall under the radar and referred to the role of commercial organisations and local charities that supported parents educating children at home. It was suggested that representatives from such organisations could be invited to speak to members, to provide a better understanding of why families used these services and what support was available.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated provided on elective home education in Leicestershire, the County Council's statutory duties in this area and how these were discharged by the Inclusion Service be noted;
- (b) That officers provide further information on the number of school attendance orders issued and, of those, how many resulted in children returning to school;
- (c) That the Director be requested to explore ways to engage with home educating families, local charities and relevant support organisations.

12. Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its view on the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which set out how the County Council would meet its statutory duties and responsibilities for children in care and care leavers until 2029. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A member asked for clarification on the changes to the strategy, noting that these appeared to be minor. Members were advised that the changes were primarily intended to ensure that the strategy remained up to date and reflected relevant new legislation and guidance.
- (ii) Nationally, care leavers were over-represented among young people who were not in education, employment or training. It was reported that the Council had a focused area of work through the Virtual School, the 16-plus service and apprenticeship routes to try and address.
- (iii) Members recognised that, because of the trauma experienced by some young people, those aged 16 to 18 might not always be ready to engage fully in education or training opportunities. The Committee therefore welcomed the fact that support for care leavers continued up to the age of 25, when some young people might be better placed to take up such opportunities. Members also noted the importance of ensuring that a range of pathways were available, including university, apprenticeships and vocational or trade-based routes, so that young people could pursue options best suited to their interests and abilities.
- (iv) In response to a question about digital poverty, members were advised that support was provided to ensure care leavers had access to appropriate equipment, including IT kit and phones, so that they were not disadvantaged. Personal advisers also supported young people with applications and practical tasks in a way that a parent or carer might otherwise do. Members noted that consideration was being given to establishing hubs in localities to provide accessible support for young people.
- (v) A Member queried what data was available regarding the number of care leavers that accessed university and apprenticeships and the number of those identified as having special educational needs and disabilities. The Director undertook to provide further data to Members after the meeting.

- (vi) Members welcomed the inclusion of the promise to children and young people and the evidence that the voice of young people had informed the strategy.
- (vii) A member asked about elected member representation on the Corporate Parenting Board and noted that members had not been asked to make nominations. It was explained that member champions had previously been established to support children in care and care leavers following a member review, but that the current position was being reviewed to determine whether that model remained appropriate. A Member commented that this work should be progressed urgently if the Council wished to strengthen its approach to corporate parenting.
- (viii) Members emphasised the importance of all political groups being able to feed into this work and being appropriately represented, given that corporate parenting was a responsibility for all members. It was suggested that an all member briefing should be provided to reemphasise to all members their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- (ix) A member suggested that, as the strategy had been contributed to by children and young people, consideration should be given to presenting it in a format that was accessible and engaging for them, including through an App or other alternative media. The Committee was advised that children in care had produced a video, which had been shown to children and young people, explaining corporate parenting.
- (x) Members queried the extent to which the Council could support looked after children and care leavers to access opportunities that families might otherwise provide, including activities linked to their interests, access to technology, holidays and work experience. It was recognised that there was a balance to be struck, as many families across the county also faced financial pressures. The Director advised that payments to children's homes included provision for activities, pocket money and holidays, and that this would be considered as part of the review to ensure that arrangements were working effectively.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which set out how the County Council would meet its statutory duties and responsibilities for children in care and care leavers until 2029 be noted;
- (b) That the Director be requested to provide further information on care leaver data, including figures relating to those that accessed university and apprenticeships, and those identified as having SEND;
- (c) That the Director be requested to consider elected member involvement in the Corporate Parenting Board and the member champion model and that an all member briefing be provided to reemphasise members corporate parenting responsibilities.

13. Schools White Paper and SEND Reform

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Government's Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving and the associated SEND Reform proposals. The report summarised the national policy direction, outlined the implications for the County Council and its partners and highlighted key risks and opportunities. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) It was noted that the proposals represented the most significant set of reforms since 2014 and that a key aim was to strengthen support for children and young people within mainstream education.
- (ii) Members emphasised the importance of translating national legislation and guidance into arrangements that would work effectively for Leicestershire children, young people and families.
- (iii) The Committee noted that there were currently over 9,000 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Leicestershire and that numbers had grown significantly in the last year. It was further noted that under the Government's current proposals existing Plans would not change. It was understood that EHCPs were likely to be reserved for children attending special schools or those with the most complex needs, while children in mainstream schools who did not meet that threshold might instead have an individual support plan put in place. Members were advised that the principal distinction appeared to be that EHCPs would be local authority-led and funded, whereas individual support plans would be school-led and school-funded.
- (iv) Members considered it important to reassure parents that children who currently had an Education, Health and Care Plan would retain it under the proposals as presently understood. Members also asked how the reforms would affect the Council's responsibilities, school funding arrangements and routes of appeal. Officers explained that the funding position was not yet clear. Current funding arrangements included school funding, the notional contribution and local authority top-up funding, but it appeared likely that more funding would be passported to schools in future. The mechanism for doing so, and the extent of any additional funding, remained uncertain.
- (v) In relation to appeals, the Committee was advised that the proposals did not appear to remove the ability for parents to challenge decisions relating to ECHPs. However, it appeared that tribunals might in future only be able to make recommendations rather than binding decisions. The position in relation to appeals or complaints about individual support plans was less clear, with early indications suggesting that these might be considered through the school complaints processes and escalation to Ofsted.
- (vi) Members raised concerns about the lack of fairness and consistency of funding, noting that similar levels of need could be funded differently depending on the school or area a child lived. Leicestershire remained one of the lowest funded county councils nationally for high needs funding per pupil, meaning that a child attending a school in Leicester City could attract more funding than a child attending a Leicestershire County Council school. The Director assured members that the Council continued to work through the F40 Group to campaign for fairer funding

arrangements.

- (vii) The forecasted Dedicated Schools Grant deficit had reduced from £117 million to £99 million, which was considered a positive local position. It was also noted that the Government's proposed arrangements included reimbursement of a proportion of the net deficit, although the precise detail of how much this would be was yet to be confirmed.
- (viii) The direction of travel within the reforms was generally considered to be right, particularly the focus on building capacity in mainstream schools, but there remained risks around timing, funding and implementation. The Director reported that work had been undertaken with schools and partners to identify gaps in confidence and capacity within mainstream provision and to develop a plan to address those gaps over time.
- (ix) Members asked about the potential cost of individual support plans compared with EHCPs, and whether reducing reliance on EHCPs would, in practice, improve outcomes for children. The Director advised that the cost of individual support plans was not yet known and would be a matter for schools. It was estimated that, based on current patterns, around 60% of EHCPs related to children in mainstream provision and around 40% to children in specialist provision, although the final criteria for individual support plans had not yet been confirmed.
- (x) It was noted that children with EHCPs in mainstream schools tended to achieve stronger academic outcomes, while those in special schools often achieved stronger social outcomes. Overall, outcomes for children with an EHCP in Leicestershire were considered to be good.
- (xi) Members expressed support for mainstream inclusion in principle but raised concerns about variations between schools and multi-academy trusts, including differences in access to educational psychologists and other specialist support. It was suggested that this could create a postcode lottery for parents.
- (xii) A Member commented that there needed to be clarity about how the success of mainstream inclusion would be measured, when concerns would trigger review, and how the Council would intervene if arrangements were not working effectively. The Director confirmed that the Council in its response to the Department for Education's consultation had emphasised the same concerns, the need for checks and balances and a role for the local authority where provision was not found to be effective.
- (xiii) Members noted the Experts at Hand model used a locality-based approach to bring together specialists that could provide support on education, health and social care matters. Schools had responded positively to the model, and work was underway to develop measurable key performance indicators.
- (xiv) A Member questioned whether there would be enough qualified staff to deliver the proposed changes across a wider range of mainstream schools. Leicestershire was considered an attractive area in which to work and did not generally experience the same recruitment difficulties as other areas. However, it had been acknowledged that workforce capacity could be an issue and it was therefore a key area being considered locally through partnership working.

- (xv) Members also raised concerns that schools were already under considerable pressure and that a greater emphasis on mainstream provision could place additional burdens on schools unless the necessary funding, support and specialist expertise were in place.
- (xvi) A member asked that future reports include a list of abbreviations, given the technical nature of the subject matter.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Government's Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving, and the associated SEND Reform proposals be noted.

14. Quarter 4 2025-26 Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Department's performance for the period January to March 2026 (Quarter 4). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) During the Ofsted inspection in December, inspectors had been positive about referrals and assessments and the identification of need. However, repeat referrals remained an area that was scrutinised closely as part of performance monitoring.
- (ii) It was noted that audits of repeat referrals did not indicate that these involved children and families being rereferred soon after their case had been closed. Some did return to the service after closure, but this could be appropriate where needs were periodic or circumstances changed. This was being closely monitored to understand and address the increase over this quarter.
- (iii) In relation to repeat child protection plans, members were advised that the key factors were often domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse. Officers reported that further training was being considered to support staff to take different approaches in these cases. Members also noted that events such as the World Cup could lead to increases in domestic abuse referrals, and that the front door needed to remain flexible in order to respond to changes in demand.
- (iv) It was noted that the Family First programme was designed to support continuity, with a worker remaining with a family throughout the process. Members suggested that, where a family returned to the service within a short period, consideration should be given to whether the referral could be directed to a social worker already familiar with the family's circumstances, rather than progressing through the service as an entirely new referral, where this was appropriate and safe to do so.
- (v) A member referred to permanent exclusions and noted that the figure was substantially higher than in 2018/19. The member asked why exclusions had increased and what impact the Covid-19 pandemic had had. The Director advised that the pattern reflected a system under pressure, with funding pressures and the impact of Covid-19 contributing to escalation. The Committee was advised that this was a national issue and that Leicestershire reflected wider national trends.

- (vi) Members were advised that one of the reasons for establishing the outreach service was to address the increase in exclusions. Early indications of impact were positive, but officers considered that the service should be allowed to operate for a full year before this was assessed and reported back to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2026 (Quarter 4) be noted.

15. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 1st September 2026 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.40 pm
02 June 2026

CHAIRMAN



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL PLAN
2026 – 2029 PROGRESS UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Committee with a progress update on the Leicestershire Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 - 29.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026 – 29 was presented to the Committee at the meeting on 20 January 2026. At that meeting, the Committee requested a progress report be presented after six months.
3. The Cabinet approved the draft Plan at its meeting on 3 February 2026.
4. The Plan for 2026-29 was developed in order to fulfil statutory duties and to provide a basis for the Children and Family Service's vision, planning, commissioning and delivery of services until 2026. The Plan and associated actions provide a vehicle for Children and Family Services to work together on shared priorities and to maximise resources and expertise.
5. The Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 – 29 is aligned to the County Council's Strategic Plan for 2022 - 26 and aims to set out how the Department will contribute to the delivery and achievement of the Council's strategic outcomes.
6. It also aligns to Leicestershire's relevant partnership plans including Leicestershire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Children and Families Partnership Plan.

Background

7. The Children and Family Services Department developed a new Departmental Plan for 2026 - 29, setting out a refreshed vision, priorities and ambitions for its services. The Plan provides the strategic framework for service delivery, setting out the department's ambitions and priorities to contribute towards improving outcomes for the children, young people and families of Leicestershire:

- a) Support children and young people to 'Build Strong Foundations':
 - Focus on development, readiness for learning and learning as a driver of wellbeing for all children and young people.
 - Work in partnership to offer support and opportunities to children in their own communities, to help them reach their full potential, and transition well into adulthood.
 - Work in partnership to identify those children and young people who would benefit from support and provide a shared response to them.
- b) Support children and young people to 'Be Safe and Belong':
 - Work with families to ensure risk is understood and reduced, and targeted support is provided at the right time, in the right place by the right service and agency.
 - Develop and use partnerships to prioritise safety for children and young people and to ensure it is understood that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
 - Create an understanding of belonging across partnerships so that children feel they matter and can maximise positive opportunities and links in their families, early learning and education settings and communities.
 - Empower families to build positive relationships and support systems to create safety for children to live within their family or family network.
- c) Support children and young people to 'Enjoy and Achieve':
 - Ensure children and young people have access within their communities to good quality early learning and education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
 - Develop a shared understanding of the impact of inequalities and trauma across partnerships, and a shared approach to supporting vulnerable children.

Monitoring and Reporting Progress

8. Progress against the Departmental Plan is monitored through established Children and Family Services governance arrangements. Oversight is provided by the Departmental Management Team and senior management teams, with regular review of delivery against agreed priorities, actions and outcomes. These arrangements help to ensure that evidence of impact, areas for improvement and emerging risks are considered as part of the Department's wider improvement activity.

Annual service delivery planning

9. At the start of each financial year, each service area prepares an annual service delivery plan setting out the key actions and developments needed to support delivery of the Departmental Plan. These plans are reviewed, quality assured and signed off by Heads of Service and Assistant Directors to ensure they are aligned with departmental priorities and available resources. Progress against service delivery plans is monitored quarterly by senior and departmental management teams. This enables the Department to identify progress, address delays or risks, and take corrective action where required.

Performance reports

10. Key performance indicators are monitored through a structured reporting process that operates throughout the year and across all relevant service areas. Performance is reviewed monthly at service level through Improvement Cycle Meetings, with summary updates provided to the Senior Management Team each month. In addition, bi-monthly service performance reports are prepared for the Departmental Management Team. These reports review performance over time and benchmark progress against regional statistical neighbours. This process enables the Department to maintain oversight of performance, identify and respond to areas of concern, and target improvement activity where required.
11. Performance evidence has helped to demonstrate clear progress and positive impact against the departmental plan, including:
 - Early Help (via Targeted Family Help) interventions are achieving agreed outcomes for most families, helping to improve family resilience and reduce the need for escalation.
 - The reduction in escalation from Child in Need plans, improved reunification outcomes for children in care, and continued strength in placement stability indicate that children and families are receiving more effective and timely support.
 - Workforce stability has also improved, strengthening continuity of relationships for children and families and supporting more consistent practice. Between 2023 and 2026, social worker turnover has reduced, vacancy levels have fallen, and agency usage has decreased. This improved stability, combined with sustained investment in learning, quality assurance and performance management, provides a strong foundation for delivering the remaining ambitions within the departmental plan.

Continuous Improvement Plan and Self-Evaluation Framework

12. The Department's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) set out the department's ambitions around early help, safeguarding, permanence, inclusion and workforce development, into specific improvement activity, measurable actions and milestones. This activity is delivered mainly by Children's Social Care and Targeted Family Help services and there is a clear golden thread from the Plan to the CIP and SEF and into individual Service Delivery Plans, team objectives and frontline practice.
13. Progress is routinely assessed through the SEF process, which brings together performance information, quality assurance activity, audit findings, inspection outcomes and the voice of children and families to evaluate the impact of services. Underpinning this is the Department's "Achieving Excellence Through Purposeful Practice" plan, which defines the values, behaviours and culture expected across Children's Services. This ensures that the way staff work with children, families and partners is aligned with the ambitions set out in the Departmental Plan, promoting relationship-based, child-centred and evidence-informed practice. Together, they provide a coherent performance and improvement structure that links strategic priorities directly to the experiences and outcomes of children and families.

14. Progress monitoring is supported by a comprehensive performance, assurance and scrutiny framework, providing managers and elected members with regular oversight of both service performance and the impact of improvement activity. A performance report is routinely presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing analysis of key local and national performance indicators, emerging trends and areas requiring further focus. This is complemented by a suite of statutory assurance reports that provide deeper insight into the quality, effectiveness and impact of services for children and families, including:
- Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership provides assurance regarding the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
 - Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report, which scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of planning and outcomes for children in care
 - Adoption Agency and Fostering Agency Annual Reports, which monitor progress against our sufficiency, permanence and family-based care ambitions
 - Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, which ensures the experiences and feedback of children, young people and families directly inform service improvement.

Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs

15. Progress against the Departmental Plan priorities for Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs (EIAN) is monitored through a structured framework of strategies, transformation programmes and service delivery plans. This includes the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, the recently approved Belonging Strategy, Attendance and Inclusion programmes, and wider partnership activity with schools, health partners and communities. Together, these provide the basis for tracking delivery, reviewing performance and assessing the impact of activity on outcomes for children and young people.
16. Progress is reviewed through established governance and reporting arrangements, including performance dashboards, departmental performance reports, programme boards, Wand reports to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These arrangements enable senior leaders and members to monitor delivery against agreed priorities, understand areas of risk or underperformance, and identify where further action or assurance is required.
17. Reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also provides a mechanism for reviewing progress in key areas of work. For example, the Elective Home Education report was presented in June 2026, and the Belonging Strategy includes a commitment to quarterly reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This supports transparency, enables members to have oversight of progress and impact, and provides assurance that delivery remains aligned with the Departmental Plan.
18. Examples of progress include:
- Waiting lists for Inclusion and Attendance services have reduced despite increased demand, meaning children are being seen more quickly and receiving earlier support to access and attend mainstream provision.

- Leicestershire has continued to track below the national average for permanent exclusions in both primary and secondary schools since 2021/22, indicating that support for mainstream schools is helping more children remain in education.
- The average time to complete a needs assessment and finalise an Education, Health and Care Plan is currently 18.7 weeks. The Service has remained within the statutory 20-week timescale since January 2026, despite an increase in requests, meaning children and young people are receiving support more quickly.

Alignment with key strategies and plans

19. Progress against the Plan is also considered alongside relevant departmental, corporate and partnership strategies and plans such as the Children and Family Services Voice and Influence Strategy and Leicestershire's Best Start in Life and Families First Programme plans. This helps ensure that delivery remains coherent, avoids duplication and supports shared priorities across the Council and its partners.

Consultation

20. The Children and Family Service Department continually seeks feedback from children, young people and families across Leicestershire, through direct work and group work undertaken with children and families, through specific engagement activity, transformation activity and through children and young people's forums. The Plan was informed by feedback from children, young people and families on their needs and experiences and input has also been sought from the Children's Youth Council for Leicestershire (CYCLe), SEND CYCLe, Young Carers CYCLe, Children in Care Council and Family Hub parent/carer groups.

Resource Implications

21. The Plan provides the context within which Children and Family Services' budgets are produced, and the Department will continue to ensure it makes the best possible use of its resources.
22. Delivery of the Plan will require the Department to maintain and develop effective working relationships with a range of partners, including but not limited to colleagues across all other County Council departments, District Councils, Health, Police, Leicester City and Rutland Councils and the voluntary and community sector.

Conclusions

23. Processes are in place to give departmental management and elected members a clear line of sight from the strategic priorities in the Departmental Plan through to operational delivery, providing assurance that progress is being actively monitored through robust governance mechanisms, and that the ambitions set out in the Departmental Plan are being translated into measurable improvements in practice, service quality and outcomes for children, young people and families across Leicestershire.

Background papers

Draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026-29, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 20 January 2026:

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

Draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026-29, Cabinet, 3 February 2026:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=8304&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None

Equality Implications

25. The Children and Family Service's Departmental plan is for all children and young people living in Leicestershire and their families. The plan would not seek to discriminate against any child or young person but rather to ensure that the needs of all children and young people are met, therefore there is the potential for all children, young, their families to experience a positive impact as a result of the plan.

26. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

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

Appendices

Children and Families Departmental Plan 2026 -29

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Leicestershire Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026 - 2029

This plan sets out our vision, ambitions for children and our high-level priorities for Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services Department for the next three years.

The plan is shaped by the voices of children, young people, and families, reflecting their needs and experiences. Their input will continue to guide our priorities, services, and success measures

What Children, Young People and Families have told us

- “Take time to understand me and get to know me before asking me difficult questions
- “Keep me involved in the decisions being made, I am nearly an adult myself and I do understand things.
- “Don't rush from one thing to another, let me have time to think and explain it to me
- “ (my worker) was just so understanding and empathetic, and she listened when I needed to rant
- “Because at hard times in life it's sometimes difficult to talk to people, but (my worker) made me feel valued and heard
- “Being trained to be on an interview panel and doing mystery shop feels like I'm being heard and I can make a change. It's helped my confidence
- “The way everything was planned out ... it gave me my own voice
- “Don't talk down to me, make the relationship feel equal
- “The worker that ran our group was really nice and I didn't feel that she judged me at all. This made me talk more openly about my problems I was having about my low mood and my history with domestic abuse. Things got better for me and my children
- “My worker has been fantastic in helping my family and finding a provision for my son to attend, she has not given up in her quest to do this, I feel she has gone above and beyond, not only in finding us support for our son, but also listening to me
- “I've never felt judged and my children always felt really safe and comfortable around the worker

What we will do

One Vision

Leicestershire is a place where all children can build strong foundations, be safe and belong, and enjoy and achieve

Three Ambitions

We want to support all children and young people to:

Build Strong Foundations

Be Safe and Belong

Enjoy and Achieve

Nine priorities

To support children and young people to Build Strong Foundations we will:

- Focus on development, readiness for learning and learning as a driver of wellbeing for all children and young people
- Work in partnership to offer support and opportunities to children in their own communities, to help them reach their full potential, and transition well into adulthood
- Work in partnership to identify those children and young people who would benefit from support and provide a shared response to them

To support children and young people to Be Safe and Belong we will:

- Work with families to ensure risk is understood and reduced, and targeted support is provided at the right time, in the right place by the right service and agency
- Develop and use partnerships to prioritise safety for children and young people and to ensure it is understood that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility

- Create an understanding of “belonging” across partnerships so that children feel they matter and can maximise positive opportunities and links in their families, early learning and education settings and communities

- Empower families to build positive relationships and support systems to create safety for children to live within their family or family network

To support children and young people to Enjoy and Achieve we will:

- Ensure children and young people have access within their communities to good quality early learning and education that enables them to achieve their full potential
- Develop a shared understanding of the impact of inequalities and trauma across partnerships, and a shared approach to supporting vulnerable children

How we will work with children and families



Voice:

- Putting children and young people at the heart of all our activities by involving them, hearing them and ensuring their voice is influencing the planning, design and delivery of our services



Belonging:

- Supporting children and young people to feel personally accepted, respected, included, and supported by others in their school, social and wider environment so they can “Live Their Best Life”
- Enabling all children to grow up with a sense of belonging, with at least one adult who provides unconditional care/love



Purposeful Leadership:

- Leading with integrity and purpose and being clear in our expectations
- Leading with empathy, innovation, creativity and with high support, high challenge, high expectations
- Leading by valuing others, being meaningfully inclusive, being an ally to those around you and challenging barriers
- Leading with a clear vision that demonstrates ambition for children, families, the workforce and services
- Leading across the Department, taking accountability for making and being the difference



Developing and retaining an excellent workforce:

- Creating an environment that enables good practice to flourish by equipping our workforce with the skills, knowledge and behaviours needed to best support improved outcomes for children and young people in Leicestershire
- Creating an inclusive culture that nurtures talent and allows every individual to flourish and reach their potential
- Recognising and valuing the differences in each of our members of staff and believing that everyone has the right to be treated with dignity and respect



Being Responsive:

- Providing a safe, compassionate and inclusive environment that recognises the pervasiveness and potential impact of trauma on our children and families, our staff, our organisation and our communities
- Ensuring that this understanding is incorporated into every aspect of our administration, culture, environment and service delivery and acknowledge that every interaction is an intervention and that relationships are at the core of our work



Robust Commissioning, Planning and Management of Resources

- Having processes, tool and skills in place that ensure innovation, best value and quality, market engagement and support sufficiency needs
- Exploring opportunities for joint commissioning across partners to ensure collaboration and partnership working where it is appropriate
- Using value for money interventions that make a difference
- Having detailed service plans in place that outline how each ambition will be achieved and how progress will be monitored



Data and Performance:

- Informing planning and driving performance by ensuring the right data and business intelligence is available to the right people, at the right time and in an accessible form



Underpinning Values

- Ensuring that Flexibility, Trust and Respect, Openness and Transparency and Positivity underpin our delivery of services for children and their families
- Being Aspirational - achieving the best outcomes for children and families
- Being Curious – by digging for detail using purposeful practice
- Being Collaborative - building relationships built on respect, valuing others and a focus on solutions



How we will measure success

- Children and families tell us we have made a positive difference
- Children and families are involved in service design
- Performance indicators show improving outcomes
- Interventions are timely and avoid delay
- Decision making is evidence-based, supported by robust management oversight
- Early help is effective in reducing the number of children requiring social work intervention
- Audit tells us our interventions are robust and measure impact

Strategies that will underpin delivery of the Plan

- | | |
|---|--|
| • Alternative Provision Strategy | • Permanence and Adoption Strategy |
| • Business Intelligence Strategy | • Recruitment and Retention Strategy |
| • Care Placements Strategy | • Road to Excellence: Achieving Excellence via Purposeful Practice |
| • CFS Placement Sufficiency and Market Position Statement | • School Places Strategy |
| • Community Safety Strategy | • Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire |
| • Corporate Parenting Strategy | • Voice and Influence Strategy |
| • Early Help Strategy | • We Care Strategy |
| • Education Belonging Strategy | • Youth Justice Plan |
| • Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy | |
| • Maternity and Early Years Strategy | |





CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

LEICESTERSHIRE MUSIC OVERVIEW REPORT

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Committee about the work of Leicestershire Music and how it links to wider areas including education, advocacy and profile raising for music education. The report will share data about latest achievements and impact as well as explain the funding and governance set up of Leicestershire Music as the Lead organisation for the Leicestershire Music Hub.

Background

2. Founded in 1948, Leicestershire Music (LM) is the lead partner of the Leicestershire Music Hub (LMH). It provides countless young people in Leicester and Leicestershire the opportunity to access to a high quality and inclusive music education. In 2024, LM was established as the Hub Lead Organisation for Leicester and Leicestershire, implementing the National Plan for Music Education (NPME) through a needs based Local Plan for Music Education (LPME).
3. Through a central workforce and variety of partnerships (including schools) LMH enables children and young people from all backgrounds in Leicester and Leicestershire to 'Enrich and connect their world through life changing musical experiences.'
4. LM's leadership is strengthened and supported by an independent Hub Board and Leicestershire County Council (Children and Family Services) to ensure that the organisation continues to move forward and grow and develop in line with the ever-changing needs of the communities it serves.

Funding

5. LMH is awarded two ring-fenced grants:
 - the revenue grant, which is core funding to co-ordinate and support the delivery of music education provision through a Hub partnership in line with the vision, aims and strategic functions for Hubs as set out in the NPME.
 - the capital grant, which is funding to increase the volume, range, relevance and accessibility of musical instruments, equipment and technology in the Hub area.

6. The revenue grant has been confirmed as static for academic year 2026-27 (£1.4 million). The grant has only increased by 4.61% between 2015-16 & 2026-27.
7. Had the grant kept pace with inflation, the 2026-27 allocation of £1.4m would have been worth £1.9m (£0.5m / 35.4% higher) .
8. Local Government pay awards and National Insurance increases add on average £120k per annum to the LM wage bill, which is funded by the grant.
9. A Fundraising Strategy is in place and there has been a greater emphasis in the last 2 years in income generation through both traded activity and fundraising.

Delivery

10. To help drive forward its ambitions, LMH has a carefully thought-out vision for the musical future of our children and young people in Leicester and Leicestershire and fully embraces the objectives and recommendations of the NPME. In particular, LM is committed to:
 - providing an inclusive, diverse, and engaging music education and recognise that music education plays a vital role in developing creativity, cognitive skills, social connections, and overall well-being.
 - delivering high-quality music education programmes which will be achieved by investing in the continuous professional development of music educators, fostering partnerships with local schools and cultural organisations, and regularly evaluating the impact and effectiveness of our work.

Alignment with Children & Families Priorities

Inclusion and SEND

11. LM delivers bespoke projects in SEND schools and offers support to SEND settings, aligning with the council's focus on special needs. LM lead on the Award winning 'Uprising' programme which is training specialist teachers in SEND Music delivery.

Well-being & Personal Development

12. Music ensembles foster mental health and social benefits, supporting early help priorities. 2025-26 saw the introduction of SEMH focused music delivery assisting with improvements in attendance and well-being of young people at risk of exclusion.

Partnership & Outreach

13. LM works with schools (93% of all schools across Leicester and Leicestershire in 2025-26 academic year), community groups, and LMH partners to broaden access and ensure equity of access.

Partnerships

14. LM has strong partnerships with schools, local organisations, national organisations and community groups. These partnerships enable equitable access to music education and mean that the offer is broad and diverse. Partners include Pedestrian,

Soft Touch Arts, Cosmopolitan Arts, Bullfrog Arts, The Philharmonia, Royal Birmingham Conservatoire, National Youth Jazz Orchestra and Orchestras Live. Partnership agreements are in place and are reviewed annually and partners successfully use Hub grant money to leverage further funding and share data about the impact of their work. Examples of this kind of work can be seen here:

- National Youth Jazz Orchestra:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvRQnnVuYm0&feature=youtu.be>
- Leics Connect Music Industry Careers Programme:
<https://youtu.be/0xm1Kr0YjBU?si=-oVCgtYysWt7nedv>

Schools

15. LM's school team fosters relationships with all state-funded schools in Leicester and Leicestershire and support them to deliver high-quality music education, including a quality curriculum support offer and CPD programme, specialist tuition, instruments and group playing activities, and a broad range of progression routes and musical experiences for all pupils. A team of music leaders go in and deliver as well as schools having the opportunity to come to various performance venues across the city and county to see and take part in live music performances.
16. Overall school engagement in 2025-26 was at 93%. The national average for the same period was 92%.

Progression and Musical Development

17. LM focusses on individualised progression pathways for young musicians, enabling them to develop their skills and pursue music education at all levels. This will involve collaborations with a range of diverse partners, professional musicians, and industry experts to provide guidance, mentorship and performance opportunities. This has developed significantly over the past two years with the introduction of a peripatetic one-to-one and small group teaching team, new beginner music ensembles and a team of 'casual' music leaders who have been essential in delivery of progression opportunities to young people from a variety of backgrounds and especially in an out of school setting.

Inclusion, Diversity, Equity and Accessibility (IDEA)

18. LM is committed to delivering an inclusive and welcoming environment for Music Education, performances, training, and developing opportunities to all, where anyone can positively explore their musical talents and passion safely.
19. LM's Inclusion Policy is in the process of being rewritten following key member of the team receiving training on the 'Flourish' course which looks at the Youth Music IDEA framework to identify the needs LM has. At its heart is our ambition:

"At Leicestershire Music, we believe that excellence and inclusion are not mutually exclusive; they are mutually reinforcing. Every child and young person should have access to music education, regardless of their background, identity, location, ability, socio-economic circumstances or prior musical experience.

20. We recognise that an inclusive music service is one that actively removes barriers, values diverse perspectives, reflects the communities it serves and creates equitable opportunities for participation, progression and leadership.”

What's Working Well

21. The current performance data 2025-26 is as follows:

- 93 % of all schools in Leicester and Leicestershire have been supported in their music education – via Continuing Professional Development (CPD), School Music Development Plans, performance Opportunities and Music Teaching
- 82% of all schools took part in a singing opportunity – including CPD, massed choirs and choir competitions
- 21.6% of all pupils taking part in LM activity are from a disadvantaged background (PP and/or SEND)
- In total LM worked with over 18000 students in schools alone
- Pupils performed at Haymarket Theatre, De Montfort Hall and The Venue, De Montfort University, Leicester's Riverside Festival, Leicester Music Conference and national Music Mark conference
- Media coverage included interviews on BBC Radio Leicester and ITV News
- LM launched it's Alumni scheme which attracted donations and sponsorship for disadvantaged students to be able to access music education
- Youth Music funded the careers programme to the value of £30,000

Key Challenges

22. The key challenges which have been identified are:

- Ongoing local Pay Award forecasts an £120k per annum increase to the LM wage bill which has to be found from grant funding money
- 2026-27 funding has been confirmed as static meaning in real terms LM will be receiving less year on year since 2015
- Income generation is reliant on schools and families purchasing traded goods which nationally there is a decline in due to cost of living and competing educational priorities
- National Centre for Music Education due to start in September 2026 – the body responsible for the delivery of this will also manage the National Music Hubs programme so potentially some changes in grant management and expectations
- Remaining inclusive and relevant adapting to changing needs and interests of young people with a fit for purpose workforce – workforce development plan will need to be a key focus going forwards
- LMH serves both Leicester and Leicestershire meaning under Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), LM will likely be picking up additional work (schools changing authorities and the possibility of the addition of Rutland whose Music Education funding currently comes under Northamptonshire Music Hub)

Future Plans and Development

23. The following plans have been formulated in order to develop the Service:

- To deliver a Music and Wellbeing (Sound Minds) project over a three-year period focusing on prevention, partnering with other services such as children's mental health and therapy.
- To deliver music tuition in all Oakfield schools for the academic year 2026-27 – signalling a significant commitment to music for the young people that attend these settings. It has also enabled some growth in delivery staff with recruitment taking place for these roles.
- 'Musician in Residence' programme to continue to be rolled out following pilot year - Music Leaders will spend more time in one school fostering relationships, enabling progression for young musicians and creating a musical culture within a school. This will enable better long-term prospects for young musicians and has positive sustainability impacts with lesser travel for music leaders
- First ever Impact Report focussing on the outcomes for children and young people will be published and shared and used as part of fundraising awareness and advocacy.
- Leicester Music Board work continues to grow with a 2027 Young Person's Music Careers Conference and careers programme in planning
- Performance opportunities for young people in 2026-27 include Haymarket Theatre, De Montfort Hall, The Venue, side by sides with The Philharmonia Orchestra, Leicester's Riverside Festival and Brewbeat Festival as well as open mic nights hosted by PPL PRS Ltd.
- Workforce development to improve inclusive nature of music teaching and implement new Inclusion strategy.
- To streamline Communication and Marketing messages to improve reach to parents with regards to improving numbers in group music making. To include communicating the wider benefits of music education on young people's social, emotional and mental wellbeing.

Background papers

The Power of Music to Change Lives: National Plan for Music Education:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/62bc1242d3bf7f292040d364/The_Power_of_Music_to_Change_Lives.pdf

National Music Hub Data Dashboard:

<https://app.powerbi.com/view?r=eyJrJoiMmY0MDg5ZGMtMGYwNi00Zjk3LTk3NTQtOWZmNmRkYzZIOTNiliwidCI6ImM3YTZmYzMyLTc1MzgtNGlwZS1hOTZhLTA1Zjg1NTAwN2MxMSJ9>

Young people to benefit from creative education boost:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/young-people-to-benefit-from-creative-education-boost>

Leicestershire Music website:

<https://leicestershiremusichub.org/>

Equalities Implications

24. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

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

Officer to Contact

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**CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE – 1 SEPTEMBER 2026**

QUARTER 1 2026/27 PERFORMANCE REPORT

**JOINT REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY
SERVICES AND THE DIRECTOR OF CORPORATE RESOURCES**

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Committee with an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period April to June 2026 (Quarter 1).

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

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

Background and Overview

3. The following report and accompanying data aim to report on the priority areas identified by the Children and Family Services Departmental Plan. The Plan identifies ambitions and measures to monitor progress. The current performance data is appended and has been refreshed to concentrate on indicators where updated data is available for Quarter 1.
4. Quartile positions are added where comparative national data is available. Comparative data is not available for all indicators.
5. From eight measures reported that have a national benchmark, six are in the second quartile, and two are in the bottom quartile.

Tableau Dashboard Usage

6. Across the Children and Family Services department, in Quarter 1 2026/27 there were 639 active Tableau Server users, an increase from Quarter 4 2025/26 (621). Across the Department there were 41,745 views, up from 41,464 views in the previous quarter, at a rate of 65.3 views per user, down slightly from the previous quarter (66.8).
7. Across the two main service areas, in Quarter 1 2026/27 there were 325 users and 20,702 views in Targeted Early Help and Social Care at a rate of 63.7 views

per user. In Education and SEND there were 194 users and 10,444 views, at a rate of 53.8 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. Updated comparison data is expected in Autumn which will strengthen comparison nationally with the publication of the annual children in need (CIN) census data.
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 37.6% at the end of Quarter 1 compared to 25.4% at the end of Quarter 4. In the most recent quarter 47 of 125 children began a second or subsequent child protection plan compared to 72 of 215 in the previous quarter. Leicestershire is now placed in the bottom quartile of local authorities compared to most recent national results published for 2024/25. A key piece of audit work has been completed to provide insight into this significant area of performance with headlines evaluated by the senior management team. It is noted that for some children the repeat plan is after an extended period of time since the previous plan ended. For some the current child protection issues are new and auditors have confirmed that the previous plan ending was correct and a new plan was necessary to safeguard the child. The audit work has recommended actions for the Service to further strengthen practice which includes enhanced responses to domestic abuse which is a common feature identified. Regular audit work continues to drive improvement.
10. The percentage of re-referrals to Children's Social Care within 12 months was 26.5% at the end of Quarter 1 which is an increase compared to 24.7% at the end of the previous quarter; 437 children were 're-referred' within Quarter 1 compared to 532 children in Quarter 4. Leicestershire continues to be placed in the fourth quartile of local authorities. Key pieces of work have been undertaken to respond to data errors linked to the implementation of a new contact and referral form in April 2026 which continues to make some data unreliable. Alongside this, analysis of audit findings identifies work in response to standard and medium risk domestic abuse incident reported by the police are a key element of the repeat referral cases. A new approach to provide earlier offers of support in the extended domestic abuse team has been put in place since early July with impact being analysed within three months. This activity forms part of short-term responses to the issue of repeat referrals with longer term solutions linked to the development of the integrated front door within the Families First partnership programme.
11. The percentage of assessments completed within 45 days to the end of Quarter 1 was 88.5%, a slight increase compared to the end Quarter 4 (87.5%). Within Quarter 1, 1,632 assessments were completed, with 1,444 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 92.4% at the end of Quarter 1 (85 out of 92 young people), a decrease compared to the end of the previous Quarter (95.8%). Leicestershire is now placed in the second quartile of local authorities using available comparisons, although performance continues to exceed the target set.
13. The percentage of Care Leavers aged up to 21 in Education, Employment or Training was 62.0% at the end of Quarter 1 (57 out of 92 young people), a decrease compared to the end of the previous Quarter (63.2%). Leicestershire is now placed in the second quartile of local authorities using available comparisons, although performance continues to exceed the target set. 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 4 who had a dental check in the preceding 12 months was 71.8% (540 children), and similar to 72.1% reported for the previous quarter. For Children in Care aged up to 13 years, the percentage with a dental check is higher at 77.4% compared to 64.7% for young people in care aged 14 years or more. Targeted work with carers and providers aims to improve take up of dental care across all age groups.
15. The percentage of Children in Care at the end of Quarter 1 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months was 85.6% (644 children), and similar to 86.5% reported for the previous quarter. For Children in Care aged up to 13 years, the percentage with an annual health check is higher at 87.4% compared to 83.4% for young people in care aged 14 years or more. The Corporate Parenting Board provides opportunities to collaborate with health partners to review take up of health assessments and drive improvement.

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.
17. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) was 4,290 at the Summer term 2026 school census. This is 251 children higher than at the Spring term 2026 school census (4,039). 92% of the additional EHCP children in mainstream schools at Summer 2026 were on roll at the same school in the previous term. The Spring term 2026 school census EHCP numbers, and the proportion of the pupil population it represents, are the highest recorded for any school census term since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed. 4.33% of all pupils on roll now in Leicestershire mainstream schools have an EHCP.

18. The number of children in mainstream schools in Leicestershire without an EHCP but in receipt of SEN Support was 13,690 at the Summer term 2026 school census. This is 582 higher than the Spring term 2026 school census (13,108). The Summer term 2026 school census SEN support numbers, are the highest recorded for any school census term since the phasing in of the 2014 SEN Code of Practice changes were completed. It also presents a return to the trend of year-on-year comparative increases, which was reversed in the termly data for Autumn and Spring of the 2025/26 academic year.

People are safe in their daily lives

19. Local Youth Justice statistics are regularly reported to the Youth and Justice Partnership Board. The latest report was presented at the June 2026 board.
20. The number of First Time Entrants into the Criminal Justice System in Q4 2025/26 (latest data) was 17. This is an increase of four compared to the previous quarter (Q3 2025/26). Local data is currently unavailable for Use of Custody and Re-offending, although Ministry of Justice figures are available in the report.

Help every child to get the best possible start in life

Early Years

21. In the Summer term 2026, 66% of eligible two-year-olds took up their Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE). This is a decrease from the Spring term 2026 (68%). For three-year-olds, the figure was 84.7%, a decrease over the Spring term 2026 (87.1%).
22. Due to issues reporting FEEE adjustment, there may be slight inaccuracies in the above figures. Data on the quality of provision is currently unavailable due to changes in the Ofsted Inspection framework. Work is ongoing to develop data and reporting in these areas, and an update will be available later in the year.

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

23. The official benchmarking data has been made available by the Department for Education (DfE) for offers relating to primary and secondary school entry in September 2026.
24. The percentage of applicants obtaining their first preference for first time admission to Primary school in 2026 was 94% (approx. 6.4k out of 6.8k applicants). This is 1.4% lower than in 2025 (95.4%). This figure is within the second quartile of local authorities nationally, and the same as the average for Leicestershire's Statistical Neighbours (94%).
25. The percentage of applicants obtaining their first preference for Secondary school transfer in 2026 was 90.2% (approx. 6.8k out of 7.5k applicants). This is 1.8% lower than in 2025 (92%). This figure is within the second quartile of local

authorities nationally, and 0.5% lower than the average for Leicestershire's Statistical Neighbours (90.7%).

26. The number of children Electively Home Educated (EHE) was 1,460 at the end of Q1 2026/27. This is an increase of 56 students since the end of Q4 2025/26 (1,404 students), and compared to the same period last year, end of Q1 2025/26 when there were 1,461 students, it represents a stabilisation of the numbers for the first time in recent years.
27. Between August 2025 and June 2026, there have been 495 young people join the EHE cohort for some time period, 267 of these young people (54%) were aged between 12 and 15 years of age, 277 (56%) were female, 158 (32%) had identified Special Educational Needs (either SEN Support or an Education, Health and Care Plan), and 195 were eligible for a Free School Meal (40%). Each of these groups are overrepresented compared to the general population profile of Leicestershire compulsory school aged residents attending Leicestershire state funded schools, which at the Summer Term 2026 recorded 36% aged between 12 and 15, 49% as female, 21% with Special Educational Needs, and 19% as Free School Meal eligible. During this period there have also been 302 young people that left the EHE cohort, with 220 (73%) of these young people returning to school or an alternative provision.
28. The main reasons for young people joining the EHE cohort between 1st August 2025 and 30th June 2026 (495 young people) were:

Reason	Total Young People	% of Total
Mental health	111	22.4%
Other	94	19.0%
No reason given	89	18.0%
Difficulty in accessing a school place	78	15.8%
School provision not meeting need	75	15.2%
Cultural/Life choice	46	9.3%

29. The official benchmarking data has been made available by the Department for Education (DfE) for suspensions and permanent exclusions during the 2024/25 academic year.
30. The number of permanent exclusions from Leicestershire schools as a percentage of the school population in the 2024/25 academic year was 0.09%. This rate is 30% higher than last year, 0.07% in 2023/24, and almost 400% higher than in 2018/19, which was a rate of 0.02%. The number of permanent exclusions increased to 94 in 2024/25, from 72 in 2023/24, and 19 in 2018/19. 2024/25 saw the highest number of permanent exclusions from Leicestershire schools since 2006/07, when there were 108.
31. Leicestershire is in the second quartile of performance nationally. The national benchmark was 0.12%, a decrease from 0.13% in 2023/24, which was the highest national number and proportionality of permanent exclusions since the data collection started in its present form in 2006/07. The average for

Leicestershire's Statistical Neighbours was 0.10%, which is 0.01% higher than the average for Leicestershire. This group of Local Authorities saw a 0.03% annual decrease in rate (with rounding), from 0.12% in 2023/24.

32. Unvalidated data up to the end of March 2026 for the 2025/26 academic year is showing permanent exclusion numbers to be lower than for the same period last year, 59 compared to 61.
33. The number of children receiving at least one fixed term suspension from Leicestershire schools as a percentage of the school population in the 2024/25 academic year was 3.45% (3,473 children). This rate is 5% lower than for the last academic year (3.62% and 3,654 children), and 82% higher than the rate for 2018/19 academic year (1.9% and 1,860 children). The 2024/25 performance for Leicestershire represents the first academic year after 2019/20 to see a fall in the number and rate of pupils suspended from the previous academic year, although the performance remains the second highest since collection of this data began by the Department of Education (DfE) in 2005/06.
34. Leicestershire's performance is in the second quartile nationally, and is better than both the national performance, which decreased by 4% to a rate of 3.89%, and Leicestershire's Statistical Neighbours, who saw a 4% decrease to a rate of 3.96%.
35. Unvalidated data up to the end of March 2026 for the 2025/26 academic year is showing the number of children suspended to have continued to reduce, 2,480 compared to 2,799 for the same period last year. This is the lowest number for this time period since 2022/23, when the number was 2,424.
36. The percentage of young people (16-17) in Leicestershire not in education, employment, or training (NEET) at the end of Q1 2026/27 was 1.4% (216 young people). This rate was 0.1% higher than at the end of Q4 2025/26 but remains below the target of less than 2.1%.

Conclusion

37. The report provides a summary of performance at the end of Quarter 1 2026/27, covering the period April to June 2026.
38. 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 1, 2026/27

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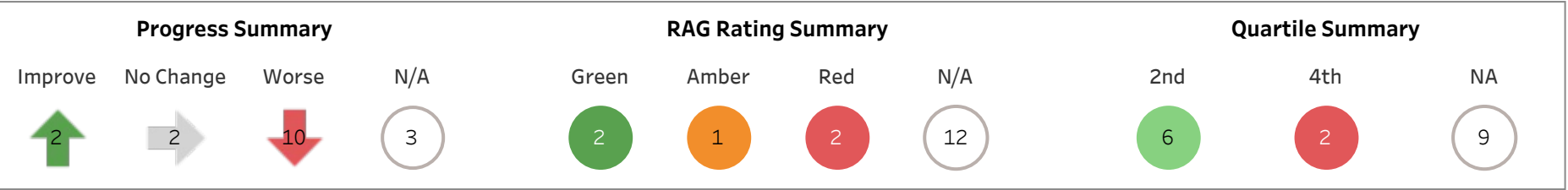
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CFS Overview & Scrutiny Dashboard Q1 2026/27



Strategic Plan Outcome
All

Area
All

Search Indicator
All

Area	Indicator	Latest Data	Period	Previous Data	Perform. DOT	Target	RAG	Quartiles
Early Years	Eligible 2 year olds taking up their FEEE	66.0%	Summer Term 2026	68.0%		NA	N/A	NA
	Eligible 3 year olds taking up their FEEE	84.7%	Summer Term 2026	87.1%		NA	N/A	NA
Education	Applicants obtaining their first preferences for first time admission to Primary school	94.0%	2026	95.40%		93.7%	N/A	2nd
	Children Electively Educated at Home	1460	Q1 2026/27	1461		NA	N/A	NA
	Children receiving at least one fixed term suspension as a % of School population	3.45	2024/25	3.6		NA	N/A	2nd
	NEET young people aged 16-17	1.4%	Q1 2026/27	1.3%		<2.1%	N/A	NA
	Secondary pupils achieving their first preference for Secondary transfer	90.2%	2026	92.0%		NA	N/A	2nd
SEND	Children in mainstream schools in receipt of SEN Support (without EHCP)	13690	Summer Term 2026	13108		NA	N/A	NA

Social Care	Children in mainstream schools with EHCP	4290	Summer Term 2026	4039		NA	N/A	NA
	Assessments completed within 45 days	88.5%	Q1 2026/27	87.5%		>90.3%	A	2nd
	Care leavers EET	62.0%	Q1 2026/27	63.2%		>54.0%	G	2nd
	Care leavers in suitable accommodation	92.4%	Q1 2026/27	95.8%		>92.0%	G	2nd
	Children becoming subject to a CPP for second or subsequent time	37.6%	Q1 2026/27	25.4%		<20.8%	R	4th
	Children in care who have had dental checks within last 12 months (at end of period)	71.8%	Q1 2026/27	72.1%		NA	N/A	NA
	Children in care who have their annual health assessment within last 12 months (..	85.6%	Q1 2026/27	86.5%		NA	N/A	NA
Youth Justice	Re-referrals to CSC within 12 mths	26.5%	Q1 2026/27	24.7%		<18.7%	R	4th
	No. of first time entrants to the criminal justice system aged 10-17 (year to date)	17	Q4 2025/26	13		NA	N/A	NA

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

CHILDRENS SOCIAL CARE STATUTORY COMPLAINTS AND
COMPLIMENTS ANNUAL REPORT 2025-26

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to provide members of the Committee with a summary of the complaints and compliments received in respect of children's social care services commissioned or provided by the Children's and Family Service during 2025- 26. The Annual Report is appended to this report.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

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

Background

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

6. The Annual Report for Children's Social Care is appended to this report and provides a summary of the statistical information and headline issues emerging from the analysis of complaints activity for 2025/26.
7. In addition to the social care report, the Scrutiny and Overview Committee will be provided with the Corporate Complaint Report 25/26. This is to allow the Committee to scrutinise and further explore all the departmental areas highlighted in both reports.

Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints received and outcomes.

8. It is important to note that some complaints regarding Childrens Social Care are not considered through the statutory procedure. The Council follows guidance from the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in determining such cases. This can be either because the complainant is not eligible, or the subject matter falls outside of the scope of the statutory procedure.
9. The number of statutory complaints received in 2025/26 were as follows:
 - 46 complaints considered at Stage 1, compared to 41 in 2024/25
 - 11 complaints considered at Stage 2, compared to 4 in 2024/25
 - 1 complaints considered at Stage 3, compared to 3 in 2024/25
10. The Council considered 183 complaints under the Corporate Complaints Procedure; a significant increase from the previous year (168). The majority being Child Protection matters. Taking this all into consideration, the overall number of complaints saw an increase of 8.9% as shown below.

Reporting Year	Statutory Complaints	Corporate Complaints	Total
2023-24	52	129	181
2024-25	48	168	216
2025-2026	58	183	241

11. While social care complaints have increased, this should be viewed in the context of a corresponding increase in service activity. Social care related complaints (statutory and corporate) as a percentage of the number of 25/26 referrals to Children's Social Care is 0.6% (0.7% in 24/25), demonstrating only a small number go on to make a statutory complaint and that complaint volumes have not risen at the same rate as referrals.
12. Analysis of the statutory social care complaints decided show the main areas complained about were poor level of service or service failure.
13. During the year, two complaints were received directly from children or young people. The Complaints Manager continues to have good links with Children's Rights Officers. This is to ensure and validate that young people are not blocked in any way from accessing the formal complaints procedure.

Stage Escalations

14. The number of stage 2 complaints in 25/26 is 46 (41), an increase of 8. As a percentage of Stage 1 complaints this equates to an escalation rate of 24%, an increase from the previous year (10%).
15. There was one complainant who requested escalation to Stage 3 after completing Stage 2.

Statutory Complaints Performance

16. 46% of Stage 1 cases were responded to within the maximum limit of 20 working days, this compares to 56% in the previous year.
17. There are often good reasons why complaints exceed 20 working days to resolve, for example complexity or meetings being arranged. Whilst personal contact is positive and should be encouraged, statutory guidance makes clear this does not “stop the clock” in terms of the 20-working day deadline.
18. Timescales for Stage 2 complaints also improved during the year with 7 of the completed investigations being concluded within the statutory timescale of 65 working days.
19. The Council has continued to manage Stage 2 investigations through an in house “arms-length” investigator. This is helping with response timescales but more crucially with quality of reports and reducing un-necessary escalation.
20. The Stage 3 review panel was held and responded to within statutory timescales.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Performance

21. The Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman received 63 enquiries relating to Education & Children Services, of which 17 were Upheld. No Public Reports were issued.

Compliments

22. The Council received 20 compliments; this is an increase from the previous year (6). The Complaints Team continue to remind managers of the importance of recognising and sharing positive feedback, which bring balance to the annual report.

Learning from Complaints

23. There is good evidence of learning from complaints at a local level with upheld complaints having clearly articulated actions to improve wider performance over and above resolving the individual issues

Recommendations

24. The Committee is asked to:

- a) Note the Children's Social Care Complaints Annual Report, covering the period 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026
- b) Provide comment and feedback on the content and analysis within the report

List of Appendices

Appendix A – Childrens Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments: Annual Report 2025-26

Appendix B – Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report 2025-26

Officers to contact

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Children's Social Care Statutory Complaints and Compliments Annual Report **2025/2026**



CONTENTS

Purpose of Report	3
Introduction.....	3
Complaints Volumes (Cases Received 2024-2025)	4
Statutory Children’s Social Care Complaint and LGO Cases	4
Corporate Complaint Cases.....	5
Statutory Complaints Received by Service Areas	6
Compliments Received 2024-2025	7
Complaints Performance	7
Who Complains?	10
Financial Implications.....	10
Learning from Complaints.....	11
Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Performance	12
Monitoring the Process	14
Appendix A – Compliments Received	15
Appendix B - Upheld cases	18

Purpose of Report

To report to Members and Officers on Leicestershire County Council's (LCC) Children's Social Care complaints activity from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

To meet the requirements of Regulation 18(2) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1681 Local Authority Social Services Complaints (England) Regulations 2006 and Regulation 13(3) of Statutory Instrument 2006 No. 1738 The Children Act (1989) Representations Procedure (England) Regulations 2006.

For the current year the following Statutory guidance remains relevant:

- Getting the best from Complaints 2006
- the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) [Practitioner Guidance](#) which should be referenced alongside the existing statutory guidance

This annual report provides analysis and commentary for Children and Family Services on all complaints managed under the statutory process. Those complainants who do not qualify to use the statutory process are considered under the County Council's Corporate Complaint Procedure and reported in the Corporate Annual Report presented to the Scrutiny Commission.

The Complaints Manager role is responsible for ensuring that complaints are handled appropriately and providing support to the department in resolving complex cases. In addition, the Complaints Manager will highlight key trends that emerge each year and any recommendations that would improve how we work. The Children and Family Services department retain responsibility for actioning any such improvements.

Introduction

This report only considers complaints identified as statutory complaints as defined by the Statutory Guidance outlined within "Getting the Best from Complaints".

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

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

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

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

Complaints Volumes (Cases Received 2025-2026)

Statutory Children's Social Care Complaint and LGO Cases

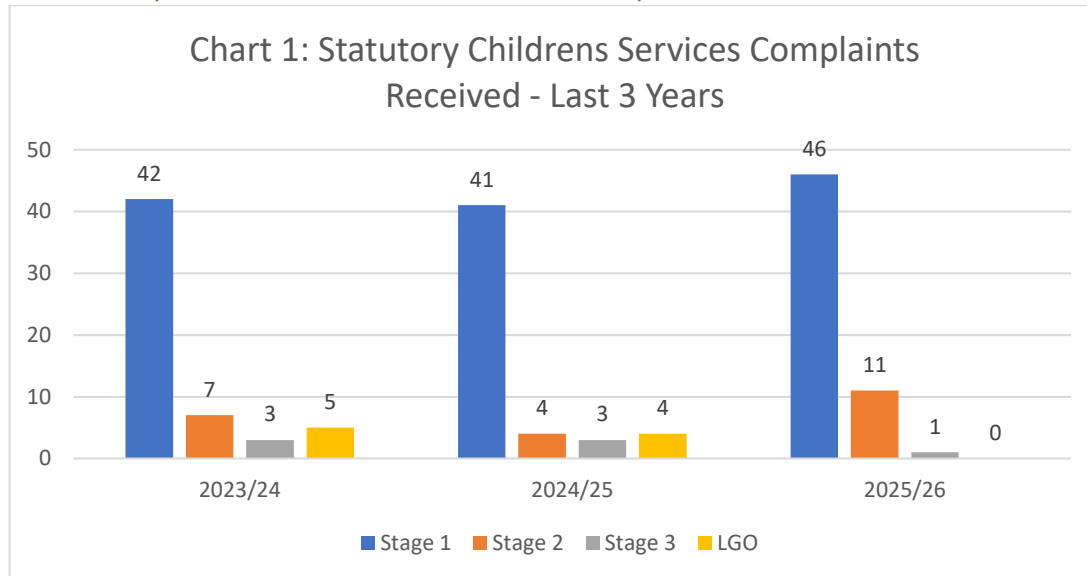


Chart 1 shows a total of 58 cases (the total of stage 1, 2 and 3 cases) were accepted under the statutory procedure in 25/26. This is an increase of 10 from the previous year (48).

Stage 1

46 cases were accepted under Stage 1 of the local policy – Local Resolution. This is an increase of 5 from the previous year (41).

Stage 2

11 cases escalated to Stage 2 of the local policy - Independent Investigation. This is a large increase of 7 from the previous year (4) and represents 24% (rounded) of the Stage 1 cases, an increase from 24/25 (10%).

Stage 3

Stage 3 Panels cannot re-investigate complaints and as such can only look at the quality and comprehensiveness of the Independent Report at Stage 2.

1 Stage 3 Review Panel was convened in 25/26; this figure is lower than the previous year even though stage 1 complaints were higher.

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

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

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

The Council received 0 ombudsman cases, in respect of statutory children's complaints, in 25/26. This shows the work being carried out at stage 1, 2 and 3 are beneficial and suitable remedies are being achieved.

Corporate Complaint Cases

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

To give the full picture of complaints, Table 1 sets out all social care related complaints for the last 2 reporting periods.

Table 1: table showing counts of social care complaints received and managed under the Children's Social Care Complaints Policy or Corporate Complaints Procedure.

Reporting Year	Statutory Complaints	Corporate Complaints	Total
2023-24	52	129	181
2024-25	48	168	216
2025-26	58	183	241

Table 1 shows, there has been a 19% increase in the total number of complaints about Children's Social Care.

When examining these complaint volumes, it is important to consider the broader operational context; specifically, the total demand handled by Children's Social Care throughout the year. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the primary case categories, illustrating not only the type but also the escalating volume of demand placed on the service in 3 of the 4 areas listed.

Table 2: cases dealt with by Children's Social Care in each reporting period.

Social Care Demand	2024/25	2025/26	% Change
Referrals to Children's Social Care	6797	7477	+10
Single Assessments	6530	6737	+3.2
Children in Care at 31 March	694	765	-10.2
Child Protection Plans at 31 March	506	669	+32.2

Analysing complaints alongside these figures helps to contextualise the proportionality of concerns raised: while the total number of complaints has grown, so too has the overall caseload, suggesting that the rise in complaints may partly mirror the service's expanding remit and the complexities of the cases managed.

When viewed in the context of increased referral activity, the proportion of referrals versus complaints has reduced from 0.7% in 2024/25 to 0.6% in 2025/26. While complaint volumes increased, they did not rise at the same rate as referral demand suggesting a slight improvement in the relative level of dissatisfaction expressed through the complaints process.

Statutory Complaints Received by Service Areas

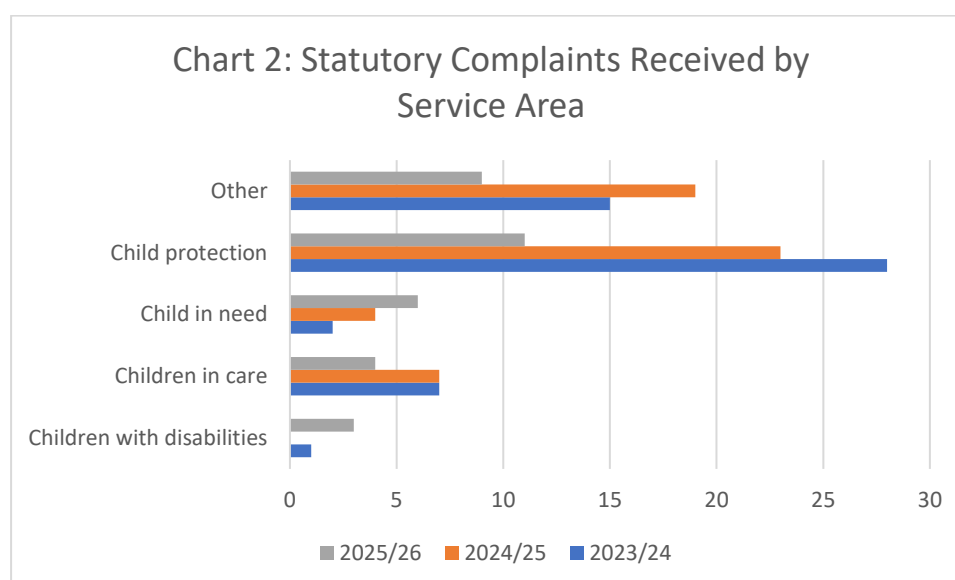


Chart 2 shows the top four services with the highest counts for 25/26 and the comparisons for those services for 24/25 and 23/24. For ease of visualisation, the remaining services have been grouped under other. Child Protection consistently presents with the most cases across

the reporting years shown and both Children in Care and Children with Disabilities has seen a decrease.

Compliments Received 2025-2026

During 2025-26 there were 20 compliments recorded regarding Children's Social Care officers. This is an increase on last year (6). The Complaints Team can only record compliments which are received directly via our online compliments form or shared when received directly into the service. As many compliments are received directly by the service, the above data may not be truly reflective of the overall amount received.

A sample of departmental comments can be found at Appendix A and provide an important balance when reviewing the performance of the department.

Complaints Performance

The key performance indicators for speed of response, outcomes, causes and identified learning are linked to complaints that have been decided.

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

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

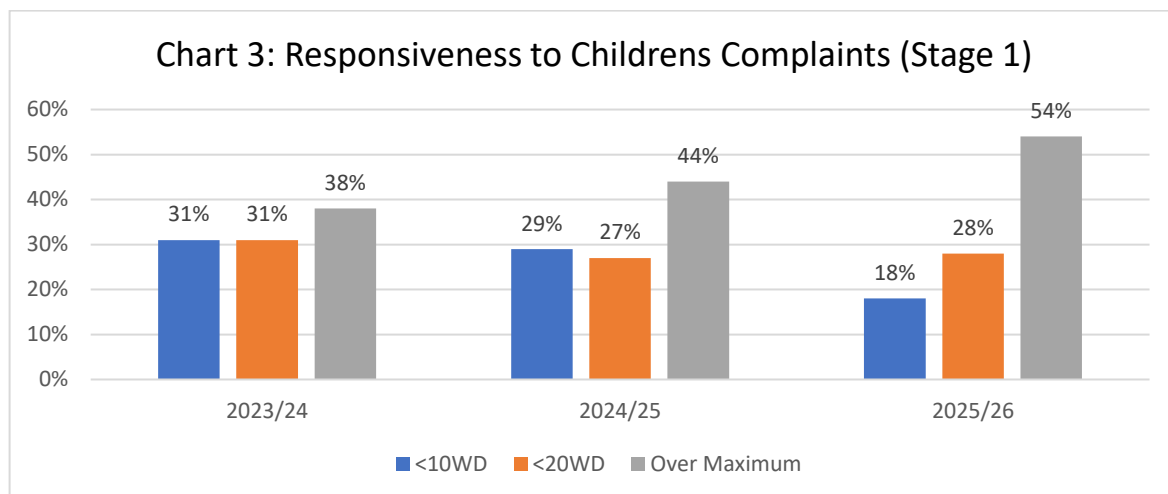
Responsiveness to Statutory Complaints

Stage 1

In respect of 'Stage 1 Local Resolution', the Council aims to provide a response to the complainant within 10 working days in accordance with Regulation 14 'the local authority must consider and try to resolve the representations as soon as is reasonably practicable and in any event within 10 working days of the start date as defined in paragraphs (3) and (4).' Complex cases may take longer to consider and 'The local authority may extend the period for considering representations under this regulation by a maximum of 10 working days where they consider the representations to be complex.', giving a maximum of 20 working days.

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

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



Analysis of the Stage 1 response times shows the percentages of cases per time category has decreased with 46% (25/26) of cases being responded to within 20 W/D, compared to 56% in the previous year. There were 46 complaints in 2025/26, 5 more complaints this year than in 2024/25 (41) and with the use of AI being used to write complaints, they are becoming more complex and can take longer to respond to which reflects in Chart 3.

Cases over the maximum period highlights the importance of ongoing monitoring of case complexity and resource allocation to ensure that timely resolutions remain the norm, and to prevent delays that might negatively impact complainant satisfaction and overall trust in the process

Stage 2

Regulation 17 states the 'local authority should send notice of their response to the complainant and, where one has been appointed, to his advocate within 25 working days of the start dates as defined in paragraphs (4) and (5).' Where it is not possible to respond within 25 working days, cases may be extended 'no later than 65 working days from the start date, by which they will have concluded their consideration and sent notice of their response.'

Table 3: table showing the count of Stage 2 cases which met the response time categories

Time to Respond	24/25	25/26
Within 25 working days	1	4
Within 65 working days	2	3
Over maximum	1	6

The proportion of cases responded to within the maximum statutory guideline of 65 working days has decreased from the previous year, with 7 of the 13 investigations closed achieving this. This is down to the large increase of stage 2 complaints in 2025/26, the complexity of the stage 2 requests received and the delays out of our control such as, holding interviews with relevant people/staff and service users' availability.

The ombudsman has indicated that providing a local authority is managing the expectations of a complainant and not unduly delaying resolution, there is unlikely to be severe criticism of not meeting this timescale.

Stage 3

Regulation 18 states 'Where a complainant is dissatisfied with the outcome of the investigations of his representations under regulation 17 the complainant or, where one has been appointed, his advocate may request that the representations be further considered by a panel in accordance with regulation 19.'. The complainant should make their request within 20 working dates of the date on which the complainant received the notice of the local authority's response. The local authority has up to 50 working days in which to issue its response.

There was 1 request to escalate to Stage 3 during the year, which progressed to a panel hearing and was managed within the statutory timescale.

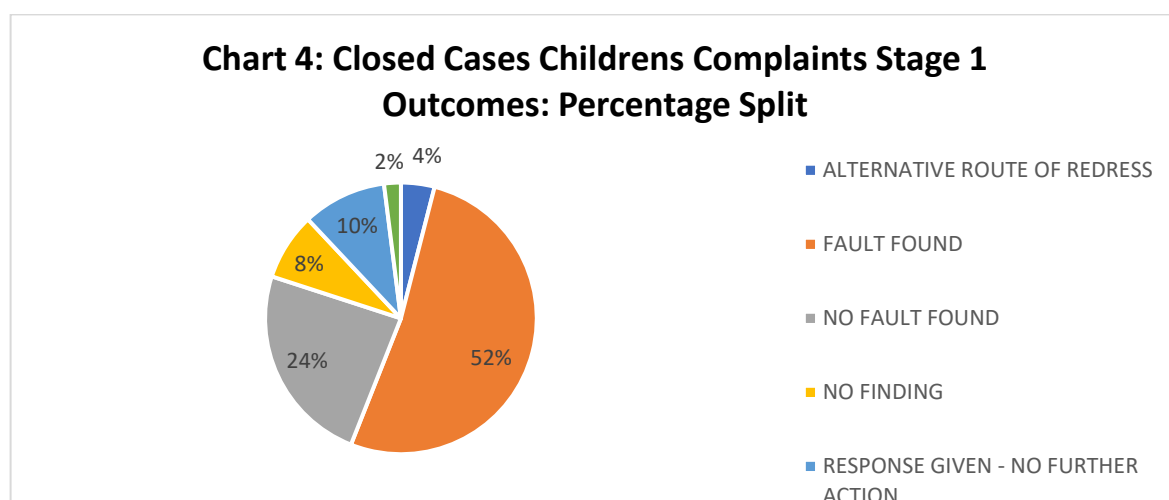
Complaint Causes

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

The biggest single cause during 2025-26 was around poor level of service or service failure (12) which also interlinked with accuracy of records.

Most complaints continue to be made by parents or family members (where they have sufficient interest in the child or young person's welfare¹).

Complaint Outcomes



¹ Guidance set out in section 2.6 of Getting the Best from Complaints.

Chart 4 above shows that Stage 1 Children's Services complaint outcomes shows that 52% (26 cases) of complaints were upheld (compared to 42%(58 cases) in 24/25), with fault found, making this the largest outcome category. This indicates that just over half of complaints investigated resulted in some level of service failure or maladministration being identified and provides valuable opportunities for learning and service improvement.

24% (12 cases) of complaints resulted in no fault being found, demonstrating that in almost a quarter of cases the investigation concluded that services had acted appropriately and in accordance with relevant policies and procedures.

10% (5 cases) of complaints received a response with no further action required, while 8% resulted in no finding, reflecting cases where a definitive conclusion could not be reached or where the issues raised did not lend themselves to a formal finding.

Overall, the outcomes demonstrate that whilst a significant proportion of complaints were upheld, almost half of cases either found no fault, required no further action, were withdrawn, or were resolved through alternative means. The findings reinforce the importance of complaints as a mechanism for identifying service improvements while also providing assurance where investigations determine that practice and decision-making were appropriate.

Who Complains?

In 2025/26, two complaints were made by children or young people². This is lower than 2024/25 (4%) and represents 2% of the overall volume. The remaining complaints were made by parents or others who were deemed to have sufficient interest in the child's well-being.

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

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

Financial Implications

Children's Social Care Complaint Policy

Children's Service Complaints expenditure

Both Stages 2 and 3 of the investigation to take place.

require independent

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

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

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

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

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

Costs continue to be controlled through several ways including:

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

Learning from Complaints

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

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

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

Corrective Action

All the 26 complaints where fault has been found have been reviewed by the Complaints Team to ascertain what action the relevant department has taken, both in remedying the fault, and any wider learning to avoid such issues occurring in the future.

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

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

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

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman Performance

Each year, the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) publishes a set of data that reflects its complaint-handling activity across England. This includes both national and local authority-level insights. The information contained in this section has been extracted from the LGSCO's data set.

Enquiries

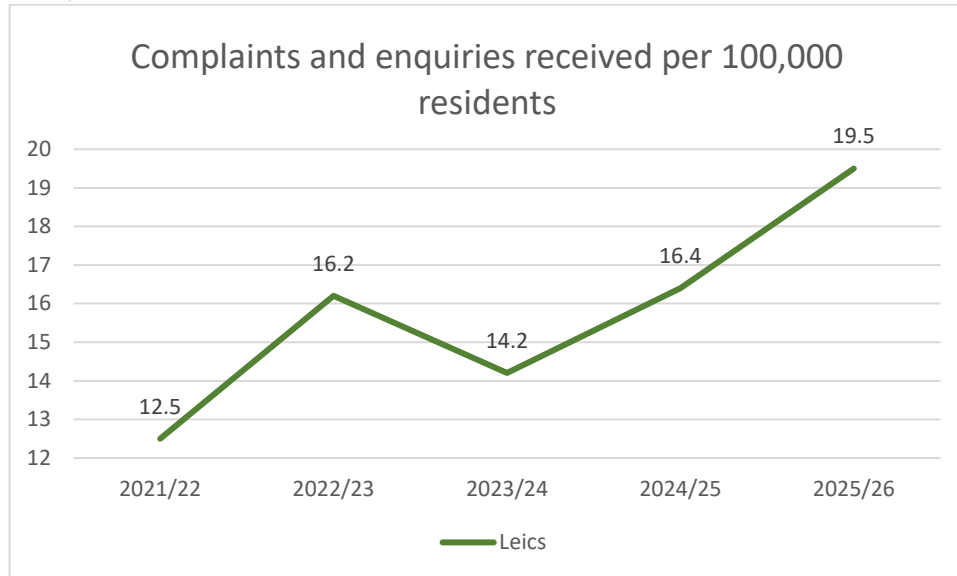


Chart 5: volume and percentage share by area

Case Category	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26	
Education and Children's Services	67	64%	73	60%	83	57%
Adult Social Care	26	25%	30	25%	36	25%
Highways and Transport	8	8%	14	11%	16	11%
Corporate and Other Services	-	-	2	2%	10	7%
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%
Housing	1	1%	-	-		
Planning and Development	-	-	1	1%		
Other	-	-	1	1%		

Chart 5 shows that Ombudsman complaints and enquiries continue to be concentrated in three categories. Education and Children's Services remain the largest category, increasing from 67 cases in 2023/24 to 83 in 2025/26. However, its share of total cases has reduced from 64% to 57%

Decisions

In respect of decisions made against cases categorised as Education & Children Services (63 cases of which 35 were SEN related), the LGSCO made the following decisions:

- 27 Referred back for local resolution
- 17 Upheld compared to 33 in 2024/25
- 16 Closed after initial enquiries
- 1 Incomplete/Invalid

- 1 Advice Given
- 2 Not upheld

Monitoring the Process

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

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

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

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

Appendix A – Compliments Received

- Thank you to the admissions & appeals team we were very happy and grateful with the support and communication throughout the whole process and wanted to thank you all
- We felt incredibly well supported throughout the whole adoption transition time over these last 3 weeks and would like to reiterate our thanks to all involved, particularly Isabelle Coad's support.
- Thank you to Rebecca Allen and Isabelle Hockenhull for all your help over the last few months. Isabelle has been such a great help to us through a very difficult period. We are so grateful to both of you and won't forget it.
- Jessie, again thank you so much for all your help and support it was lovely talking to you yesterday, thank you.
- Thank you so much Claire Nicholls for all you have done for us and for your help and support. The learning has been invaluable. We both feel so much more able to cope with the challenges of raising a child affected by early life trauma.
- Sally was a breath of fresh air with the four weekly sessions we had with her. Her strategies, support, friendliness have had a huge impact on our family life. She is a credit to her role within the Family Help service.
- I just wanted to take a moment to say a heartfelt thank you to Tafadzwa for everything you have done for me and my children. Your support and guidance have been absolutely incredible.
- Thank you to the SENA team, my daughter started Leicester High School for Girls and has done very well. I wanted to share my gratitude in the support and faith Maya has received to help her fulfill her true potential despite her challenges.

Appendix B – Upheld Cases

Of the 17 Upheld cases, 14 were recorded as ‘fault and injustice’ and a summary of the cases is provided below.

Case 1 Special educational needs 19-May-2025

We cannot investigate Mrs X’s complaint the Council failed to seek advice and information from an Educational Psychologist (EP) as part of its Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment of her child Y because it is connected to her appeal to the Tribunal. The Council was at fault for not issuing Y’s plan within the statutory timescales. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X to acknowledge the uncertainty and delayed appeal rights this caused.

Case 2 Special educational needs 29-May-2025

We found the Council at fault for failing to properly consider its duty to provide alternative education for Mrs X’s child, Y, or document its decision-making. However, we cannot say the Council’s decision would have been different, but for these faults. The Council agreed to apologise and pay a symbolic financial remedy in recognition of the avoidable uncertainty this caused. It also agreed to provide guidance to its officers.

Case 3 Alternative provision 03-Jul-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to provide education for her child for over three years. Mrs X also complained the Council failed to review or update her child’s Education, Health and Care Plan. We found fault with the Council failing to provide suitable education for Mrs X’s child from 22 May 2023 to 28 August 2024. We also found fault with the Council delaying by 17 months outside the statutory timescales in reviewing Mrs X’s child’s Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has also accepted it failed to provide provision to Mrs X’s child from their Education, Health and Care Plan or provide suitable education from 3 September 2024 to 30 May 2025. We have detailed the actions the Council has agreed to take to address the injustice its fault caused in paragraph 86 of this decision statement.

Case 4 Special educational needs 22-Jul-2025

The Council was at fault in how it reviewed and amended Mrs X’s child W’s Education, Health and Care Plan. It was also at fault for delay securing the provision in that Plan and for poor complaints handling. This caused Mrs X frustration and meant she had to go to undue time and trouble pursuing her complaint. It also meant W missed out on provision they should have had. To remedy their injustice, the Council will apologise to Mrs X, pay her £1100 and confirm the name of the member of staff who will act as her single point of contact in future.

Case 5 Special educational needs 20-Aug-2025

Mrs X complained that the Council delayed issuing an Education, Health and Care Plan after a needs assessment. There was 6 months delay by the Council, which was fault. A payment remedies the injustice to Mrs X. There was also delay in providing Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy provision, which could have been provided separately to the school setting which Mrs X disputed at tribunal. An apology and payment remedies the frustration and distress, and loss of provision to Y, the child.

Case 6 School transport 03-Sep-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to properly assess her child's transport needs, did not communicate effectively and caused delays in arranging suitable transport. We find the Council at fault for failing to reflect key information from the application in its risk assessment, and for failing to keep Mrs X updated. As a result, unsuitable transport was arranged, and Mrs X incurred avoidable costs to ensure her child could attend education. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X.

Case 7 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, Z's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to the Council's area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place Z temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by: apologising to Mrs Y and Z; making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on Z; and service improvements.

Case 8 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, X's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to its area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place X temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by: apologising to Mrs Y and X; and making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on X.

Case 9 Special educational needs 23-Sep-2025

We will not investigate this complaint about the Education, Health and Care plan process. This is because the Council apologised and offered a suitable remedy and it is unlikely further investigation would achieve anything more for Mr X.

Case 10 Special educational needs 17-Nov-2025

We found fault by the Council on Mrs Y's complaint about its failure to process her request for an Education, Health and Care plan within statutory timescales. It missed the statutory time limit by 39 weeks. It failed to consider whether it was appropriate to fund her daughter's special needs it was aware of when she started home education. It also failed to consider its section 19 duties sooner, advise her and consider education other than at school sooner, or give her information about the consequences of home educating her. The Council agreed to send a written apology, pay £397.06 for the injustice caused by its failures, provide an Action Plan showing how future assessments will be completed within statutory timescales, and will ensure relevant officers consider section 19 duties and education other than at school during assessments where children are out of school. It will ensure it gives parents relevant information and improve communication with them.

Case 11 Alternative provision 27-Nov-2025

Mrs X complained the Council did not provide full time education suitable for her daughter's needs when she could not attend school. We found the Council at fault for not putting in place

provision it agreed her daughter needed, impacting on her educational progress. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a symbolic payment to recognise the injustice caused.

Case 12 Special educational needs 08-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate if the Council was at fault for failing to ensure Miss X's child Y received the special educational provision outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan, as it was too closely connected to her reason for appealing to the Tribunal. There was fault in the Council's communication and complaint handling for which it has offered a suitable financial remedy during our investigation for the frustration caused. The Council was also at fault for failing to send its decision within four weeks of Y's annual review meeting however this fault did not cause a significant injustice.

Case 13 Special educational needs 23-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate this complaint about the school named in an Education Health and Care Plan, or a failure to provide education. Mr X has appealed to the SEND Tribunal about the matter and therefore the law says we cannot investigate. Nor will we investigate Mr X's further complaint about delays in the annual review process. When considering this complaint, the Council agreed to provide a suitable remedy for Mr X's injustice and there are no wider public interest issues to justify investigating this complaint.

Case 14 School transport 14-Jan-2026

Summary: The Council was at fault for failing to ensure Y's final amended Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan was issued within statutory timescales following the annual review. The Council was also at fault for failing to consider the relevant circumstances of Y's school transport application when deciding to award them a personal travel budget instead of council organised transport. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to remedy the distress, frustration and uncertainty caused.

Corporate Complaints and Compliments Annual Report

2025 - 2026



Executive Summary

This report summarises compliments, complaints and Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman activity relating to Leicestershire County Council during 2025/26. It outlines customer contact, complaint outcomes, response performance and how learning is being used to improve services.

The Council continues to deliver a wide range of statutory and discretionary services in a challenging environment, with rising demand and ongoing financial pressures. In 2025, there were more than 9.6 million contacts across e-forms, emails, telephone calls, web views and visits to County Hall. Given the scale and breadth of the Council's contact with residents, formal complaints continue to represent a small proportion of overall interactions. This provides important context for the complaint volumes reported, while recognising that each complaint remains a valuable opportunity to understand residents' experiences, resolve issues and improve services.

However, overall demand increased during 2025/26, with both complaints and compliments rising. Compliments increased significantly, particularly for Libraries, Heritage and Museums. Corporate complaints also increased, with the highest volumes relating to Children and Family Services and Environment and Transport. Special Educational Needs and SEN transport were the two highest complaint areas, with SEN notably higher than SEN transport.

Most Stage 1 Corporate Complaints were answered within the Council's maximum 40-working-day timescale, although fewer met the 10-working-day response aim. Stage 2 complaints increased substantially and response times declined, indicating greater dissatisfaction after the initial response and additional pressure on the process.

Complaint outcomes show the importance of learning from feedback. In 2025/26, 47% of Stage 1 and 42% of Stage 2 Corporate Complaints were upheld. The Council has reviewed areas with higher escalation, particularly SEN, and introduced new complaint response templates to support more consistent, thorough and clearly structured responses, with quality checks by the Complaints Team.

Ombudsman activity also provided external assurance and learning. Complaints and enquiries relating to Leicestershire increased, although decisions reduced slightly. Upheld cases fell from 33 to 25, the upheld rate per 100,000 residents improved, the Council complied with all Ombudsman recommendations, and no public reports were issued.

Overall, the report shows increasing complaint demand, while most complaints continue to be resolved through the Council's own procedures. The findings reinforce the need for early resolution, clear communication, timely responses and effective use of feedback to improve services. The Council will continue to strengthen complaint handling practice and use feedback from residents, service users and the Ombudsman to improve quality and consistency.

Background

Complaint Policies

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

1. Adult Social Care Complaints Policy

This policy follows legislative requirements and applies to adult social care services provided by or arranged by the Council. This is a two-stage statutory process (with the Ombudsman being the second stage) and may include (but not limited to) complaints relating to assessment of need, provision of services, delays, or decisions made under the Care Act 2014.

2. Children's Social Care Complaints Policy

This policy follows legislative requirements and applies to children's social care services provided by or arranged by the Council. This is a three-stage statutory process and may include (but not limited to) complaints regarding care planning and placement, services to children in need, child protection, fostering and adoption.

3. Corporate Complaints Procedure

This procedure is for complaints where the above two named statutory processes do not apply. The Corporate Complaints Procedure may not be used where exemptions apply, for example court proceedings or a tribunal process, or where other routes exist, for example, to report a pothole.

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

Complaint Handling Structure

The Council operates a shared complaint handling model, where cases are received centrally and passed to individual services to investigate/respond to, with the central team then issuing the Council's response to the complainant. The central team provides support and guidance to services, the key services offered are:-

1. Complaints advice and support
2. Production of Performance Reports

3. Liaison with the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman
4. Quality assurance of complaint responses
5. Complaint handling training for operational managers
6. Scrutiny and challenge to complaint responses

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

Overall Demand

Figure 1 below shows the demand, split by case type, for the last five reporting periods, whereas Figure 2 provides information regarding the percentage change.

There is a rising trend in overall demand across the four reporting periods, with the total demand increasing by 9% between 2024/25 and 2025/26.

The latest reporting period shows a shift in demand profile compared with the previous year. In 2024/25, most case types reduced, with complaints down 12%, ASC statutory complaints down 14%, Children's statutory complaints down 8%, compliments down 7% and LGSCO cases down 20%; enquiry cases were the only area of notable growth at 18%.

In 2025/26, this pattern reversed for several categories: complaints overall increased by 27%, compliments rose significantly by 63% and ASC statutory complaints increased by 12%, while enquiry cases fell by 18%. The Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) and Children's statutory complaints continued to reduce, but at a much slower rate than in 2024/25.

Please note that each complaint stage is counted individually and Enquiry Cases are those matters that are either informally resolved, a first-time request for a service or require signposting to other organisations or to other routes for redress.

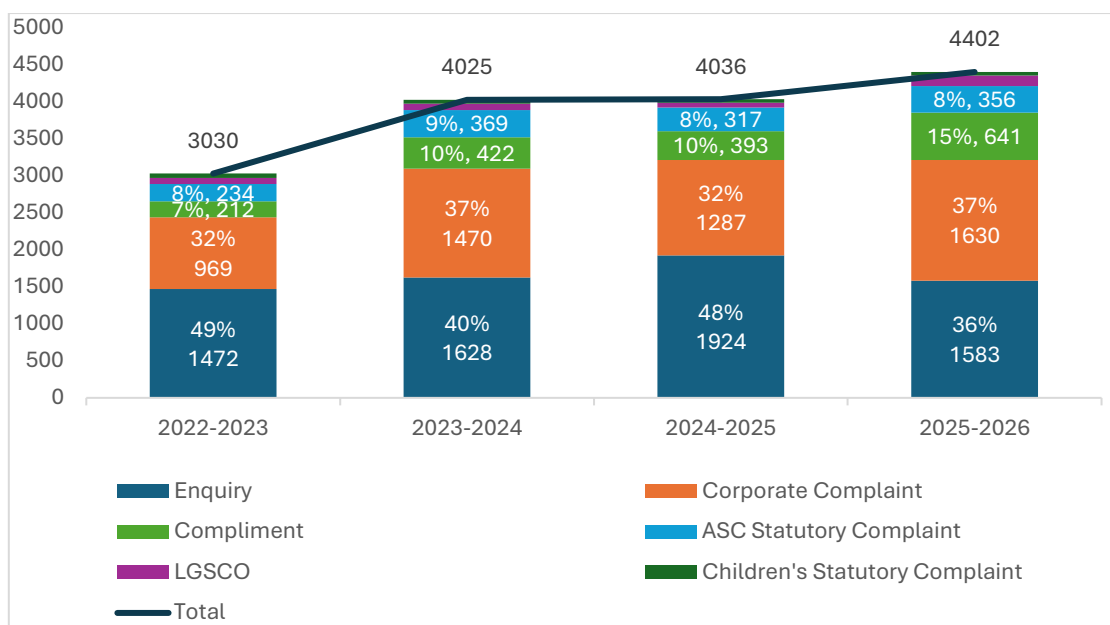


Figure 1 – chart showing demand (cases received), by case type, for each reporting period.

Case type	2021/2022 to 2022-2023	2022-2023 to 2023-2024	2023-2024 to 2024-2025	2024-2025 to 2025-2026
Enquiry growth vs PY	2%	11%	18%	-18%
Complaint growth vs PY	65%	52%	-12%	27%
Compliment growth vs PY	-35%	99%	-7%	63%
ASC Statutory Complaint growth vs PY	16%	58%	-14%	12%
LGSCO growth vs PY	52%	2%	-20%	-6%
Children's Statutory Complaint growth	22%	-15%	-8%	-4%

Figure 2 - percentage change in case types for each reporting period

Compliments

The number of compliments received in 2025/2026 compared to 2024/2025 increased by 63% (248). The Adults and Communities department (as was named within these reporting periods) has consistently presented as the top department receiving compliments throughout the reporting periods shown. From a service perspective, Libraries, Heritage and Museums (a service within the Adults & Communities Department) received 63% of the 641 received in 2025/26. This

service has received the most compliments in the last three reporting periods, reflecting the value residents place on this provision.

Analysis of the compliments shows that positive feedback is strongly linked to the quality of residents' interaction with staff and volunteers. Common themes include kindness, helpfulness, professionalism, clear guidance and well-organised services. Compliments were particularly evident in libraries, heritage and museums, reflecting the value residents place on accessible community activities and positive cultural experiences. Feedback also highlighted appreciation for responsive support in education, adoption, registration, environmental and health-related services. Work was completed throughout the year to encourage compliments, including training across services on recording compliments and QR codes being placed in libraries to encourage service users to provide feedback. Overall, the compliments demonstrate that residents value services that are personal, practical, welcoming and delivered with care.

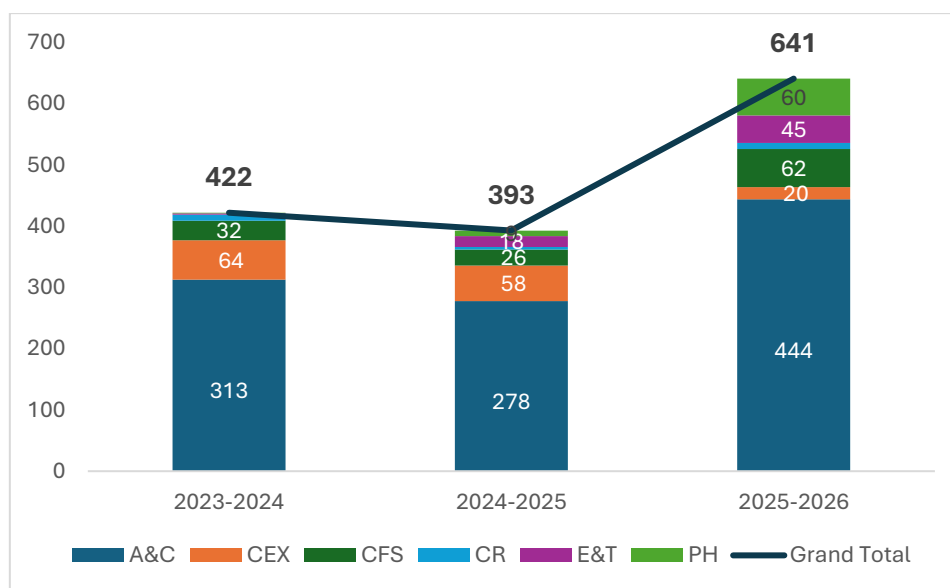


Figure 3 – Chart showing the number of compliments received by department for each reporting period.

All Stage 1 Complaints

Figure 4 shows how stage 1 complaint volumes reduced significantly between 2023/24 and 2024/25 before increasing during 2025/26.

Corporate Complaints continue to represent the largest complaint category, accounting for the majority of all Stage 1 complaints. While Corporate Complaints

increased in 2025/26 compared with the previous year, volumes remained below 2023/24 levels.

Adults social care and adults statutory complaints combined have increased overall in 2025/26 by 22 complaints but still remains lower than 2023/24 numbers.

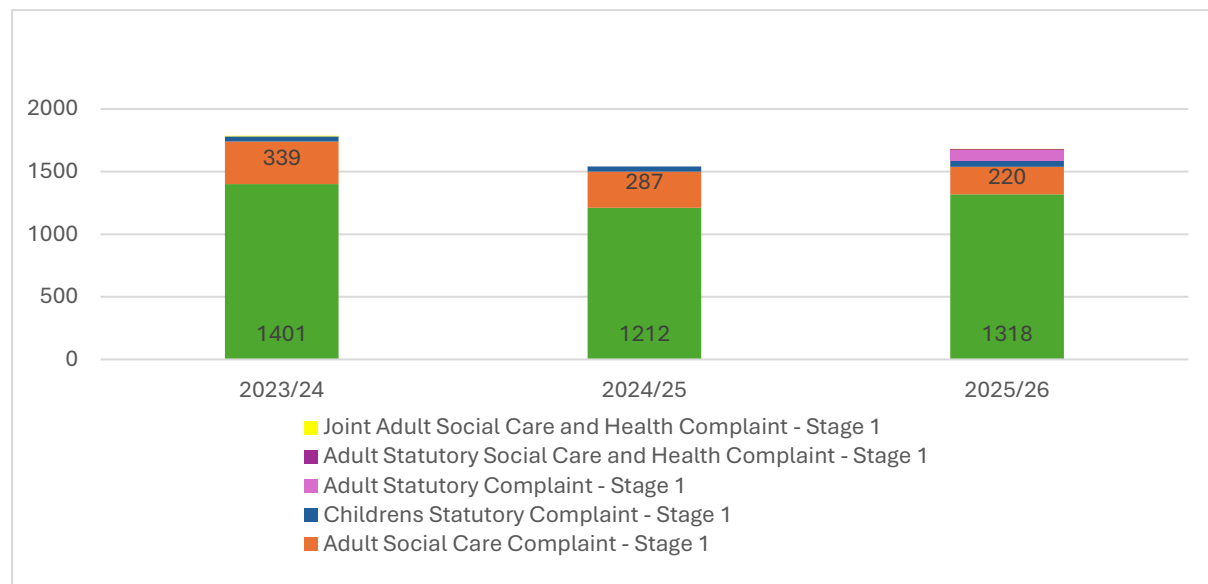


Figure 4 – Stage 1 complaints by stage for each reporting year.

Figure 5 shows that, when complaint volumes are adjusted for population size, the overall rate of Stage 1 complaints per 100,000 residents reduced between 2023/24 and 2024/25 before increasing again in 2025/26.

Although the latest year shows an increase of 15 complaints per 100,000 residents compared with 2024/25, the rate remains below the 2023/24 level. This suggests that, while complaint demand has increased in the most recent reporting period, the longer-term position is still lower than the peak seen two years ago. The annual population increase of around 12,000 residents also provides important context, as the Council is serving a growing population while complaint rates remain below the previous high point.

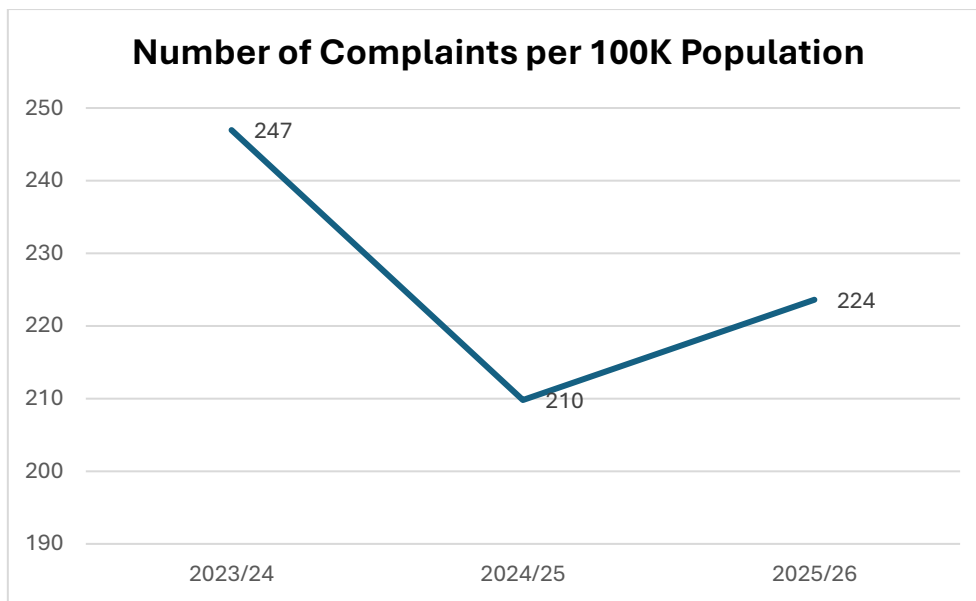


Figure 5 – Complaints per 100,000 within Leicestershire population

There was a total of 188 complainants who made more than 1 stage 1 complaint between 01/04/2025 and 31/03/2026. Generally, service users who have made more than 1 stage 1 complaint, have done so for different services and unrelated issues.

Corporate Complaints

Stage 1 Corporate Complaints

Figure 6 shows that the number of Stage 1 Corporate Complaints received has increased to 1,310 in 25/26 (1,210 in 24/25) and remains concentrated in two departments: Children and Family Services and Environment and Transport.

Children and Family Services recorded the highest volume in 2025/26 and has shown a gradual increase over the three-year period, while Environment and Transport remain the second largest source but is below the 2023/24 level.

Other departments continue to account for a much smaller proportion of complaints, indicating that overall performance is influenced by trends within these two high-volume service areas.

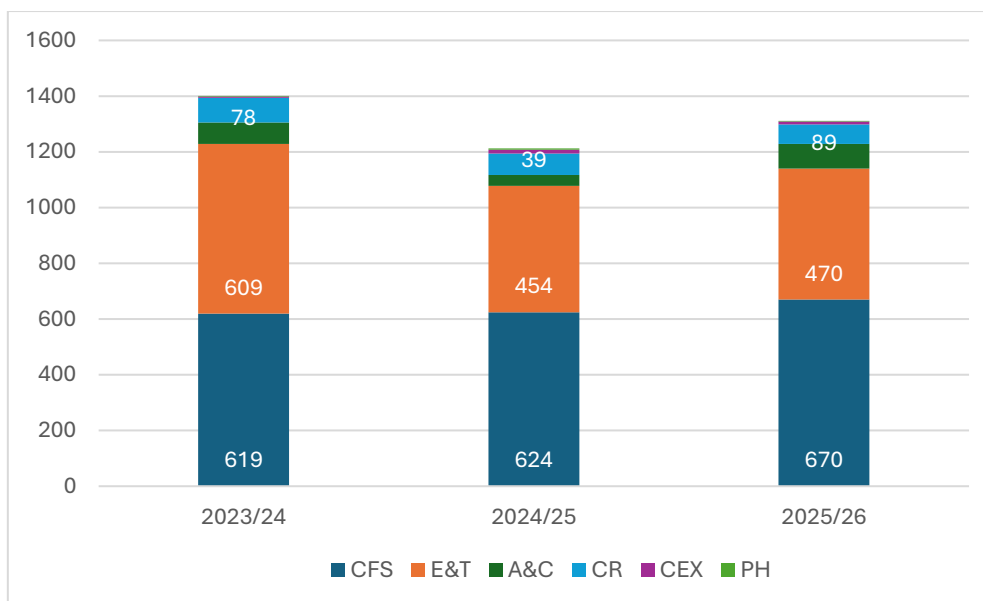


Figure 6 – Stage 1 corporate complaints by department

Stage 1 Corporate Complaints – Responsiveness

The Council's policy states we aim to reply to a corporate stage 1 complaint within 10 working days, but this can be extended up to a maximum of 40 working days.

Figure 7 shows that performance against the 10-working-day response aim has reduced over the three-year period, indicating that Stage 1 Corporate Complaints are taking longer to resolve. However, most complaints continue to be answered within the maximum 40-working-day period, with the proportion exceeding this limit remaining relatively stable at around 10%. This suggests that while early responsiveness has weakened, overall compliance with the maximum response timeframe has been broadly maintained despite increased complaint volumes.

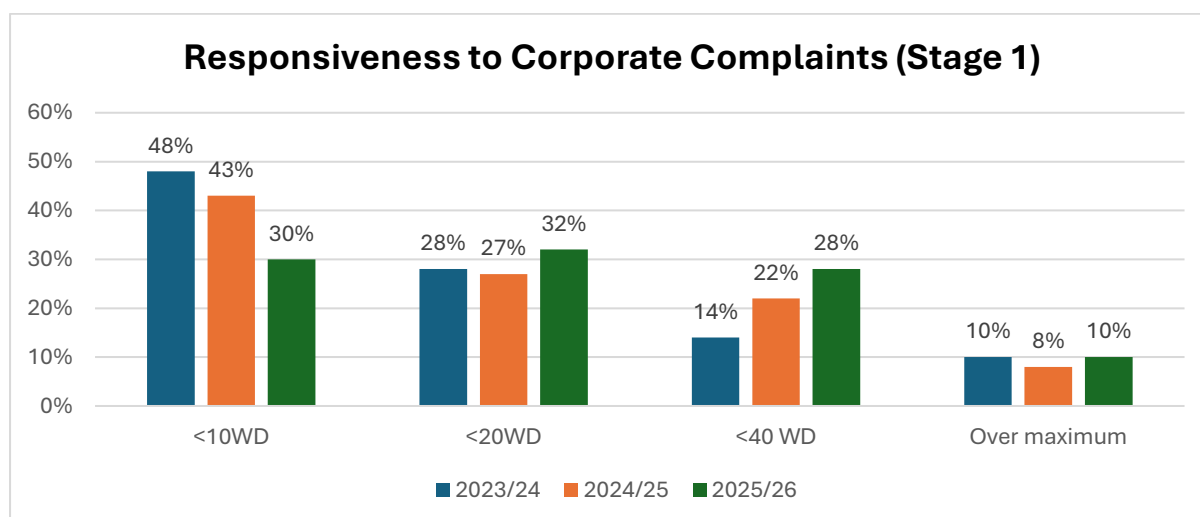


Figure 7 – responsiveness to stage 1 corporate complaints

Stage 1 Corporate Complaints – Decided

The chart below shows the top 5 complaint areas which have achieved an outcome, meaning where a decision has been made to either uphold or not uphold the complaint. The five most common complaint categories accounted for 551 of the 1,309 Stage 1 Corporate Complaints closed during 2025/26 (42.1%). Special Educational Needs Assessment (SENA) was the largest individual complaint category, with 299 complaints (22.8% of the total). Children's and SEND-related services dominated the highest-ranking complaint reasons, with SENA, Child Protection, School and SEN Transport, and SENA School Place collectively accounting for 385 complaints, representing 29.4% of all complaints closed during the year. Highway Repair and Maintenance was the fifth most common complaint category and the highest-ranking issue outside Children's Services. The concentration of complaints within a small number of service areas highlights where improvement activity is most likely to have the greatest impact on reducing future complaint volumes.

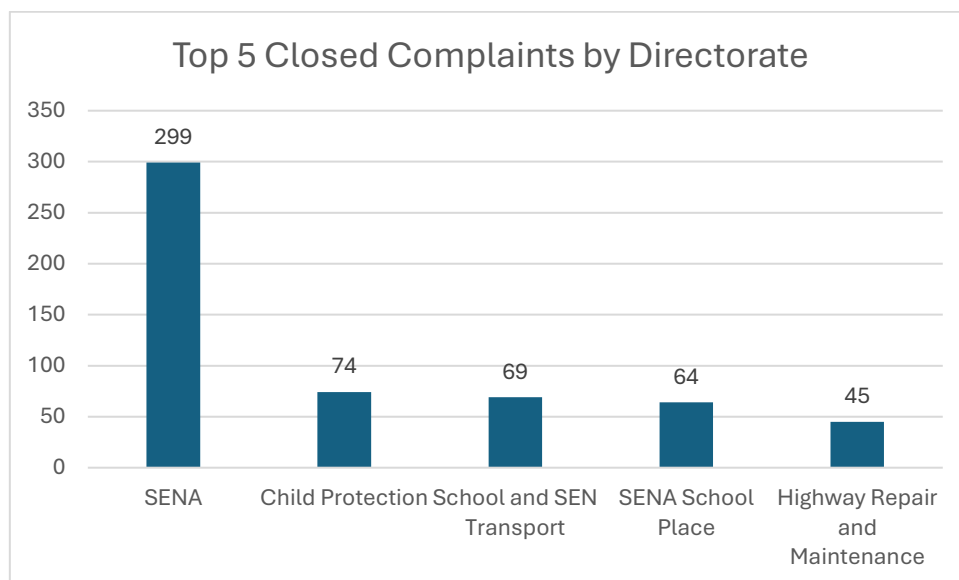


Figure 8 – top 5 complaints closed by directorate

The graph below shows during 2025/26, almost half (47%) of all Stage 1 Corporate Complaints were upheld, which is a reduction from 48% in 2024/2025 meaning the Council has seen an increase in the number of upheld cases with a small decline in the upheld rate.

A further 30% of complaints were investigated and concluded with no fault found, providing assurance that services had acted appropriately in a significant proportion of cases.

Neutral outcomes, including no finding and response given with no further action, accounted for 18% of closed complaints, while only a small number of cases were withdrawn (1%) or redirected to an alternative route of redress (4%).

Overall, the data demonstrates that the majority of complaints progressed through a full investigation process and resulted in a clear outcome for the complainant.

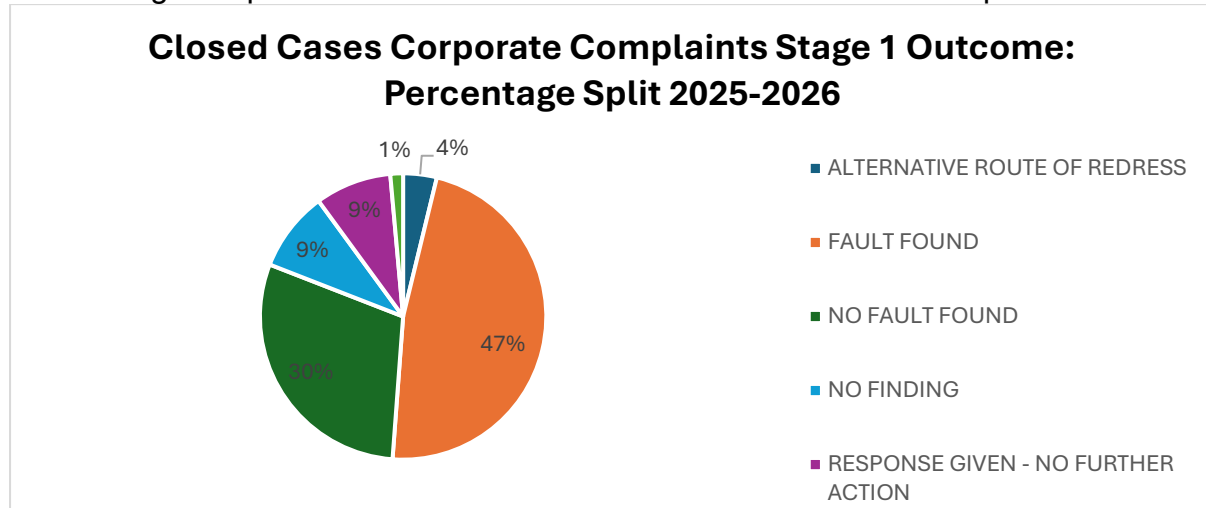


Figure 9 – stage 1 complaint outcomes

Stage 2 Corporate Complaint – Volumes

The graph below shows the number of Stage 2 corporate complaints increased significantly during 2025/26, rising to 218 cases compared with 74 in 2024/25. The increase was driven largely by CFS, which accounted for 159 Stage 2 complaints and approximately 73% of all escalated complaints.

While Stage 1 complaint volumes increased only modestly during the year, the proportion progressing to Stage 2 rose substantially from around 6% to 17%. This suggests that a greater number of complainants remained dissatisfied following their Stage 1 response and highlights the importance of strengthening early resolution and response quality, particularly within CFS. Other departments experienced comparatively low levels of escalation and had a limited impact on the overall trend.

The Complaints & Information Manager completed a review of all SEN complaints to understand why complaints were moving to Stage 2. During this exercise, a large portion of the complaints had been completed correctly but there were a small number of complaints where escalation to Stage 2 could have been mitigated.

Following this the team have created new complaint response templates for use across the organisation. These templates provide structure to complaint responses and ensure each point has been thoroughly investigated. These are then quality checked by the complaints team before being issued.

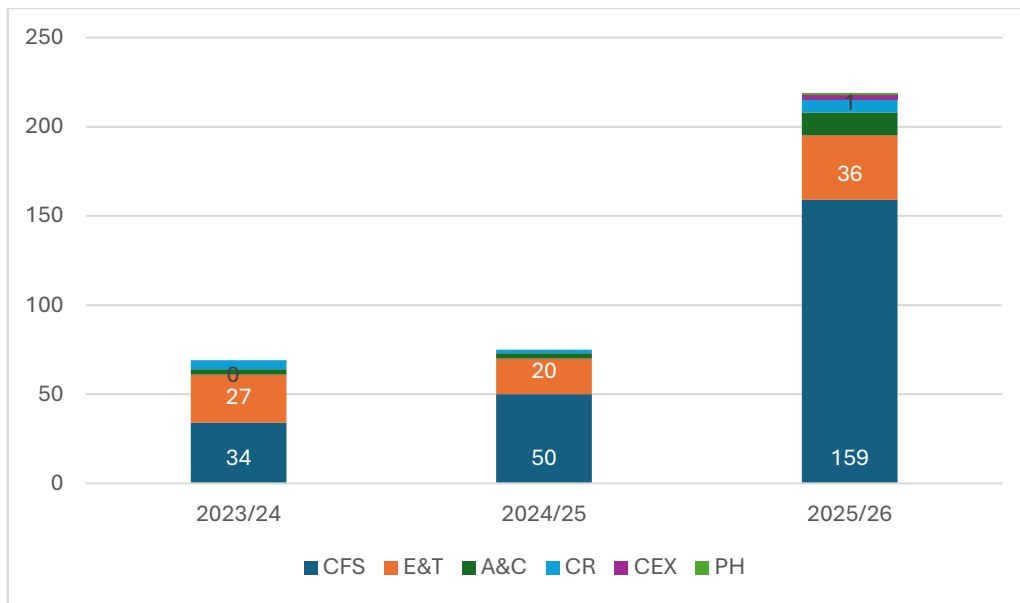


Figure 11 – stage 2 corporate complaints by department

Stage 2 Corporate Complaints – Responsiveness

The Council's policy states that stage 2 cases will be responded to within 20 working days.

Figure 12 shows a deterioration in Stage 2 responsiveness, with the proportion of complaints answered within 20 working days falling from 61% in 2023/24 to 31% in 2025/26. This means that, in the latest reporting period, over two-thirds of Stage 2 complaints exceeded the target timescale. The decline should be viewed alongside the significant rise in Stage 2 volumes, which placed additional pressure on the complaints process and likely contributed to longer response times.

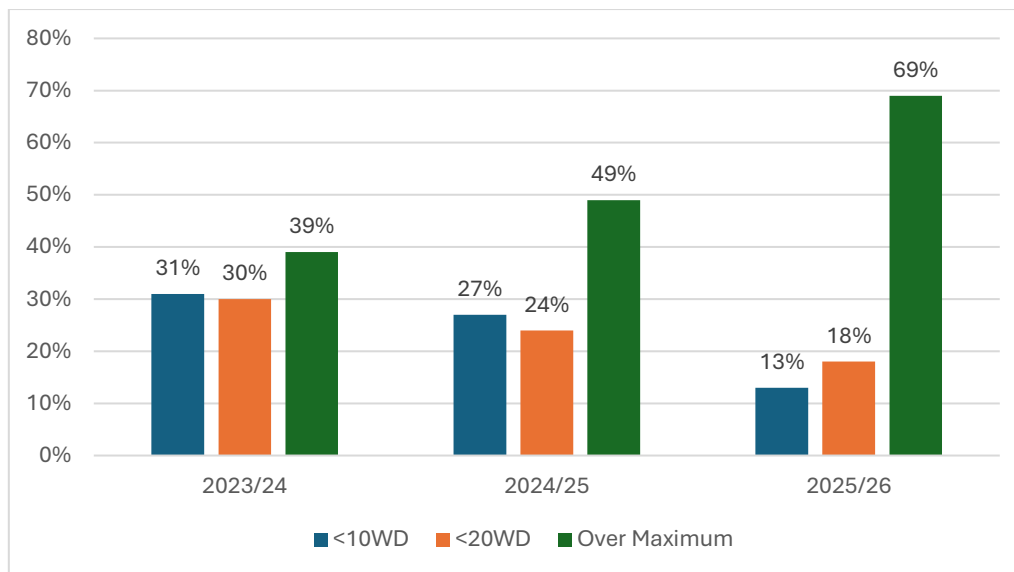


Figure 12 – responsiveness to stage 2 complaints

Stage 2 Corporate Complaints – Decisions

During 2025/26, 42% of Stage 2 Corporate Complaints were upheld, while 36% resulted in no fault being found. Where the complaint was upheld, the Complaints Investigator disagreed with the initial findings of the stage 1 complaint, where no fault was found this indicates the Complaints Investigator agreed with the initial complaints assessment and response. Together, these outcomes accounted for 78% of all closed Stage 2 complaints, demonstrating that most investigations reached a clear conclusion.

A further 19% resulted in either no finding or a response being provided with no further action required. Very few complaints were withdrawn (1%) or redirected to an alternative route of redress (2%). The outcomes indicate that Stage 2 continues to provide both an important safeguard for complainants and an effective mechanism for reviewing service decisions, with a significant proportion of escalated complaints identifying areas for learning and improvement.

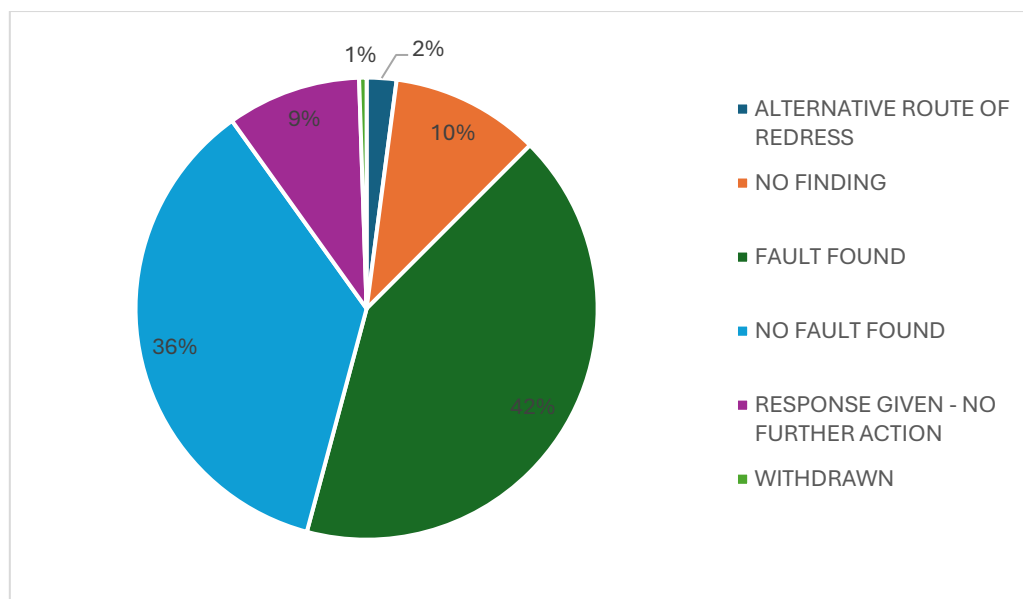


Figure 13 – stage 2 complaint outcomes

Learning from Complaints

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

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

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

Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO)

The number of enquiries and complaints received means the number of new cases received in the reporting period.

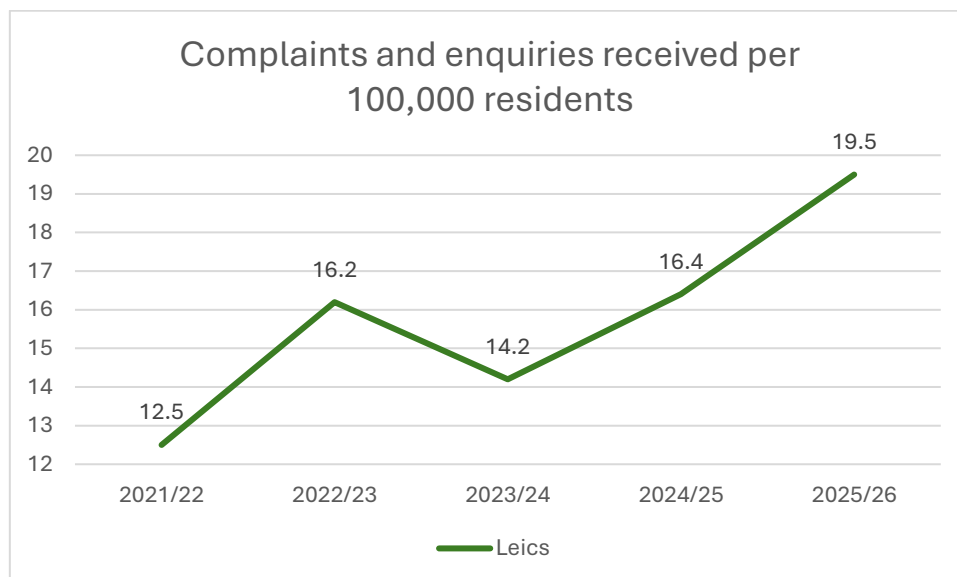


Figure 14 – LGO complaints per 100,000 residents

The number of complaints and enquiries received by the Ombudsman in respect of Leicestershire has generally increased since 2020/21, increasing from 122 (2024/25) to 146 in 2025/26. An increase per 100,000 residents is also seen.

Volume and Percentage Share by Area

Case Category	2023/24		2024/25		2025/26	
Education and Children's Services	67	64%	73	60%	83	57%
Adult Social Care	26	25%	30	25%	36	25%
Highways and Transport	8	8%	14	11%	16	11%
Corporate and Other Services	-	-	2	2%	10	7%
Environmental Services & Public Protection & Regulation	2	2%	1	1%	1	1%
Housing	1	1%	-	-		
Planning and Development	-	-	1	1%		
Other	-	-	1	1%		

Figure 15 – LGO case volumes by area

Figure 16 shows that Ombudsman complaints and enquiries continue to be concentrated in three categories. Education and Children's Services remain the largest category, increasing from 67 cases in 2023/24 to 83 in 2025/26. However, its share of total cases has reduced from 64% to 57%, suggesting that increases are also being seen across other service areas.

Adult Social Care has increased in volume, from 26 to 36 cases, but has remained stable as a proportion of total cases at 25%. Highways and Transport has also increased from 8 to 16 cases, maintaining an 11% share in the two most recent years. Corporate and Other Services has seen the most notable proportional increase, rising to 10 cases and 7% in 2025/26.

Overall, the top three categories account for between 92% and 97% of cases each year. The dominance of Education and Children's Services mirrors the profile of Leicestershire's local complaint numbers within other local authorities.

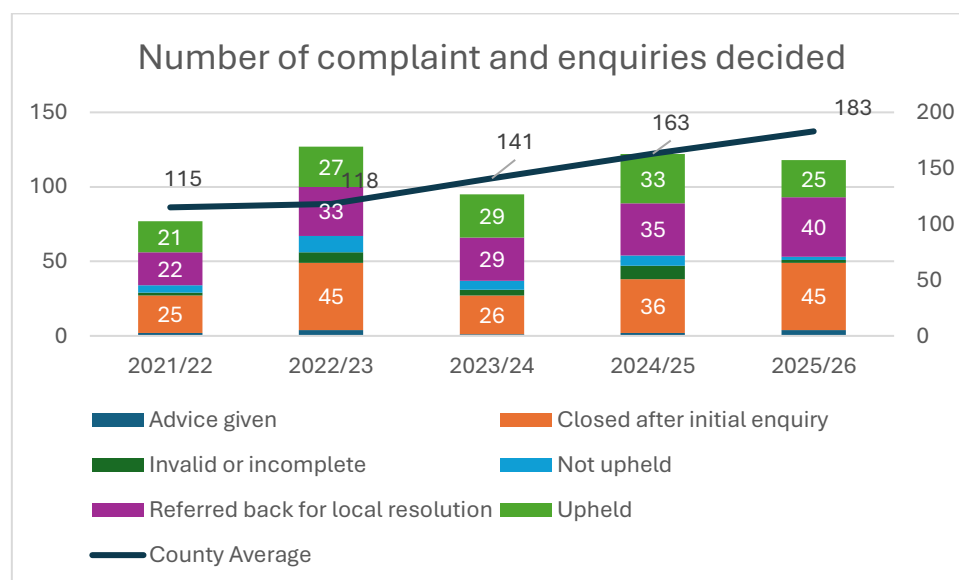


Figure 16 – complaint and enquiries decided by the LGO

For context, during 2025/26, 218 Stage 2 Corporate Complaints were received. Of these, 39 complaints were subsequently referred to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman, representing an escalation rate of 17.9%. A total of 25 Ombudsman decisions were issued in relation to Corporate Complaints. This equates to 11.5% of Stage 2 complaints and 1.9% of all Stage 1 Corporate Complaints received during the year, demonstrating that the vast majority of complaints were resolved through the Council's own complaints procedure without requiring an Ombudsman determination.

The number of complaints and enquiries decided by the Ombudsman in relation to Leicestershire has fluctuated over the five-year reporting period and, in each of the

last three years, has remained below the rising average. This trend continued in the most recent reporting period, with the number of cases decided decreasing by 4, from 122 in 2024/26 to 118 in 2025/26.

The key decision category is 'Upheld', as these are cases where investigations took place and the Ombudsman found fault; the next section considers upheld cases in more detail.

Complaint decisions upheld by the Local Government & Social Care Ombudsman in Leicestershire

The Ombudsman uses two key metrics in relation to upheld cases:

- 'Uphold Rate' which shows how often an organisation gets things wrong and is expressed as a percentage of the investigations the Ombudsman completes.
- Upheld decisions per 100,000 residents (metric available since 2022/23).

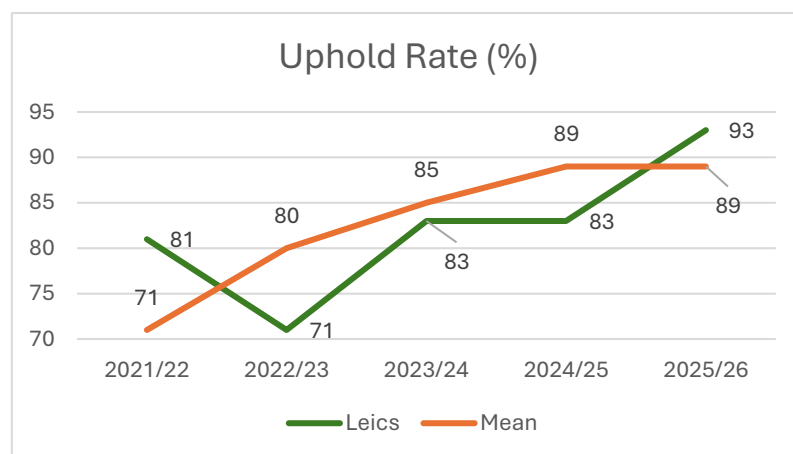


Figure 17 – LGO upheld rate

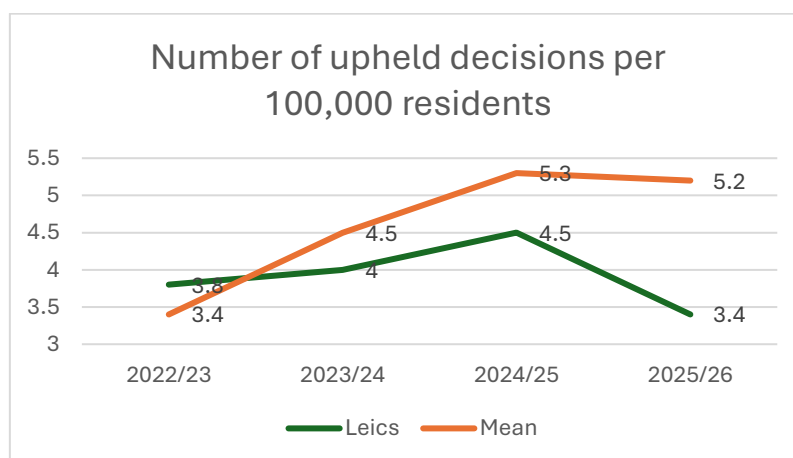


Figure 18 – upheld LGO decisions per 100,000 residents

Figure 18 shows that Leicestershire's Uphold Rate has increased from 83% in 2024/25 to 89% in 2025/26. However, this increase should be interpreted in the context of lower case volumes: the number of cases investigated fell from 40 to 27, and the number of upheld cases reduced from 33 to 25. This means the higher percentage does not reflect an increase in the actual number of upheld cases. Instead, it indicates that a greater proportion of the smaller number of investigated cases were upheld.

This highlights the importance of considering the Uphold Rate alongside the number of upheld decisions per 100,000 residents. Against this measure, Leicestershire's position has improved, reducing from 5.2 upheld cases per 100,000 residents in 2024/25 to 3.4 in 2025/26. Overall, while the percentage rate has increased, the underlying volume of upheld cases and the population-adjusted rate suggest an improvement in performance.

It should be noted that changes implemented by the Ombudsman to its investigation processes in 2022/23 have contributed to an increase in the average Uphold Rate across all complaints.

Upheld cases (25) in 2025/26 remain concentrated in Education and Children's Services, although the overall number reduced slightly from 19 to 17. Within this category, SEN-related complaints continue to dominate. Adult Care Services also saw a reduction in upheld cases, from 13 to 8, with no upheld charging cases recorded in 2025/26.

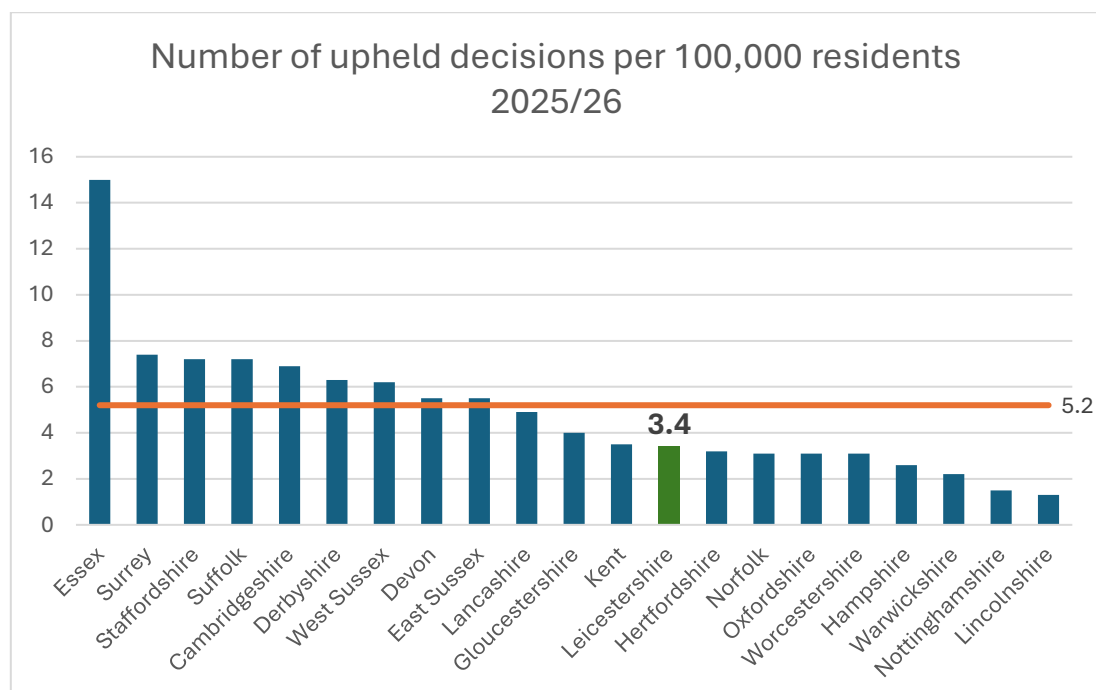


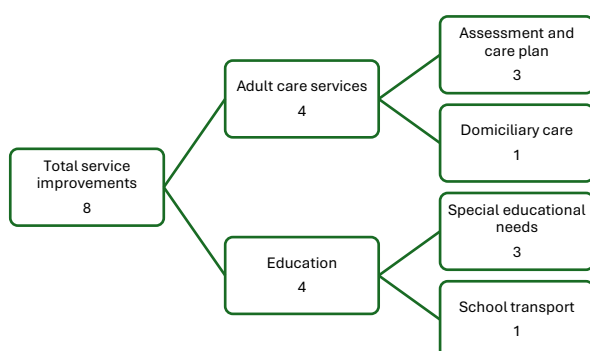
Figure 19 – Upheld decisions per 100,000 residents compared to county councils

Leicestershire's relative position improved in 2025/26, with 8 counties performing better, compared to 10 in 2024/25. It is worth noting that small numbers are involved in almost all county figures with each case investigated representing 4 or 5% for some counties. A single case can cause a noticeable swing in rate.

Service Improvements

Service improvements are actions the Council agrees to take to address faults identified in our investigations, which help prevent similar problems affecting other residents.

8 cases with service improvements were recorded in 2025/26.



Remedy Payments Recommended by the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman

The Ombudsman may recommend a remedy in the form of a payment which may contain elements for failure to provide a service together with an element to recognise the complainants time and trouble to pursue the complaint. The table below shows the total payments made because of recommendations made by the Ombudsman.

Reporting Year	Remedy Payment Value
2022/23	£40,750
2023/24	£27,222
2024/25	£21,113
2025/26	£37,494

Appendix A – Sample of Compliments Received in 2025/26

- We had a guided tour with Francis which was great and really brought the history to life. The battle at the end was a good laugh. Thank you.
- A lovely morning at Wigston library with great crafting activities. Thank you for being so kind.
- I loved the Easter craft event at Wigston library. It was fun, exciting and I loved drawing and making things.
- The Bosworth Battlefield Heritage Centre is well worth a visit! The staff and volunteers were a credit to the site and the videos were a good way of showing the time-line of what occurred.
- The Roald Dahl craft event at Oadby Library was a very interesting theme for the kids, which they enjoyed and the staff were very helpful too.
- Thank you for being such an important part of our wedding day. Your calm presence, guidance and kindness helped us feel at ease and fully present in one of the most meaningful moments of our lives.
- Thank you Robbie Coleman for your help with the plans which were very good and for getting back to parents quickly.
- Thank you to the SENA team, my daughter started Leicester High School for Girls and has done very well. I wanted to share my gratitude in the support and faith Maya has received to help her fulfil her true potential despite her challenges.
- LOVE the bite size videos Charlotte and Thank you so much for your help and support, as always. Post-adoption is one of the very few teams at LCC that have always been so helpful. Thank you!
- We have lived here for 11 years and struggled with all the leaves on the pavement but someone recently came and cleared them onto the street and then cleared them up with a street sweeper. We are over the moon! Thank you.
- Visited Lount recycling centre with a car of mixed items, well organised and equipped site with all operatives fully engaged. As they say a good customer experience....really a job well done!
- I have just finished the 12 week weight management and it has been such a great experience, Tyrell explained things in real life making it more realistic for people to make permanent changes and loose weight. Thank you.

Appendix B – LGSCO Decisions for Leicestershire County Council 01 April 2025 – 31 March 2026

There are 25 results (please note that to maintain confidentiality, the ombudsman does not publish all decisions)

Case 1 Special educational needs 19-May-2025

We cannot investigate Mrs X's complaint the Council failed to seek advice and information from an Educational Psychologist (EP) as part of its Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment of her child Y because it is connected to her appeal to the Tribunal. The Council was at fault for not issuing Y's plan within the statutory timescales. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X to acknowledge the uncertainty and delayed appeal rights this caused.

Case 2 Special educational needs 29-May-2025

We found the Council at fault for failing to properly consider its duty to provide alternative education for Mrs X's child, Y, or document its decision-making. However, we cannot say the Council's decision would have been different, but for these faults. The Council agreed to apologise and pay a symbolic financial remedy in recognition of the avoidable uncertainty this caused. It also agreed to provide guidance to its officers.

Case 3 Domiciliary care 24-Jun-2025

Mrs H complained a Care Provider wrongly told her that her mother, Mrs G, would not have to pay for care she received at home for six weeks. We did not uphold the complaint. While there was some evidence to support Mrs H's account and some poor complaint handling by the Provider, this did not cause Mrs G or Mrs H an injustice.

Case 4 Assessment and care plan 01-Jul-2025

Mrs X complained the NHS Trust and the Council discharged her father from hospital into an unsuitable care home. We found fault by the NHS Trust, but we could not say this would have led to a different outcome. The NHS Trust has already accepted the fault, but we recommended it apologises to Mrs X for the uncertainty caused. We did not find fault by the Council's actions, but we did find fault with how it dealt with Mrs X's complaint. We made recommendations to address this.

Case 5 Alternative provision 03-Jul-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to provide education for her child for over three years. Mrs X also complained the Council failed to review or update her child's Education, Health and Care Plan. We found fault with the Council failing to provide suitable education for Mrs X's child from 22 May 2023 to 28 August 2024. We also found fault with the Council delaying by 17 months outside the statutory timescales in reviewing Mrs X's child's Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has also accepted it failed to provide provision to Mrs X's child from their Education, Health and Care Plan or provide suitable education from 3 September 2024 to 30 May 2025. We have detailed the actions the Council has agreed to take to address the injustice its fault caused in paragraph 86 of this decision statement.

Case 6 Special educational needs 22-Jul-2025

The Council was at fault in how it reviewed and amended Mrs X's child W's Education, Health and Care Plan. It was also at fault for delay securing the provision in that Plan and for poor complaints handling. This caused Mrs X frustration and meant she had to go to undue time and trouble pursuing her complaint. It also meant W missed out on provision they should have had. To remedy their injustice, the Council will apologise to Mrs X, pay her £1100 and confirm the name of the member of staff who will act as her single point of contact in future.

Case 7 Special educational needs 13-Aug-2025

We will not investigate this complaint about educational provision for a child. Some of the complaint is late, Miss X had an appeals right and it was reasonable to expect her to use them. Additionally, we could not add to the investigation the Council has already carried out, because it upheld her complaint and has provided a suitable remedy for her injustice.

Case 8 Special educational needs 20-Aug-2025

Mrs X complained that the Council delayed issuing an Education, Health and Care Plan after a needs assessment. There was 6 months delay by the Council, which was fault. A payment remedies the injustice to Mrs X. There was also delay in providing Speech and Language and Occupational Therapy provision, which could have been provided separately to the school setting which Mrs X disputed at tribunal. An apology and payment remedies the frustration and distress, and loss of provision to Y, the child.

Case 9 School transport 03-Sep-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to properly assess her child's transport needs, did not communicate effectively and caused delays in arranging suitable transport. We find the Council at fault for failing to reflect key information from the application in its risk assessment, and for failing to keep Mrs X updated. As a result, unsuitable transport was arranged, and Mrs X incurred avoidable costs to ensure her child could attend education. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to Mrs X.

Case 10 Domiciliary care 15-Sep-2025

We will not investigate this complaint about adult social care provided at home, and specifically about the mismanagement of medication. It is unlikely we would add to the Council's investigation or reach a different outcome. There is not enough outstanding injustice to justify our involvement; the Council apologised to recognise the impact of failings in service. We are satisfied with the actions the Council took.

Case 11 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, Z's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to the Council's area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place Z temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by apologising to Mrs Y and Z; making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on Z; and service improvements.

Case 12 Special educational needs 17-Sep-2025

Mrs Y complained about the way the Council dealt with her child, X's special educational needs and educational provision following a move to its area. We have found fault causing injustice by the Council in failing to: place X temporarily at another school; secure their special educational needs provision; and make suitable alternative provision following the transfer of their Education, Health and Care Plan. The Council has agreed to remedy this by apologising to Mrs Y and X; and making payments to reflect the distress caused and the impact of the missed education on X.

Case 13 Special educational needs 23-Sep-2025

We will not investigate this complaint about the Education, Health and Care plan process. This is because the Council apologised and offered a suitable remedy and it is unlikely further investigation would achieve anything more for Mr X.

Case 14 Domiciliary care 13-Oct-2025

Mrs X complains on behalf of Mr and Mrs Y that the Council has not dealt with adult social care properly, causing avoidable distress and Mr and Mrs Y's needs not being met. The Council is at fault because Mrs X was not informed about bathing issues, Mr and Mrs Y missed some care, and the Care Provider did not respond to the complaint properly. Mrs X suffered avoidable distress and had to provide some care to Mr and Mrs Y. Mr and Mrs Y suffered a lack of care. The Council should apologise to Mrs X and Mr and Mrs Y.

Case 15 Domiciliary care 21-Oct-2025

Mrs X complained the Council failed to ensure her mother, Mrs Y, had suitable care at home. The Council was at fault. It was also at fault in how it decided that it would not take action to safeguard Mrs Y's welfare. The faults caused Mrs X significant distress and uncertainty, for which the Council will apologise and pay her £300. It will also issue a staff reminder to prevent similar fault in future.

Case 16 Special educational needs 17-Nov-2025

We found fault by the Council on Mrs Y's complaint about its failure to process her request for an Education, Health and Care plan within statutory timescales. It missed the statutory time limit by 39 weeks. It failed to consider whether it was appropriate to fund her daughter's special needs it was aware of when she started home education. It also failed to consider its section 19 duties sooner, advise her and consider education other than at school sooner, or give her information about the consequences of home educating her. The Council agreed to send a written apology, pay £397.06 for the injustice caused by its failures, provide an Action Plan showing how future assessments will be completed within statutory timescales, and will ensure relevant officers consider section 19 duties and education other than at school during assessments where children are out of school. It will ensure it gives parents relevant information and improve communication with them.

Case 17 Alternative provision 27-Nov-2025

Mrs X complained the Council did not provide full time education suitable for her daughter's needs when she could not attend school. We found the Council at fault for not putting in place provision it agreed her daughter needed, impacting on her

educational progress. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a symbolic payment to recognise the injustice caused.

Case 18 Special educational needs 08-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate if the Council was at fault for failing to ensure Miss X's child Y received the special educational provision outlined in their Education, Health and Care Plan, as it was too closely connected to her reason for appealing to the Tribunal. There was fault in the Council's communication and complaint handling for which it has offered a suitable financial remedy during our investigation for the frustration caused. The Council was also at fault for failing to send its decision within four weeks of Y's annual review meeting however this fault did not cause a significant injustice.

Case 19 Special educational needs 23-Dec-2025

We cannot investigate this complaint about the school named in an Education Health and Care Plan, or a failure to provide education. Mr X has appealed to the SEND Tribunal about the matter and therefore the law says we cannot investigate. Nor will we investigate Mr X's further complaint about delays in the annual review process. When considering this complaint, the Council agreed to provide a suitable remedy for Mr X's injustice and there are no wider public interest issues to justify investigating this complaint.

Case 20 School transport 14-Jan-2026

Summary: The Council was at fault for failing to ensure Y's final amended Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan was issued within statutory timescales following the annual review. The Council was also at fault for failing to consider the relevant circumstances of Y's school transport application when deciding to award them a personal travel budget instead of council organised transport. The Council has agreed to apologise and make a payment to remedy the distress, frustration and uncertainty caused.

Case 21 Other 24-Feb-2026

We do not consider Leicestershire County Council acted with fault when it decided certain care homes could meet Mrs D's assessed needs on discharge from hospital. The Council did not act with fault when it decided she should pay a top-up, despite jointly funding that placement with the NHS Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Care Board under Section 117 of the Mental Health Act. However, the Council's communication around the Section 117 top-up arrangement and invoices amounted to fault which caused Mrs D's daughter, Miss D, inconvenience and stress. But we consider the Council has already remedied that injustice to her.

Case 22 Assessment and care plan 04-Mar-2026

There was a delay by the Council in reviewing H's assessment after Mrs X complained, which caused her frustration and anxiety. In addition, the Council has not considered properly H's additional expenses incurred because of his disabilities, with the result that he is unable to finance some items. The Council agrees to review his personal expenses allowance.

Case 23 School transport 09-Mar-2026

The Council was at fault in how it dealt with Mrs X's application for free school transport. This caused Mrs X avoidable frustration but did not mean she missed out on Council funded school transport. The Council will apologise to Mrs X.

Case 24 Assessment and care plan 25-Mar-2026

Mrs X complained about the actions of Leicestershire County Council (the Council), Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (the Trust) and HC-One Ltd (the Provider). She complained about faults in the way her late brother Mr Z was discharged from hospital, in his residential care and in the handling of concerns, safeguarding and complaints. We upheld elements of all three complaints. We recommended the organisations apologise and provide remedies to Mrs X. We also recommended service improvements. The organisations accepted our recommendations, so we have completed our investigation.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

DRAFT LEICESTERSHIRE AND RUTLAND SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN
PARTNERSHIP YEARLY REPORT 2025-26

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek the views of the Committee on the draft Yearly Report of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership (LRSCP) for 2025-26.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Acts of 1989 and 2004 set out specific duties for Local Authorities, working with partner organisations and agencies, to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 puts a duty on the Local Authority to provide services to children in need in their area; section 47 of the same Act requires Local Authorities to undertake enquiries if they believe a child has suffered or is likely to suffer significant harm.
3. These duties can only realistically be discharged with the full co-operation of other partners, many of whom have individual duties when carrying out their functions under section 11 of the Children Act 2004.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 and Working Together 2026 (statutory guidance on multi-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children) give responsibility for this join-up locally to the safeguarding partners, the Police, Integrated Care Board and the Local Authority, which have a shared and equal duty to agree and make arrangements to work together to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in a local area.
5. The multi-agency safeguarding arrangements locally are managed through the LRSCP that covers the counties of Leicestershire and Rutland.
6. It is a statutory requirement, as set out in Working Together 2026, that the Safeguarding Partners publish a report at least once every twelve months on the arrangements and their effectiveness.

Background

7. The original Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements for Leicestershire and Rutland were presented to this Committee in March 2019, prior to being published in June 2019.
8. In 2024-25, the arrangements were reviewed in light of the updated government guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be based on Local Authority areas. Arrangements can cover two or more local authority boundaries by agreement. As a number of partners are shared with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, as of December 2024, joint [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) are now published.
9. In line with Working Together 2026, updates to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements are required when there are key changes, such as changes to the Lead Safeguarding Partners, or the list of relevant agencies. Updates are sent to the Department for Education. In 2025-26, updates were implemented to reflect:
 - The change of Lead Safeguarding Partner for the Integrated Care Board, Police and Leicestershire Local Authority
 - The change of Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Police, Rutland Local Authority and Leicestershire Local Authority.
10. The Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) shares some operational arrangements with the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board and some partnership structures with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Yearly Report

11. The key purpose of the Yearly Report is to assess the impact of the work undertaken in 2025-26 on safeguarding outcomes for children in Leicestershire and Rutland. Specifically, it evaluates performance against the priorities that are set out in the [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Business Plan 2025-27](#).
12. The report outlines the learning, assurance, training and improvement activity of the LRSCP and its partners, and the impact this has had on safeguarding children. Key messages from the SCP to Leicestershire are:
 - There has been a significant amount of work completed around child sexual abuse and the progress made was reflected in the findings of the local system-wide child sexual abuse snapshot, completed by the NSPCC, and the positive result of the Leicestershire Joint Targeted Area Inspection.
 - The Safeguarding Children Partnership has supported a system change around how Health shares more detailed health information with Children's Social Care and highlights the impact / potential impact of abuse and neglect upon a child's health needs.
 - The Safeguarding Children Partnership has been liaising with and seeking assurance from the Adolescent Safety and Diversion Board and the local Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group on Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE)

and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) work across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, in light of the findings of Baroness Casey's report.

- The reflective questions for Safeguarding Children Partnerships, posed in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's briefing ["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children](#) (March 2025), have been addressed. A multi-agency audit has been completed, new training commissioned, and learning promoted and embedded.
- The Partnership has been awaiting publication of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's [Child Neglect: A thematic analysis](#). This was released in April 2026. Work will now be carried out to respond locally to the national learning.
- The Partnership continues to benchmark itself against and consider learning from key national and out of area reviews. In 2025-26, it has particularly focused on the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's [Protecting all vulnerable babies better: national review into the broader safeguarding issues raised by the death of baby Victoria Marten](#) and the Sara Sharif Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review.

Proposals/Options

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

Consultation

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

Resource Implications

16. Safeguarding partners have, along with Safeguarding Adults Board partners, set a single agreement of principles to share the operating costs of the SCP and Safeguarding Adults Board for Leicestershire and Rutland.
17. As part of this agreement, Leicestershire County Council contributed £66,258 to the SCP in 2025-26. This is 32% of the total funding for the SCP (£206,989). This matches the contribution for 2024-25.
18. Expenditure overall was £249,210. Although costs have risen, evidence suggests that the output of the Partnership demonstrates value for money. The difference between funding and expenditure was covered by the SCP's reserve funds.
19. As of 1 April 2026, the SCP's reserve funds stand at £103,315. This amount has been held due to a foreseen increase in costs and has meant that partners have not been asked for an increase in contributions; however, this surplus will eventually be

used and therefore all partners will be expected to ensure that the LRSCP is self-sufficient.

20. Leicestershire County Council hosts the Safeguarding Partnerships Business Office that supports the SCP and Safeguarding Adults Board.

Timetable for Decisions

21. The Yearly Report of the SCP will be presented to the Cabinet for noting on 8 September 2026. The Yearly Report will be published by the end of September 2026. Any comments will be considered and addressed prior to the final report being published.

Conclusions

22. The Committee are asked to comment on the draft LRSCP Yearly Report 2025-26.

Background papers

23. Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 September 2025: [Draft Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2024-25](#).

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None.

Equality Implications

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

Human Right Implications

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

Crime and Disorder Implications

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

Health Implications

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

Appendices

Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership Yearly Report 2025-26

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**Leicestershire & Rutland
Safeguarding Children
Partnership
Yearly Report 2025-26**

Foreword

The child protection and early help landscape continues to evolve, with the Families First Partnership (FFP) a year into its two-year implementation programme. This is an exciting opportunity to reset the way services are delivered and how agencies and practitioners engage children and families. The programme is underpinned by principles and values of whole family working and developing multi-disciplinary teams who contribute to a team around the family.

The SEND Reform is in progress, and changes are imminent as a result of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the Crime and Policing Act 2026, with the aim of strengthening practice around different cohorts of children and young people, including care leavers, those affected by child sexual abuse and child criminal exploitation.

These reforms and changes in legislation will have an effect on multi-agency working nationally and locally. We, the local Safeguarding Children Partners, have a responsibility to support and guide the local workforce through this period of change, acknowledging the context of increased demand and challenging workloads. We thank them for their continued dedication and commitment to local children and young people.

In 2025-26, the Safeguarding Children Partnership of Leicestershire & Rutland, alongside the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, have implemented and embedded our own significant changes to structure and processes. These have led to improvements to quality assurance, scrutiny, communication and engagement arrangements. This has, in turn, led to encouraging and impactful feedback about our work at both a strategic and practice level, with the Leicestershire Joint Targeted Area Inspection recognising the commitment to support local children affected by child sexual abuse, and at an operational level with positive responses to our training events and learning and development resources.

We are pleased to present this report of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership that covers the period from 1st April 2025 to 31st March 2026.

The Safeguarding Partners for Leicestershire & Rutland

Key Achievements in 2025-26	Key Challenges in 2025-26
• Significant amount of work completed around child sexual abuse and the progress made reflected in the positive result of the Leicestershire Joint Targeted Area Inspection • Changes implemented to the subgroup structure have had a positive impact on understanding of	• Changes resulting from national reforms, whilst positive, are requiring a lot of local changes which is challenging in terms of timescales and resources required • There is a need to ensure the Partnership remains stable in the context of wider changes, such as

quality assurance and service improvement, with an increased number of multi-agency audits completed in 2025-26, enhancing the picture around key safeguarding themes - Two Young Scrutineers have been recruited to work alongside the Adult Independent Scrutineer, strengthening the commitment to ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of children and young people are at the heart of everything the Partnerships do - Continued timely implementation of learning resulting from national reviews, published by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, and out of area reviews	the Local Government Reorganisation Significant and notable increase in demand at the front door across all three Local Authorities (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) and, therefore, there has been a significant demand in multi-agency meetings, with rises in strategy discussions, Section 47s, Initial Child Protection Conferences and Review Child Protection Conferences
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"I just wanted to take a moment to say a heartfelt thank you to the worker for everything you have done for me and my children. Your support and guidance have been absolutely incredible."

Feedback from Leicestershire parent/carer

"I hope every situation would have social workers like you two. It doesn't feel like you were judgmental, but for (Mum) especially that meant a lot to me that she wouldn't feel judged. You both have been open and honest. You came across as people that understand people and what children need. [...] You were people that knew more than us and we can only ever learn from people like you. [...] You worked with us teaching us, so we learnt too."

Feedback from Rutland parent/carer

Observations from our Independent Scrutineer

During 2025-26, I have continued to provide independent scrutiny, constructive challenge, assurance and support to the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership. My focus has been on testing whether the local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements are effective, whether partners are working together with sufficient pace and impact, and whether the voice and lived experience of children and families are influencing strategic decision-making.

This year, the Partnership has shown clear evidence of strengthening its governance and quality assurance arrangements. The revised subgroup structure, including the introduction of separate Performance and Audit Groups, has improved its ability to understand practice, identify themes and translate learning into action. It has also supported a more focused approach to assurance, enabling partners to consider quantitative data alongside qualitative evidence from audits, reviews and practitioner feedback.

There have also been notable strengths during the year. The Partnership's work on child sexual abuse has been particularly significant, bringing together learning from local reviews, multi-agency audit activity, the NSPCC system-wide snapshot and the Leicestershire Joint Targeted Area Inspection to inform strategic planning and workforce development. The positive findings from the Joint Targeted Area Inspection reflected strong local commitment, skilled frontline practice and effective multi-agency leadership. The challenge now is to sustain this momentum and ensure that the emerging strategy, training offer and pathways lead to consistent practice across all agencies.

As Independent Scrutineer, I have observed the Partnership's continued focus on learning from reviews, national evidence and inspection findings. There is a clear commitment to embedding learning in practice through briefings, procedures, training and assurance activity. Work on neglect, safeguarding children with chronic health needs, safer sleep, belonging and harm outside the home demonstrates the breadth of the Partnership's safeguarding agenda and its willingness to respond to both local and national learning.

Another important development has been the Partnership's strengthened commitment to hearing from children, young people and families. The establishment of the Communication and Engagement Group and the recruitment of Young Scrutineers are important steps in ensuring that scrutiny is informed not only by professionals, but also by those who experience services. This work should continue to develop so that the voices of children and families are visible in priority-setting, audit activity, service improvement and the evaluation of impact.

Alongside these strengths, there remain areas requiring continued attention. Increased demand across the front door, child protection processes and multi-agency meetings has placed pressure on agencies and practitioners. At the same time, the implementation of national reforms, including the Families First Partnership programme, SEND reform and legislative change, is creating further complexity. The Partnership will need to maintain oversight of the impact of these changes, particularly in relation to thresholds, information sharing, workforce capacity and the consistency of multi-agency decision-making.

This wider context is compounded by ongoing organisational change across partner agencies and sustained budgetary pressures. The impact of these pressures should be kept under close review, particularly in relation to capacity, partnership resilience and the ability to sustain improvement activity.

In response, I have worked closely throughout the year with the Independent Chair of the Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board. This has supported a more joined-up approach to scrutiny in two key areas: understanding the impact of partnership budget pressures and progressing work on transitional safeguarding.

Looking ahead to 2026-27, the Partnership should maintain its focus on evidencing impact. This means demonstrating how learning from scrutiny, audit, reviews and inspection leads to measurable improvements in practice and outcomes for children. Particular attention should be given to the implementation of the Child Sexual Abuse Strategy, the response to child protection demand, the effectiveness of the refreshed assurance arrangements, and the extent to which children's voices are influencing change.

Overall, the Partnership has made positive progress during 2025-26. It has shown openness to challenge, a willingness to adapt its arrangements and a clear commitment to learning and improvement. Continued independent scrutiny, strengthened by the contribution of Young Scrutineers, will support partners to maintain this focus, challenge each other constructively and ensure that safeguarding arrangements make a demonstrable difference to children and families in Leicestershire and Rutland.

Amanda Boodhoo

Independent Scrutineer

Area profile

Local Context

The sources of information for this section are the local Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs), which analyse the health needs of populations, and the latest statistics on school and pupil numbers published by the Department for Education.¹

Leicestershire

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

The Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2026-2029 shows that:²

- In 2024, the total resident population in Leicestershire was 745,573. 49.4% (368,446) of the population were male and 50.6% (377,127) were female.
- 22.3% (166,369) of the Leicestershire population were aged 0-19 years. This compares to 22.9% of the East Midlands population and 23.1% of England's population.
- Breaking the data down further into smaller age ranges, most male children/young people in Leicestershire fell within the 15-19 age group and most female children/young people fell within the 10-14 age group

Age range	% of males of the total Leicestershire population	% of females of the total Leicestershire population
0-4	2.5%	2.4%
5-9	2.9%	2.7%
10-14	3.0%	2.9%
15-19	3.2%	2.8%

- Across the Leicestershire districts in 2024, Charnwood had the largest population (188,385 people), while Melton had the smallest population (54,052 people). Charnwood had a larger proportion of the population in the 15- to 24-year-old age group than the other districts. This was likely due to the student population of Loughborough, both at university and college age. Oadby and Wigston had a higher proportion of the population in the 15 to 19

¹ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-strategic-needs-assessment-and-joint-health-and-wellbeing-strategies-explained> and <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2025-26>.

² Leicestershire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2026-29 – accessible via <https://www.lsr-online.org/leicestershire-2026-2029-jsna>. The JSNA data is taken from the Demography Dashboard, first created by Leicestershire County Council Business Intelligence Service in December 2025 and updated in June 2026.

age year band, perhaps reflecting the younger population of the city and student population.

- In 2021, the majority (87.5%) of the resident population of Leicestershire was of white ethnicity.³ The figure for the East Midlands was 85.7% and the figure for England was 81.0%. Those residents from an Asian ethnic background constituted 8.2% of the population; those residents from a mixed ethnic background constituted 2.2% of the population; and those from a black ethnic background constituted 1.1% of the population.
- There are differences between age groups. A smaller proportion of people in the age groups under 50 years old in Leicestershire identified as white compared to those in the age groups over 50 years old.
- Looking at the 0-24 age range, in Leicestershire, 82.6% of people were of White ethnicity; 9.2% of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnicity; 5.1% of Mixed or Multiple ethnicity; 1.7% of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnicity; and 1.3% of other ethnicity.
- Across the seven districts, the majority of each population was of white ethnicity. With the exception of Oadby and Wigston, all districts had a larger proportion of people of white ethnicity than England. For the majority of the districts (other than Melton and North West Leicestershire), those residents from an Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnic background constituted the second largest proportion of each district's population. In Oadby and Wigston, the proportion of the population that identified as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh (27.9%) was over two times larger than any other district. The proportion of the population that identified as Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnicity in Oadby and Wigston (27.9%) and Charnwood (12.4%) was larger than the proportion for England (9.6%).
- According to the 2025 Indices of Deprivation, Leicestershire is ranked 136th out of 153 Upper Tier Local Authorities in England. None of the districts within Leicestershire fall within the top half of deprived local authority districts within England. However, despite this positive high-level picture, some pockets of deprivation exist. Three areas in Leicestershire fall within the most deprived decile nationally; these areas can be found in Loughborough and Coalville.

Statistics on school and pupil numbers for the Academic Year 2025-26, published by the Department for Education,⁴ show that:

- There were 107,577 pupils in Leicestershire schools.
- The majority of the school population (73.3%) is of white British ethnicity.⁵

³ This is the most recent data available on the Leicestershire JSNA.

⁴ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2025-26>.

⁵ Note that this total includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. It does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.

- English is known or believed to be the first language of 88.5% of pupils, with 10.2% of pupils known or believed to have a first language other than English and 1.3% where language is unclassified.⁶

Rutland

The Rutland Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) 2026-2029 shows that:⁷

- In 2024, the resident population estimate for Rutland was 41,443. 51.2% (21,237) of the population were male and 48.8% (20,206) were female.
- 21.6% (8,959) of the population were aged 0-19 years. This compares to 22.9% of the East Midlands population and 23.1% of England's population.
- Breaking the data down further into smaller age ranges, most children/young people in Rutland fell within the 15-19 age group.

Age range	% of males of the total Rutland population	% of females of the total Rutland population
0-4	1.7%	1.7%
5-9	2.3%	2.3%
10-14	3.1%	2.7%
15-19	4.2%	3.6%

- In 2021, the majority (94.8%) of the resident population of Rutland was of white ethnicity. A larger proportion of the population were of white ethnicity in Rutland than in the East Midlands (85.7%) and England (81.0%). Those residents from a mixed ethnic background constituted 1.8% of the population; those from an Asian ethnic background constituted 1.5% of the population; and those from a black ethnic background constituted 1.3% of the population.
- There are differences between age groups. A smaller proportion of people in the age groups under 50 years old in Rutland identified as white compared to those in age groups over 50 years old.
- Looking at the 0-24 age range, 91.7% of people were of White ethnicity; 3.9% of Mixed or Multiple ethnicity; 2.2% of Asian, Asian British or Asian Welsh ethnicity; 1.6% of Black, Black British, Black Welsh, Caribbean or African ethnicity; and 0.7% of other ethnicity.
- According to the 2025 Indices of Deprivation, Rutland is ranked 150th out of 153 Upper Tier Local Authorities in England. Rutland has low levels of deprivation across most of the measured domains, but Rutland is more deprived for the domains of living environment and barriers to housing and

⁶ As above.

⁷ Rutland Joint Strategic Needs Assessment 2026-29 – accessible via <https://www.lsr-online.org/rutland-2026-2029-jsna>. The JSNA data is taken from the Demography Dashboard, first created by Leicestershire County Council Business Intelligence Service in December 2025 and updated in June 2026.

services. One of Rutland's areas falls within the 10% most deprived areas nationally for the living environment domain and nine of Rutland's areas fall within the 10% most deprived areas nationally for the barriers to housing and services domain.

Statistics on school and pupil numbers for the Academic Year 2025-26, published by the Department for Education,⁸ show that:

- There were 7,772 pupils in Rutland schools.
- The majority of the school population (85.9%) is of white British ethnicity.⁹
- English is known or believed to be the first language of 94.8% of pupils, with 4.9% of pupils known or believed to have a first language other than English and 0.3% where language is unclassified.¹⁰

⁸ See <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics/2025-26>.

⁹ Note that this total includes state-funded nursery, primary, secondary, alternative provision (AP) schools and special schools, and non-maintained special schools. It does not include independent schools nor general hospital schools. This is because independent and hospital schools submit an aggregate school level census that does not include characteristics breakdowns such as ethnicity, age and language.

¹⁰ As above.

The Partnership

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

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

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

Multi-agency safeguarding arrangements should be based on Local Authority areas. Arrangements can cover two or more local authority boundaries by agreement. As the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership shares a number of partners with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership (LSCP), joint [Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) (MASA) are published.

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

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

Partnership Governance

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

As set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026, statutory guidance published by the Department for Education (DfE), each safeguarding partner identifies a Lead Safeguarding Partner (LSP) and a Delegated Safeguarding Partner (DSP).¹¹

The membership of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership comprises of Safeguarding Partners and other relevant agencies, including Education, Health agencies, Probation and other organisations working with children.

The full membership of the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership can be found on the website: <https://lrsb.org.uk/scp-membership-list>.

¹¹ Department for Education, [Working Together 2026: A guide to multi-agency working to help, protect and promote the welfare of children](#), March 2026, page 29, paragraph 52 and page 31, paragraphs 60 and 61.

Partnership Chair

The Lead Safeguarding Partners appoint the role of Partnership Chair to individual Delegated Safeguarding Partners, rotating on an annual basis. Chairs and Deputy Chairs have been agreed until 2029-30 and their names are available via the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.¹²

Scrutineers

Working Together states that “Safeguarding partners must ensure that there are arrangements for effective independent scrutiny in place for their local area.”¹³ Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships jointly commission an Independent Scrutineer and Young Scrutineers. More information about the Young Scrutineers is included later in the Yearly Report.

Updates to published arrangements

In line with Working Together 2026, updates to the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements are required when there are key changes, such as changes to the Lead Safeguarding Partners, or the list of relevant agencies. Updates are sent to the Department for Education.¹⁴ In 2025-26, updates were implemented to reflect:

- The change of Lead Safeguarding Partner for the Integrated Care Board, Police and Leicestershire Local Authority
- The change of Delegated Safeguarding Partner for the Police, Rutland Local Authority and Leicestershire Local Authority
- The changes to the subgroup structure (further detail provided later in the report).

Yearly Report

Working Together 2026 states that “Safeguarding partners must jointly report on the activity they have undertaken in a 12-month period”.¹⁵ This Yearly Report fulfils this requirement.

Purpose of the Partnership

In line with Working Together to Safeguard Children 2026:¹⁶

The purpose of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements is to ensure that, at a local level, organisations and agencies are clear about how they will work together to safeguard all children and promote their welfare. This means:

- there is a clear, shared vision for how to improve outcomes for children locally across all levels of need and all types of harm

¹² [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements](#) (December 2024), page 8.

¹³ [Working Together 2026](#), page 39, paragraph 95.

¹⁴ [Working Together 2026](#), page 43, paragraph 111.

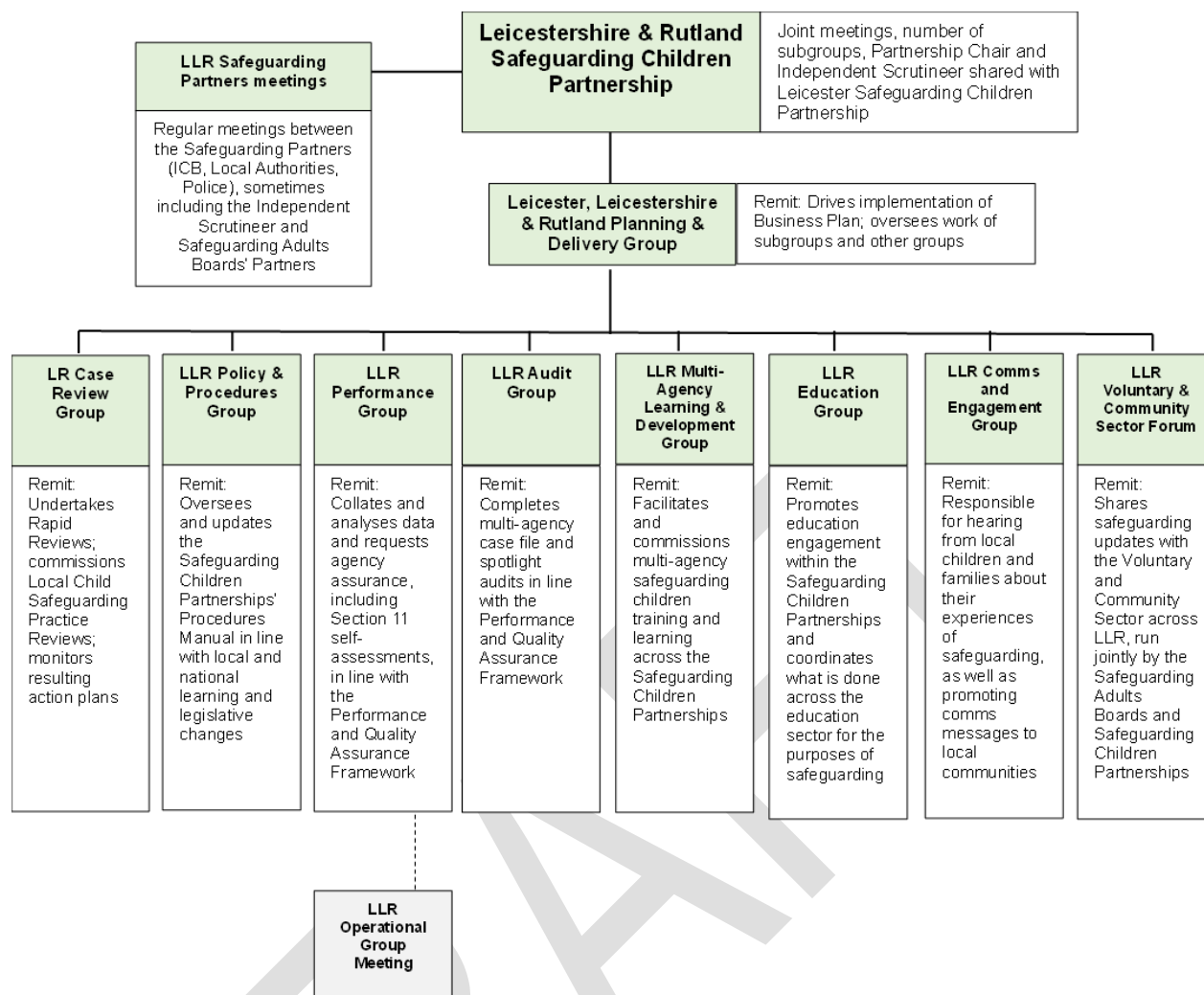
¹⁵ [Working Together 2026](#), page 43, paragraph 112.

¹⁶ [Working Together 2026](#), page 27, paragraph 44.

- when a child is identified as suffering or likely to suffer significant harm there is a prompt, appropriate and effective response to ensure the protection and support of the child
- organisations and agencies are challenged appropriately, effectively holding one another to account
- the voice of children and families combined with the knowledge of experienced practitioners and insights from data, provides a greater understanding of the areas of strength and/or improvement within arrangements and practice
- information is sought, analysed, shared, and broken down by protected characteristics to facilitate more accurate and timely decision-making for children and families, and through this the identification of groups of children who may be disproportionately over- or under-represented in services, to understand outcomes for different communities of children
- effective collection, sharing and analysis of data enables early identification of new safeguarding risks, issues, emerging threats, and joined-up responses across relevant agencies, including the identification of groups of children who may be disproportionately over- or under-represented in services, so that services are adapted to address these issues
- senior leaders promote and embed a learning culture which supports local services to become more reflective and implement changes to practice
- senior leaders have a good knowledge and understanding about the quality of local practice and its impact on children and families

Partnership structure

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



Delegated Safeguarding Partners attend the Safeguarding Partners meeting. This meeting considers shared matters of governance, funding, and sharing intelligence as well as setting the forward agenda for meetings of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships. The Independent Scrutineer and Business Managers are invited to these meetings, where appropriate. Up to half of these meetings are joint with the statutory partners of the local Safeguarding Adults Boards (SABs) and their Independent Chair is invited to join these meetings, where appropriate.

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

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

Further information about the subgroups of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships is available throughout the Yearly Report.

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

Representation of Education sector

Strategic level

For many years, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership has included representatives on its membership from primary, secondary and special schools from both local authority areas. In 2025-26, the Partnership welcomed several new Schools representatives.

The Chair of the Education Subgroup also sits on the Safeguarding Children Partnership and, when required, joins the Delegated Safeguarding Partners at the meeting of Safeguarding Partners.

Operational level

2025-26 saw the first full year of the running of the Education Group. The formation of the Education Group recognised that all local schools (including independent schools, academies, and free schools), colleges, early years and childcare settings, and other educational providers (including alternative provision) are relevant agencies for the purpose of our Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements. They are included in the local safeguarding arrangements through this subgroup, which promotes education engagement within the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and coordinates what is done across the education sector for the purposes of safeguarding.

Safeguarding themes discussed by the group in 2025-26 covered self-harm and suicide, including support for local children and young people during school holidays; the effect of the Netflix Adolescence TV drama, including the production of guidance and an emoji guide for schools; and the key findings from Warrington Safeguarding Children Partnership's 'Scarlett' Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, including work on managed moves.

Presentations were also delivered to the Education Group by the Violence Reduction Network, regarding the assets they have, including Live Safe, the School's Network and the Prevention Panels, and Project Echo. This is run by Safelives alongside Living Without Abuse, and puts the voices of survivors at the heart of local responses to domestic abuse.

The membership of the Education Group has grown throughout 2025-26. The group continues to strengthen its identity and deepen its understanding of the diverse educational settings it represents, as well as the safeguarding challenges these settings encounter.

Moving forwards, the aim is to increase the group's breadth and reach, with the intention of including more representation from secondary schools, early years, post 16 provisions and virtual schools. Also, the Education Group will discuss the

Operation Encompass changes implemented in 2025-26. Operation Encompass aims to directly connect Police and Schools, to secure better outcomes for children living with domestic abuse. Schools have raised issues and questions about the information now provided in notifications.

In addition to the Education Group, a representative from the Leicestershire Safeguarding in Education team is a standing member on other subgroups, including the Case Review Group, Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group, and the Audit Group. They support schools in submitting Rapid Review responses and audit information, as well as working to develop the learning which is taken from these processes. Rutland Education is also very engaged in subgroup work.

Interface with other local strategic boards

The interface between the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and other local strategic boards ensures assurance and joint work, where appropriate.



The Safeguarding Children Partnerships:

- Receive the Annual Report of the Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP). In 2025-26, the Partnerships were also presented with the results of their Thematic Review into Suicide and Self-Inflicted Harm in children and young people.
- Are provided with annual updates, within dedicated agenda items in meetings, from Domestic Abuse Boards and the Adolescence Safety and Diversion Board. This sits under the Strategic Partnership Board (SPB) and works to prevent and reduce involvement in violence through safeguarding, early intervention and diversion.
- Share the Yearly Report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership with the Health and Wellbeing Board to highlight safeguarding matters relevant to

their work and to support understanding and effective partnership working across systems.

The 8 Community Safety Partnerships (CSPs) in Leicestershire and Rutland commission the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Adults Board and Safeguarding Children Partnership to manage the Domestic Abuse Related Death Review (DARDR) process, formerly the Domestic Homicide Review (DHR) process. Relevant learning from Domestic Abuse Related Death Reviews is fed into the work of the subgroups of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

Financial breakdown and value for money

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

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

The contributions from partners for the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership for 2025-26 can be seen below alongside contributions for the previous year:

	2024-25	2025-26
Leicestershire County Council	£66,258	£66,258
Rutland County Council	£30,000	£30,000
Leicestershire Police	£53,417	£53,417
Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Integrated Care Board (LLR ICB)	£53,417	£55,122
Probation	N/A	£2,192
Total income for SCP	£203,092	£206,989

Expenditure for the Safeguarding Children Partnership was apportioned as follows:

	2024-25	2025-26
Staffing	£147,121	£157,779
Independent Scrutineer	£13,973	£13,439
Support Services	£1,920	£1,740
Operating Costs	£10,665	£13,144
Training*	£70,341	£63,108

Case Reviews	£2,250	£0
Total Expenditure	£246,270	£249,210

*The training figure includes half the cost of two members of staff who are shared with Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership.

Staffing costs increased as a result of the agreed Leicestershire County Council pay award (as the staff are hosted by this Local Authority).

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

Progress against statutory guidance

Review of use of restraint in secure establishments

Working Together 2026 states that “Where there is a secure establishment in a local area, safeguarding partners should undertake a review to assure themselves of the appropriate use of restraint within the secure establishment and include the outcomes of the review in the Annual Report.”¹⁷

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

Implementation of changes set out in statutory guidance

Working Together 2026

In March 2026, the Department for Education (DfE) published a new edition of its statutory guidance, Working Together to Safeguard Children. Working Together 2026 replaced Working Together 2023. This guidance applies to all organisations and agencies in England who have functions relating to children and sets out the governance for Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

The NSPCC highlighted that the key changes in the 2026 edition include updates around:

- identifying, understanding and challenging racism and discrimination
- recognising the specific needs and experiences of babies
- understanding the impact of domestic abuse on children and families
- consideration of children experiencing simultaneous harms or multiple harms
- strengthened inclusion of children in care
- the link between online harm and harm experienced in person.¹⁸

Locally, the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships are in the process of updating their Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements, multi-agency procedures and learning and development resources in line with this updated statutory guidance.

Children’s Social Care reforms

In 2023, reforms to Children’s Social Care began, supported by the Stable Homes, Built on Love strategy. The implementation of the reforms continues, as set out in the [Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive](#) policy paper, published in November

¹⁷ [Working Together 2026](#), page 44, paragraph 114.

¹⁸ NSPCC, “Working together to safeguard children 2026: summary of changes” CASPAR briefing, March 2026, <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/research-resources/2026/working-together-to-safeguard-children-2026-summary-of-changes>.

2024, and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026. The reforms are designed to shift the balance of children's social care away from late intervention – child protection and the care system – towards early intervention.¹⁹



Families First Partnership (FFP) programme

Families First Partnership is the name given by the Department for Education to the national programme of reforms across Children's Social Care. Locally, agencies have been working towards the delivery expectations for safeguarding partners set out in the Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide, published in March 2025.²⁰ This Year 1 Guide supported the first wave of reforms. The expectation set out in the guidance was that, in 2025-2026, ongoing business as usual service delivery would take place alongside transformational activity. [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide](#) was updated in March 2026 to set out what should happen in Year 2, 2026-27.

Locally, it has been acknowledged that, for both Police and Health, there is the additional challenge of needing to work in partnership with the three different Local Authorities of the sub region. To assist the process, a Clinical Lead from Health and a Detective Inspector from Leicestershire Police have been seconded to the three Local Authorities to support the programme.

During the implementation, local conferences are being held, led by the statutory safeguarding partners – Children's Social Care, Police, Health and Education – to inform the wider partnership of the progress being made. The November 2025 conference saw representatives from across the Voluntary and Community sector, District Councils, Public Health, CAMHS, Healthy Together, Integrated Care Board, Police, Probation, local authority services, Safeguarding Partnership, and Education Services.

The key pillars of the government's programme of reform are: Family Help, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams, and Family Networks. The diagram below presents the Government's vision for the reformed system:²¹

¹⁹ See Community Care Inform Children: <https://www.ccinform.co.uk/practice-guidance/childrens-social-care-reforms/>.

²⁰ Department for Education, The Families First Partnership (FFP) Programme Guide: Delivery expectations for statutory safeguarding partners in England, March 2025 (Year 1).

²¹ Department for Education, [The Families First Partnership \(FFP\) Programme Guide: Delivery expectations for statutory safeguarding partners in England: Year 2 \(2026 to 2027\)](#), March 2026, page 8.



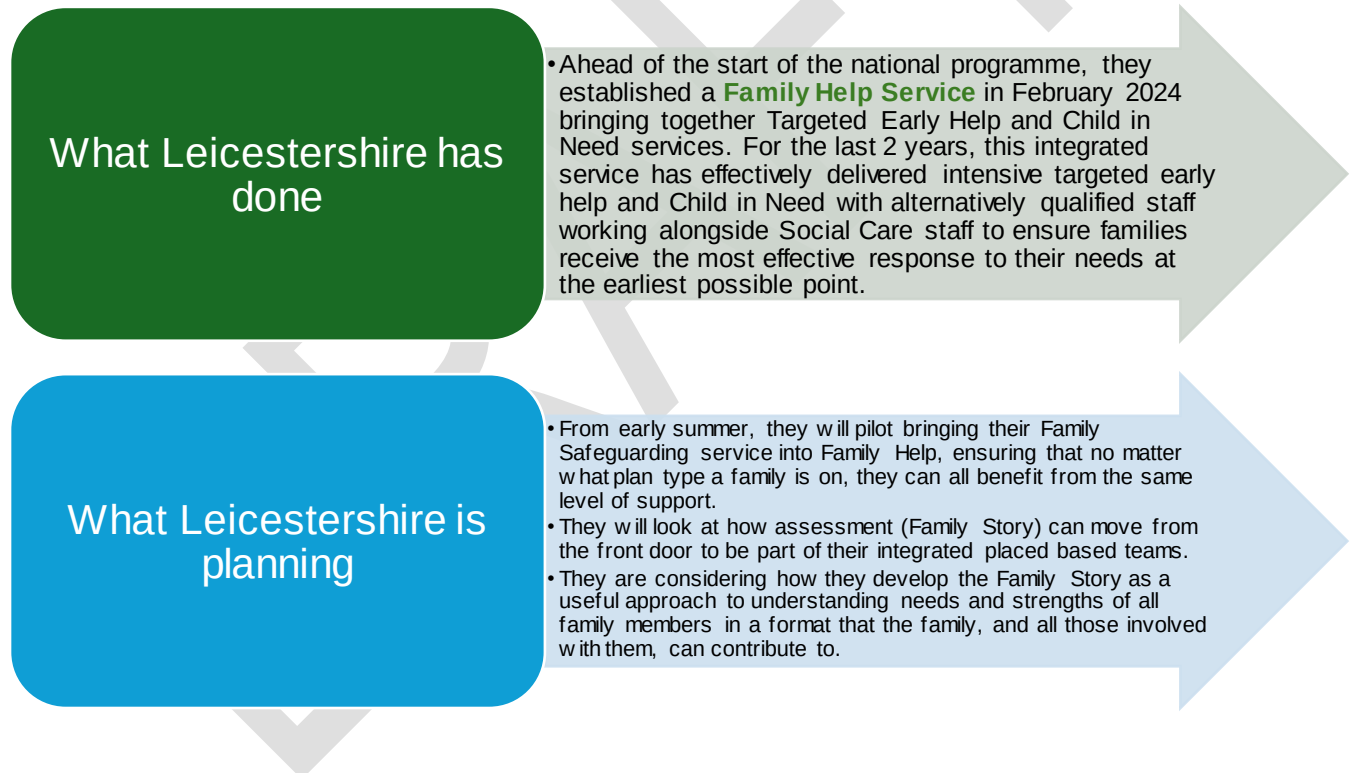
*FGDM = Family Group Decision Making and FNSP = Family Network Support Packages

There is a deadline of March 2027 for full implementation of the changes.

Leicestershire

In Leicestershire, work has been underway since summer 2025, focused on the three core pillars:

Family Help



Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT)

What Leicestershire has done

- They have been working closely with seconded colleagues from Police and Health, together with Education, to explore how they will design and implement a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team in the county.
- They have also worked closely with the City and Rutland to ensure they are developing a very similar model.

What Leicestershire is planning

- They are working towards signing off a Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland model by the end of June 2026.
- They hope to be piloting their approach soon after.

Family Group Decision Making

What Leicestershire has done

- They have based their thinking around the use of Family Network Meetings at the earliest possible opportunity.
- They have undertaken case audits to understand their current use of the model, and have been reviewing how they support practitioners and managers to achieve a consistent approach.
- They have also talked to partners across EarlyHelp about the concept of Family Networks and the role they have to play in supporting this way of working.

What Leicestershire is planning

- They have a seconded practitioner undertaking the role of Family Network Meeting Facilitator. This role will support practitioners to increase their confidence and develop their skills through a coaching approach, and will also work with partner agencies to identify ways in which talking about family networks becomes common practice across a range of services.

Rutland

Family Help

What Rutland has done

- Rutland have had an integrated front door with Family Help since 2024. They have developed this further to deliver a co-working pilot within Family Help, focusing on more joined up working for Child in Need families. The pilot is currently being prepared for evaluation.
- They have completed a system health check, alongside a single assessment workshop, and have begun implementing agreed actions.
- They have developed work to improve family friendly assessment summaries.
- They have undertaken a meeting mapping exercise to inform the development of more effective multi-disciplinary meetings.
- They have increased capacity across Family Help to support more families.
- They have offered co-working with practitioners so that families have a consistency of service.
- They have increased the support offer to partners with a panel to aid early support to families.

What Rutland is planning

- They will increase screening capacity and introduce an additional social work post.
- They will make changes to the recording systems so that they are seamless.
- They will host a workforce co-design event to finalise the shape of the Family Help Lead Practitioner role.
- They will use the evaluation to design the final model and approach.
- They will continue to work closely with SEND and Best Start in Life to ensure a coherent offer to families.

Multi-Agency Child Protection Team (MACPT)

What Rutland has done

- They worked with multi-agency partners to design a model that works for Rutland and designed an operating procedure.
- They have worked in partnership with Leicester and Leicestershire to co-design and test a Multi-Agency Child Protection Team model.

What Rutland is planning

- They will launch the Multi-Agency Child Protection Team test and learn in September 2026.
- They will evaluate and adapt the model for full implementation by April 2027.
- They will ensure there is an appropriate multi-agency training and induction offer for the MACPT.

Family Group Decision Making

What Rutland has done

- They had a working group to design the model.
- They have developed a high-level proposal which sets out their intended approach to Family Group Decision Making.

What Rutland is planning

- They will train at least 50% of the workforce as Family Group Conference (FGC) facilitators.
- They will commission advocacy support.
- They will review and further develop information and guidance materials for practitioners and families.
- They will work on data relating to Family Group Decision Making and look at how they track the impact.

Moving forwards

It will be ensured that there are links between the Families First Partnership programme across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland and the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group so that any system changes can be reflected in training, including how to access services. Any training requirements that are multi-agency can be delivered, where appropriate, through the subgroup.

Best Start in Life Strategy



The government's [Best Start in Life](#) campaign, delivered by the Department for Education and the Department for Health and Social Care, aims to help break down barriers to opportunity for every family, supporting parents and children from pregnancy through to age five and beyond. "Giving every child the best start in life" is the government's strategy for improving child health and development and meeting the ambition that 75% of 5-

year-olds in England have a good level of development by 2028.²²

Both [Leicestershire](#) and [Rutland](#) have developed and published Best Start in Life Plans.

²² See UK Government, "[Best Start in Life: 2025 campaign toolkit](#)", October 2025, pages 4 and 5.

Family Hubs

In line with Best Start in Life, Family Hubs can help families access a wide range of support. A Family Hub is not a single service; it is a group of services working together to make sure the right person with the appropriate skills offers their support.



Leicestershire has 21 [Family Hubs](#). Across Leicestershire, Best Start Family Hubs are now well established, offering accessible, joined up support for families, children, and young people. The Hubs are used by teams from across the Partnership, such as Family Help, Midwifery, Health Visiting, Housing Advice, Local Area Coordinators, Police Community Support Officers, and voluntary sector groups. This varies from area to

area. The Family Hubs can be a 'one stop shop' for advice, information and support where it is needed at the heart of local communities.



In Rutland, the [Family Hub](#) brings services together in one place to improve access, strengthen connections between families and professionals, and place relationships at the heart of community wellbeing. The

Rutland Family Hub offer includes the Oakham Family Hub; outreach services, including to people who live in a more isolated, rural area or perhaps on one of the military bases in the county; and digital services and support, including online groups and virtual, interactive learning activities.

Five to Thrive



Five to Thrive is an evidence-based model, which supports healthy brain development in children, fostering secure attachment and resilience. It promotes safety, connection, and co-regulation, helping practitioners recognise their role as a vital resource for families. The approach also encourages shared language and collaboration across services.

Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services are leading a three-year project to embed Five to Thrive and Trauma-Informed Practice (TIP) across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Nearly 200 practitioners have already been trained, with Education and Early Years being prioritised in 2025-26. Health and Midwifery will be the focus in 2026-27.

Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act

It is acknowledged that the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will lead to significant changes in different areas.²³ For example, the role of Local Authorities around safeguarding and supporting home educated children is due to increase, in light of the new duties and responsibilities to be introduced through the Act. This includes the creation of a Children not in School Register. Also, the Act will set out changes in corporate parenting responsibility for services wider than Children's Social Care.²⁴ These national changes will inform any required changes to local policies and procedures, and training requirements will be considered.

Crime and Policing Act

The Crime and Policing Act 2026 will bring in numerous elements linked to the protection of children, implementing recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse, including by introducing a new duty to report child sexual abuse, and creating new offences of cuckooing and child criminal exploitation.²⁵ These national changes will inform any required changes to local policies and procedures and training requirements will be considered.

SEND Reform

In February 2026, the government published the Schools White Paper, titled "Every Child Achieving and Thriving". Subsequently, the Department for Education published "SEND reform: putting children and young people first" and plans to reform the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) system in England.²⁶ The changes aim to improve help and support for children and young people with SEND across the 0 to 25 years system.

Locally, Education teams are considering the resource and capacity implications, the range of pastoral needs which schools have to respond to, and the logistical and strategy challenges. In October 2025, each Local Authority delivered SEND Assurance reports to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships to set out the current picture.

²³ The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill was proposed in 2024 – see <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2024/12/the-childrens-wellbeing-bill-what-parents-need-to-know/>. The resulting Act became law in April 2026.

²⁴ Department for Education, [Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill 2024: Policy Summary Notes](#), January 2026.

²⁵ The Crime and Policing Bill was proposed in 2025. The resulting Act became law in April 2026 – <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/crime-and-policing-act-2026>.

²⁶ See <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/every-child-achieving-and-thriving/every-child-achieving-and-thriving-html-version> and <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first/send-reform-putting-children-and-young-people-first-html-version>.

Local Government Reorganisation

The new councils, which will be formed as a result of the Local Government Reorganisation, are due to come into effect in April 2028. All 10 local councils (Leicestershire County Council, Leicester City Council, Rutland County Council, Borough and District Councils) are already working together on the transition.

Recent Inspections

Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI)

Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs) are carried out under section 20 of the Children Act 2004. Working Together 2026 notes that “Safeguarding partners are inspected at a single agency level by their respective inspectorates; Ofsted, His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary, Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) and Care Quality Commission (CQC). These inspectorates, along with HMI Probation, also jointly inspect and report on the impact of local multi-agency safeguarding arrangements through the joint targeted area inspection (JTAI) programme.”²⁷ Each JTAI cycle looks at a different theme relevant to multi-agency working.

In November 2025, it was confirmed that Leicestershire would be subject to a Joint Targeted Area Inspection on the theme of Child Sexual Abuse within the family environment.²⁸

This was a three-week process, with inspectors from Ofsted for the Local Authority, the CQC for Health, HMICFRS for Police and HMI Probation for Probation on site for a week in December 2025. In order to evaluate children’s experiences, inspectors carried out case sampling and tracking and observations of practice. They spoke with staff and children, young people and families. The inspectors requested information from individual agencies and reviewed case related documents, as well as performance and management information.

The Safeguarding Children Partnership supported partners in this process, submitting documentation as required and the Independent Scrutineer meeting with inspectors.

The Joint Targeted Area Inspection results letter was published on 12.02.26. The Partnership was praised, with the report highlighting robust leadership, sensitive and skilled frontline practice, effective specialist support, and a strong multi-agency commitment to keeping children safe. Inspectors also noted the proactive work already underway, including local reviews, training and a draft county wide strategy to further strengthen the response to child sexual abuse.

Partners will build on the report’s suggestions, including improving early information sharing, expanding specialist therapeutic support, and increasing take-up of multi-agency Child Sexual Abuse in the Family Environment training. Progression of the

²⁷ [Working Together 2026](#), page 39, paragraph 94.

²⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-targeted-area-inspections-of-the-response-to-child-sexual-abuse-in-the-family-environment>

Action Plan formulated as a result of the JTAI is being supported by the Safeguarding Children Partnership.

The following webpage includes the full joint statement from the partners: <https://www.leicestershire.gov.uk/news/commitment-to-support-vulnerable-leicestershire-children-recognised>. The full response is available on the Ofsted website [here](#).

Rutland Ofsted focused visit



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

In March 2026, Ofsted carried out a focused visit in Rutland. Ofsted carry out focused visits between standard and short inspections.²⁹ It was found that Family Help is good and continues to make a difference; the timeliness and quality of multi-agency strategy discussions need to improve; and the consistency of case recording needs to improve. The full response letter is available [here](#).

Probation Inspection

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland had their Local Probation Delivery Unit (PDU) inspection, with the report published in May 2025. In addition, the East Midlands, as a region, then had an inspection and that report was published in August 2025. The East Midlands Inspection result was inadequate. Victim work overall was good. The public protection work was not strong enough. In both reports, the effect of the national context was acknowledged by the Chief Inspector, with the prioritising of national policy changes, linked to prison capacity, impacting on local delivery. The Safeguarding Children Partnerships received a presentation on both the East Midlands recommendations and the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland recommendations and the Action Plan in place.

Strengthening multi-agency collaboration

Work is taking place across Leicestershire, Leicester and Rutland to develop thinking about the use of a shared early help assessment. Previously, there was the Common Assessment Framework (CAF). Locally, there has not been a focus on this way of working for many years.

The Quick-Thinking Plan (QTP) is a 2-page document which enables any organisation to quickly capture the worries, strengths and what needs to happen

²⁹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-services/inspecting-local-authority-childrens-s-services#focused-visits>

for any family with lower-level issues that do not require support from Children and Family Services. The plan will demonstrate to families that they are being heard, that there is support for them, but also what they and the organisation can do to move forward. It will be useful if the needs of the family increase or escalate. The Quick-Thinking Plan will help to demonstrate what has already been tried and can avoid families having to re-tell their story.

To date, the focus has been on Leicestershire working with school-based colleagues on this approach. It has now been opened up across the Partnerships.

DRAFT

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

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships want to have meaningful engagement with children, young people and families that makes a difference to their work. To acknowledge that engagement could be improved, two new initiatives were progressed in 2025-26 – the Communication and Engagement Group and the recruitment of two Young Scrutineers.

Communication and Engagement Group

This group is responsible for hearing from local children and families about their experiences of safeguarding, as well as promoting messages to local communities. The group's membership includes Engagement Officers, Children's Rights and Participation Team Leaders and Communications/Media Officers and the Independent Scrutineer. In the future, the Young Scrutineers will become members too (see below).

The group is working on a Strategy and has a two-year work plan, which addresses key deliverables linked to local Business Plan priorities, learning from reviews and multi-agency audits, and national learning, including from the NSPCC. To support the group's dissemination of key national messages, a Hub Relationship Manager from the NSPCC attended one of their meetings.



In 2025-26, linked to the Harm Outside the Home business priority, the group has supported promotion of [Live Safe](#). This is a partnership initiative providing a central online hub for young people,

parents/carers, and professionals across Leicester, Leicestershire, and Rutland with the main aim to empower young people (aged 10–19, but also relevant to young adults up to 25), their families, and professionals to play an active role in keeping young people safe.

A practitioner from Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) gave a presentation on care leavers' experiences of accessing mental health services, including the views of young people with lived experience. The group is now considering how to further support and increase communications around this cohort of young people.

Moving forwards

As a result of learning from a multi-agency audit, and in collaboration with the Safeguarding Adults Boards, the Safeguarding Children Partnerships will further promote [Sarah's Law](#) and [Clare's Law](#) to local families and communities. These are disclosure schemes, about child sex offenders and domestic violence respectively, which allow the Police to release information about previous history related to these types of abuse to provide information that could help protect people at risk and prevent further crimes.

During Safeguarding Adults Week in November 2025, which focused on "Prevention: act before abuse", the Safeguarding Adults Boards hosted a number of free online 15-minute spotlight briefings at the start of each week day, with one promoting

Clare's Law. The [video of the briefing](#) is now available on the Safeguarding Adults Boards' YouTube Channel. Information has also been shared with the Voluntary and Community Sector Forum. Work will continue over 2026-27. There will be more work to promote existing resources and ensure they are accessible across community settings.

Young Scrutineers

Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships have recently recruited two Young Scrutineers to work alongside the Adult Independent Scrutineer, strengthening the commitment to ensuring that the voices and lived experiences of children and young people are at the heart of everything the Partnerships do. Their role is to challenge how effectively safeguarding partners listen to, engage with, and act upon the views of children and young people.

The Young Scrutineers will:

- Attend partnership meetings to share their perspectives and help ensure priorities reflect what matters most to young people.
- Review policies, plans, and projects to ensure the voice of the child is central to decision-making.
- Contribute to reports and help present findings from their scrutiny work.
- Engage with children and young people across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to gather their views and ensure these are shared with key decision-makers.
- Visit frontline services to understand how practice works on the ground and provide informed feedback for improvement.

Ongoing voice work in partner agencies

Leicestershire Children and Family Services have:



- A Departmental Voice Strategy, grounded in the Lundy Model of Participation, which promotes a rights-based, inclusive approach that values lived experiences and cultural identity. It aims to create a culture where listening to children is not only expected but meaningfully acted upon to shape services and improve outcomes.
- Voice champions in each service area and forums with direct links with children and young people, including the Corporate Parenting Board, Children in Care Council, After Care Council, Supporting Young People After Care, SEND Youth Forum and County Youth Council for Leicestershire.
- Processes in place to ensure that children's voices are embedded in assessments and plans and their wishes and feelings are recorded by practitioners.
- A Language that Cares Toolkit and an agreement to write case records to children and for practitioners to use plain language in their interactions with children, young people and families that includes them, and not professional jargon that excludes them.
- Processes in place to incorporate the views of parents and children into their Families First programme, with the content of the Young People's page on their Family Hubs website being co-produced by young people and staff from the Leicestershire Youth & Youth Justice Service.

In Rutland:

- There is a Children and Young People's Strategy (2025-2028) which states that, when delivering services, practitioners will listen and respond to the views of children and families to shape the support they receive and to improve how Rutland Children's Services deliver services, working alongside (collaboratively with) families rather than doing to. One of their priorities is "Belonging" and a key focus area is strong participation, voice, and co-production with children and young people.
- Rutland Youth Charter is well embedded and young people regularly attend corporate leadership meetings to have their voice heard and to input into shaping service delivery.
- They are due to hold their first Youth Summit in April 2026. Previous Youth Summits have been LLR. Having a focused Rutland Youth Summit will bring together all Participation Groups to support young peoples' voices to be captured and shape local services.
- Their Children in Care Council (SUSO) has been reinvigorated, and young people are helping to shape their new planned children's home.
- They have also brought together their One Rutland Group for care experienced young people. This group is becoming more established to ensure voice is captured for care experienced young people.
- Their Corporate Parenting Board receives feedback from young people and has a co-chair arrangement.
- Rutland Children's Services use feedback from young people to shape activities for all their Aiming High and Young Carer groups. The Aiming High service arranges a variety of activities for children and young people up to age 25. The sessions are for those who have special educational needs or a disability.

The Health and Wellbeing workers of the Teen Health 11-19 Service, which works across Leicestershire and Rutland to provide health and emotional wellbeing advice and support to children and young people aged 11-19 (25 with SEND), write all notes to the child, clearly evidencing the voice of the young person being supported.

The CAMHS Young Person's Team use several approaches to facilitate engagement and communication, such as play and alternate communication forms like written or flashcards. For young people for whom English is not their first language, interpreters are booked to ensure communication needs are met.

Further work completed during 2025-26:



- For the first time, the Safeguarding Children Partnership published a [Children's and Young People's Version of their Yearly Report for 2024-25](#). This is a child friendly version which captures what was achieved using pictures and words.
- The Leicestershire Children and Family Services' Departmental Plan for 2026-2029 was published in March 2026. It reflects what children, young people and families have told them about their needs and experiences. Alongside the full departmental plan, they have also developed a family friendly version, shaped with the input of young people from CYCLe (County Youth Council for Leicestershire) and the Youth Voice Group. It was designed to clearly explain to families how they will work with them and what they can expect from the service.
- Between 29th September-10th October 2025, Leicestershire Children & Family Services held Life Story Fortnight. For children coming into care, even for a short time, it is important to complete life story work with them, so that they can start to understand what happened. This usually takes the form of a life story book or folder, but life story work does not end there. Life story work is an ongoing process of direct work, with the aim of helping the child understand their journey into care and answer questions they may have.
- New Children's Rights and Participation Films, produced by the Leicester Rights and Participation Service and created with children and young people, were promoted by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships in the May 2025 issue of the Safeguarding Matters newsletter. The new resources were the outcome of a consultation, with the workforce and with children, around what is needed to help improve how practitioners listen, and more importantly ensure children and young people have an influence on decisions that are made about them.



- The Safeguarding Children Partnerships supported promotion of Project Echo. This is a Leicestershire pilot project where local survivors, both adults and children, of domestic abuse are being invited to share their insight and lived experience. The project will help deliver a national blueprint for embedding child and adult domestic abuse survivors' voices in community approaches to domestic abuse. Representatives from the project have given presentations at Safeguarding Matters Live and to the Education Group.

- On 8th December 2025, during the 16 Days of Activism against gender violence, Living Without Abuse held a Survivors Voice Conference. There was a trauma focus and survivors' stories. This was promoted by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards.
- Survivors have played a key role in shaping Leicestershire County Council's draft Domestic Abuse Reduction Strategy, sharing their experiences to highlight what works well and where barriers still exist. The strategy focuses on earlier help, better awareness, making information clearer, and stronger joint working between services. It also sets out plans to improve access to safe accommodation and ensure children are recognised and supported as victims in their own right. A consultation process, between April and May 2026, will seek people's views on the draft Strategy. This consultation has been promoted through the Leicestershire Family Hubs website.³⁰

"You have been a good support, very approachable, you have listened and been there to support the needs towards myself and my son. Thank you for your personal approach with me. Feel like I've made a friend."

"I just wanted to say how much I appreciated talking to you. You made me feel comfortable and listened to with understanding, kindness and without any judgement. It truly felt supportive, so a big thank you from me!"

Feedback from Leicestershire parents/carers

"They are completely happy to support my views and wishes and try hard to help me with this. They also always listen to my opinions and help to understand things if I don't."

"My Young Carers Youth Worker was kind, caring, and made me feel comfortable."

Feedback from Leicestershire children/young people

³⁰ See <https://www.familyhubsleicestershire.org.uk/hot-topics/have-your-say-plans-support-families-affected-domestic-abuse>.

"The Family Hub offers invaluable support for families and individuals alike. Whether you're seeking community connections, practical resources, or a welcoming space to learn and grow, the Hub provides a warm and inclusive environment. I highly encourage anyone looking for support or camaraderie to visit – it's truly a place where everyone belongs."

"It is comforting to know that being Foster Carers for Rutland means that we will be working with a very professional, friendly, and supportive team of dedicated individuals. We receive excellent training, and the young and vulnerable young people in our care are offered excellent advice, nurture, guidance, and every chance to thrive and succeed."

Feedback from Rutland parents/carers

"X has also been my social worker for a full year now, and that has made such a difference. Before her, most of my social workers were only with me for a short time, so it was hard to feel settled or build trust. Having someone who stayed, listened, and understood has meant a lot. She has supported me, checked in on me, and helped me feel more confident about the changes happening in my life."

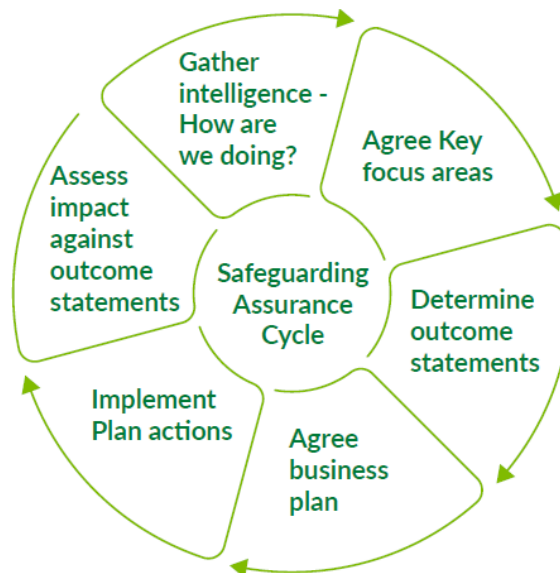
"I am happy with all the support I have received from all the people around me. I can't believe how far I have come in 6 months from 2:1 care to 1:1 and now floating support in semi-independent living. I want to help other people in care and be a part of the children in care council and the development of the new care home that has been planned for Rutland Children."

Feedback from Rutland children

The Business Priorities of the Partnership

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership worked with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership to identify shared priorities for the [Joint Business Plan 2025-27](#). The two-year-plan allows time to embed the outcomes of the key deliverables and, subsequently, analyse the impact of these outcomes.

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



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

Child Sexual Abuse

What we did in 2025-26:

- Signed up to work with the NSPCC (funded by the Home Office) to undertake a local system-wide child sexual abuse snapshot to understand and evidence the effectiveness of the local response to this type of abuse. The process, involving a survey of professionals, was completed by September 2025.

Overall, the NSPCC identified:

- Strong multi-agency commitment to Child Sexual Abuse response
- Child Sexual Abuse complexity recognised, especially in familial contexts
- Good practice exists but is inconsistently embedded
- Low professional confidence in managing Child Sexual Abuse disclosures
- Public awareness and prevention activity underdeveloped

A Task & Finish Group has been set up to progress the NSPCC's recommendation that a local strategy is devised (see below). The findings of the snapshot have been fed into the Task & Finish Group.

- Completed an audit, between May and July 2025, to assess the quality of local multi-agency decision making when responding to concerns about child sexual abuse. The learning was fed into the Task & Finish Group working on the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland (LLR) Child Sexual Abuse Strategy. Further information on the findings of the audit is available in the "Quality Assurance and Service Improvement" section of this Yearly Report.
- Completed an analysis of learning around child sexual abuse from out of area reviews to further support the information for the local Strategy. This report considered 15 cases published in 2025 on the [NSPCC Case Repository](#) where "Child Sexual Abuse" had been deemed to be a main feature,³¹ with "sexual abuse" identified as a key word/phrase by the NSPCC.
- Started drafting the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Child Sexual Abuse Strategy. This is progressing well and is being informed by the learning from local processes, as described above, and including the Joint Targeted Area Inspection findings, the national learning from the [Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse](#) (October 2022) and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's national review, ["I wanted them all to notice": Protecting children and responding to child sexual abuse within the family environment](#) (November 2024). Local Action Plans had been developed as a result of these national reports, and these are being incorporated into the Strategy.
- Identified and evaluated a range of multi-agency training initiatives around child sexual abuse, in a range of formats, with specific attention to the role of schools, early years and other education settings.
- Completed a training needs assessment, with agencies that attend the Multi-Agency Learning and Development Group reviewing their own internal offer to help plan and inform further the multi-agency training offer being developed. Most agencies reported making use of the resources from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse, including the e-learning.

Outcomes and impact:

- The Leicestershire [Joint Targeted Area Inspection report](#) acknowledged "*strong governance*" from the Safeguarding Children Partnerships around child sexual abuse learning and developing a trauma-informed workforce. It noted that *"Although the partnership's strategy is still in draft form, its ambition is evident through collaboration with the National Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) and the Centre of Expertise in Child Sexual Abuse (CSA Centre). The strategy has also drawn helpful*

³¹ "Main feature", in general, means that the incident that initiated the review was child sexual abuse. Some other cases that did not fit this description were included.

insights from local safeguarding practice reviews, thematic briefings, surveys and audits to inform planning and practice. Some of this work was far-sighted in advance of publication of the CSPRP report into child sexual abuse in the family environment in 2024 and work has picked up pace since the panel report.”

- The July 2025 session of the Supervisors’ and Trainers’ Network focused on child sexual abuse. Attendees received presentations on the impact of child sexual abuse; the East Midlands Children and Young People’s Sexual Assault Service (EMCYPAS) or ‘Coral Cove’ and what it offers; and the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Hub and the links between Child Sexual Abuse and Child Sexual Exploitation.

95 people attended from a range of agencies, including Local Authorities, Health, Education, Early Years Providers, Voluntary and Community Sector Providers, District/Borough Councils and Leicestershire Fire & Rescue Service.

Below are some comments taken from the evaluation forms:

“It was really useful hearing about the different places professionals / families can go for support. This will definitely help with the delivery of my Designated Safeguarding Lead training as I can pass this information on.”

“The presentation from the perspective of the lived experience was very powerful. A lot of reflective practice for me individually which will only enhance me further as a manager and supervisor.”

“I found the content both interesting and highly relevant. Excellent session. Very thought provoking. I think it will stay with me and influence my practice.”

- In September 2025, the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group published [Resources to help build confidence when working with Child Sexual Abuse](#).
- Four pilot child sexual abuse awareness training courses have been delivered, two that were a full day and two that were half day sessions, to test the proposed materials and get feedback. This has informed what will be delivered regularly via the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group’s training programme moving forwards.

Moving forwards:

- The aim is for the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Child Sexual Abuse Strategy to be finalised and published in Summer 2026, with promotion throughout the Partnerships to follow.
- Regular training sessions, with a focus on child sexual abuse, will consistently form part of the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Training Programme. This will include delivery of:

- A half-day session around confidence in working with child sexual abuse and having difficult conversations. Prior to this session, attendees will be encouraged to complete the e-learning offered by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse
- An online session focusing on child abuse in the family environment
- Workshops on 'Understanding CSE/A from a survivor's perspective', which will provide a broader foundation and insight into the full lived-experience journey. These will be delivered by The Reign Collective, who are survivors of child sexual abuse
- 'Following the Breadcrumbs' sessions, allowing practitioners to deepen their learning specifically around recognising and responding to disclosure, delivered by The Reign Collective.
- The local Multi-Agency Public Protection Arrangements (MAPPA) Strategic Management Board has been asked by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships to review how people who present a risk of sexual harm and who have contact with children are assessed and managed. The completion date for this work is May 2026, and it is, currently, on target.
- The Safeguarding Children Partnerships will develop a local coalition and/or victim response pathway for local children and young people who have experienced recent or non-recent sexual abuse. They are currently considering adapting and adopting the Child Sexual Abuse Response Pathway set out by the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse.
- Assurance will be sought by the Safeguarding Children Partnerships that there are local pathways for referring children for appropriate forensic medical and other health assessments, for both recent and non-recent sexual abuse, and that safeguarding practitioners understand them.
- It has been agreed that multi-agency audits, with a focus on practice around child sexual abuse, will be completed at the start and end of the two-year business plan period. A second audit will be completed by December 2026.

Neglect

What we did in 2025-26:

- Revised the local multi-agency Neglect procedure throughout, to be published in April 2026.
- Produced a new procedure around safeguarding children with chronic health needs, including where neglect is a feature. As set out in the 2024-25 Yearly Report, in response to local learning from a Leicestershire Rapid Review, a Task & Finish Group was formed with practitioners from Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland to carry out this work.

The work acknowledged that many children will have health needs that are of a short-term duration and who do not require long-term clinical management, and most children will have their health needs managed effectively by parents with the support of universal or targeted support. The procedure was required to support those children where longer-term chronic health needs are being managed in the context of wider safeguarding concerns, including neglect. This work was supported by an Independent Facilitator with expertise in this area.

The new procedure – [Safeguarding children with Long-Term Chronic Health Needs who require “additional child safeguards”](#) – was published in January 2026 on the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships’ Procedures Manual.

To support the new procedure, also in January 2026, two launch events were held and a presentation was delivered to the Education Group. A video of one of the launch sessions is available via YouTube – [Safeguarding Children with Chronic Health Needs video](#) – and there is also a [7-Minute Briefing on Safeguarding children with chronic health needs](#).

- Supported a wider system change around how Health shares more detailed health information with Children’s Social Care and details the impact / potential impact of abuse and neglect upon a child’s health needs. This has been supported by the publication, in January 2026, of [Best Practice Guidance for Health Staff: Sharing health information with Children’s Social Care and partner agencies](#) and the implementation of a new “Health needs checklist for Child Protection Conference and Core Groups” and a new process that strengthens the health information that goes to Strategy Discussions.
- Continued to support awareness raising of the [Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool](#). This addressed the learning from an audit completed in 2024-25, which found that there was poor use of the Tool, with too much reliance on Health staff, either the Midwife or Health Visitor/Public Health Nurse, talking to parents and carers about safer sleep. It also responded to the results of the Section 11 frontline practitioner survey, completed in 2024-25, that found 44% of practitioners that completed the survey were aware of the Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool.
- Provided the Supervisors’ and Trainers’ Network with sessions on both the new safeguarding children with chronic health needs procedure and neglect more widely.
- Commissioned a new training course around neglect, with two sessions delivered in 2025-26.

Outcomes and impact:

- Extensive consultation took place during 2025 regarding the new system change in Health and the safeguarding children with chronic health needs procedure, including with Health staff in the 0-19 service, GPs, Community

and Hospital Consultant Paediatricians, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) and University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL) Safeguarding Teams, Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Conference Chairs and Social Workers via Social Work Managers.

Around 180 practitioners attended the two procedure launch events. Since the procedure was launched, it has been promoted to various Health settings by the Designated Nurse for Children and Adult Safeguarding.

The full impact of the changes cannot be assessed in detail until they have been in place for a sustained period of time. It is believed that they will have a significant impact for key meetings and how the partnership manages child protection planning.

Current feedback has been positive, with practitioners seeing the potential to greatly improve information sharing and multi-agency collaboration in understanding any child's health needs in the context of abuse and neglect and providing better support to the cohort of children with chronic health needs.

- Safer sleep information was disseminated via the identified Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safer Sleep Champions, which includes practitioners from Children's Social Care, Early Help, Health Visiting, HomeStart Teams, Perinatal Services, Neonatal Services, Breastfeeding Support Services, Turning Point Drug and Alcohol Services and Maternity Lecturers at the local Universities.

The Safer Sleeping Risk Assessment Tool was promoted again in the May 2025 issue of Safeguarding Matters. A one-hour Safer Sleep Session was delivered by the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Designated Doctor for Child Deaths during Safer Sleep Week 2026.

The importance of the Tool was reiterated at a meeting of the Supervisors' and Trainers' Network and a Trainers' Network, held specifically for those who deliver safeguarding training to those working in Early Years. It was made clear that there is an expectation that messages around safer sleeping will be shared in all core/essential safeguarding children courses, including Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) training.

Moving forwards:

- In April 2026, the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel published [Child Neglect: A thematic analysis](#). The Safeguarding Children Partnerships have been awaiting this national thematic review. They will now carry out work to respond locally to the national learning, including learning set out in the additional briefing papers on [The use of child neglect assessment tools](#); [Child Neglect: Voice of the child](#); and [Child Neglect: Responding to cumulative harm](#).
- The national learning will inform the update of the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Neglect Toolkit. This work is already in progress, and it is

planned to include changes around dogs in the home, safer sleep and fire risk.

- The Safeguarding Children Partnerships will be seeking information from individual agencies on how the chronic health needs procedure has been implemented. Agencies have been provided with an assurance form to complete, which will be requested for return in October 2026. The Audit Group has agreed to carry out a multi-agency audit in the future to test how the procedure has been embedded.
- Regular sessions of the commissioned Neglect training course will form part of the multi-agency offer on the Safeguarding Children Training Programme.
- The Audit Group will complete an audit on Neglect in 2026-27.

Harm Outside the Home

What we did in 2025-26:

- Sought updates on Child Criminal Exploitation (CCE) and Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE) work across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland from the Adolescent Safety and Diversion Board, with the Chair of the Board invited to present to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships on an annual basis in line with multi-agency safeguarding arrangements.
- Received information from the local Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group, who considered the findings of the National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, led by Baroness Casey.³² Multiple cases of rape and abuse against children across the country led to this report and the recommendations were addressed to the government. The Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group felt it was necessary to consider the recommendations and benchmark the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland region against them. They provided assurance to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships about their findings (see below).
- Received assurance from the Local Authorities, Police and Health regarding safeguarding of Looked After Children and Care Leavers, particularly in relation to exploitation and missing.
- Sought an improved understanding of sexual assault of children and young people outside the family environment across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The Safeguarding Children Partnerships are looking to assure themselves that individual assaults, which have been the subject of local reviews, are not reflective of any wider and broader risks related to group-based child sexual exploitation. Data was collated by the Performance Subgroup from Leicestershire Police over a 5-year period for analysis.

³² Baroness Casey of Blackstock, National Audit on Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, June 2025, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-audit-on-group-based-child-sexual-exploitation-and-abuse>.

- Supported promotion of Live Safe, which is a partnership initiative with the main aim to empower young people (aged 10-19, but also relevant to young adults up to 25), their families, and professionals to play an active role in keeping young people safe.
- Adapted a [Neurodiversity and Exploitation Briefing](#), created by Wolverhampton Safeguarding Together, for local use. This was in co-ordination with the local Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group. It explores why neurodivergent young people can be targeted by offenders.
- Continued to deliver the training course entitled 'Child Exploitation: An introduction to CSE, County Lines, Trafficking and Missing' as part of the multi-agency offer on the Safeguarding Children Training Programme.

Outcomes and impact:

- The Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group assured the Safeguarding Children Partnerships that child sexual exploitation is investigated by the Serious Crime Team in Leicestershire Police. The well-established Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) Team enables detailed information to be shared between the Local Authorities, Police and Health to support multi-agency decision making for children subject to child sexual exploitation and child criminal exploitation. The MACE Team has established an audit programme to test the validity of MACE Team decision making. The Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group is seeking assurance that ethnicity data is captured in the design of data sets.
- The volume of data collected by the Performance Group regarding sexual assault of children and young people outside the family environment across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland made it difficult to draw conclusions. It was identified that this requires further work, analysis and expertise.
- A dedicated Live Safe webpage has been included on each Safeguarding Children Partnership's website (see <https://lrsb.org.uk/live-safe-information>). It has been accessed over 300 times since it was published in November 2025 on Leicestershire & Rutland's website.

An article on Live Safe was included in the October 2025 issue of the Safeguarding Matters newsletter and a presentation was delivered at the December 2025 Safeguarding Matters Live event. The Voluntary and Community Sector Forum has been asked to support communication to children and young people in communities across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

- A "My Role" article was included in the October 2025 issue of Safeguarding Matters on the Team Managers of the Child Exploitation Team in Leicestershire County Council.

Moving forwards:

- The Child Exploitation and Serious Violence Group will confirm that the local definition of what group-based abuse is adheres to the definition in Baroness Casey's report.
- The Performance Group will liaise with other agencies, as necessary, to gain a wider understanding of sexual assaults and continue to consider the data. They are liaising with the Multi-Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) team and the Child Criminal Exploitation and Serious Youth Violence Operations Group to see whether assurance can be provided.
- The Supervisors and Trainers' Network, planned for April 2026, will focus on 'Harm outside the Home'.
- The Audit Group will complete an audit on "Harm Outside the Home" in 2026-27.

Belonging

What we did in 2025-26:

- Addressed the reflective questions for Safeguarding Children Partnerships posed in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's briefing, entitled ["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children](#) and published in March 2025. In order to identify what further development was needed in reviews to respond to issues of race, racism and racial bias, a Task & Finish Group was formed to analyse Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EEDI) in the Case Review Groups' review processes. A work plan was agreed and has been completed. A local action plan is being progressed (see below).
- Continued to promote and embed learning from "Race, racism and safeguarding children" in multi-agency learning and development. An article was included in the May 2025 issue of Safeguarding Matters, and it is referenced within the Core Awareness Safeguarding Children training.
- Completed an audit on the theme of "Belonging", between January and March 2026, to establish the effectiveness of multi-agency working in considering the role of immigration status, culture, faith, and parenting in safeguarding. Further information on the findings of the audit is available in the "Quality Assurance and Service Improvement" section of this Yearly Report.
- Progressed work, via a Diversity Task & Finish Group formed to meet an action from the 2023-25 Business Plan, with a focus on providing multi-agency learning and development around immigration status, culture, faith, and parenting to improve knowledge, understanding, and practice in relation to safeguarding children.
- Translated the leaflet, "Reducing the risk of harm to children in your household: Advice for parents who use drugs or alcohol", into five different languages – Arabic, Gujarati, Hindi, Punjabi, and Urdu. This leaflet is used

by Turning Point, which provides drug and alcohol support services across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The leaflets were supplied directly to Turning Point for their use.

- Continued work on Transitional Safeguarding, via a Task & Finish Group formed to support the 2023-25 business priority. The group is owned by both the Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards and is co-chaired by children's and adults' representatives. Specifically, the group's purpose is to develop a multi-agency Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland transitional safeguarding policy or practice guidance. It is acknowledged that Transitional Safeguarding is not simply transition planning for people who are moving from Children's Social Care to Adult Social Care services.³³
- Supported the re-launch of [My Adult, Still my Child](#). This is a pioneering UK-based website designed to support parents and carers of young adults aged 16 and over who may not be able to make decisions for themselves, providing legal guidance, advice on health and care decision-making, and resources for transitioning to adult services.

Outcomes and impact:

- The Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Reviews Task & Finish Group gathered information from partners involved in children's reviews at a local level to gauge confidence; this also covered what staff are provided with in terms of training. They were assured that awareness is being promoted in individual agencies, including through training and quality assurance processes.

The group conducted two in-depth audits of Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews across Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland to analyse where there were strengths and to identify weaknesses in equality, equity, diversity and inclusion. The Case Review Groups have a shared policy and templates, which consistently prompt consideration of all protected characteristics. There is a specific question on equality, diversity and inclusion for agencies to answer in information returns and in the template for the Rapid Review Report, which is submitted to the National Panel.

To further support this process and strengthen the response, the Task & Finish Group has proposed some changes to the paperwork. Further recommendations have also been made to the Case Review Groups (see below).

- As a result of the Task & Finish Group's analysis, and their response to both local and national learning, two new resources have been produced and published:
 - A [Practitioner Briefing on Adultification](#), which was adapted from a resource from Salford Safeguarding Children Partnership and

³³ See Local Government Association transitional safeguarding resources for more information about transitional safeguarding: [Transitional safeguarding resources | Local Government Association](#).

includes research and an image created by Jahnine Davis, National Kinship Care Ambassador and Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel member

- A [Practitioner Briefing on Cultural Genograms](#), which was adapted from a resource from Pan Bedfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership and sets out why cultural genograms are needed and why it is important to be culturally competent when working with families.
- The Diversity Task & Finish Group has identified a provider to deliver training for the Partnerships to broaden understanding of religion, culture and communities relevant to the demographics of Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. This training will be delivered between May and June 2026. It has also commissioned training to enable the Partnerships with understanding the support available and issues faced by families with no recourse to public funds, and immigration status.
- The Diversity Task & Finish Group has made links with the East Midlands Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance (RIIA), which is a partnership of ten Local Authorities and the Northamptonshire Children's Trust, who work collaboratively to improve outcomes for children and young people in the East Midlands. The aim is to support resources being shared across the region via the RIIA learning hub.
- Transitional safeguarding was an area identified in 2024-25 as demonstrating limited progress. As a result, regular progress meetings have been held, throughout 2025-26, with the Independent Chair of the Safeguarding Adults Boards and the Independent Advisor for the Safeguarding Children Partnerships.

The Task & Finish Group has completed a local multi-agency mapping exercise and the report from this exercise has established that the position has not changed locally, with regard to the specific cohort of young adults/people that do not fit into existing pathways when the transition from children's to adults' services occurs. Group members have started to produce and present real-life case examples from their service which describe the journey from children's to adults' services for young people, as well as practitioner experiences. This analysis and lived experience will inform the production of the policy / practice guidance.

Moving forwards:

- The Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in Reviews Task & Finish Group has recommended that the Case Review Groups complete the following work:
 - Agree a new position statement around consideration of Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion in reviews, to be included in their Terms of Reference

- Amend Rapid Review and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review templates with a view to strengthening the Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion sections with new additional prompts to pull more out of agencies' responses
- Strengthen the Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion section of the Individual Management Review (IMR) Report / Rapid Review Report author training
- Request that Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is consciously considered when preparing Key Lines of Enquiry for Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews
- Request that Equality, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion experience and training is stipulated, which is pertinent to the case, when advertising for a Reviewer.
- The Diversity Task & Finish Group will organise a conference, to include children and young people with lived experience, to support understanding of their experiences and to support wider learning.
- The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland transitional safeguarding policy or practice guidance is due to be ready for November 2026.

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

Thresholds

The Business Plan for 2025-27 states that the Policy and Procedures Group will lead on publishing a refreshed Thresholds document, confirming changes and setting out a broad continuum of Family Help. This work was due to be completed by the end of March 2026. There has been an issue with progressing this work, though, as transformation activity is not at a stage where the Policy and Procedures Group has the information required to update the Thresholds document.

Quality Assurance and Service Improvement

The Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership has a Performance and Quality Assurance Framework shared with the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership. This can be found here <https://lrsb.org.uk/lrscp>.



Changes in 2025-26

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships previously shared an Assurance and Audit Group. It was acknowledged that the remit of this group was very large. To address this and to reflect the structure successfully employed by the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Adults Boards, from 2025-26, two new groups were implemented to replace the Assurance and Audit Group. There are now a Performance Group and an Audit Group, which fulfil the requirements of the Performance and Quality Assurance Framework.

The Performance Group analyses performance data; plans, scopes and tasks multi-agency assurance processes; and analyses findings from multi-agency assurance processes, including findings from agencies' internal assurance processes and Section 11 self-assessments.

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

It was anticipated that this change would allow for more audits to be completed and improve the ability to evidence how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes. These expected improvements are now evident in the work completed in 2025-26.

Additionally, in 2025-26, it was decided to step down the monthly Safeguarding Assurance Keep in Touch meetings, which fed into the Performance Group. This meeting brought together senior safeguarding leads to share intelligence and joint oversight of the ability of multi-agency children's safeguarding services to maintain statutory functions in relation to safeguarding children. The meetings have been closed down because data detailing trends in workload and workforce capacity are now collated by the Performance Group.

Performance data

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

Leicestershire

Child Protection data

	2024-25	2025-26
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Education	1071	1092
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Health	1171	1186
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Housing	61	60
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Police	1841	2381
Number of Strategy Meetings*	2961	3593
Number of Section 47 enquiries*	1778	2609
Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs)**	389	583
Number of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs)**	683	894
Number of Child Protection Plans that started over the year***	617	848

*This is children not a count of meetings

**This is a count of conferences

*** This number accounts for the plans that started across the year (and subsequently ended too).

Categories of Abuse*

	2025-26
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – physical abuse	38
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – emotional abuse	285
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – sexual abuse	83
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – neglect	340
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – multiple categories	102

* This data is related to starts during the quarter

In general, in Leicestershire across 2025-26, the number of referrals from different sectors remained stable. There was a substantial increase in referrals from the Police. The Safeguarding Children Partnership identified that the Police make the highest number of contacts to the Local Authorities, and a piece of work was recommended to ensure that contacts are appropriate, focused and of the required quality. A report was presented to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' meeting in October 2025, following the completion of joint analytical work by Leicestershire Children's Social Care and Leicestershire Police about the number of contacts made by the Police that are converted and accepted as referrals. Assurance was provided that, overall, the volume of referrals was appropriate and proportionate, and they were being managed effectively. Mechanisms are in place at the Front Door – Children's Social Care make the decision about what is a referral based on application of the threshold criteria. Work continues to ensure that these are evaluated by the Police and Children's Social Care to identify the most appropriate pathway for the child, which includes Targeted Early Help.

From September 2025 onwards, Leicestershire saw an increase in their Front Door activity and higher numbers of children on child protection plans. This continued through Quarter 3 (October-December 2025) and put significant pressures on teams. By Quarter 4 (January-March 2026), the increase seen over the previous quarters reduced / stabilised, in terms of contacts, numbers of strategy discussions and conferences.

The rise in child protection numbers in the 12 months up to March 2026 was reflected across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Leicestershire completed audit activity to inform their response. Local learning confirmed strong practice and highlighted opportunities to sharpen Section 47 analysis and apply thresholds consistently. Swift actions were taken and included weekly Heads of Service oversight of Initial Child Protection Conference recommendations, as a short-term measure to support proportionate outcomes. This has now ended. This work meant that March 2026 saw a lower conversion rate from Section 47 enquiries to Initial Child Protection Conference (19.2%). This coincided with a period where a greater proportion of enquiries concluded that children's needs and risks could be safely

addressed outside of the child protection process. This particularly focused on children experiencing accumulated harm, where robust Child in Need planning within the Family Help model could successfully and proactively support families to build on strengths to improve outcomes.

During 2025-26, Leicestershire continued to strengthen their understanding of children's identity, culture, ethnicity and sense of belonging, ensuring these are considered in the support and services provided to children, young people and families. Their quality assurance activity and external inspection feedback show increasing evidence that children's cultural backgrounds, lived experiences and diverse identities are recognised and reflected in assessment, planning and practice. This year, partners across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland completed a multi-agency audit exploring children's experiences of belonging. Learning from this work is being taken forward across the Safeguarding Partnership to strengthen practice and improve outcomes for children and families. In December 2025, Leicestershire also relaunched the Race and Identity Excellence Forum (RIEF), providing a dedicated space for learning, reflection and challenge to promote equity, inclusion and anti-racist practice across services.

Local data shows that most children receiving support are from White British and other White backgrounds, broadly reflecting the county's population. Leicestershire also know that some groups are represented differently across services, including children from refugee and asylum-seeking backgrounds who are more visible within care and care leaver services and children from Black backgrounds who are generally underrepresented across most service areas when comparing to the school population. They will continue to improve their understanding of these patterns and use data, partnership learning and the voices of children and families to help ensure services are fair, inclusive and responsive to the needs of all communities

Through the Families First reforms, ongoing quality assurance activity and partnership learning, Leicestershire remains committed to improving its understanding of ethnicity, identity and belonging, using both data and the voices of children, young people and families to shape services that are inclusive and responsive to local need.

Rutland

Child Protection data

	2024-25	2025-26
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Education	81	86
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Health	42	58
Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Housing	3	2

Number of referrals to Children's Social Care – Police	92	99
Number of Strategy Meetings*	149	94
Number of Section 47 enquiries**	94	139
Number of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPCs)***	41	36
Number of Review Child Protection Conferences (RCPCs)**	72	74
Number of Children subject to a Child Protection Plan	28	61

*This is a count of meetings/families, not children

**This is a count of children

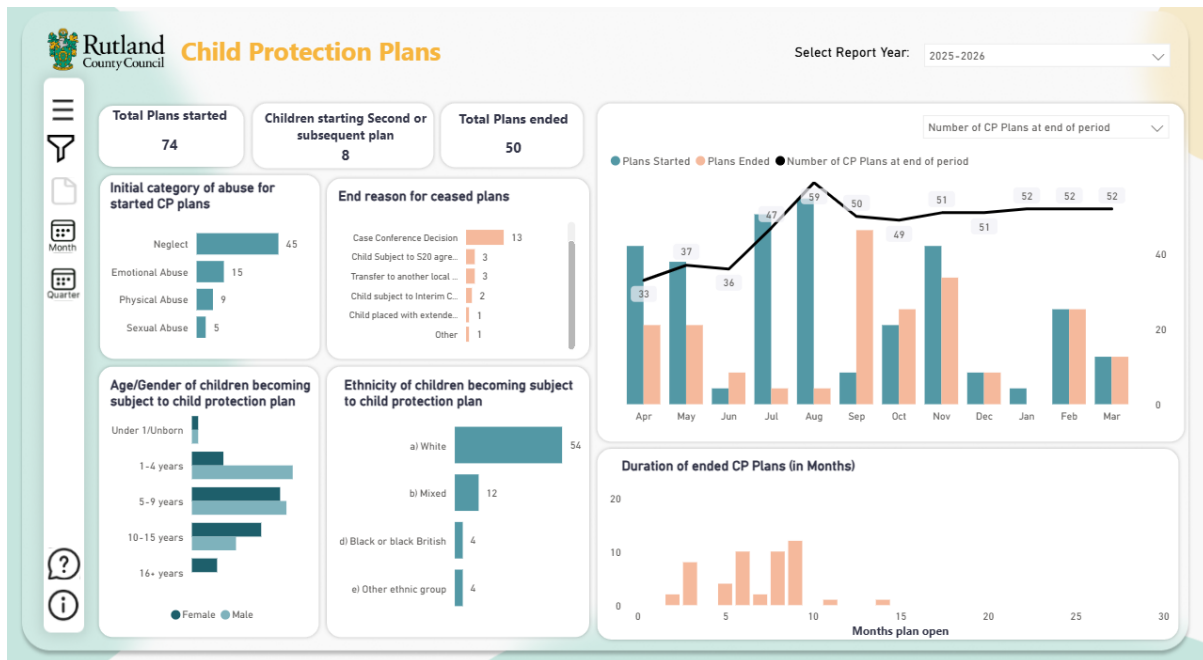
***This is a count of conferences

Categories of Abuse

	2025-26
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – physical abuse	9
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – emotional abuse	11
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – sexual abuse	5
Number of children subject to Child Protection Plan – neglect	36

In Quarter 2 (July-September 2025), Rutland saw a slight increase in referrals overall and children being discussed for child protection concerns. It was noted that the increase in numbers for Rutland would have an impact on partners as they would be asked to attend more meetings and the pattern appeared to be repeated across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. As a result of this increase, Rutland completed dip sampling for children being subject to Child Protection Plans and this found that thresholds had been applied appropriately. By Quarter 4 (January-March 2026), Rutland's child protection numbers had remained stable from the original spike within the reporting year. They also noted that partner referrals remained relatively stable, suggesting that thresholds for escalation to Children's Social Care are understood.

The table below shows a snapshot of the data available for 2025-26 for children subject to Child Protection Plans for Rutland. Within this data, it can be identified that most children subject to Child Protection Plans are White British. This would be expected in Rutland in line with the overall demographics for the county, which is predominately White British.



In relation to equality, diversity and inclusion considerations, Rutland have provided cultural genogram training to support frontline practitioners to understand any needs. They have undertaken audits on the theme of belonging for the multi-agency case file audit and identified that they needed to improve recording of ethnicity and religion within their case management systems. This has been actioned and is now mandatory.

Rutland has revised its corporate EDI strategy. Children's services inputted into this via their Youth Summit, directly using children's voices and experiences, which are now included in the strategy.

Within their own internal audits, Rutland continues to consider equality, diversity and inclusion and this shapes their training and learning and development offer.

Multi-agency response to data analysis

It was agreed that, as the increase in child protection numbers seen across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland had an impact on capacity across the partnership, a multi-agency audit would be beneficial to establish if there were any threshold issues and to identify any learning. The Performance Group have requested that the Audit Group carry out a spotlight audit on the increase in children on child protection plans. This will take place in Quarter 1 of 2026-27.

In Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, the majority of children subject to Child Protection Plans are under the category of abuse of neglect. This is reflected in Neglect being selected as a business priority in the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Business Plan for 2025-27. All subgroups have been allocated work, with the Policy & Procedures Group progressing an update of the Neglect Toolkit, the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group commissioning a new one-day training course, and the Audit Group due to complete a multi-agency case file audit in 2026-27. All of this work will be informed by the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Thematic Analysis on Child Neglect, published early in April 2026.

Self-Assessment

Section 11 self-assessments are undertaken by agencies as part of their duties under Working Together 2026.³⁴ Every other year, each member of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships self-assesses whether their organisation is being effective in keeping children safe, via a self-audit. In the years where the Section 11 is not completed, a frontline practitioner survey is completed. This work is co-ordinated by the Performance Group of the Safeguarding Children Partnerships. The results and learning are reported to the Planning and Delivery Group.

For 2025-26, a Section 11 self-assessment audit was completed. This requested information on strategic and governance arrangements; workforce capacity and resilience; service change and transformation; listening and responding to children at risk; effectiveness linked to the current business plan priorities; and learning and improvement.

Agencies were asked to grade their level of effectiveness in each area, provide evidence to demonstrate effectiveness and, if not currently reporting being 'fully effective', document their plan to achieve full effectiveness, including when they expected to see improvements.

Agency submissions are being analysed, and a report will be presented to the Planning & Delivery Group in 2026-27.

The 2024-25 Section 11 Practitioner Survey sought to establish from frontline staff and managers across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland how they used local resources available to them to help safeguard local children. In response to the findings, the Performance Group produced and published [Local Resources to Help you Safeguard Children 2025](#). It provides an overview of, and links to, each resource asked about in the survey, with the aim of increasing awareness and use of these resources.

Audits

Both multi-agency case file audits and spotlight audits are completed throughout the year. A case file audit is a deep dive audit, looking at a smaller number of cases in more detail. A spotlight audit is dip sample audit, looking at a greater number of cases.

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

³⁴ [Working Together 2026](#), Chapter 4, pages 114-115, paragraphs 258-259.



Spotlight audit on children on a child protection plan and in receipt of CAMHS

In 2021-22, an audit was completed on the theme of children and young people with mental health needs. This 2025-26 audit sought to provide a follow up to the previous audit and to assess progress in regard to any gaps in joint working with children in need of safeguarding when they are in receipt of mental health services. The audit took place between March and April 2025.

The audit found that:	Outcomes and Impact
- Where CAMHS were informed and invited to child protection meetings, they attended or sent apologies and provided a report. - The voice of the young people and parents / carers was evident in the records. - In two cases, where the child was born a girl and now identifies as a boy, preferred pronouns and names were recorded and used by partnership agencies and appropriate support was provided around gender identity and transitioning. - There was evidence that CAMHS practitioners were not always invited to Strategy Discussions, Child Protection Conferences or Core Groups. If a child/young person is on the CAMHS waiting list, Local	Since the audit was completed: - Each Local Authority has provided assurance that Children's Social Care are sharing invites to meetings and minutes with CAMHS for children known to them on the waiting list and who are actively engaged with CAMHS. Rutland reported that the learning from the audit had been communicated to the social work teams and practice reviews have shown that this is being implemented. Leicestershire explained that the learning from the audit had been shared with all relevant service areas and new system monitoring is now in place for tracking attendance at meetings. - CAMHS provided assurance that System 1 has been updated with current children subject to child protection plans and open to Children's Social Care to ensure that

Authorities should always still invite CAMHS. • CAMHS practitioners are not always made aware when a Child Protection Plan has ended to enable removal of the child protection icon from System 1 records. • Social Care should not be reliant on waiting for a mental health diagnosis; there should be a focus on supporting the child/young person every day and the presenting issues and needs, as these are unlikely to change as a result of a diagnosis. • Agencies should ensure that they understand the impact of a child's mental health on their siblings. It could have a parenting impact on siblings, as well as an emotional impact.	all professionals can input into these plans. Also, following cross referencing with the Local Authorities, a manual update has been completed to remove the child protection icon from System 1 records, where a Child Protection Plan has ended. • The findings from the audit, including what worked well and learning points, were presented in a 7-Minute Briefing on the Multi-Agency Spotlight Audit on Children on a Child Protection Plan in receipt of CAMHS. This is published on the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' websites and was also disseminated via the October 2025 issue of Safeguarding Matters. • A repeat CAMHS audit is planned for 2026-27 to test the impact of this audit.
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Case file audit on Child Sexual Abuse

An audit is to be completed at the start and end of the two-year business plan period to analyse the quality of local multi-agency decision making when responding to concerns about child sexual abuse. For this first audit, the audit tool focused on the key areas of learning identified in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's National Review, "I wanted them all to notice", including prompts to consider evidence of critical thinking and curiosity around sexual abuse and harm and understanding of risks, triggers, motivations, and specific impact and ongoing risk to the child. The audit took place between May and July 2025.

The audit found that: • The Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (PSARC) made therapeutic referrals and carried out child protection medicals when requested. Where they received referrals that did not meet their thresholds, they fed back to referrers. • There was an example of excellent work by the Children's Independent Sexual Violence Advisor (ChISVA),	Outcomes and Impact • It was acknowledged that the learning from the audit, around under use of the Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (PSARC) and issues around therapeutic work, was similar to learning identified by the NSPCC's Child Sexual Abuse (CSA) System Wide Snapshot for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. The Audit Group's report was shared with the Task & Finish Group working on the Leicester,
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with plans updated at every contact, the child's concerns being used to plan upcoming sessions and the child's lived experience outside of sexual abuse being recorded. • There was an under use of the Paediatric Sexual Assault Referral Centre (PSARC) in some cases. • Issues around therapeutic work have been identified and further scoping work is needed. • Practitioners could have been more professionally curious around how child sexual abuse could be affecting a child's behaviours.	Leicestershire and Rutland Child Sexual Abuse Strategy and the response to this shared learning will be led by them to avoid repetition. • In September 2025, a learning pack, entitled Resources to help build confidence when working with Child Sexual Abuse, was published. It is for practitioners and managers to use when working with or suspecting child sexual abuse and encourages professional curiosity, including lots of links to practice resources, including from the Centre of Expertise on Child Sexual Abuse. • A 7-Minute Briefing on the Multi-Agency Case File Audit on Child Sexual Abuse was published on the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' websites in December 2025.
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Spotlight Audit on Electively Home Educated (EHE) children

An audit on the theme of electively home educated children was previously undertaken in 2022-23. Following this, local guidance was produced and published in September 2024, supported by four training briefing sessions. This audit was completed to assess progress and any gaps in the implementation of the local guidance. Additionally, one of the conclusions of the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's [Safeguarding children in Elective Home Education Panel Briefing](#) was that *"local safeguarding partners take all necessary steps to assure themselves that policy, practice, and procedures in their area enables professionals to work effectively together, with children and their families, to safeguard and protect this group of children."* Also, the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR) on Sara Sharif, published in November 2025, raised issues around elective home education.

It was recognised that lots of electively home educated children have no safeguarding concerns, and their education is meeting their needs. The audit aimed to understand their visibility in line with previous local, and current national, learning, focused on establishing if children were known to services or presenting vulnerabilities. The audit took place between October 2025 and January 2026.

The audit found that: • Local Authority Inclusion Services are being proactive where they have	Outcomes and Impact • A 7-Minute Briefing on the Spotlight Audit on Electively Home Educated (EHE) Children will be disseminated
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concerns and working as well as they can within the current guidance. • Agencies are acting appropriately when electively home educated children become known to them. • In a change from the earlier audit's findings, Leicestershire and Rutland Children's Social Care records do now routinely capture that the child is electively home educated, with flags being used to achieve this. • There is a good process around Operation Encompass and electively home educated children. • As with the previous audit, Inclusion Services have significant limitations with regards to their powers when dealing with families of children who are electively home educated, which adds to the barriers to professional oversight and support to this group of children.	via the April 2026 issue of Safeguarding Matters. • It was acknowledged that many of the issues raised in this local audit reflect those raised in national publications. It is difficult to implement changes until national legislation changes. The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will aim to strengthen measures around home educated children. Its publication will likely require changes to local policies and procedures.
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Case file audit on Belonging

An audit on the theme of "Belonging" was completed to establish the effectiveness of multi-agency working in considering the role of immigration status, culture, faith, and parenting in safeguarding. This audit supported the business plan priority and acknowledged that, whilst many of the recommendations in the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel's Briefing, "It's Silent", are linked to Rapid Review and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review work, the overarching recommendation is:

*Safeguarding partners are asked to consider this report, and the reflective questions contained within it. We recommend that partnerships carefully evaluate current partnership work in this area and identify what further development is needed in learning reviews, and multi-agency safeguarding practice, to address and respond to issues of race, racism and racial bias.*³⁵

The audit considered cultural needs, communication needs, immigration status, intersectionality, racism and adultification. It took place between January and March 2026.

³⁵ Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, ["It's Silent": Race, racism and safeguarding children: Panel Briefing 4](#), March 2025, paragraph 7.8.

The audit found that:	Outcomes and Impact
• There was evidence of different agencies' recognition of ethnicity, language and identity of families, trauma, migration and cultural transition. • Where clearly evident, cultural context was explored well, understood and considered. • There was effective professional curiosity in high-risk cases – for example, where forced marriage was a concern. • Many of the cases involved domestic abuse, physical chastisement or maternal mental health issues. • There was inconsistency regarding: ○ Use of interpreters ○ Quality of information in making / receiving a referral ○ Accurate capture of ethnicity ○ Exploration of intersectionality ○ Exploration of racism. • Where families had moved into the country, a lot of professionals can be involved and this can have a negative effect, including on trauma-informed practice. • Where the child was from a dual heritage background, the impact of ethnicity was not so clearly recognised. • In terms of immediate actions, the main focus was often, understandably, on risk to and safeguarding of the child, but understanding of belonging at the beginning of the process could help support in the future.	• A 7-Minute Briefing will be produced to disseminate the learning. • The Policy & Procedures Group will review existing Toolkits and assessment tools – for example, the Neglect Toolkit – to ensure they are properly focused on belonging. • Guidance / information sheets on ethnicity will be sourced or produced to support practitioner understanding, with this work being led by the Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group. • Individual agencies will review their practice guides for the use of interpreters and update, where appropriate.

Other assurance work

Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Operational Group Meeting

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

Internal Quality Assurance Processes

The Audit Group seeks annual assurance from partner agencies around their internal quality assurance processes. This includes information on key findings from internal agency audits undertaken to support and broaden safeguarding learning and how the voice of the child is included in internal agency safeguarding audits and how it drives improvement.

Joint Targeted Area Inspections (JTAs)

Supported by the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships, multi-agency partners carry out audits on Joint Targeted Area Inspection themes, as they are announced, to measure their effectiveness in that area and consider improvements. In 2025-26, the Planning & Delivery Group received assurance on the audits completed on the themes of Domestic Abuse and Child Sexual Abuse, in line with the JTAI themes.

The national learning from JTAI audit cycles is also considered and informs local work. The [Joint Thematic Report into the multi-agency response to children who are victims of domestic abuse](#), published in January 2026, indicated that local learning on this theme was reflected in some of the national learning.

Assurance reports from other partnerships / services

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships receive annual assurance reports from other partnerships / services that oversee specific areas of work linked to safeguarding. The following areas are invited to present on an annual basis:

- Child Death Overview Panel (CDOP)
- Local Authority Designated Officers (LADOs)
- Front Door
- Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs)
- Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- Corporate Parenting
- Adolescence Safety and Diversion Board (ASDB)
- Domestic Abuse Locality Partnership Boards.

Use of data and information sharing

Quantitative data and qualitative information are shared to evidence that safeguarding arrangements are effective.

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

Moving forwards, phase two of the Child Protection Information Sharing (CP-IS) service is being rolled out. This means that children in care, children on Child Protection Plans and unborn babies subject to Child Protection Plans, their mothers and NHS numbers will automatically be on Health systems for the 0-19 service. All GPs, community dentists, community paediatricians and the Sexual Assault Referral Centre (SARC) will know about the fact that these children are subject to those criteria.

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 will introduce a new statutory Information Sharing Duty, which will come into force on 30th September 2026. Local arrangements will be updated in line with this national duty.

An example of how information sharing has improved practice and outcomes in 2025-26 is analysis completed around referrals from the Police into Children's Social Care. Questions were raised following performance reporting by the three Local Authorities to the Safeguarding Children Partnerships. It was identified that the Police made the highest number of contacts to the Local Authorities and that a relatively high percentage of these did not proceed further into the system for action.

A piece of work was recommended to ensure that contacts were appropriate, focused and of the required quality. Meetings were held to consider the quality of referrals, how these were progressed, the reviewing processes in place, the communication between agencies and the pathways in place.

It was established that the volume of referrals was being managed effectively. There was not one particular reason for the volume of referrals from the Police.

Learning was identified around what could be done better. As a result, a proposal was progressed to add further information to police notifications to improve the analysis of risk associated with relationships and work to share the Police 'Threat Risk Assessment' commenced. The work also highlighted positive outcomes around standard Public Protection Notices (PPNs) going into Leicestershire's Extended Domestic Abuse Team and them being able to apply early intervention with some of those families affected by domestic abuse, which prevents an escalation of behaviour. This is a strength and really supports the Government's agenda for Family Help and prevention.

The work completed provided a good overview of the local systems and the openness of the Partnerships. It also identified how the Family First Partnership Programme will provide a good opportunity to strengthen information sharing even more.

Safeguarding in Education Teams

Leicestershire

The Safeguarding in Education team at Leicestershire County Council supports schools with all safeguarding concerns and signposting to Safeguarding Children Partnership safeguarding procedures.

They deliver:



Rutland

At Rutland County Council, they deliver training to the Education Sector throughout the year, including:

- Safeguarding Information Briefings, which are delivered three times a year by the Children's Social Care Team. The purpose of the briefing is to deliver key safeguarding updates and develop a Signs of Safety approach to practice.
- The Designated Safeguarding Leads Forum, which is delivered three times a year by the Children's Social Care Team. These sessions are attended by Designated Safeguarding Leads based in schools or early years settings. The purpose is to deliver safeguarding updates and present information from a range of professionals including the Virtual School, Fostering Team and Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO).
- The SEND, Inclusion and Learning Service send regular updates to the education sector around safeguarding through regular bulletins. These updates happen on a weekly basis.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Procedures

Together, the Leicestershire & Rutland and Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnerships ensure that procedures are in place for multi-agency safeguarding in line with Working Together 2026. Throughout 2025-26, the Policy and Procedures Group has revised procedures and created new guidance in response to learning from local and national reviews and assurance processes.

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

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

DRAFT

Workforce development through multi-agency learning and development and training

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

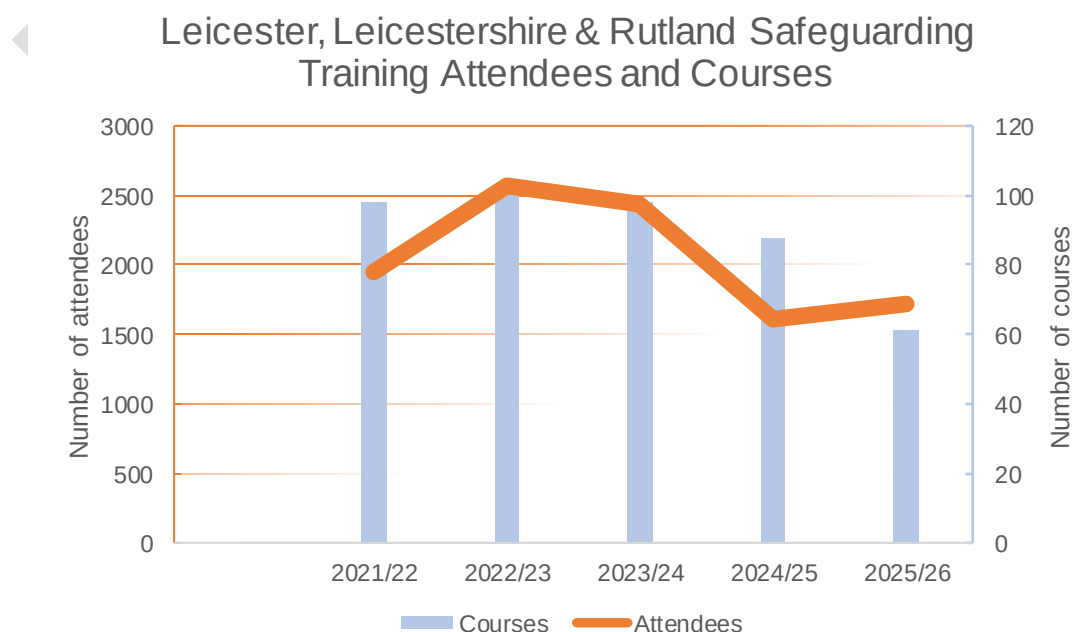
The Safeguarding Children Partnerships provide:

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

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

Training Delivery

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



This year the Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Programme delivered 61 courses to 1723 attendees. The Partnerships also supported the Baby Fortnight programme through collaborative planning, promotion and technical delivery support. The programme brought together agencies across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to deliver a wide range of workshops and practice forums focused on infant wellbeing, brain development, safer sleep, healthy relationships, early years development and wider support for families with babies and young children.

A significant development during 2025-26 was the introduction of dedicated Early Years safeguarding training. New Early Years versions of both Core Awareness and Designated Safeguarding Lead training were launched to better support safeguarding and welfare requirements that were set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) 2025.

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group also strengthened safeguarding leadership and workforce accountability through enhanced specialist learning opportunities. This included the introduction of a new “Safer Recruitment to Safeguard Children” course, and “Multi-Agency Reflective Supervision” course. Both of these consider staff and safeguarding. Established Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) training further strengthened understanding of how organisations should respond appropriately to allegations concerning staff and volunteers to ensure children remain protected.

To improve accessibility and ensure safeguarding learning reached practitioners across different agencies and sectors within Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, the Partnerships expanded the flexibility of training delivery during 2025-26. Evening and weekend training sessions were introduced to support practitioners working varied hours and shift patterns, helping to ensure wider access to safeguarding learning opportunities.

Update of Competency Framework

The Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Safeguarding Children Competency Framework (SCCF) was updated in January 2026 and then further reviewed to include any changes from the new Working Together to Safeguard Children, published in March 2026.

The Safeguarding Children Competency Framework is for use by the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Children’s Workforce to support individuals and organisations to undertake their safeguarding roles and responsibilities in a confident and competent manner. It outlines the minimum expected level of safeguarding competence that people need to have in order to work or volunteer with children.

The changes made reflect Annex C of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS), updated in September 2025, which talks directly about what should be in the training for early years’ practitioners and Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs). The changes to the Framework were minimal, and it is suitable for use by any agency. Four training sessions were delivered to explain how to use the Safeguarding Children Competency Framework, to support managers and supervisors.

Safeguarding Matters Live

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group also supported the delivery of Safeguarding Matters Live events. Two [Safeguarding Matters Live](#) are held each year. These are online briefings for staff across the children and adults' multi-agency partnerships. They share learning from reviews and audits, procedure and guidance updates, resources to support practice, and messages around key national issues and from key national reports. The slides from the events are made available via the website and sessions are available to watch on the [YouTube Channel](#).

Over the two events delivered in 2025-26, with one in July and one in December, over 640 practitioners attended.

For the first time, the July 2025 Safeguarding Matters Live was a hybrid event, with in-person attendance at City Hall and also online attendance. The event was focused on a specific topic, Safeguarding and Domestic Abuse. It looked at how domestic abuse can impact both adults and children and what services are available to support, with stalls from some of these local services at City Hall. Topics included Economic Abuse and the Domestic Abuse Act, the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment Conference (MARAC) process and Transnational Marriage Abandonment, which is a type of immigration abuse mostly suffered by migrant women which had recently been recognised as a form of Domestic Abuse in legislation.

Topics covered in the December 2025 event were working with transient families and strengthening safeguarding practice across boundaries; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) – who they are and what they do; Live Safe – a partnership initiative with the aim to empower young people; Project Echo – a project from Safelives alongside Living Without Abuse, putting the voices of survivors at the heart of local responses to domestic abuse; and PEGS (Parental Education Growth Support), which aims to reduce the impact of Child to Parent Abuse by supporting parents and professionals.

Supervisors and Trainers Network

Commencing in June 2025, there is now a Supervisors' and Trainers' Network. Meetings take place three times a year. Membership is by invitation and is only available for staff who are named in their agency as a Safeguarding Trainer or a Safeguarding Manager/Supervisor.

The group was formed to ensure that those who are in responsible supervisory positions are fully briefed about the learning from children's Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews, audits, national safeguarding recommendations and the work that underpins the Safeguarding Children Partnerships' business priorities. The aim is to provide the opportunity to discuss and explore the learning so that attendees can facilitate the sharing of this information during supervision, team meetings and when advising on specific safeguarding issues. Expert speakers are invited to deliver presentations to the Network. Videos of the sessions are published on the [YouTube channel](#).

Topics covered in 2025-26 included Child Sexual Abuse, the new safeguarding children with chronic health needs procedure and "Adolescence Abuse, Neglect and the Interface with Adultification".

Trainers Network

The Safeguarding Children Partnerships co-ordinate a Trainers Network to look at development/practice issues in this area. The focus of the network is to look at the trainers' support needs and to offer regular meetups between trainers to share knowledge, skills and to help develop the delivery of safeguarding children training.

Training Impact

Feedback from participants throughout the year demonstrated the positive impact of the training programme and reflected the quality, accessibility and practical value of the learning delivered. Practitioners described trainers as “professional”, “knowledgeable”, “down to earth” and “easy to understand”, highlighting the supportive learning environment created across sessions.

Feedback particularly recognised the practical relevance of training content, opportunities for discussion and reflective learning, and the value of experienced trainers sharing real-life safeguarding perspectives. The flexibility of the training programme was also positively received. Feedback from Designated Safeguarding Lead Refresher training highlighted the benefit of evening delivery, with one practitioner noting that attending outside normal office hours “*made it easier to attend and focus on [the training] without other priorities crowding in*”.

“I found the training and presentation well formulated and carried out. It was very informative and pulled from local and relevant examples and challenged thinking. As a new practitioner within Leicester, I found it helpful as an introduction to local safeguarding pathways.”

Feedback from participant of Core Awareness in Safeguarding Children training

“I really enjoyed the scenarios and hearing the perspective of the trainer on how she dealt with situations. This was a very informative part of the training. Training was delivered in a superb fashion. Trainer was down to earth, easy to understand and was able to help me with queries I raised at the end of the session helping me to strengthen our approach in the future.”

Feedback from participant of Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) training

“This was a very helpful day with a very professional knowledgeable trainer. I already had a good knowledge of safeguarding, but this covered Leicester and Leicestershire requirements/paperwork and was therefore particularly useful.”

Feedback from participant of Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Refresher training

Evaluation feedback across the 2025-26 learning programme demonstrated a significant increase in practitioner confidence following attendance at safeguarding training. Average confidence ratings, marked out of 10, increased from 6.56 prior to training to 8.55 following training, representing an overall increase of 1.99 points and approximately 30% growth in confidence across the workforce. Similarly, according to the same set of evaluation data, the attendees who answered the questions report a raise of 28% in their knowledge and 25% raise in their skills.

	Knowledge	Skills	Confidence
Scaling question point increase – out of 10	6.7 to 8.6	6.8 to 8.5	6.6 to 8.6
Average point increase	1.9	1.7	2.0
Percentage %	28%	25%	30%

The Safeguarding Children Partnership Learning & Development homepage on the Leicestershire & Rutland website was viewed over 2100 times, with the Competency Framework webpage being viewed nearly 2950 times.

The [Safeguarding Basic Awareness PowerPoint](#), aimed at people who may work in a voluntary capacity or staff requiring a basic induction to children's and adults' safeguarding, has been visited over 8000 times this year on the Leicestershire & Rutland website.

During 2025-2026, more than 90 people requested they be added to the Safeguarding Matters distribution list, with nearly 900 people now signed up.

“Training was good and informative, and a refresher to what organisations are available when dealing with safeguarding. Also resources available to take back to team.”

“Absolutely fantastic, very impactful and will share with colleagues.”

“Fantastic coverage from all speakers. I will be reviewing our safeguarding procedures and also discussing this within our team meetings, linking in resources and signposting staff to watch this Safeguarding Matters recording.”

“Learned about different agencies and how they operate and how to make contact with them.”

Feedback from attendees of Safeguarding Matters Live

Learning and Development Resources

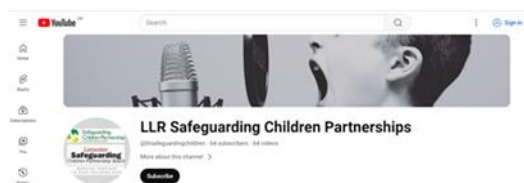


During 2025-26, two print issues of the [Safeguarding Matters newsletter](#) were published. They included information on the latest reports from the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, a spotlight on stalking and harassment, Project Echo, Live Safe, and the re-launch of [My Adult, Still my Child](#).

Updates on local and national safeguarding information are also delivered in a concise email format via the Safeguarding Matters Digest. There was a special Digest on National Stalking Awareness Week (21st April to 27th April 2025). Other topics covered in the Digests included the national Romance Fraud Awareness Video Campaign, launched by the Met Police in October 2025; the national County Lines Awareness

webinars, hosted by the National County Lines Coordination Centre; and local events linked to the 16 Days Of Activism To End Gender-Based Violence.

The Safeguarding Matters [newsletters](#) and [Live PowerPoints](#) and videos are available via the website and [YouTube channel](#). Individuals can request to be added to the distribution list so that they are informed of publication and event dates by emailing lrsbpo@leics.gov.uk. The Safeguarding Matters Digest is disseminated via email to those that have signed up to receive it. To be added to the distribution list, individuals can email lscpb@leicester.gov.uk.



The [LLR SCPs' YouTube channel](#) provides a bank of safeguarding videos that capture presentations from multi-agency training events and other resources that can be utilised by partners for learning and

development – for example, in single agency training and supervision.



The Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships and Safeguarding Adults Boards also offer a set of [Building Confidence in Practice Resources](#). These resource packs aim to focus on often complex issues that arise for practitioners when they are working with people whether they are children or adults. In February 2026,

a new resource pack was published on [Information Sharing to Safeguard Children and Adults](#). It was developed from work undertaken by Kent Safeguarding Children Multi-Agency Partnership. The resource pack aims to address effective sharing of information between practitioners, local organisations and agencies, essential for early identification of need, assessment, and service provision to keep children and adults safe. It covers key topics such as Legislation and Guidance and includes tips and links to resources.

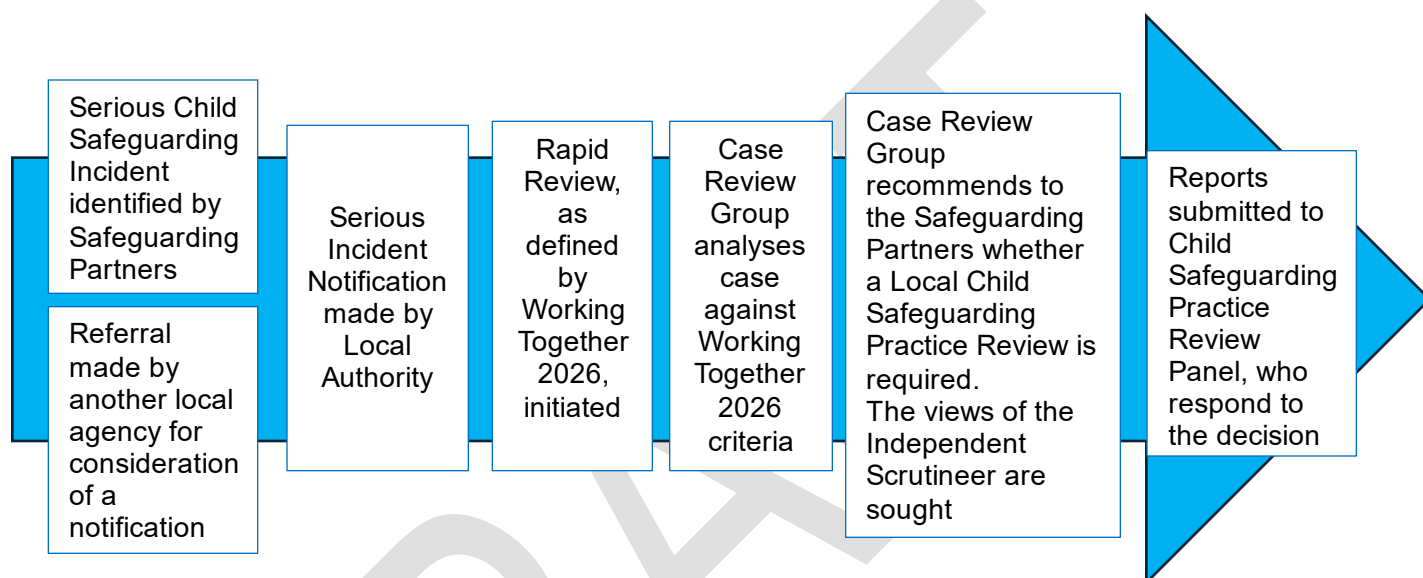
Moving forwards

The Multi-Agency Learning & Development Group will set up short online sessions, entitled “Safer Together: Top 10 LLR Safeguarding Essentials”, on a quarterly basis to raise awareness of key procedures and resources from the Safeguarding Children Partnerships, with the aim of helping support these being accessible and visible to professionals. For example, a 7-Minute Briefing could be shared, which could introduce learning from a review and link it to the procedures, or 10 top procedures/resources for safeguarding could be shared, which could link to key themes from reviews, such as professional curiosity or ‘invisible men’, and help to re-visit and embed key learning messages.

Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Local Rapid Reviews and Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews

Responsibility for how a system learns lessons from serious child safeguarding incidents rests at a national level with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel and at a local level with Safeguarding Partners. The Safeguarding Children Partnership assesses serious safeguarding incidents, as defined by Working Together 2026, in cases where abuse or neglect of a child is known or suspected, and the child has died or been seriously harmed.



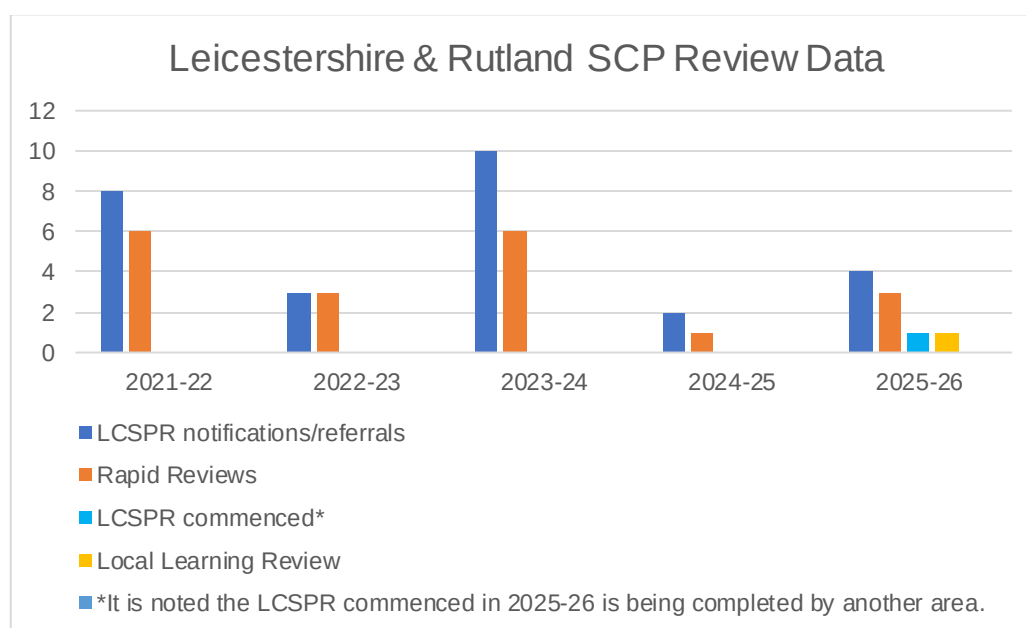
Changes relevant to reviews in Working Together 2026

Updates to Working Together 2026 have included more detail on potential reviews on the deaths of care leavers and have introduced the possibility of Safeguarding Children Partnerships carrying out “Local Learning Reviews.”³⁶ Working Together 2026 states that “Where safeguarding partners have determined the criteria for serious incident notification has not been met, they may choose to undertake their own local learning reviews outside of the formal review process. For example, where there is an opportunity to learn from good or poor practice, or from a near-miss incident. However, only incidents that have been notified as a serious incident through the Child Safeguarding Incident System shall be subject to the procedures followed in this guidance and overseen by the Panel.”³⁷

³⁶ [Working Together 2026](#), page 138, paragraph 384.

³⁷ [Working Together 2026](#), page 137, paragraph 378.

Key decisions and actions taken



During 2025-26, four notifications/referrals for potential Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (LCSPRs) were received by the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership's Children's Case Review Group (CRG), up from the two in 2024-25 but not disproportionately out of line with previous years.

Three of these notifications/referrals were in relation to Leicestershire children. The other notification was in relation to children from outside of the area. However, because the suspected abuse had occurred in Leicestershire, as per the Children Act 2004, Leicestershire Local Authority was required to make the notification. This case went on to become a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, commissioned by the area where the children reside.

It was decided that, whilst one of the cases did not meet the criteria for a serious incident notification, it could lead to useful learning for the Safeguarding Children Partnership. Therefore, it was agreed to commence a Local Learning Review.

Therefore, the Partnership carried out two Rapid Reviews about Leicestershire children following a serious incident notification, in line with Working Together 2026, in the period of this report.

It was agreed that the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review, commissioned in 2020-21, which had been on hold with an interim report because of an ongoing criminal process, should be considered as complete. The Panel was reconvened, including the original Independent Reviewer, and they concluded that no further work was required to deliver learning. The Safeguarding Children Partnership is satisfied and assured that the work linked to the learning from this Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review has been completed, with outcomes recorded and impact considered and tested. Given the possibility of criminal prosecution in the future, the report is not being recommended for local publication. This decision has been communicated to the national Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel.

Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews are published on the [Leicestershire & Rutland website](#) for 1 year. Past reviews are still available and accessible via the [NSPCC's National Case Review Repository](#).

Themes and learning identified from reviews completed in 2025-26

Rapid Reviews

One Rapid Review involved a baby girl of Mixed Black Caribbean and White ethnicity who presented to hospital with suspected non-accidental injuries. The Rapid Review included agencies from the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership and out of area agencies. Themes included effectiveness of multi-agency information sharing, safety planning and agency roles, and Child Protection Plan categorisation.

The Rapid Review discovered:

- Prior to her birth, the baby and her older half-sibling had been placed on a Child Protection Plan, under the category of emotional abuse, following a domestic abuse incident. A range of services were quickly put in place from the start of the plan to both understand and support parenting.
- Responsibility for maintaining safety within the safety plan was placed on the mother, the parent experiencing domestic abuse.
- The effectiveness of multi-agency meetings was limited when key agencies were not present, and information was incomplete, particularly in relation to the parents' histories.
- Agencies had recognised the relevance of the baby's race, being a dual heritage child, and there were proactive discussions documented with the parents about race and identity.
- There was good multi-agency work and information sharing following the baby's hospital admission.

It was agreed that:

- While emotional abuse/harm is a valid category for concerns related to domestic abuse, this example highlighted the importance of factoring the child's age and developmental vulnerability into risk assessments and the categorisation of harm within Child Protection Plans. It was proposed that, for babies under 12 months in the context of domestic abuse, the category of Child Protection Plans should be risk of physical abuse/harm.
- It is essential that safety planning considers the wider support network and does not place the responsibility of creating safety solely on the non-abusing parent.
- More work is needed to explore multi-agency perspectives to enhance safety planning to ensure agencies bring challenge and detail to what is to be expected to build robust safety for the child.

The other Rapid Review considered the physical abuse of two young siblings, a White British girl and boy, by their father and his partner. The children had previously been on a Child Protection Plan for neglect. This was in place when they moved from out of area into Leicestershire. It ended prior to the concerns being raised. The Rapid Review included agencies from the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding

Children Partnership and out of area agencies. Themes included disguised compliance, information sharing at point of transfer between different Local Authority areas, recognising the role of new partners within the household and respecting roles and responsibilities within the Child Protection process.

The Rapid Review discovered:

- No agency held information to suggest unexplained injuries or concerns regarding physical abuse during the period of child protection planning.
- When the family moved to Leicestershire, there was a gap in the information received from the out of area Local Authority.
- During the period of child protection planning, agencies saw continuous engagement and compliance with the plan by the individuals who are now seen as the perpetrators of abuse.
- There were some process issues when concerns about parenting in general were raised by a member of the family.
- On one occasion, when they raised a concern about a parent's presentation, the Early Years provider felt their contributions were not valued by Social Care.
- When an anonymous referral was received, swift action was taken within the Partnership for safeguarding action to be put in place.

It was agreed that:

- The Partnership must reflect on how to build workers' confidence and ability to look at concerns regarding disguised compliance, to ensure that all professionals bring challenge and seek to triangulate what appears to be visible, thinking beyond what is presented.
- The sharing and triangulation of historical information when families move in and out of areas is crucial.
- The level and depth of understanding regarding the dynamics of the relationship between the father and his partner could have been stronger. It is important to explore the roles and impact of changing household dynamics.
- All partners, including early years professionals, should feel able and supported to challenge and be aware of escalation routes to respond if necessary. This message will be highlighted and promoted.

Neither Rapid Review resulted in a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review (LCSPR). The cases met the criteria, but the decision was taken that an appropriate level of learning had been established as a result of the Rapid Review, meaning a Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review was not required. Both the Independent Scrutineer and the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel agreed with these decisions.

Care Leaver Review

In 2024-25, Leicestershire Children's Social Care made a notification regarding the death of a care leaver who was in his early 20s. The case was considered by the Joint Case Review Group, which includes representatives from both adults' and children's safeguarding teams. In 2025-26, in line with Working Together 2026, it

was agreed to carry out a Care Leaver Review / Local Learning Review.³⁸ This type of review does not need to be submitted to the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, but learning is identified and disseminated with a view to improving practice.

In this particular case, the circumstances of this young man's death led agencies to believe there was potential learning for the Safeguarding Children Partnership to strengthen multi-agency practice for young people in this cohort. Learning was identified, including around the following themes: care leaver status and vulnerability, information sharing around care experienced young adults and homelessness.

Locally, the Leicestershire Corporate Parenting Board has previously agreed to identify care leaver status as a protected characteristic, which means that this group of individuals could have additional vulnerabilities. This review highlighted a difference in how "vulnerability" is understood across agencies. All agencies and professionals may not understand or recognise the specific vulnerabilities experienced by care experienced young adults and the responsibilities held by professionals towards this protected characteristic.

It was acknowledged that the Government are bringing in regulations and statutory duties around the corporate parenting responsibility, which includes children in care and care leavers. As a result of the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026, any public body will have a duty to protect these cohorts, as if they were their own children or young people. It was agreed that a national recommendation from this case will be made regarding care leaver status.

Local Learning Review

The referral that led to the decision to commence a Local Learning Review was submitted late in 2025-26 and so this review will be progressed in the upcoming year.

Actions from Reviews

Action plans are in place to respond to and monitor areas of learning from all reviews.

In the last year, the Partnership has completed all Action Plans in place from reviews from previous years and is progressing well with the Action Plans from the reviews held in 2025-26.

Actions from reviews in 2025-26 implemented and in progress include:

- The proposal that, for babies under 12 months in the context of domestic abuse, the category of Child Protection Plans should be risk of physical abuse/harm was taken to the Policy & Procedures Group. The proposal was initiated by Leicestershire Children's Social Care and has now been agreed across the sub-region, by Leicester and Rutland Children's Social Care too. Consequently, the Domestic Abuse procedure on the Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Procedures Manual is to be updated to reflect this point about categorisation.

³⁸ [Working Together 2026](#), pages 137-38, paragraphs 381 and 384.

- A [7-Minute Briefing on Safeguarding babies in the context of domestic abuse](#) was published and promoted.
- Leicestershire Children's Social Care has produced Practice Guidance on Safeguarding Babies Under 12 Months Exposed to Domestic Abuse. This was shared with the Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel, who asked to include a link to this guidance on their new [Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel Learning Hub](#) in the vulnerable babies' section of the website.
- A new training course on Multi-Agency Working Within Child Protection Plans will start in early 2026-27, with the aim of improving understanding of roles and responsibilities within the child protection conference and planning process, as well as core group meetings and the role of professionals, including safety planning within child protection.

Moving forwards

- Existing resources in relation to professional curiosity and the response to disguised compliance will be updated in light of new learning and the learning material will be reissued to all partners.
- Local guidance to support transfer of Child Protection Plans into the area is being produced by the Leicestershire Safeguarding Unit and will be shared across the Partnership to support bottom lines of information sharing at point of transfer to include a full chronology.
- Safeguarding Children Partnership resources will be further publicised, including the escalation procedure, to ensure that all agencies can access these including Early Years provision.
- One hour Learning from Reviews sessions will be held on specific Rapid Reviews. Participants will be able to consider how best to share the learning with their own teams. The PowerPoint and associated information will be provided as a resource that can be used by leaders, managers and supervisors in their own agencies or teams.
- There will be consideration of a local strategic agreement around care leaver status, as a protected characteristic, and what this means in terms of understanding of vulnerability. The approach will take into account the legislation around care leavers included in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Act 2026 and the change in corporate parenting responsibility for services wider than Children's Social Care.

Dissemination of learning

Learning is shared with practitioners across organisations through single and multi-agency training, briefings and learning events, including to communicate updated guidance and changes in procedures. Also, the Safeguarding Children Partnership communicates learning to the workforce through:

- The [Safeguarding Matters newsletter](#) and [live events](#) and the Safeguarding Matters Digest

- [7-Minute Briefings](#), which are designed to convey key messages from reviews and encourage managers and workers to reflect on their practice.
- The Leicestershire & Rutland [Practice Points – Learning from Safeguarding Children Partnership \(SCP\) Reviews and Audits](#) document, which was launched and published on the website in October 2023. It provides key learning points for all practitioners and managers from audits and reviews, both local and national. This is a live document. The latest version was published in March 2026.
- An end of year “Learning from Reviews” document that summarises learning from local cases, including anonymised case details/context, and Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel publications. This can be used as a PowerPoint for guided discussion, for example, in team meetings or turned into a PDF for individual practitioners to read through in their own time. It was first agreed in 2024 that this would be provided on an annual basis.

How we are measuring impact

Agencies are asked to provide assurance regarding how they disseminate and use learning resources produced by the Safeguarding Children Partnership, including 7-Minute Briefings and the Learning from Reviews resource, and to provide any feedback collated. It has been confirmed, for example, that the Integrated Care Board share resources via the GP Forum and directly to GP Practices, with the expectation that they are disseminated to their staff. Leicestershire Education disseminate information via the Headteachers’ Safeguarding Newsletter, in the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL) Forum and direct to Designated Safeguarding Lead emails. University Hospitals of Leicester NHS Trust (UHL) have reported that 7-Minute Briefings, Safeguarding Matters and learning resources that can be easily shared are very valuable and well received.

The Case Review Group produce impact reports following the completion of actions initiated as a result of Local Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews. Now that the outstanding LCSPR has been completed, an impact report will be produced to evaluate the updates carried out since the time of the incident.

Following the completion of work around a previous Rapid Review, agencies have been told that the Safeguarding Children Partnership will be seeking information from individual agencies on how the chronic health needs procedure has been implemented and promoted. They were provided with a form to complete. This will be requested for return in October 2026. Additionally, the Audit Group has agreed to coordinate and provide oversight to future assurance activity to hold agencies to account for how this procedure is implemented and how it is delivering the ambition for system change. They have agreed to complete a case file audit in 2027.

National Reviews

National reviews are used for benchmarking and ensuring best practice locally. The Safeguarding Children Partnership analyse the learning from national reports and out of area reviews and ensure it is integrated into local thinking and practice. For example, national and out of area learning is considered during Rapid Reviews and included in the Practice Points. Across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland, this

learning is often incorporated into a local Action Plan, with actions disseminated to the appropriate Safeguarding Children Partnerships' subgroup.

Date	Publication	How national learning has been considered in local work
May 2025	Serious Incident Notifications	A report allowing for comparison of Leicestershire & Rutland notification data with that of other areas for 2024-25 was produced and shared with the Case Review Group.
November 2025	Sara Sharif Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review Surrey Safeguarding Children Partnership	Learning was considered by the Case Review Group in the December 2025 meeting. Learning points and links to the review and related 7-Minute Briefing have been included in the Practice Points. An extraordinary meeting of the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Case Review Groups will consider any further action required in April 2026. Learning will be included in an article in the April 2026 print issue of Safeguarding Matters.
February 2026	“Protecting all vulnerable babies better”: National review into the broader safeguarding issues raised by the death of baby Victoria Marten Child Safeguarding Practice Review Panel	Learning points and links to the review and the briefing note for child protection professionals have been included in the Practice Points. An extraordinary meeting of the Leicester and Leicestershire & Rutland Case Review Groups will consider any action required in April 2026. Learning will be included in an article in the April 2026 print issue of Safeguarding Matters.

Future Planning

Throughout the Yearly Report, future changes to be implemented have been highlighted around scrutiny, engagement with children and families, quality assurance and training.

The two-year business planning period started in April 2025 and will run through to March 2027. Therefore, the priorities in 2026-27 will continue to be Child Sexual Abuse, Neglect, Harm Outside the Home and Belonging. The [Joint Leicester, Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnerships' Business Plan for 2025-27](#) is published on the website.

For each of these areas, there are key deliverables, leads, timescales and impact measures. This enables the Safeguarding Children Partnerships to monitor progress and secure assurance that actions are making a positive difference to the lived experience of children and families.

Conclusion

Again, in 2025-26, the Leicestershire & Rutland Safeguarding Children Partnership has been working in the context of significant national reforms and changes to statutory guidance. This has provided the opportunity to review and improve how the Partnership works together to safeguard children and look to make better use of the resources across the Partnership. The positive impact of the changes implemented to quality assurance processes is evident. Moving forwards, these processes will only be further strengthened by the involvement of the Young Scrutineers. The Partnership's learning and development output continues to support and adapt to the changing needs of the workforce. As this period of national and local transition progresses, with the aim of creating a whole-system, early intervention approach to improve outcomes for children, the Partnership will contribute to changes in practice through training and sharing learning from review and assurance work across the partnership.

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CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

ANNUAL REPORT OF THE INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES.

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present the Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officers for children in care. The report evaluates the extent to which Leicestershire County Council has fulfilled its responsibilities to these children for the period 1 April 2025 – 31 March 2026.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The IRO (Independent Reviewing Officer) has a statutory role to ensure effective and improved care planning for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority, securing better outcomes, placing their wishes and feelings at the centre of the plan and giving full and due consideration as set out in the IRO Handbook 2010.
3. The Annual Report is a requirement of The IRO Handbook which provides statutory guidance for Independent Reviewing Officers and Local Authorities, setting out the function of the role in relation to case management and review of looked after children. The content and format of the report follow's the expectations of the guidance.
4. The report is available for the scrutiny of the Overview and Scrutiny committee and is accessible as a public document. Most importantly, it is communicated to Leicestershire's children in care in a child and young person friendly version .
5. The role of the IRO is supported by the Corporate Parenting Strategy. The Strategy sets out how the County Council and its partners work together to help Children in Care and Care Leavers feel safe, valued, supported and empowered to achieve the best possible outcomes in life.

Background

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

7. There are a wide range of implications and impact assessments that should be considered as part of the decision-making process in the planning process. The IRO Service in Leicestershire is hosted within the Safeguarding and Performance Service, part of Children's Social Care (CSC), which sits within the Children and Family Services (CFS) department. Whilst part of CSC, it remains independent of the operational line management for children in care which sits in the operational social work teams. Management accountability sits with the Head of Service, Safeguarding and Improvement.
8. The role of the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is essential to the quality assurance and effectiveness of the looked after experience of children and young people. This is not just on an individual basis but collectively, with IROs having a key part to play in monitoring the performance of the local authority as a Corporate Parent; drawing out themes for improvement and development, providing challenge. This aims to drive forward change and improvement both in respect of children's individual plans but more thematically in respect of service development.
9. The effectiveness of the role has rightly been subject to scrutiny since its inception, and the legal framework and statutory guidance was revised in 2010 to support a strengthened position. This is set out in the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations 2010 (amended 2015) and the IRO Handbook 2010.
10. The report details key performance data for the reporting year. It is an opportunity to pinpoint areas of good practice and areas for further development and improvement. It provides information that contributes to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. It highlights emerging themes and trends, and details areas of work which the service has prioritised during the year 2025/2026. It sets out areas for further work in the years 2026/2027.

Headlines

11. During 2025/26, the number of children in care increased to 761, compared with 694 at the end of the previous year.
12. The Independent Reviewing Officer Service completed 2,203 Review of Arrangements meetings for individual children, equating to 1,783 meetings when sibling groups are counted together.
13. Despite this increased demand, timeliness remained strong, with 98.4% of reviews completed within expected statutory timescales.
14. Children's participation remained a clear strength, with 93% of children aged over four supported to contribute to their review. Permanence planning is also strengthened, with 96% of children having an agreed permanence plan and all children who had reached their second review, where assessments had concluded, having a permanence plan identified.

Key achievements

15. Key achievements during the year included maintaining timely and purposeful reviews during a period of increased demand, further embedding child-centred and

trauma-informed approaches to review meetings, and strengthening the use of challenge and escalation to reduce drift and delay in care planning.

16. The Service completed 431 Quality Assurance Alerts, including 144 formal escalations, 199 challenges and 88 recognitions of outstanding practice. This reflects a more mature quality assurance culture, with stronger oversight of care plans and greater recognition of effective practice.
17. The Service has also continued to contribute to wider improvement activity, including continuing to embed the Language that Cares Toolkit, continued use of the Coming Into Care Pack, engagement with CAFCASS, the Family Justice Board, regional IRO forums, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Youth Voice Council.

Forward plans

18. Over the next 12 months, the Service will focus on sustaining timely, high-quality reviews in response to demand; continuing to strengthen children's participation, including wider use of the My Review booklet; and continuing to challenge drift and delay so ensuring timely permanence planning for children.
19. Further priorities include improving the use of feedback and quality assurance data to demonstrate impact, maintaining oversight of health and dental needs, promoting family networks, identity and belonging, supporting work on reunification and preparing for relevant developments linked to the Families First Partnership Programme enduring relationships.

Consultation

20. During the year, consultation has taken place with a number of key stakeholders. The Youth Voice Council, which is made up of a number of children and young people who are in care, has been a group to offer responses and engage in consultation on a number of topics.
21. The Service seeks feedback from young people who Independent Reviewing Officers are working with, alongside parents, family, foster carers, and then other wider professionals who attend Review of Arrangements Meetings.
22. The Corporate Parenting Board provided further strategic steer for service development for Looked After Children service and the IRO service is well represented in that forum.

Resource Implications

23. There are no resource implications.

Conclusions

24. This report sets out a summary of the work of the Independent Reviewing Service and the keys areas of focus for the past year. Bringing this together has enabled us to reflect on the key achievements and successes of the service, alongside recognising areas of further development. Those areas have fed into plans for the

next 12 months to continue to drive an effective service for the children and young people of Leicestershire who are in care.

Background papers

Corporate Parenting Strategy, 2026 -2029:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/documents/s196414/Appendix%20A%20-%20Corporate%20Parenting%20Strategy.pdf>

Independent Reviewing Officers Handbook:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/independent-reviewing-officers-handbook>

Our Promise:

<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/f9c9e0bc-28c9-484f-bc0b-84926b5c0925/69.-children-in-care-promise-a5-portrait-02.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

25. None required.

Equalities Implications

26. These are addressed throughout the report as the aim is to improve standards and outcomes for all children and young people in care, including disabled children, young children and those from minority and harder to reach groups. The IRO Service has a diverse compliment of staff with good representation across gender, age, sexual orientation as well as ethnicity.
27. The role of the IRO is supported by the Corporate Parenting Strategy which upholds local authority responsibilities in terms of the nine protected characteristics and there is no negative impact (age, sex, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief and sexual orientation). The strategy recognised that children in care and care leavers have varied identifies and those should be supported and recognised within corporate parenting responsibilities.
28. Leicestershire County Council has agreed that being Care Experienced will be treated as a protected characteristic. This is alongside a number of neighbouring Local Authorities.

Human Rights Implications

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

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

30. None

Appendices

Appendix A – Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2025/26

Appendix B – Annual Report of the Independent Reviewing Officer 2025/26
(Child friendly version)

Appendix C – Corporate Parenting Strategy

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Safeguarding and Performance Independent Reviewing Officer Service Child in Care Annual Report 1st April 2025 – 31st March 2026



Table of Contents

1. Executive Summary
2. Introduction
3. Context
4. Profile of the IRO Service
5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children
6. What do we know about the performance and quality of practice within our IRO – Looked After Children's Service?
7. What is the impact for our children and families?
8. What have we achieved against our aims over the past 12 months?
9. What can we do better and our plans over the next 12 months?

1. Executive Summary

The Annual Report for the Independent Reviewing Officer Service provides an overview of service performance in 2025-2026 and identifies our priorities for the forthcoming year. The Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook sets out the statutory requirement for an annual report on the delivery of services and the impact of the Independent Reviewing Officer service on the outcomes for children in care.

For the purpose of this report, the term Looked After Child will be used for statutory related references to children looked after by the Local Authority and all other references will refer to Children in Care.

As reflected in our last annual report, 2024/25 was a year of embedding our reset and regroup from 2023/24. This year, 2025/26, has been a year of continuing to build on positive changes and ensuring consistency in our practice, whilst keeping children at the centre of their care planning.

During this reporting year there has been an increase in the number of children in care, with 761 children in care on 31st March 2026 compared with 694 children on 31st March 2025. This increase has resulted in greater demand across the Independent Reviewing Officer Service, with 2,203 Review of Arrangements Meetings completed for individual children, equating to 1,783 meetings when sibling groups are counted together. Despite this increase in activity, timeliness has remained strong, with 98.4% of meetings completed within timescale.

Children's participation has continued to be a strength of the service. For children aged over four, 93% contributed to their review during 2025/26, which is a slight increase from the previous year. Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to use creative and flexible approaches to support children and young people to share their views, including face to face, hybrid and virtual meetings, advocacy, trusted adults, alternative communication methods and the use of the My Review booklet. The continued embedding of purposeful and trauma informed review meetings has supported children to remain central to their care planning.

Permanence planning has strengthened over this reporting period. Of the full cohort of children in care, 96% had an agreed permanence plan, and all children who had reached their second review and where assessments had concluded had an identified permanence plan. Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to maintain a strong focus on permanence from the earliest stage of a child's journey in care, using review meetings, midway reviews and challenge processes to reduce drift and delay wherever this is identified.

The service has also continued to strengthen its quality assurance role. During 2025/26, 431 Quality Assurance Alerts were completed for children in care, including 144 formal escalations, 199 challenges and 88 recognitions of outstanding practice. This reflects a more mature and consistent approach to identifying concerns, challenging delay and recognising good practice. Most escalations were resolved at Team Manager or Service Manager level, demonstrating that challenge is being used constructively to support improvement for children and achieving early resolution.

There have been positive developments in the wider service context, including continued engagement with CAF/CASS, the Family Justice Board, regional Independent Reviewing Officer forums, the Corporate Parenting Board and the Youth Voice Council. The Language that Cares Toolkit and Coming Into Care Pack have continued to support child-centred practice, and the service has contributed to wider work to strengthen responses to child sexual abuse and harmful sexual behaviour.

There remain areas for continued focus into the future. These include sustaining timely and purposeful reviews in response to demand, improving the use of the My Review booklet, strengthening analysis of feedback and quality assurance data, providing greater oversight of health and dental needs, and continuing to challenge drift and delay in permanence planning.

Over the next 12 months the service will continue to focus on participation, permanence, family networks, reunification, health and wellbeing, quality assurance and challenge.

Overall, the Independent Reviewing Officer Service has continued to provide robust independent oversight, challenge and advocacy for children in care. The service has maintained strong performance during a period of increased demand and change, while continuing to promote children's voices, timely permanence, purposeful care planning and improved outcomes for children and young people in Leicestershire.



2. Introduction

The Annual Report for Safeguarding and Performance - Independent Reviewing Officer service offers an oversight of performance in 2025-2026, identifying our key achievements and setting out priorities for the forthcoming year.

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

We recognise the role of the service as central to driving forward the Continuous Improvement Plan 2024-2027, and promoting the key goals and behaviours set out in Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice.



The Independent Reviewing Officer Service sits within the Safeguarding and Performance Service and works closely with Child Protection Conference Chairs to promote consistency, quality assurance and high standards of practice for our most vulnerable children. The service operates through two dedicated specialist teams, Child Protection Conference Chairs and Independent Reviewing Officers for children in care, who provide expertise, leadership and oversight within their respective areas of practice. Together, they drive continuous service improvement and contribute to the delivery of a robust and effective safeguarding system with a key focus on the quality of plans.

Although the service sits within Children and Family Services and forms part of the wider Children's Social Care structure, it remains operationally independent of the teams responsible for service delivery and resource allocation for children in care. This independence is fundamental to the IRO role, enabling objective oversight of care planning and ensuring that the voices, needs and rights of children remain central to decision-making.

The Independent Reviewing Officer Service plays a critical role in quality assurance and service improvement. Through independent scrutiny of care planning, safeguarding practice and permanence planning, IROs help to ensure that interventions are timely, effective and focused on achieving the best possible outcomes for children. Their statutory responsibilities include monitoring the progression and implementation of care plans, identifying and challenging drift or delay, and ensuring that children receive the services and support they need.

IROs are uniquely placed to identify themes, share good practice and highlight areas for development across the looked after children system. Through constructive challenge, effective advocacy and independent oversight, they provide assurance regarding the quality, safety and consistency of services, helping to drive continuous improvement and secure positive outcomes for children and young people.

This report outlines the contribution made by the service in Leicestershire, to quality assurance and the improvement of services for children and young people in the care of the County Council during the year April 2025 to March 2026.

It is an evaluative report considering how effectively the Safeguarding and Performance service has fulfilled the statutory responsibilities of its role and the impact that this has had on children and families of Leicestershire. It is an opportunity to identify areas of good practice – 'what is

working well' and those in need of development and improvement – 'what needs to happen'. It highlights emerging themes and trends, providing information that contributes to the strategic and continuous improvement plans of the local authority. The performance measures used to measure success are both qualitative and quantitative data from all areas of quality assurance undertaken throughout children's services.

3. Context

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

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

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

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

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

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2026) does not currently suggest changes to the statutory requirements for this role.

4. Profile of the Service

Safeguarding and Performance Service, IRO focus team

1x FTE Service Manager (covers both focused teams)

1x FTE Safeguarding Manager- Looked After Children

13.01 x FTE IRO

There are significant benefits to the Independent Reviewing Officer Service being located within Children's Social Care whilst maintaining operational independence. This position provides IROs with a strong understanding of local priorities, performance demands and service pressures, enabling informed and effective scrutiny.

The effectiveness of the IRO role depends on a culture of collaboration where value is placed on independent challenge and oversight. While IROs do not manage cases or direct interventions,

they ensure that care plans remain focused, timely and effective in achieving positive outcomes for children. Where progress is not being achieved, IROs provide constructive challenge and advocate for change.

Strong professional relationships with practitioners, managers and senior leaders enable IROs to fulfil their quality assurance responsibilities, champion good practice and contribute to continuous service improvement. The service continues to receive strong support from senior leaders, recognising the important contribution IROs make through their statutory responsibilities and wider quality assurance role.

IROs are central to driving Signs of Safety and Trauma-Informed Practice, promoting strengths-based planning, the effective use of support networks, and an understanding of the impact of trauma on children and families.

The service remains committed to continuous improvement through its Learning and Audit Framework, peer audit activity and monthly Improvement Cycle meetings. These provide robust oversight of performance, identify emerging themes and inform improvement activity, with progress regularly reported to the Senior Management Team each month.

Towards the end of this annual report year, in December 2025, there were some changes in leadership following Jane Moore's appointment as Chief Executive Officer and Sharon Cooke's appointment as interim Director of Children's Social Care. The Safeguarding and Performance Service Head of Service, Kay Fletcher, was appointed as interim Assistant Director, and Hollie Martin, our previous Service Manager, was appointed as interim Head of Service. The service has welcomed Emma Bulgin as interim Service Manager; she was previously the Local Authority's Agency Decision Maker. As we come to the end of this reporting year, our management structure remains interim though with strong insight into the needs of the service, and commitment to continuing the established relationships and support to the service.

In terms of IRO sufficiency, growth was agreed during 2024/2025 in response to increased demand and an additional IRO joined us in December 2025, taking our total to 13.1 FTE. The service has continued to be stable in terms of both staffing and development. This year's data consistently shows positive performance as a result of workforce stability, experience and capacity within the team.

Challenge Meetings

The Service Manager for the Safeguarding and Performance Service, Safeguarding Managers, and the Agency Decision Maker meet bi-monthly for a Pre-Challenge Meeting. This provides an opportunity to discuss cases and explore themes of emerging concern. Over 2024-25, this was monthly however has been reduced to bi-monthly over this year as a reflection that our escalation process is well established and emerging themes are addressed at an earlier stage.

Consideration is given to whether these cases or matters should be taken to the formal Challenge Meeting with the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care, or whether further actions can be taken in the first instance. A tracking spreadsheet is kept with a log of these discussions and the cases and themes are followed up with the allocated Independent Reviewing Officer during supervision or Team Meetings. Given the quality assurance role of the Agency Decision Maker, particularly in respect of permanence, this forum is key to jointly identifying themes and areas of practice which need further development at the earliest opportunity.

The formal challenge meeting is then held with the Assistant Director bi-monthly as part of this process, to discuss identified areas of concern, identified in the pre-challenge meeting. Cases discussed in this forum are cases which have followed the full escalation process which is set out in statutory guidance.

This formal challenge meeting also provides a chance to review and consider data linked to quality assurance alerts completed since the previous meeting and themes identified.

Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service (CAFCASS) & Family Justice Board

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

It is positive that CAFCASS management has expressed a strong commitment to continuing to build productive working relationships between Independent Reviewing Officers and Guardians.

The Assistant Service Manager who oversees the line management of the Independent Reviewing Officers attends meetings with managers from CAFCASS to discuss identified themes and ensure that there is a strong partnership in place. Six-monthly meetings are being arranged between Independent Reviewing Officers and Cafcass Guardians, including managers, to review and support working relationships, share information and updates and ensure any matters arising can be addressed.

Feedback and learning from the service is fed into the routine Family Justice Board meetings and in turn the service is kept up to date with any issues arising from the Public Law work that in turn influences Independent Reviewing Officer practice. This supports timely care planning and better outcomes for the children based on collaborative learning.

Regional Independent Reviewing Officer Forums

The service has continued to engage in the East Midlands Regional Independent Reviewing Officer forums and has benefited from quarterly tailored training and networking days over 2025/26. Each Regional Day has a key theme with a variety of speakers delivering presentations, as well as opportunities to work in small groups with colleagues from other areas, to share good practice and reflect on ways to improve services for children and their families. The engagement promotes the sharing of learning and development to strengthen our local service offer. Over 2026/27 there are plans for three online training sessions and one in-person training session.

5. Independent Reviewing Officer Service: Looked After Children

Being a Corporate Parent

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

Independent Reviewing Officers are represented at the Corporate Parenting board by the Assistant Service Manager and Service Manager. Going forwards for 2025/2026 we plan to grow and strengthen our links to the Corporate Parenting team further in line with developments in that service.

Our Corporate Parenting Strategy states:

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

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

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

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

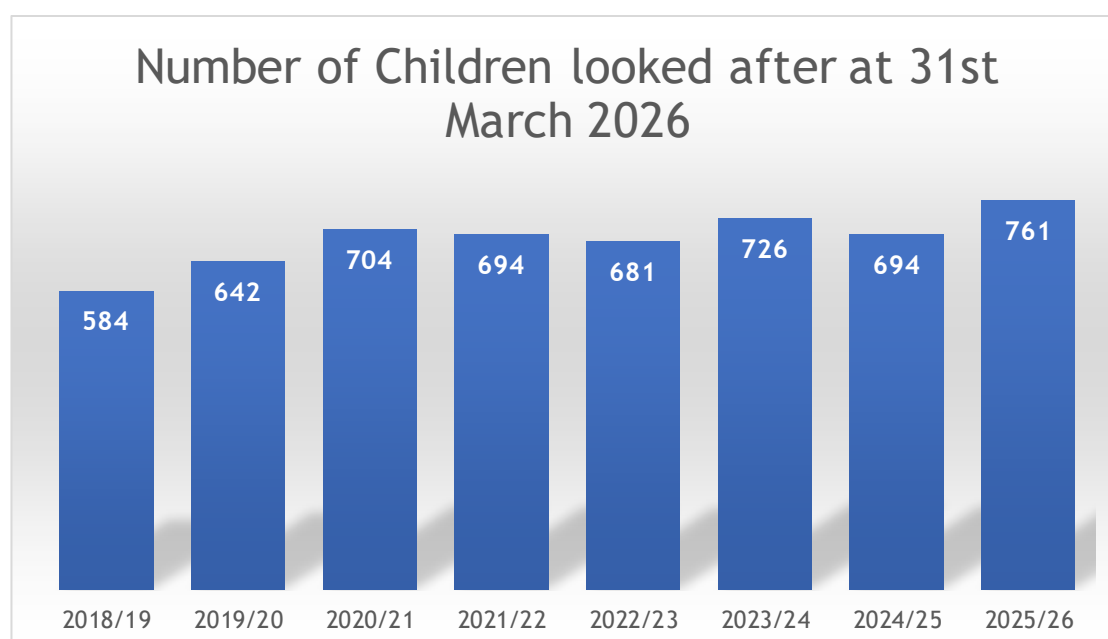
We are committed to the voice of our children and young people informing all areas of decision making, underpinned by a "You Said, We Did" approach. Participation is central to all services delivered to our children and young people and is championed in effective children and young people led forums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

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



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

Numbers of Children in Care



There were 761 children in care on the 31st March 2026, this is an increase of 67 children (9.7%) from 694 children in care on 31st March 2025.

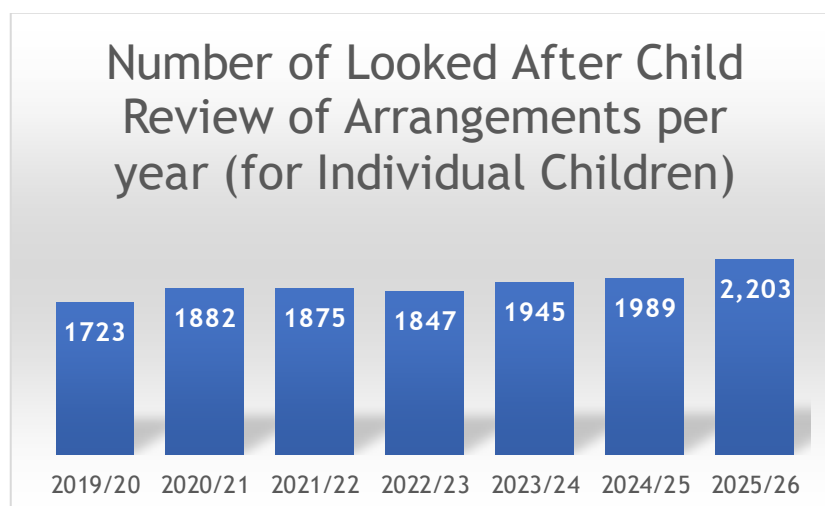
761 children is equivalent to 51.6 children per 10,000 population aged 0 to 17 in Leicestershire.

This compares to an average of 53.5 children in care per 10,000 children in Statistical Neighbour authorities, 62.0 for East Midlands and 67.0 for England as of 31st March 2025.

We have a robust review of our threshold decisions for children becoming looked after and work hard to maintain and strengthen family networks including by seeking permanency to reduce the length of time a child may remain in care.

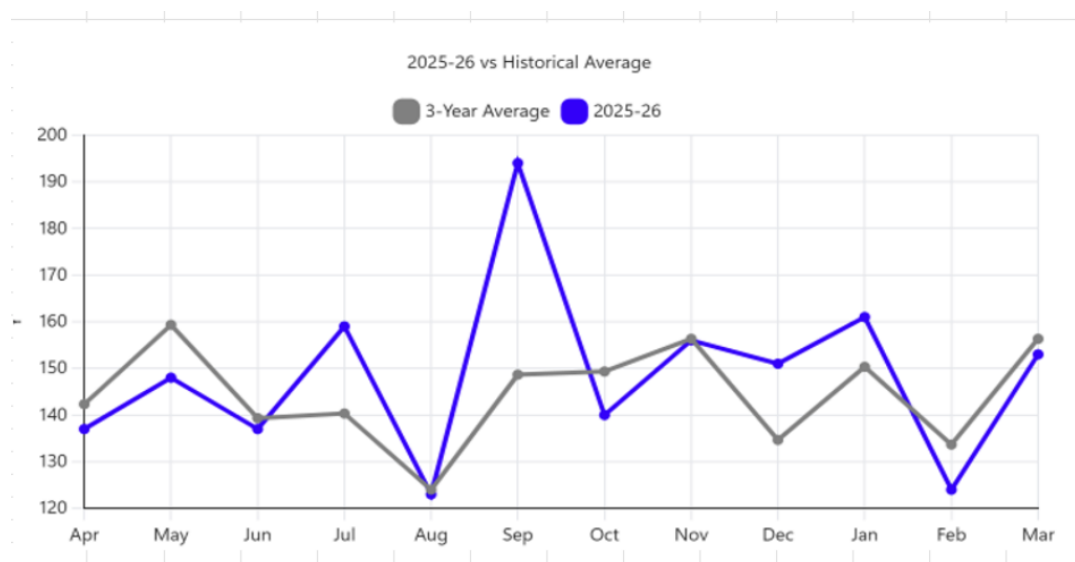
Of the 761 children in care on 31st March 2026, 464 (61.0%) were male and 297 (39.0%) were female. This represents an increase of 51 males compared to 31st March 2025, (413, 54.3%), and an increase of 16 females (281, 36.9%)

Numbers of Review of Arrangements Meetings



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

On average there were 149 reviews chaired each month, with peaks of 194 in September 25, and lower numbers of 123 in August 25. This is an increase in comparison to an average of 141 reviews chaired monthly over 2024-2025. The variance in number of reviews is shown in the graph below.

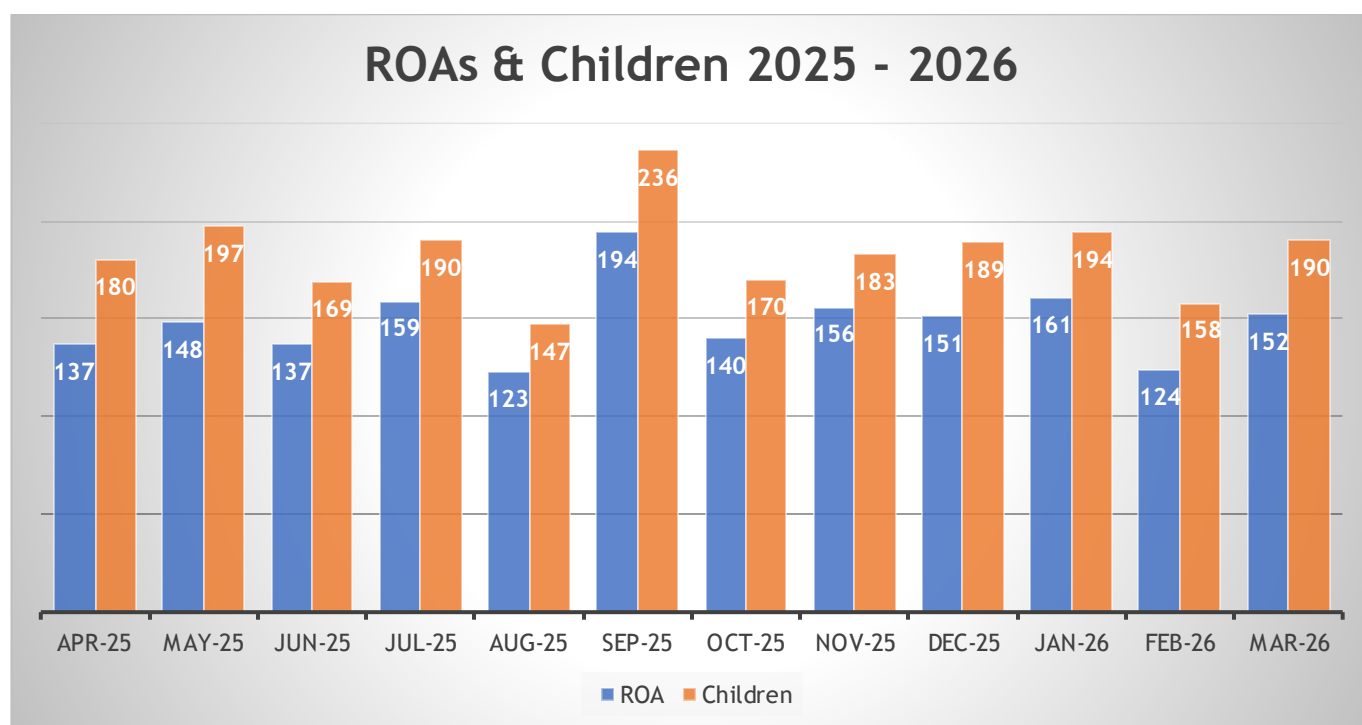


There has been an increase in the number of Review of Arrangements Meetings completed during the reporting period compared with the previous year. A total of 2,203 Review of Arrangements Meetings for individual children were undertaken, equating to 1,783 meetings once sibling groups were accounted for and counted as a single meeting where appropriate. This is an increase of 214 meetings for individual children (10.8%) and 97 meetings overall (5.8%), in comparison to the last reporting year.

While sibling groups continue to have an impact on overall meeting numbers, the increase in both individual child reviews and overall meetings indicates that the rise in activity cannot be attributed solely to larger sibling groups entering care.

Monthly performance broadly followed expected patterns, although a notable peak in activity was recorded during September. Analysis of available data has not identified any clear operational, demographic or practice-related factors to explain this increase, and activity levels returned to expected ranges in subsequent months. At this stage, the September peak appears to represent an isolated fluctuation rather than evidence of an emerging trend.

The data also demonstrates that increases in review activity are accompanied by increases in the number of children reviewed. In September 2025, the highest level of activity was recorded, with 194 ROAs relating to 236 children, reflecting both increased demand and the impact of sibling groups entering or progressing through review processes together. Similarly, in January 2026, 161 ROAs related to 194 children, further evidencing the continued prevalence of sibling group arrangements. Below is the graph that shows the difference between reviews and children per month over the year.



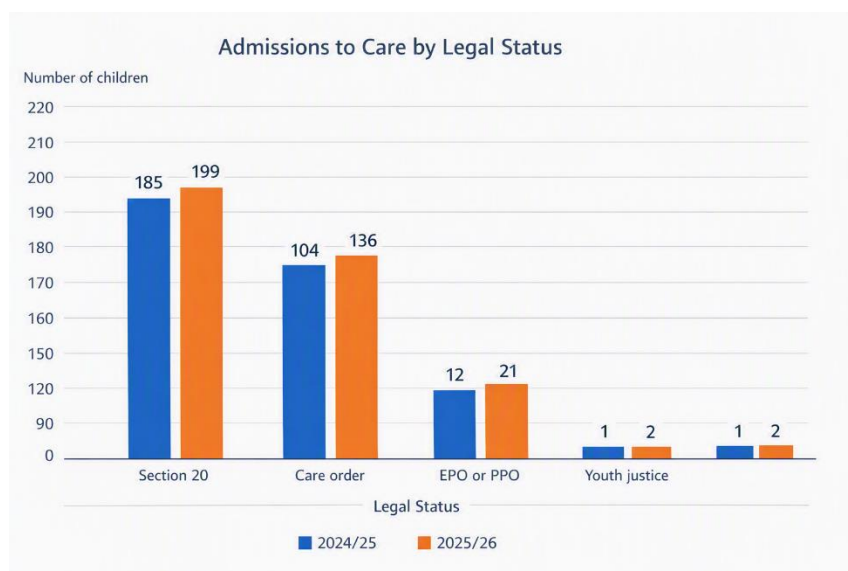
Over this year, we have continued to embed midway reviews, which take place between review meetings so that the Independent Reviewing Officer can carefully track a child's care plan. This can also take place at other points during the review period, if the Independent Reviewing Officer identifies a need to formally track the child's care plan more often.

At the midway review, any concerns regarding a child's care plan are raised and resolved and only when the Independent Reviewing Officer considers there needs to be an additional review

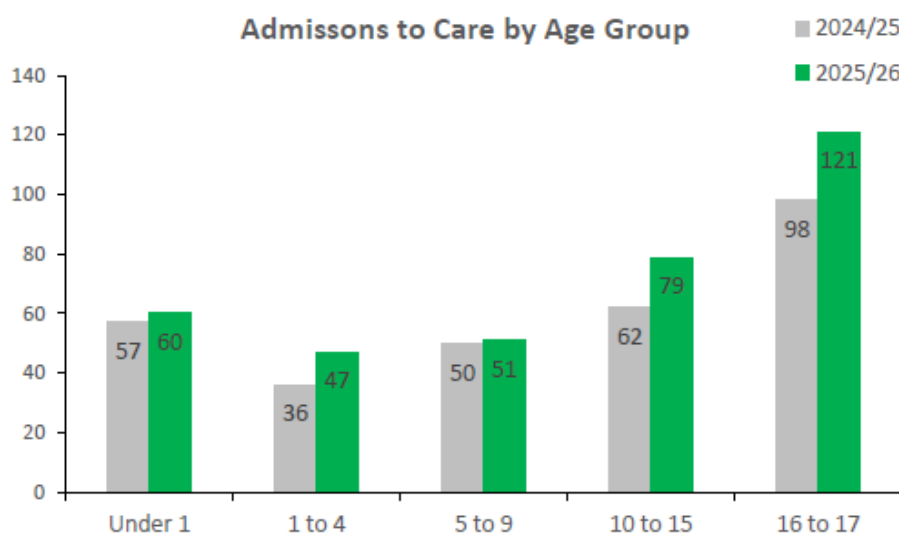
of arrangements meeting will this be arranged. Generally, all issues can be dealt with at the midway review. This aims to both improve quality and avoid drift and delay in planning permanency for children, which has remained a key focus for the service in this period. Early reviews can still be held for children in specific circumstances as outlined in the Independent Reviewing Officer Handbook.

Admission by Legal Status & Age

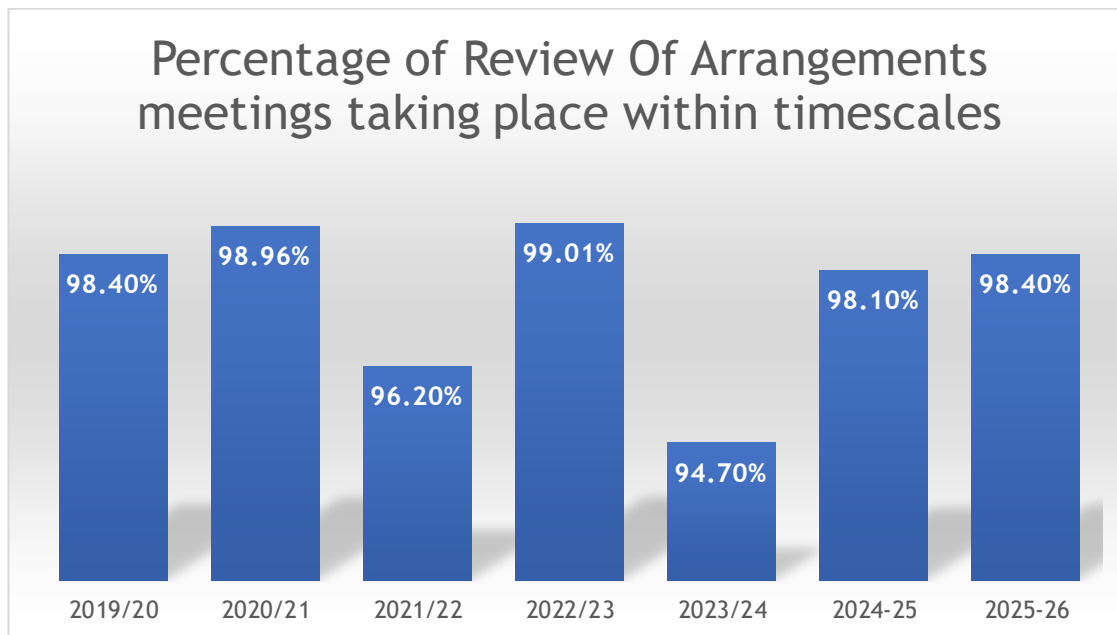
During 2025/26, 358 children were admitted into care, representing an increase of 55 admissions (18%) compared with the 303 admissions recorded in 2024/25. The visual below shows the breakdown by legal status.



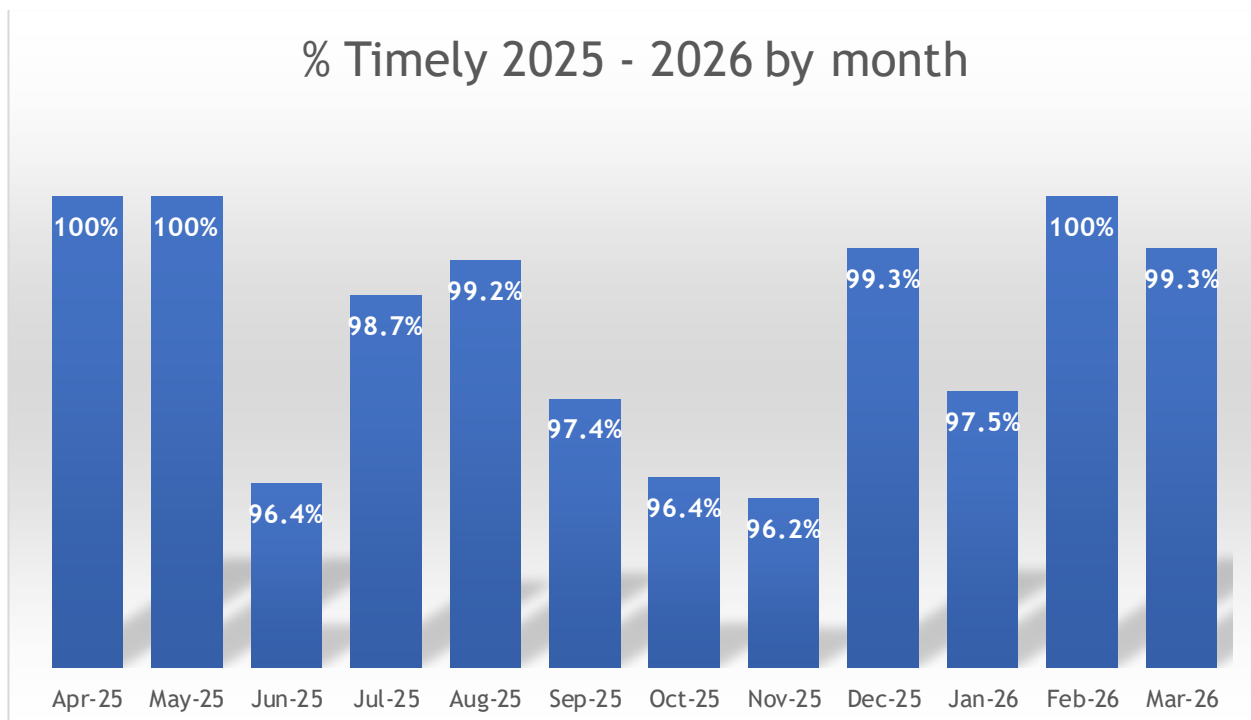
In 2025/26 there was an increase in children admitted to care for all age groups. Further examination of admissions to care by age group and legal status in 2025/26 are shown in the charts below.



Timeliness of Reviews



At the year ending 31st March 2026, 98.4% of meetings were completed within timescale and 1.6% (30 reviews) took place out of timescale. This is a positive small increase from 2024/25 as we have had an increase in meetings overall, and a further reduction of meetings held outside of the expected timescale.



We continue to hold our monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings which provides Head of Service oversight to all aspects of the Review process and therefore considers the number of meetings completed, timelines, whether face to face, stepped down or out of date. This is key to keeping performance on track. Oversight from Senior Management team is then provided each month in a management meeting dedicated to performance.

Participation

The child and young person's voice, their views and wishes are essential to care planning. As always, Independent Reviewing Officers continue to strive towards obtaining this and ensuring children and young people actively participate in the review process. Over this year we have continued to hold reviews in line with the child's expressed views, recognizing that for some children they prefer their reviews face to face, and for others they prefer virtual reviews.

We have also recognized that hybrid meetings have been beneficial, allowing for those unable to attend face-to-face to dial into the review meeting. This includes parents, family members, or other professionals, and improves participation more generally. Having this level of flexibility has allowed us to hold review meetings in the way children would like them to be held, and with those they would like to be present.

During the review year, 58.2% (1,037) of reviews were held face-to-face, 3.3% (59) were delivered using a hybrid approach, and 38.4% (684) were held virtually. This compares with 2024/25, when 64.2% (1,082) of reviews were held face-to-face, 0.9% (16) were hybrid, and 34.8% (587) were virtual.

While there has been some year-on-year variation in the proportion of reviews delivered through face-to-face, virtual and hybrid formats, the overall pattern remains broadly consistent. Importantly, the format of each review is planned in partnership with children, young people and their families, taking account of their individual circumstances, preferences and participation needs. The changes seen across the different meeting formats therefore reflect a flexible, child-centered approach to review planning, rather than any significant change in the level of review activity.

We can see that our participation numbers have remained high over this review period, and for children aged over four, we can report that 93% of children contributed to their review this year. This is a slight increase from 92% last year and shows consistent performance. This is very positive as part of our drive to have the child at the centre of their planning.

We acknowledge that not all children will want to attend their meeting, and it will be necessary to support their participation in other ways. Over this review year, the Independent Reviewing Officers have been creative in how they gain their children and young people's views. For one young person with disabilities, photographs are used to share his experiences, and his progress in independence skills. For another young person and their final review, the IRO met with her prior to her final review to complete a timeline of her experiences/achievements since living with her carer who she is staying with into adulthood. This was completed to ensure her final review was a celebration of all of her achievements and celebrated the relationship between her and her carer. It was completed on a roll of paper, she did drawings and put photo's on marking her achievements and she added more details to this in the run up to her review. At her review, the young person spoke about the support she'd received, her achievements. This was a real celebration with cake shared to mark the occasion and lots of positive feedback about how meaningful the review was for this young person.

For another young person, the IRO met with the young person prior to his review, they played dominoes and chatted, he then opted to stay for his review for the first time, having just done a fun, regulating activity just before the meeting which calmed any nerves, built rapport and made this a positive experience.

For another young person, he was actively involved in planning his review being asked where they would like the review to take place and setting the time. This was centered around his needs and preferences rather than exclusively around the professional needs. The review was scheduled for 4.30pm after college day, so it would limit any disruption to the young person's schedule and attendance at college.

For a child in their adoptive home, the IRO spent time playing with him and his adopters, using building blocks. This helped to gather more insights into the things the child does with his parents, including playing together in the mud kitchen. He let the IRO have a cuddle with his toy monkey which his daddy had bought him to support with his transition to his permanent placement. They also read a story together which was part of helping the child to understand transition planning. This simply story telling helped to provide an important opportunity for the IRO to understand more about wider family relationships, and the child's relationship with his younger brother. He proudly showed off the shelf his daddy had made for his toys. This sort of creative and child focused approach demonstrates the IRO's drive to place the child's voice at the centre of their plan.

We have continued to drive purposeful practice within review meetings, making sure they provide a space where children and young people would want to attend, ensuring discussions are held in a trauma-informed way and that discussions are proactive and meaningful in producing clear outcomes.

The Independent Reviewing Officers get to know their children, their families, networks and professionals around them, and adapt their style of chairing review meetings to best suit the young person and their situation. This may mean an emphasis on strengths first and a more solution-focused discussion about some of the worries. It may mean the young person's review is more like a discussion covering all the key areas, or that some discussions take place outside of the main meeting if it is not appropriate for the child to hear some of the more adult discussions needed.

We have found that being more purposeful in our review meetings is crucial to keeping children and young people at the center of the planning process.

For 2025/26, the table below shows types of participation of young people:

	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26
Children who are under the age of 4	363	370	404	405	367	329	332	386	416
Children who attend their reviews and speak for themselves	554	632	659	561	590	714	855	863	863
Children who attend but communicate via an advocate	4	10	7	18	23	48	66	31	38
Children who attend and	2	3	0	4	3	4	4	6	5

convey their views non-verbally									
Children who attend but don't contribute	11	10	11	7	4	14	22	23	24
Children who do not attend but brief someone to speak on their behalf	52	98	87	81	118	104	76	38	33
Children who do not attend but communicate their views by another method	415	296	450	636	623	495	478	515	658
Children who do not attend or convey their views in any other way	87	163	103	118	147	139	112	127	113

Another important area within children and young people's participation is the use of the 'My Review' booklet. This is a document written and designed by the Youth Voice Council to help children and young people prepare for their review or be submitted to the Independent Reviewing Officer as a written record of their views.

This continues to be sent electronically to the social worker, who will either complete the booklet with the young person or share it with the young person so they are able to complete it independently or with support.

Over this year, 216 booklets have been returned, which is a slight decrease compared to 227 booklets in 2024/25. However, both are positive increases from 128 booklets in 2023/24. There is more work required to improve the visibility of this document, and the Independent Reviewing Officers continue to promote its completion which forms an action for 26/27.

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

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

Participation Driving Service Improvements

At the start of 2023, the Children in Care Council developed a survey regarding the language of care to be completed by their peers in care, seeking to gain their views on professional language used. Over the 2023/24 year, the Language that Cares Toolkit was developed from this as further support to practitioners who have important conversations with children and young people about being more aware of the language they use and the importance of this for our children and young people.

The toolkit was launched in June 2024, and the Independent Reviewing Officers have played a pivotal role in this by ensuring at each review meeting that practitioners are using the toolkit. This ensures that we capture what the child calls the place they are living, what they call their carers, what they call the time they spend with their family and any other important language or words they would prefer us to use.

This will then be reflected in the child's record of the meeting, and it would be expected to be seen across all recording for the young person. For non-verbal children, we will ensure we consider how they communicate and which words they prefer to use and for babies/toddlers the use of sensitive language and ensuring we are having open discussions within reviews with parents/ carers about promoting language that cares.

We are now two years into using this toolkit and it has continued to be a positive addition to practice, with IROs and social workers reflecting on children's preferences when it comes to the language they use during their time in care.



Care Plan

All children who are looked after in the care of the Local Authority have a Care Plan which sets out what the child needs to keep them safe and provide support with someone identified to carry out tasks and dates when they will be finished

Alternatives:

Young Person's Plan

My/Your Plan

Independence Plan

Future Plan

Home

Where a child currently lives – this can be confusing as a child might call their home the place where their parents live

Alternatives:

This Country

New home

Current home

Where I live now

Means home country (UASC)*

Where they lived with their family before they came into care*

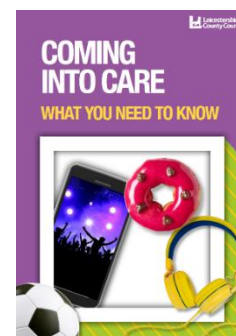
Ask the Young Person what they wish to call 'home'

Residential home

Safe place to call home

It is essential for a young person to decide what they want to call the place they live in Care

We are two years from the launch of our Coming Into Care Pack, which is a document created by the Children's Rights and Participation team providing helpful information for children in care. Like with the toolkit, this has also been shared with those working with children in care including foster carers and providers and is supported by IROs.



Permanence

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

Permanence Plan (at second review)	Total	%
Return to family	33	5.9%
Adoption	46	8.2%
SGO/CAO	26	4.7%
Supported living in the community	94	16.8%
Long-term residential placement	54	9.7%
Long-term fostering	263	47.1%
Twin Tracking	42	7.5%
Total without permanence plan agreed	0	0.0%

Total with permanence plan agreed	558	100.0%
Total	558	100.0%

Plan agreed before 2nd review	558	100.0%
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Statutory guidance for care planning states that there should be a permanence plan for all looked after children at the time of the second review of arrangements. We have slightly altered our recording process on this to ensure all children's proposed permanence plan is recorded from their 28-day Review of Arrangements meeting. The IRO is endorsing the child's proposed permanence plan from the earliest stage and continues to place strong emphasis on permanence being confirmed at the earliest opportunity.

Permanence Plan (ALL LAC – from start of care period)	Grand Total	%
Return to family	49	6.4%
Adoption	66	8.6%
SGO/CAO	32	4.2%
Supported living in the community	145	18.9%
Long-term residential placement	61	7.9%
Long-term fostering	294	38.2%
Twin Tracking	91	11.8%
Total without permanence plan agreed	31	4.0%
Total with permanence plan agreed	738	96.0%
Total	769	100.0%

In 2025/26, data has been used from the full cohort of children in care and 96% (738 children) had a permanence plan agreed, with 4% (31 children) without permanence agreed. These children had not had their second review by 31 March 2026, and there are a further 11.8% (91 children) who have twin tracking as their care plan, as their assessments have not concluded to determine their recommended final care plan within care proceedings. Therefore, all children who have had their second review, and where assessments to determine their permanence plan have been finalised, have a permanence plan.

Comparing this with the previous year 2024/25, permanence planning has strengthened during 2025/26. Despite a 10.5% increase in the looked after population, the proportion of children with an agreed permanence plan improved from 92.1% to 96.0%. Long-term fostering remains the predominant permanence route, while notable increases have been seen in supported living and Special Guardianship Order/ Child Arrangements Orders. Family-based permanence options have grown overall, and residential provision has remained proportionately stable. The continued reduction in children without permanence agreed demonstrates positive progress in ensuring children achieve timely permanence outcomes.

Independent Reviewing Officer Challenge & Escalation

Practice improvement and quality assurance is a significant role for the service. The service uses two quality assurance processes; *challenge* which is an informal quality assurance process, and *escalation of professional concerns* which is a formal quality assurance process.

We routinely review Quality Assurance Alerts to help identify any key themes or areas which need to be addressed; this is then shared within the Senior Management Group.

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

Between 1 April 2025 and 31 March 2026, 431 Quality Assurance Alerts were completed for Children in Care, comprising 144 formal escalations, 199 challenges and 88 recognitions of outstanding practice. This represents a significant increase in overall QA activity compared with previous years. Formal escalations increased from 76 in 2024/25 to 144 in 2025/26. Challenges also increased to 199, compared with 168 in 2024/25.

Recognition of outstanding practice rose substantially from 16 in 2024/25 to 88 in 2025/26. The data shows a strengthening quality assurance framework and how our electronic recording system has developed over the past few years to ensure that escalations are always formally captured and recorded.

Category	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	Change 24/25 to 25/26
Formal Escalations	39	76	144	+89%
Challenges	103	168	199	+18%
Outstanding Practice	94	16	88	+450%
Total Alerts	236	260	431	+66%

All formal escalations are reviewed on a monthly basis and consideration given to patterns or themes emerging from service areas or specific teams, leading to discussions being held with relevant managers or services, and training and support identified as needed to help support the improvement of practice. For the formal escalations completed, we have seen 118 resolved at Team Manager level, 49 resolved at Service Manager level and 3 resolved at Head of Service level.

An example of one formal escalation was where an IRO raised concern that therapy had not been fully explored for a young person since his last review. He had experienced significant trauma and a number of moves in where he was living; however, he had subsequently had a positive match and settled with his foster carers. This was raised with the manager, who responded with recommended actions that the team then followed up. At his subsequent review, it was noted that play therapy was now in place weekly with his foster carer. Positive feedback was shared about this, and the young person enjoyed the creative play, particularly the sand. This is a positive example of the support from the IRO contributing to new thinking for the young person, addressing any challenges, and development of the care plan.

The service has continued to regularly discuss and review the processes of QA's, working with an agreed set of bottom lines which has developed a far higher degree of consistency within the team, although there will inevitably remain some variance as the process has to involve a degree of professional discretion. There has been a renewed focus within the IRO group to achieve greater consistency between them around our escalation process, with focus in team meetings and peer supervision groups keeping this under review which will continue into 2026/27.

Operational managers continue to work from their own dashboards of data, which are reviewed monthly for compliance matters. Whilst Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to send challenges for compliance matters, this has been more refined to where drift and delay has been identified. This has allowed Independent Reviewing Officers to focus on more qualitative matters relating to children's care planning rather than quantitative matters.

For positive feedback, there is no requirement for a manager to provide a response however for escalation of concerns it is necessary for a manager to respond and the Independent Reviewing Officer to be satisfied with the response before the QA is formally resolved. Stage one resolution is with the Team Manager, Stage two with the Service Manager, Stage Three with the Head of Service and Stage four with the Assistant Director. A final stage would be with the Director of Children's social care, although no cases were required to be escalated to this level during the year 2025/26.

Additionally, as part of the escalation process, if an Independent Reviewing Officer has sufficient concern in relation to a child or young person's care planning, they can refer the case to either Cafcass or request independent legal advice, neither of which was required during 2025/2026.

Personal Education Plans

The virtual school are currently reviewing and developing how they monitor and capture Personal Education Plans meaning that further detail will be available for future reports; at present data is captured per academic year.

Term	School Age PEPS completed	All age groups PEPS completed	Total
Autumn 25/26 (August 25 - Jan 26)	490	731	98%
Spring term 25/26 (Jan 26 - April 26)	433	743	98%

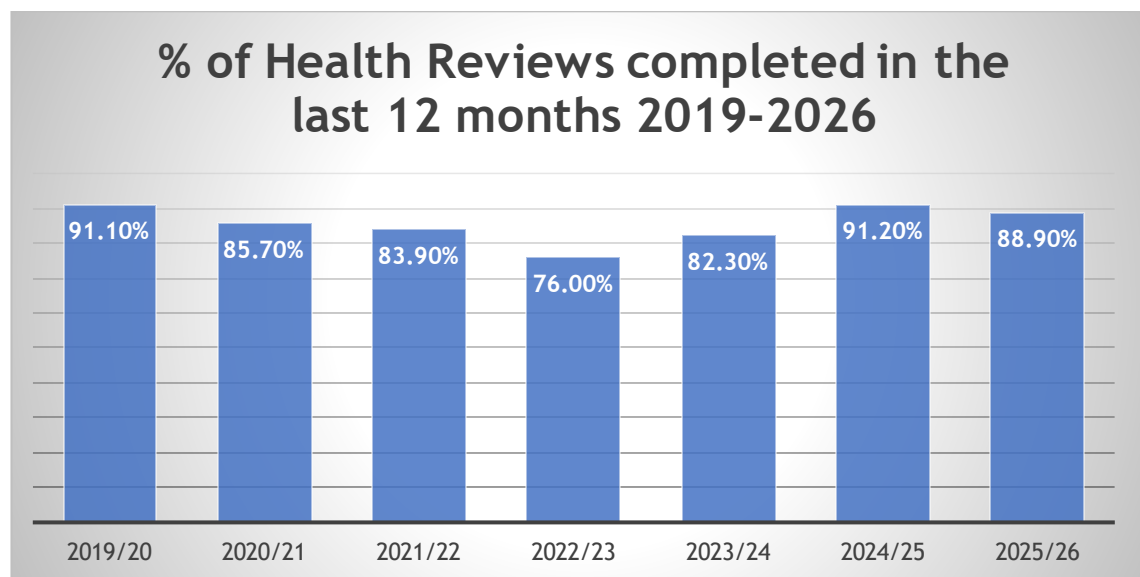
At Review of Arrangements meetings, Independent Reviewing Officers routinely confirm if PEP meetings have taken place, whether all recommendations are being progressed and whether this is sufficient or further action is necessary. Completion of PEPs is seen as a high priority, as they are fundamental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

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

Health checks completed within twelve months

In 2025/26, 88.9% of children had their annual health reviews completed within timescale, which is a slight decrease from 91.2% in 2024/25.

IROs continue to focus on children's health needs during review meetings, reviewing their annual health assessment and ensuring any recommended follow up is included as part of their care planning actions. There has been contact where necessary between the IRO and Looked After Children's Health team where specific information has been needed about a child's health, or advice has been sought. Health colleagues attend the Corporate Parenting Board and are held to account for service delivery for children in care. There are operational and strategic meetings that take place between children's social care and health to discuss provision and any challenges.



Dental checks within a twelve-month period

As with health reviews, dental checks are viewed with high importance in contributing to children and young people's well-being. Over this reporting year, 86.2% of children had their teeth checked by a dentist.

We are aware that there can be several factors that may contribute to missed checks, such as a young person declining services. This data is reviewed on a monthly basis by the children in care service to determine any steps needed for young people who have outstanding checks.

Strengthening our response to child sexual abuse

Following the publication of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) findings in 2022, Baroness Casey's Audit of Group-Based Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse, and the report '*I Wanted Them to Notice: Protecting Children and Responding to Child Sexual Abuse Within the Family Environment*' (November 2024), Leicestershire strengthened its workforce development offer in relation to assessing and responding to adults who pose a risk of harm to children, including specialist training which was successfully completed by IROs.

Alongside this, the IRO service contributed to the development of the internal Care and Protect Assessment tool and associated Risk Assessment tools, which have been rolled out across the department for intervention with families, adults who caused or may have caused harm, and protective adults.

In December 2025, there was a Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) across LLR which focused on sexual abuse within the family network. Some of our children in care were identified as part of that inspection and joint interviews with IROs, CP Chairs and allocated social workers were

completed. The final report was published in February 2026, with the main findings detailing that *'The partnership is committed to recognising and responding to child sexual abuse in the family environment. The safeguarding partners work closely together to consider shared matters of governance, funding and intelligence, to seek to ensure consistency across the wider area.'* They also noted that senior leaders across the partnership know their services well and share their openness to learning and supporting staff's continuous improvement through some well-received training. The quality of assessments, including capacity to protect assessments, was positive. IROs continue to ensure that children who have experienced sexual harm are provided with the right support for their circumstances and needs via identified actions within their care plan.

The service is responsible for the harmful sexual behaviour consultation offer. Five specialist IROs provide this offer of support and oversight where a child is using harmful sexual behaviour. A referral is made by the allocated social worker to the service and a harmful sexual behaviour meeting is held. It may be that advice is offered, or that the young person is allocated an IRO to oversee their plan due to concerns of harmful sexual behaviour. This can be a child subject to a child in need plan, child protection plan or child in care plan. Feedback has been that this offer is considered helpful and supportive to those teams and workers who are providing intervention to families. IROs who provide this role are actively involved in further developments across the service, led by the Practice Excellence Team, in how we support young people using sexually harmful behaviour.

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

Well managed meetings

Over this review period we have had a mix of face-to-face, hybrid and virtual review meetings. Independent Reviewing Officers have been visiting the children they are working with and are thinking of creative and proactive ways of including children and young people in their reviews. The service has continued to have clear guidelines that review meetings should take place in children's best interests, and we have seen participation levels increase in line with following a young person's wishes regarding the way their review is conducted. The individual profile of each Independent Reviewing Officer is shared consistently to ensure that children know their reviewing officer as the basis for strong relationships to be established.

Permanence

The service has continued to focus on permanence and timely planning for children. The service continues to monitor this robustly through review meetings, monitoring of children's records and seeking updates between meetings. Independent Reviewing Officers provide professional challenge to teams if there are concerns about drift and delay for children. All children who are in a position to have a permanence plan have this agreed by the second review, showing the ongoing focus on achieving permanence for children.

Celebrating success

The Independent Reviewing Officers are committed to highlighting and sharing our children's successes and sharing these with senior managers including the Head of Service for Children in Care, Assistant Director and Director.

There are numerous positive examples to share, and I have highlighted some below:

- A young person who has found education really tricky over this year, got a certificate from school for 'always setting a great example of behaviour in the classroom' which was celebrated by a certificate from our Director.
- A young person who is blind held a fundraiser for the RNIB. There were raffles, a meet and greet with animals, food and cupcakes, along with a bouncy castle and garden games, which raised £500. A voice note was sent to the young person by our Director to celebrate her success.
- A young person who ran a 6k muddy obstacle course run.
- A young person was playing out with his friends on their bikes and scooters when one of his friends fell off his bike and injured himself, causing cuts and bruises and bleeding. Out of the entire friendship group, it was our young person who helped his friend and supported him back home to his parents. The boy's parents rang his carers to express their thanks and appreciation for his caring nature and quick thinking in helping his friend to safety.
- A young person turning 18 had a birthday dinner out and the young person chose who she would like to attend who she felt were most significant to her, including her kinship carers, Social Worker, Independent Reviewing Officer.

Whilst our children's successes continue to be significant, we have also recently celebrated a 16+ provider who have gone above and beyond to support their young people with their identity and culture by arranging a cultural cooking day which was positively received, they have done this again this year. The staff, young people and social workers for the young people got together and cooked their cultural dishes and shared these together.

After the success of our Celebration Achievement Awards in March 2025, celebrating our children in care and their achievements, organised by the Corporate Parenting Team, three different events were hosted to accommodate the different age groups. This style of event is again planned for June 2026, and next year's annual report will comment on this further.



Visible Footprint of the Independent Reviewing Officer

Over this year, the Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to show a high visibility of their work and involvement on children's records. They record their involvement on the IRO Activity Log which is a running record on activity over the child's review period, including their preparation for the review, contact with the child and/or their network prior to their review meeting, meeting with the child and any other case work that they complete. The recording of challenge is also included in the Activity Log, and positively the date of conclusion and level it was concluded at have been added in preparation for formal reporting being completed on this.

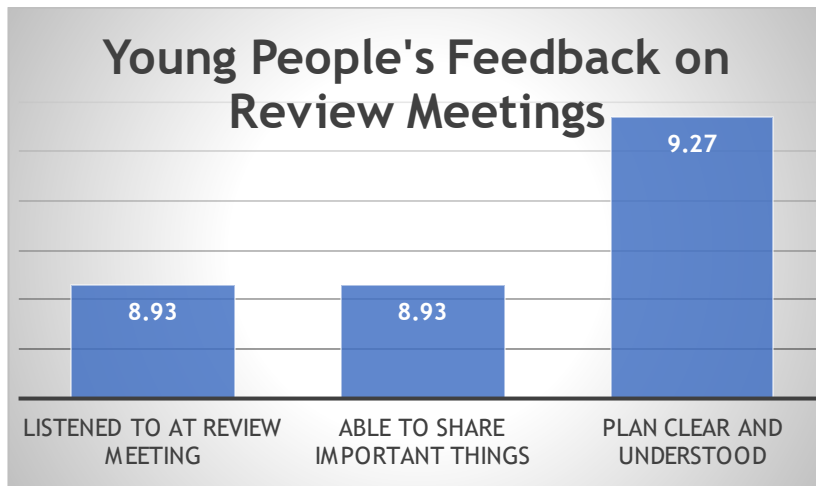
Feedback from children

One of the main ways the service has received feedback from children has been via the Youth Voice Council, formerly the Children in Care Council (CICC). Over this year, the key focus for them has varied over recent months. One of the key projects we have been working on has involved reflecting on court processes to better understand whether children and young people feel they have sufficient information and are adequately prepared to participate in court proceedings.

One particularly impactful discussion focused on the use of taxis for children in care and the effect that poor service provision can have on their wellbeing. This feedback has prompted challenge and discussion within the organisation, resulting in work to improve taxi provision and ensure services are more suitable, reliable, and responsive to the needs of children and young people.

Independent Reviewing Officers continue to endeavour to consult with children before their reviews take place to ensure they can decide where and when they want their review to be held, who attends and key issues to discuss. The Independent Reviewing Officers also encourage the children to chair their own reviews. The Independent Reviewing Officers do develop and have longstanding relationships with the children they are allocated to, so over time develop a relationship whereby they may message, call or visit them to gain their views. This is captured on the Activity Log as well as in the child's review of arrangements summary.

Children continue to be involved in their care planning and their review meetings as shown on the participation table and the Independent Reviewing Officers continuing to be positive and proactive about their children's involvement in review meetings. Over this review period we have implemented feedback forms, one for a young person if they have attended their review, one for a young person who hasn't attended and then another one for adults who have attended which is suitable for both family and friends and professionals. For the young people that attended the following has been provided:



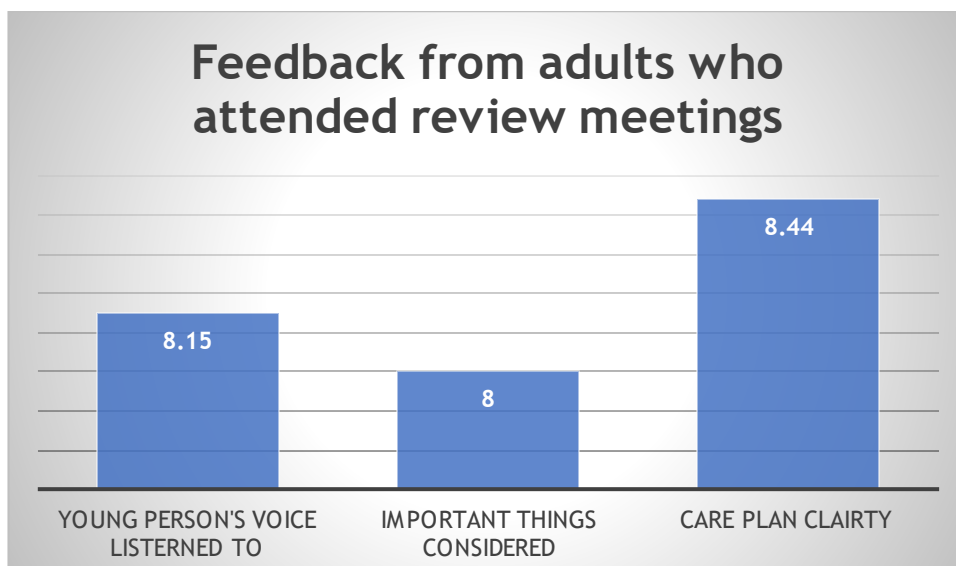
We continue to review our feedback forms within team meetings and use them to grow and learn as a team taking on board the advice provided through the feedback.

Feedback from professionals

The Service values feedback from professionals and acknowledges the importance of working in partnership with colleagues to get the best outcomes for children.

Alongside feedback forms from children and young people detailed above, we have also developed feedback forms for adults who attended review meetings, including parents and professionals, who shared the following.

We continue to review our feedback forms within team meetings and use them to grow and learn as a team taking on board the advice provided through the feedback.



8. What we achieved against our aims over the past 12 months?

The 2024/2025 annual report set out our plans for 12 months going forward. Below is how we have addressed and achieved those aims:

Social Work Reforms

During 2025/26, Families First reforms have continued to develop, and the service has remained engaged with emerging changes and their potential implications. Whilst there have been no significant changes to the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer during this reporting period, the service has continued to monitor developments and ensure that children continue to receive robust independent oversight throughout periods of organisational and national change. Within our service, there are likely to be changes to the Child Protection Chair role with the development of the Lead Child Protection Practitioner role. The changes Leicestershire plans to make will be piloted over 2026/27, with implementation by 1 April 2027.

Embedding of the Language that Cares Toolkit

A key priority for 2024/25 was embedding the Language that Cares Toolkit into practice following its launch in June 2024. We have made good progress in this area and are now two years into the implementation of the toolkit. Independent Reviewing Officers routinely use the toolkit during review meetings to ensure children's individual preferences about language are captured and reflected in review records and wider care planning documentation. This has helped ensure that recording is more child-centred and sensitive to children's identities, relationships and lived experiences. The toolkit continues to be viewed positively and has become an established part of practice across the service.

Consistent Practice: Our Bottom Lines

During 2025/26, the service has continued to progress its revised bottom lines and purposeful practice standards. These expectations were reviewed and updated in October 2025, building upon the work undertaken following the service day in November 2024. The evidence suggests these standards have become well established, supporting a positive culture shift in how review meetings are prepared for and conducted. The reduction in reviews held in two parts has been sustained, review quality has improved, and 98.4% of Review of Arrangements meetings were completed within timescale despite increasing demand on the service.

Utilising Data to Improve Practice

The service has continued to strengthen its use of data throughout the year. Monthly Improvement Cycle Meetings have provided regular oversight of performance, reviewing review activity, timeliness, participation, and other key indicators. Data analysis has also been used to better understand trends relating to participation, permanence, review activity and quality assurance. In addition, the feedback mechanisms for children, families and professionals have provided valuable information to support service development and evidence impact.

The service has continued to provide robust scrutiny and challenge where concerns have been identified regarding drift, delay or care planning. Permanence remains a key focus, and the data demonstrates positive progress, with 96% of children having an agreed permanence plan and all children reaching their second review having permanence agreed. Quality assurance activity has also increased significantly, with 431 Quality Assurance Alerts completed during the year, including increases in both challenge and formal escalation activity. This demonstrates the continued commitment of Independent Reviewing Officers to advocating for children, challenging delay and supporting timely decision-making.

Improving Administrative Processes

Progress has continued in improving recording and administrative processes, including the use of Microsoft Copilot to support records of Review of Arrangements meetings. A pilot started in January 2026, with positive feedback received during the pilot centred on IROs being more focused on discussion during the meeting and improved timeliness of meeting records being completed. The young people who have been present for meetings which have been recorded have not raised any concerns about this change to the process. This has now been rolled out to the whole IRO service. It is accepted that not all children will want their review meeting to be recorded, and a key bottom line is that the use of Copilot does not affect the quality of the record being produced; the IRO still remains fully responsible for the record. Now this has been implemented, further review of records will take place during the 26/27 period.

The service has further embedded the use of Mosaic workflows, activity logs and quality assurance systems to support more effective oversight of children's plans. Amendments have also been made to challenge and escalation recording processes to improve monitoring and reporting. Whilst some system developments remain outstanding, there has been continued progress in improving the visibility and recording of Independent Reviewing Officer activity and quality assurance work.

Promoting Participation of Children and Young People

This has remained a significant strength for the service. Participation levels have increased slightly, with 93% of children aged over four contributing to their review, compared to 92% in the previous year. Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to demonstrate creativity and flexibility in supporting children to express their views, including through advocacy, trusted adults, alternative communication methods and individual engagement approaches. Children have also benefited from a choice of face-to-face, virtual and hybrid meetings to support their participation. Whilst use of the My Review booklet remains significantly higher than previous years, there has been a small reduction compared to 2024/25, and increasing its use remains a priority moving forward.

The Importance of Networks

The service has continued to recognise the importance of family, friendship and professional networks in children's lives. Review meetings have maintained a focus on relationships, identity, belonging and permanence planning, with sibling group reviews continuing to support family-centred approaches where appropriate. Independent Reviewing Officers have also continued to work purposefully with children's wider networks to ensure they remain involved in planning and decision-making, supporting positive outcomes and stronger permanence arrangements.

Supporting Effective Use of the Public Law Outline

Independent Reviewing Officers have continued to support effective practice for children subject to pre-proceedings and care proceedings by maintaining a strong focus on permanence planning and preventing drift and delay. Through review meetings, midway reviews and ongoing oversight between reviews, Independent Reviewing Officers have provided scrutiny of children's plans and challenged where progress towards permanence has not been achieved within expected timescales.

The service has continued to embed midway reviews, enabling concerns about care planning to be identified and addressed at an earlier stage rather than waiting for the next statutory review. This has supported timely decision-making and strengthened oversight of children's plans throughout proceedings.

9. What can we do better and our plans for the next 12 months?

Participation and Children's Voice

The voice of children and young people remains central to the work of the Independent Reviewing Officer Service participation within reviews remains a significant strength of the service, with 93% of young people contributing to their review during 2025/26. However, there remains a cohort of children who do not attend or contribute to their reviews, and we will continue to explore creative and individualised approaches to support their participation.

A particular focus for the coming year will be increasing the use of the My Review consultation document. Whilst completion rates remain significantly higher than in previous years, there has been a slight reduction from 2024/25, and we will work with social workers, foster carers, Children's Rights Officers and the Youth Voice Council to raise awareness and encourage greater use of this valuable tool.

Health and Wellbeing

Children's health remains an important area of focus. Whilst annual health assessments continue to be completed for the majority of children, performance has reduced slightly from 91.2% to 88.9% during 2025/26. Dental attendance also remains below the level we would aspire to see for all children in care.

The service will continue to work closely with health colleagues to ensure health needs are appropriately considered at every review, recommendations are progressed and children receive timely access to health services. We will also seek greater involvement in future health audit activity to strengthen joint quality assurance and shared learning.

Quality Assurance, Challenge and Escalation

The service has continued to strengthen its quality assurance function, with increased use of challenge and escalation processes supporting improved oversight of children's care planning. There has also been a welcome increase in the recognition of outstanding practice.

A priority for 2026/27 will be continuing to improve consistency in how challenge and escalation processes are applied across the service. We also want to further develop our recording and reporting systems so that challenge activity, themes and outcomes can be more effectively analysed and used to inform service improvement.

Family Networks and Relationships

As the number of children in care continues to increase, maintaining family relationships and strengthening support networks becomes increasingly important. The service will continue to promote family network approaches and ensure that children remain connected to the people who are important to them wherever it is safe and appropriate to do so.

We will continue to support early family network identification and encourage professionals to consider wider family and community connections as part of permanence planning and preparation for adulthood.

Families First Partnership Programme

National social work reforms, the Families First Partnership Programme, are underway across England, and Leicestershire is progressing its own plan in line with government recommendations. While the role of the Independent Reviewing Officer remains unchanged, the

responsibilities of Child Protection Chairs, who are also part of our service, will evolve. We expect greater clarity on these changes in the coming months and will continue to assess their impact on our service, but we are working with the project team to prepare for the likelihood of new standalone job descriptions and roles for IROs. We know that the future focus of this programme into 2027 is “Enduring Relationships”, as set out by the Department for Education, and the service will be keenly involved in any developments.

Reunification

IROs are involved in discussions and planning around reunification for our children where possible. Following on from the Families First Partnership focus, national guidance positions reunification as one of the key ways in which enduring relationships with family can be preserved or rebuilt. Over the next year, as a service, we will be engaged in development around our approach to supporting reunification.

Unregulated Placements

IROs play an important role in oversight and challenge for all children in care, but we recognise that when children are placed in unregulated placements, that a further increased level of oversight and consideration is needed. IROs will focus on how we support this small cohort of children to help support their needs being met and provide challenge to teams in securing the right placements that meet their needs.

Authors:

Emma Bulgin

Interim Service Manager, Safeguarding and Practice Development Service

Rebecca Peters

Assistant Service Manager: Safeguarding & Performance

Date: 10th August 2026

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Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report 2025-2026

“We are your IROS and our role is to make sure your voice is heard and that the plans that are made for you are supporting you now and into the future.”



At a glance

 **761**

children and young people were in care on 31 March 2026.

 **2,203**

review meetings were held during the year.

 **98.4%**

of review meetings happened on time.

 **93%**

of children aged 4+ shared their views in their review.

 **96%**

of children had a permanence plan agreed.

 **431**

quality alerts helped us speak up and celebrate good practice.

Health and learning

88.9% health checks on time

86.2% dental checks

2,143 Personal Education Plans completed

Our focus for 2026-2027

-  More ways for you to share your views, including the My Review booklet
-  Increasing our input to young people in more short-term placements
-  Stable long-term plans, homes and relationships
-  Making sure you have the right health and dental support
-  Workers who support you focusing on your family, friends, and sense of belonging
-  Supporting you to speak up if things need to improve

Our Promise: We will listen to you, make sure your voice is heard, and help you feel safe, supported and cared for.

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Corporate Parenting Strategy

| 2026 - 2029



Our Children, Our Future

Leicestershire's commitment to inspire, support and enable
Children in Care and Care Leavers to be ambitious and successful

Contents

Foreword.....	3
Introduction	7
1. Leicestershire as a Corporate Parent.....	8
2. Who are ‘Children in Care and Care Leavers?’	10
3. Leicestershire’s Children in Care and Care Leavers.....	11
4. What do our children say?	12
5. Equality, Diversity and Belonging	14
6. Corporate Parenting Principles – Children and Social Work Act 2017	16
7. Who is involved and responsible?	16
8. Councillors as Corporate Parents.....	17
8.1 Officers within Children and Family Services	18
8.2 Virtual School	19
8.3 What else do we do to show that we care?	20
9. Governance Arrangements for Corporate Parenting	21
9.1 Corporate Parenting Board	21
9.2 Where you can share your voice and it be heard	22
10. What success will look like	24
Appendix A	25

Foreword

Sharon Cooke - Interim Director of Children and Family Services

In Leicestershire, we believe every child and young person deserves the very best. We are proud to be ambitious for our children and young people, and we're committed to delivering high-quality services that make a real difference to your lives and futures. I feel extremely privileged to lead the services that support our children in care and care experienced young people. I promise that we will keep you at the heart of all we do and at the centre of your plans. We will listen and hear your voice making sure that we measure ourselves against Our Promise, making sure that we work together to create stability and security for you and a sense of belonging.

Across our organisation and among political leaders, there is a shared drive to improve outcomes for children. Our Lead Member is a passionate advocate for you -challenging us, supporting us, and ensuring accountability at every level to ensure that we do the very best for you.

As the Senior Leadership Team, we place safeguarding, protection, and advocacy for children at the centre of everything we do. We set clear expectations that children's wellbeing must guide our decisions and our practice. We stay connected to children, young people, and staff through regular forums, listening carefully and learning from frontline experiences to shape and strengthen our services. Our focus remain firmly on you our children.

In 2024, we launched our updated Continuous Improvement Plan 2024–2027: Achieving Excellence through Purposeful Practice. This ambitious plan provides a clear roadmap for everyone from senior managers to frontline practitioners, to deliver outstanding support for children and families.

We are aspirational, we are curious, and we deeply value relationships. These core values and behaviours are the foundation of everything we do. They guide our actions, shape our culture, and ensure that children remain at the heart of our work.

Cllr Charles Pugsley

As a councillor in Leicestershire, I'm proud to stand behind our unwavering commitment to children and young people. I am immensely proud of the achievements of our young people and of the staff and carers who support them.

Children's Services are a priority across our council. From elected members to officers, there is a shared determination to make a lasting difference. As your Lead Member for Children and Families I promise to ensure that I will advocate for you and ensure that your voices are heard in every decision we make.

Our Senior Leadership Team is deeply committed to safeguarding and championing children. They lead with purpose, placing children's wellbeing at the heart of every policy and practice. They stay connected to frontline staff and young people, listening, learning, and shaping services that respond to real needs.



Cllr Charles Pugsley
Lead Member for
Children and Family Services



Sharon Cooke
Interim Director for
Children and Family Services

Why Our Promise Is Important

Our Promise is here to make sure you feel safe, listened to, and supported while you're in care or leaving care. It reminds you and us, that you deserve respect, a stable home, and people who believe in you.

The Promise is important because it helps you know:

- **You're not alone** - there are adults who will stand by you, even when things are tough.
- **Your voice counts** - your thoughts, feelings, and choices matter.
- **You should feel proud of who you are** - your identity and relationships are respected.
- **You have rights** - and we will help you understand them.
- **You can reach your goals** - we'll support your hopes, skills, and future plans.

This Promise is our way of showing that you matter, and we'll be here to help you now and as you grow.

our promise

to children in care and care leavers

by Leicestershire County Council and Partners



We will support you • Provide emotional support • Whatever you do we will be there • Ensure all your needs are met • Provide advice, information, practical and financial support • We will make sure that you know what your rights are • Will not judge you if things go wrong. We all make mistakes!	We believe in you • We will value your strengths and talents • Support you to overcome any stumbling blocks you face • Support you to achieve your goals • Embrace your individuality • Encourage your aspirations • Support you to succeed in life	We will respect your identity • We will respect your unique identity • Support you to develop your own personal beliefs and values • Accept, respect and celebrate your identity, culture and heritage • Value, respect and support important relationships • Encourage you to express your identity positively	We will listen to you • We will listen and respect you • Strive to understand your point of view • Place you at the heart of all decisions • Support you to talk about your worries and happy times • Support you to seek independent advocacy	We will support you to find a place you can call home • We will do our best to find you a home near to people who are important to you • Ensure you feel safe and secure • As you grow we will support you to learn new skills to support your independence • We are here to support if things go wrong	We will inform you • Legal entitlements and services • Up to date and accurate information • Support you to access your care records • Provide information throughout your journey • We will support you if you need to make a complaint	We will be a lifelong champion • Support you break down barriers to other agencies • Work together with other services to better meet your needs • Encourage and support you to make positive life choices • Will make sure you know how to get support when you need it • Trust and respect you.
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Produced by Leicestershire County Council as part of the Leicestershire Children and Families Partnership

Our Pledges To Children and Young People:

Sharon Cooke:

"I will ensure that your voice is heard and that the workforce that support you are in turn supported in an environment that allows them and their practice to flourish"

James Thurston – Head of Service Children in Care, Fostering, Adoption and Virtual School:

"You are at the heart of everything we do. We will listen carefully to your experiences and act on what you tell us. We will create the conditions for you to feel safe, seen, and a strong sense of belonging, and we will value what belonging means for each of you, as an individual."

Nicola Madgett – Team Leader for Corporate Parenting:

"I will make sure you are supported to have your voice heard, respected, and acted on. Ensuring that your wishes, feelings, and experiences shape the decisions that affect your life. I will create safe, respectful spaces for you to speak openly. When you share your views, I will ensure you get clear feedback about how your input influenced the outcome. I will champion your access to opportunities, education, health support, relationships, and all the things you need to thrive."

Rebecca Peters – Safeguarding and Improvement Manager:

"We pledge that you will be happy with the people who are present at your meeting, that your views and wishes are taken into account when planning the meetings and those people who do not attend provide updates. We will always do our best to make sure that your voice is heard, and we talk about the things that are important to you."

Kay Fletcher – Interim Assistant Director Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care:

"We will put your voice at the centre of our work, build relationships with you and your family network and collaborate with partner agencies so that we build strong partnerships"

Angie Lymer-Cox – Service Manager for Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children:

"My drive is always to develop workers and managers to ensure they deliver outstanding support to you and your families. My aim is to ensure you have the best chances in life, and if you are not ready to take those chances yet for any reason, they are there for you in the future when you are in the right place. I have never given up on young people I am aspirational for you all, and this will continue to be my Pledge going forward."

Helen Middleton – Service Manager for Children with Disability Service:

"We promise to help you feel safe, cared for, and understood as you grow and get ready for adult life. We will listen to what is important to you, where you want to live, what you enjoy, what you find hard, and what your hopes are for the future."

Heather Hughes – Assistant Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption:

“Our promise to you is that we will endeavour to find you a foster home with foster carers who are able to care for you with nurture and kindness, and able to meet all of your needs alongside the other professionals that work with you.”

Donna Chapman – Virtual School Head:

“The Virtual school pledges to work together with you and your school/college to access the best opportunities and support for your education.”

Carly Turner – Head of Youth Justice:

“We are here to support you and help you do well. We will get to know you, listen to what matters to you, and work alongside you in a positive and respectful way. Through youth work and early support, we will help you build confidence, learn new skills and make choices that open up opportunities for your future.”

Dr Shaun McGill – Public Health Consultant:

“We promise to work to protect and improve your health and wellbeing, now and as you grow into adulthood. Using our knowledge about health, prevention, and inequalities we will work with the NHS to make sure that services understand and meet your health and wellbeing needs. We will listen to what matters to you, and work with the people who plan and deliver health services to make sure you have the support you need to lead healthy lives.”

Julia Smith – Chief Executive of Blaby District Council:

“As the district councils of Leicestershire, we commit to championing, supporting, and empowering children and young people who are care experienced, through the services we deliver. We pledge to recognise children and young people with care experience as a protected and valued group within our communities, ensuring their needs, experiences, and voices are placed at the heart of our decision making.”

Core Values and Behaviours – the foundation for practice

Core Values

Aspirational

Achieving the best outcomes for children and families

Being Curious

Digging for detail using purposeful practice

Collaboration

Building relationships built on the Signs of Safety approach

Behaviours

Professional Kindness

Understanding trauma for children, parents and colleagues

Active Listening

Listening to build robust solutions

Outcome Focused

Creating measurable improvements for children and families

Being Accountable

Everyone is responsible for high quality practice

Introduction

We want all children and young people in Leicestershire to have safe, stable and positive lives. Our hope is that you can grow up in your family, stay connected to your community, and get support whenever you need it.

If you can't live with your family, our priority is to make sure you live somewhere safe, stable and secure. We want to find you a long-term home as quickly as possible. We also want you to have chances to aim high, believe in yourself and have a happy childhood that sets you up well for your future.

In Leicestershire, we are fully committed to Children in Care and Care Leavers. We take our Corporate Parenting responsibilities seriously and aim to act with real care, passion and ambition. Everything we do is guided by Our Promise, which sets out what you can expect from us.

We know every young person is different, with their own needs, goals and identity. Your care plan and the support you receive should always reflect you. We value diversity and make sure our services are inclusive and respectful of who you are.

We are also committed to listening to your voice in all decisions. We follow a “You Said, We Did” approach so you can see how your feedback leads to real changes. Participation is a big part of how we work, and you can get involved through groups like:

- The Youth Voice Council (was Children in Care Council)
- Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC)
- The Corporate Parenting Board
- And many other events and forums led by children and young people

This Corporate Parenting Strategy explains how we will continue to provide high-quality support for Children in Care and Care Leavers. It sets out where we are now, where we want to be, and how we plan to keep improving. Our aim is to support you to reach your goals, follow your ambitions, and succeed now and in the future.

1.

Leicestershire as a Corporate Parent

OUR VISION

Leicestershire is a place where children can build strong foundations; be safe and belong, enjoy and achieve.

Corporate Parenting is a shared responsibility, first established in the Children Act 1989. The Act places a duty not only on Local Authorities but also on partner agencies, including health, education, and housing services, to support children's services in fulfilling their responsibilities. This collective effort ensures that you receive the help, support, and services you need.

As of January 2026, Leicestershire County Council is the corporate parent to approximately 777 children and young people. This role carries a collective responsibility to act as any good parent would, ensuring that children in care grow up happy, achieve well, and lead successful lives.

A responsible parent cares deeply about their child's safety, health, education, friendships, leisure interests, and future. They understand their child's development, talents, and challenges, and they provide support, listen attentively, and respond to their needs and concerns.

Leicestershire has a strong Corporate Parenting ethos that goes beyond safety. It focuses on promoting recovery, resilience, and well-being. Central to this is the importance of stability, which is reflected in our Permanence Policy. This policy outlines our commitment to securing emotional attachment, physical stability, and long-term support for the children in our care.

We recognise that improving outcomes for you requires close, coordinated working relationships with our partners. Leicestershire is committed to working collaboratively with wider services and with children and young people. We ensure that our looked-after children and Care Leavers have a strong voice in shaping services. We listen, take action based on their feedback, and make sure they know how their input has influenced service delivery.

Education plays a vital role in transforming life chances. Our aim is for all Children in Care to have prompt access to stable, appropriate education placements and enriching educational experiences.

The Leicestershire Virtual School actively promotes the education of Children in Care. It works with schools, alternative settings, and wider services both within and beyond Leicestershire to ensure timely access to quality education tailored to each child's needs, while minimising disruption to their learning.

The importance of our Corporate Parenting responsibilities in driving these ambitions is illustrated in the following diagram:

Raising Aspirations



2.

Who are ‘Children in Care and Care Leavers?’

A child (under 18 years) is legally ‘looked after’ by a Local Authority if he or she:

“Is provided with accommodation under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989 from the Local Authority for a continuous period of more than 24 hours; is subject to a care order; or is subject to a placement order. This also includes disabled children who are provided with accommodation under Section 20. Looked after Children in Care can be placed with foster carers, in residential homes, with parents or other relatives (under certain circumstances)”

Definition of a care leaver:

“A care leaver is broadly defined as a person aged between 16 and 25, who has been looked after by a Local Authority for at least 13 weeks since the age of 14 is either currently in care or has left care and has been looked after for a period of time after their 16th birthday”

3.

Leicestershire's Children in Care and Care Leavers

777

Children
Looked After

702

Care Leavers

Children in Care

72%

White, White British

7.4% Mixed

5.2%

Asian, British Asian

2%

Black, Black British

13.4% Other

Care Leavers

49.3%

White, White British

27% Other

10%

Asian, British Asian

5% Mixed

8.5%

Black, Black British

41.2%

of children are
living with foster
carers

of which **18%**
of children are in a
foster placement
with a connected
person / kinship
carer

16.1%

of children are
living in residential
children's homes

3%

of children
are placed for
adoption

14%

of Children
in Care are
unaccompanied
asylum seeking
children

100%

of Care Leavers
are in touch with
their PA and

95%

are in suitable
accommodation

7%

of children looked
after have a
missing incident

54%

of 18+ Care
Leavers are
in education,
employment or
training

35

Care Leavers at
university

all data as of 14/12/2025

4.

What do our children say?

As outlined at the start of this strategy, the voices of our Children in Care and Care Leavers are central to everything we do. This commitment is further reinforced through our Voice Strategy and Influence Strategy 2026-2029.

As Corporate Parents, Leicestershire is dedicated to ensuring that you have the right to express your views on matters affecting you. Where needed, they are supported by a Children's Rights Officer to help you do so. We believe that meaningful participation empowers you to achieve better outcomes.

We are fully committed to promoting meaningful participation, encouraging you to share your needs, experiences, and views so that these can shape practice and service delivery. Our approach is driven by passion, commitment, ambition, and care.

We value and respect the voices of our looked after children and Care Leavers. Together, we have developed 'Our Promise', which informs this strategy. Through this, our children have shared what they believe makes a good Corporate Parent, and we are listening.



Listen to our views and opinions and let us make decisions about our lives.
Explains decisions to us and recognises the impact of their decisions.

Keep us protected and safe

Recognise our potential, believe in us, and celebrate our achievements

Understand when we are struggling and having a bad day and know when to give us space

Be friendly and build good relationships and gets to know you

Help us to still see and be friends with our family.

Have experience of working with young people and know what to do

Support us without judgement

Understand the issues we face

Be consistent, will stand by us as our advocate

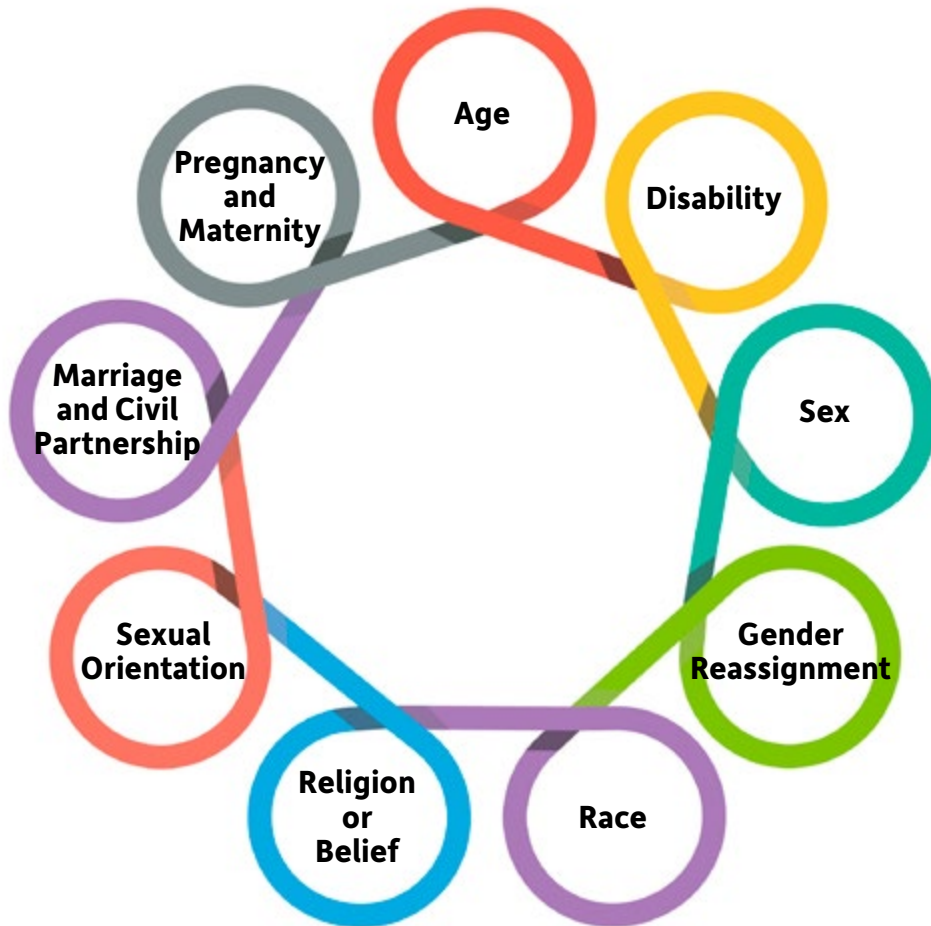
Provide opportunities like support with education, finances and getting into work.

Build our confidence and self-esteem.
Support us to get skills for the future, achieve and be the best person you can be.

Make things better

Shows us respect

5. Equality, Diversity and Belonging



You are entitled to equal access to services, free from discrimination based on age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, ethnicity, religion or belief, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy, or maternity.

Leicestershire County Council wants everyone to be treated fairly. We do not accept any kind of discrimination. We work hard to make sure no one is treated differently or unfairly because of who they are or the group they belong to.

We want everyone to have equal chances, to feel respected, and to get the support that's right for them. The council has now decided that being a care leaver should be treated as a protected characteristic. This means we recognise that young people who have been in care may need extra help. For example, if you are a care leaver and applying for social housing, you will now be placed in the highest priority group. This gives you a much better chance of getting a home, which is a really positive step for supporting vulnerable young people.

The Children Act 1989 says that a child's culture, religion and language must always be considered when supporting them. The Equality Act (which started in 2010) says that public organisations must:

- Make sure there is no discrimination, bullying or unfair treatment
- Give everyone equal opportunities
- Help different groups get along and understand each other

We want everyone who works with you to understand these responsibilities and to make sure our services are inclusive. Our Equality and Diversity Guidance explains how our core values: being aspirational, curious and working together should shape everything we do to support children and families.

Being fair and treating people equally is not only the law; it's the right thing to do. Everyone who works for the council, whether in social care, education, health, transport or any other service, has a responsibility to meet the needs of all people across the county.

Equality also means removing barriers that might stop some people, especially those with protected characteristics, from having the same chances as others. As your Corporate Parents, we want to make sure every child in our care gets the right support, guidance and opportunities to aim high and reach their goals.

Feeling like you belong is especially important for children in care. You may have experienced changes, loss, or times where things felt uncertain. Belonging is not just about where you live, it's about feeling seen, heard and accepted for who you are. It means having adults around you who support your identity, protect your rights, and make you feel safe and included.

As your Corporate Parents, it is our job to make sure you have relationships and opportunities that help you feel stable, valued and confident. We want every child in our care to feel part of a community that believes in them, supports their dreams and stands with them as they grow into adulthood.

Belonging doesn't just happen, we work hard to make it real for every young person.

6.

Corporate Parenting Principles – Children and Social Work Act 2017

Leicestershire's commitment as Corporate Parents is to inspire, support, and enable Children in Care and Care Leavers to be ambitious and successful. We do this by being committed to providing our children and young people with stability, security, nurturing and empowering care.

The 7 principles within the act describe the behaviours and attitudes expected of councils when they are acting as any good parent would do by supporting, encouraging, and guiding their children to lead healthy, rounded and fulfilled lives.

Our role and commitment as Corporate Parents under the 7 principles:

- We will act in the best interests, and promote the physical and mental health and wellbeing, of our children and young people.
- We will encourage our children and young people to express their views, wishes and feelings.
- We will take into account the views, wishes and feelings of our children and young people.
- We will help our children and young people gain access to, and make the best use of, services provided by the Local Authority and its relevant partners.
- We will promote high aspirations, and seek to secure the best outcomes, for our children and young people.
- For our children and young people to be safe, and for stability in their home lives, relationships, and education or work.
- We will prepare our children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

7. Who is involved and responsible?

A strong Corporate Parenting ethos means that everyone from the Chief Executive to front line staff, as well as elected council members, are concerned about our Children in Care and Care Leavers as if they were their own. In Leicestershire, Corporate Parenting is promoted as the responsibility of all. The actions, ambitions and belief in our children of the Director of Children and Family Services and the Lead Member set the tone for us all to be effective corporate parents.

Our children our future - Leicestershire's commitment to inspire, support and enable Children in Care and Care Leavers to be ambitious and successful.



8.

Councillors as Corporate Parents

Back in 1998, the government reminded councillors (the people elected to make decisions for the county) that they are responsible for making sure children in care are looked after properly. They were told they must lead this work and check that the support being offered is actually working.

Since then, guides published in 2003 and 2013 have explained that all councillors should be ready to speak up for children in care and care leavers. They should make sure young people in care are treated fairly and given the same chances as anyone else.

Councillors have a special role because they have influence in the community. They know people in schools, health services, local businesses and other organisations. By using these connections, they can help create better opportunities for children in care, like work experience, training, education and support. They are also supported by council officers (staff) to meet with children in care and care leavers so they can listen to their views and understand what young people need.

In Leicestershire, we explain what we expect from councillors as Corporate Parents through seven key principles. Corporate Parenting means treating children in care as if they were part of your own family. Councillors must:

- Understand who the children in care are and what they need
- Think about how every council decision might affect children in care
- Ask themselves, “Would this be good enough for my own child?”
- Focus on improving outcomes for children in care
- Stand up for young people in their area and champion their needs
- Support the councillors who act as Member Champions
- Know about the work of the Corporate Parenting Board

Councillors play a really important role in making sure young people in care and care leavers get the support they need. This includes:

- Speaking up for children in care
- Making sure the corporate parenting principles are followed
- Checking that services are doing a good job
- Creating chances for young people to achieve and succeed
- Offering emotional and practical support
- Being a positive voice for young people in the community
- Asking important questions to make sure things improve



The most important question councillors should always ask is:

“Would this be good enough for my own child?”

This helps make sure services are fair, inclusive and built around what each young person needs.

8.1 Officers within Children and Family Services

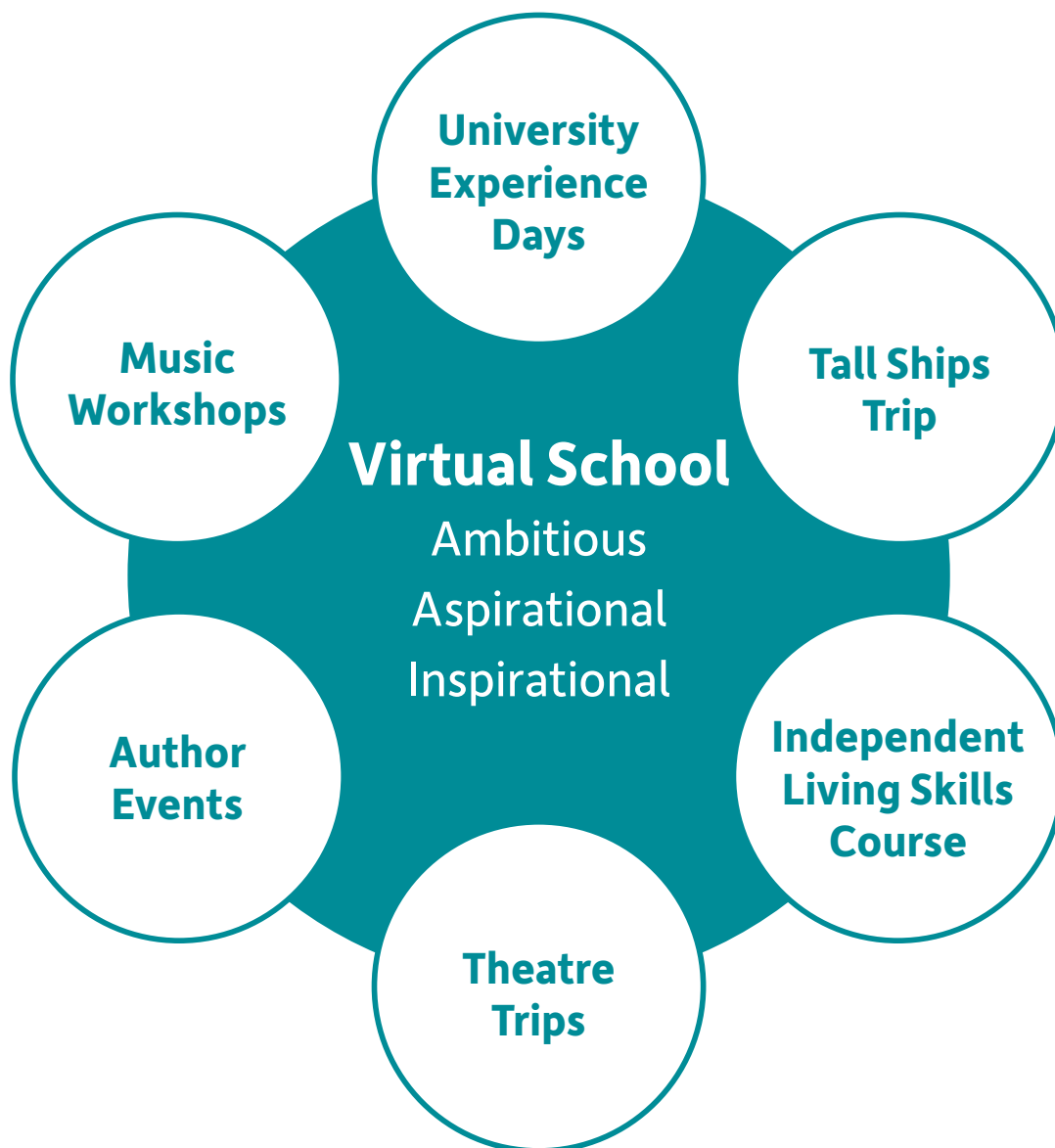
Officers in Children and Family Services have additional responsibilities to support and provide services for looked after children and young people, and Care Leavers. They will ensure that their care planning and transition planning is effective, meaningful and influenced by their voice and choice.

The Assistant Director for Children’s Social Care has direct responsibility for Corporate Parenting, as do the wide range of roles that work directly with our children, such as: Independent Reviewing Officers, Social Workers, Participation Workers, Children’s Rights Officers, Youth Offending Workers, Personal Advisors and the Virtual School.

8.2 Virtual School

In Leicestershire our Virtual School is committed to creating and supporting high aspirations for our Children in Care and those leaving care. The dedication and support offered is in place to help our children achieve their best. Our children attend a range of schools both geographically and in terms of specialism, however the virtual school is central to ensuring that all of our children receive a high standard of education to enable them to successfully achieve good outcomes and successful futures. Leicestershire Virtual School are successful by working in partnership with schools and social workers towards shared visions and goals. The Virtual School support this through monitoring, supporting and challenging where necessary through the review of the Personal Education Plans (PEP) and monitoring the use of the Pupil Premium Plus. The voice of our children is fundamental to effective planning and the Virtual School is committed to ensuring that the voice of our children is not only sought but valued and incorporated into any planning.

Additionally, the Virtual School lead a broad spectrum of engagement activities and learning opportunities including but not exhaustive of the following:



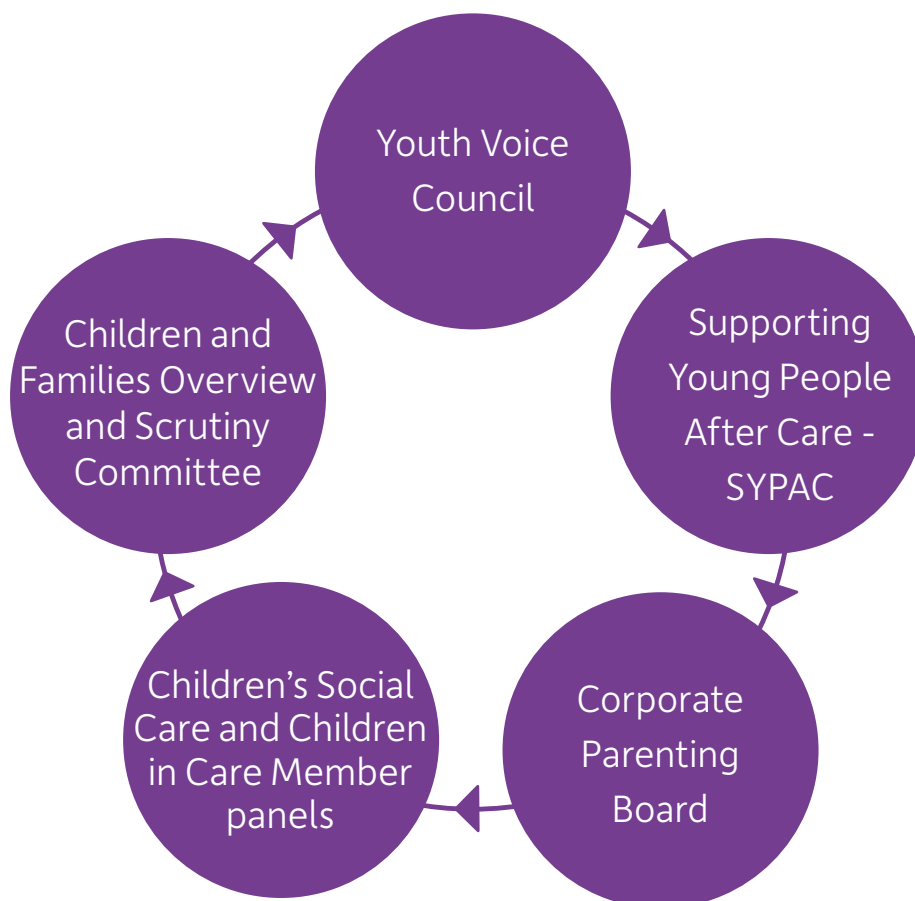
8.3 What else do we do to show that we care?

We are dedicated and committed to ensuring that our Children in Care and Care Leavers feel very much thought of and cared for by Leicestershire. This is achieved by not only ensuring that the 7 Corporate Parenting principles are fully embedded. But also providing a broader offer of engagement and contact that we consider essential to being good Corporate Parents.



9. Governance Arrangements for Corporate Parenting

Strong Corporate Parenting means strong leadership, challenge and accountability at every level. The governance arrangements that underpin our Corporate Parenting approach focus on the importance of the voice of our children and how they experience the support they receive, feel listened to and taken seriously. Our governance arrangements enable challenge and reflection on how effectively we are applying the Corporate Parenting principles and ensuring the high level of care that we strive to provide.



9.1 Corporate Parenting Board

The Corporate Parenting Board's purpose is to ensure that the whole Council and partner agencies have a joint commitment to Corporate Parenting. The Corporate Parenting Board is held four times a year and includes a membership of children and young people, the Director and Assistant Director of Children and Family Services, elected members, professionals from a range of partner agencies including Social Care, Health, Education and Police. The board is co-chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families and a member of the Youth Voice Council. There is strong representation from our Youth Voice Council and Supporting Young People After Care (SYPAC) groups, which enables our children to have the platform to challenge, influence and celebrate.

The aim of this is to achieve continuing improvements in the lives and outcomes for looked after children and young people and those who are Care Leavers. The Board ensures that the Council members and partner agencies fulfil their statutory duty as Corporate Parents and are held to account for identified actions from the board, in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people. We want the agenda and focus to be led by the young people ensuring that clear lines of communication between young people and the board can be illustrated with clear and young person friendly feedback. In addition to the prioritisation and acting in the best interests of all our children and young people keeping them at the centre of decision making. Please see Appendix A for more detail.

9.2 Where you can share your voice and it be heard

In our work, your voice isn't an add on, it's central to everything we do. Your views shape every plan we create, ensuring that decisions are made with you, not for you. We place your voice at the heart of our assessments, recognising that the best outcomes come from truly listening, understanding, and acting on what matters most to you.

Leicestershire's Youth Voice Council (formally Children in Care Council) is a group of young people in care aged between 7-18 who represent children and young people in care in Leicestershire. The group acts as the voice of their peers and meet monthly to discuss and consider the issues faced by Children in Care; things that are important to them; look at ways of making a difference for Children in Care and how they can influence this locally in Leicestershire as well as nationally through such forums as the All Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.

Our Care Leavers are vital in shaping the services going forward and improve our offer to all our children.

SYPAC is the forum for our Care Leavers 18 -25 years old and offers a monthly meeting to socialise, discuss and influence decisions regarding Children in Care and Care Leavers and to highlight their views and opinions. There is also attendance from virtual school, children's rights and welfare rights to support and enhance independence skills of our Care Leavers.

Other key participation groups include our Children in Care Choir – Beacon Voices and Out in Care our support group for LGBT+ young people.

Both our Youth Voice council and SYPAC are regularly involved in decision making at various levels and bring robust challenge to hold decision makers to account both internally, regionally and nationally. Both groups have had an effective impact on the support that our children receive and decisions within Leicestershire. Some examples of these are outlined below:

Youth Voice Council and SYPAC activities	Impact
Consulted and influenced the development of 'Our Promise'.	Ensuring the vision of Leicestershire is led by the needs of our children.
Development of a children and young person's version of the Corporate Parenting Strategy, in the form of a video.	To ensure children and young people understand the principles of the Corporate Parenting Strategy and members are held accountable for their role.
Development of a Coming into Care Pack.	To provide our children and young people with a useful information leaflet of all the key things they need to know when they come into care.
Updating the Terms of Reference and Structure for the Corporate Parenting Board.	To ensure the children and young people who attend the board have an inclusive role in the aims and objectives, as well as the themes for meetings and delivery of these.
Involvement with fostering training.	Improvement in understanding of Prospective Foster Carers of the impact of being in care. Their role in supporting this and an improved experience for our children.
Creation of a Contact Expectations document to support expectations for both children and their families about the time that they will spend with each other.	Our children are able to be clear about the expectations at the beginning and there is consistency with workers in exploring different options for family time.
Young person's interview panel for all relevant posts within Children and Family Services.	Most recently direct influence on the appointment of our Director, Assistant Director and Field work Head of Service.
Care Leaver Representative on Member Panel Meetings for housing and member champion meetings	True representation of voice within member meetings, advocating for the views of our Care Leavers.
Development and facilitation of our Out in Care Group by Care Leavers	A LGBT+ support group for children and young people, where they can socialise and have themed discussions and access support services.
Consultation in Life story Work expectations and guidance	To ensure Life Story Work practice is underpinned by the views and experiences of our Children in Care and Care Leavers.

10.

What success will look like

As corporate parents we need to know what success will look like to ensure that we are challenging ourselves to continually strive for the best for our children and achieve our ambitions regarding the care they receive. The table below sets out how we will measure our success in the delivery of outcomes for our looked after children and Care Leavers.

Outcome 1 Improved Physical Health	Outcome 2 Improved Mental Health	Outcome 3 Placement stability and safe homes	Outcome 4 Attainment	Outcome 5 Care Leavers
Children will: Have improved timeliness of Health Assessments Be registered with a GP Be registered with a dentist Be up to date with all their immunisations Have improved timeliness of Health Assessments	Children will: Be supported through evidence-based interventions to maximise their emotional and mental well being Have improved Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire results. Be referred to specialise mental health services and receive treatment in a timely manner where appropriate Benefit from joined up multi agency working to drive relationship-based approaches	We will: Where appropriate seek to place children and young people within 20 miles of their home address Where appropriate seek to place children and young people within long term, in house provision Ensure children have improved placement stability Our discharge planning will secure improved outcomes for Care Leavers Make timely decisions regarding permanence and the use of SGO's and Child Arrangement Order to be used where appropriate To support children in care to reunify back into the care of birth parents or wider family where this is safe and in child's best interests.	Children will: Be supported to achieve their full potential Have a Personal education plan which will be aspirational and ambitious Have their progress at school monitored and every child will receive tailored support from a specialist advisor	We will: Support Care Leavers to find safe, stable and suitable places to live, making sure they are as well prepared as they can be Will give opportunities to keep in touch with them until they are 25 and have high aspirations for them Support Care Leavers to remain with their longterm foster families after they have left the care of Leicestershire if that is in the best interests of the young person Support Care Leavers to become independent adults by helping to secure high quality education, training or employment opportunities
Best possible outcome for our children				

Appendix A

Corporate Parenting Board Terms of Reference

The Corporate Parenting Board will be held four times a year and will include a membership of children and young people, the Director and Assistant Director of Children and Family Services, elected members, professionals from a range of partner agencies including Social Care, Health, Education and Police. The board will be co-chaired by the Lead Member for Children and Families and a member of the Youth Voice Council representative.

What we want to achieve:

- To ensure that the Council members and partner agencies fulfil their statutory duty as Corporate Parents and are held to account for identified actions from the board, in order to achieve continuing improvements in outcomes for children and young people.
- To prioritise and act in the best interests of all our children and young people keeping them at the centre of decision making.

How we will do this:

- Ensure that the Corporate Parenting role is understood and fulfilled by all elected members and senior officers working across all directorates in the Council and by our partners.
- Listening to the voice of Children in Care and Care Leavers by meeting and talking with them and acting upon their expressed views, ensuring they are able to participate in decisions about their care and the shaping of future services.
- Monitoring and overseeing plans, strategies, or policies for looked after children, young people, and Care Leavers to ensure performance is maintained.
- Members of the Board meeting being accountable for and championing the Leicestershire Children in Care Pledge and Promise.
- Members of the Board meeting being accountable for identified actions, completing these in a timely way and providing feedback to the children and young people via the Children in Care Council, SYPAC or the Board meeting.
- Members of the Board taking issues raised forward with Senior Officers, partner agencies and those whom all have a responsibility to the role of Corporate Parenting.
- To promote and advocate for the views of all our children and young people to ensure their views are represented within the Board.
- Board members to work collectively with the children and young people members to develop a range of strategies seeking to engage our harder to reach and underrepresented group of children and young people in care.
- Monitoring and reviewing key performance data which is specific to the discussions taking place, to review the impact for our children and young people in achieving their outcomes.



Membership:

- Lead Member for Children and Families (co-chair)
- Representative from Youth Voice Council (co-chair) to be agreed at the Youth Voice Council.
- Children in Care nominated by the Children in Care Council
- Director of Children and Family Services
- Cross party Elected members nominated by the Party Groups
- Children and Family Services Lead Officers: Assistant Director Children Social Care and Targeted Early Help, Head of Service Children in Care, Fostering, Adoption and the Virtual School, Head of Service Safeguarding, Improvement and Quality Assurance, Service Manager Fostering and Adoption, Service Manager Children in Care, Service Manager Safeguarding and Performance Service, Service Manager Youth Offending Service, Service Manager for Care Leavers and Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children
- Virtual School Head
- Representative from Public Health
- Divisional Director of Families Children and Young People (FYPC) LPT.
- Designated Nurse for Looked after Children from CCG and LPT representative
- Assistant Chief Constable or Police Superintendent with lead for Safeguarding
- District Council representative e.g.: Housing
- Adults & Communities Lead Officer
- LSCB Chair
- Employment and Training Lead
- Voluntary sector and charity sector representatives who are identified as playing a role within the Board meeting.

If the nominated representative is unable to attend the Board meeting, it is an expectation that they send apologies, including an updated report which can be shared, or ensure a colleague attends on their behalf.

If it is identified that members are routinely not attending the meeting, the Service Manager for Safeguarding and Performance will follow this up, to remind members of their roles and responsibilities as well as commitment to the Board as a Corporate Parent.

Plan for Board meeting structure:

The primary venue will be County Hall committee rooms, however, if virtual meetings are required these will be facilitated via Microsoft Teams.



Standing agenda items:

- Introductions and Apologies
- Accuracy of last minutes
- Review of previous actions
- Assistant Director update
- Youth Voice Council update
- SYPAC update
- Health data summary
- Education data summary

Respect and Expectations Statement

- We will arrive at meetings on time and not leave early unless previously agreed.
- Other than for an emergency, all mobile devices will be switched off. They will only be looked at and any phone calls made during breaks.
- Laptops will only be used in meetings for reference by the person giving a presentation and NOT to reply to emails etc.
- All staff will ensure they use young people friendly language.
- Our meetings will be led by the Chair & Co-Chair. All questions, comments and discussion will be directed by them. They will ensure everyone has an opportunity to speak and make a positive contribution.
- Discussion and collective decision making can sometimes prove challenging. We will ensure all points of view are valued, listened too, and debated respectfully.
- Challenge and debate will always be directed at the point and not the person.
- Each agenda item will have an agreed time allocation and meetings will strictly run to time.
- All young people and staff will attend meetings with an open mind and ensure they are committed to making a full and positive contribution.
- Our meetings must be prioritised but if we can't attend, we will always send apologies and try to send someone in our place.

If the meeting is held virtually or as a hybrid meeting, it is expected all members will have their cameras on and will keep their microphone on mute, unless they are speaking, using the hand icon when you wish to speak.



