

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 16th MARCH 2016

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEAD MEMBER

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

In previous statements I have referred to the significant changes underway in the education and schools agenda, and the impact of those changes on our own services and arrangements. My statement today provides further information as a result of recent announcements and the potential impact for us in Leicestershire. It also highlights some of the good work we are doing supporting children and families.

Firstly in the post-16 education sector, where a programme of national sub-regional reviews has been established, as a result of a report by the National Audit Office which identified the lack of financial sustainability in current arrangements.

Leicestershire has 5 FE colleges and 18 sixth forms, 16 of which are academies, and they will be impacted by this review. We are working closely with these providers, and in collaboration with the city council, to ensure that Leicestershire gets the very best deal possible from any changes that may be required as a result of the review, which will be led by a nationally appointed commissioner.

With regard to our primary and secondary school provision, you will remember the statement made by George Osborne when announcing the content of the Comprehensive Spending Review, that “local authorities running schools is a thing of the past”. This has been further reinforced by Nicky Morgan when addressing the Primary Heads meeting, and again at the Secondary Heads meeting last Friday. Schools are being directed to form Multi-Academy Trusts, or MATs. Schools wishing to convert to Academy status will no longer be able to do so on their own, and will need to work through MATS to gain approval. Where maintained schools are working below national standards, they will become sponsored Academies.

Last week the first stages of a consultation on a national schools funding formula was announced with the intention to implement change over a period of years starting in 2017/18.

It is anticipated that there will be 4 ‘blocks’ of funding.

The first will be for schools and it is intended that schools will receive their funding directly, so there will be no requirement for a Schools Forum and the LA will have no role.

The second funding block will be for high needs pupils such as those with special educational needs and disabilities. It is intended that the LA will continue to be responsible for ensuring that the needs of these children are met. In Leicestershire, as with many other LAs, there is already considerable pressure on this budget as a result of growth in the number of children with additional needs and Children and Family Services is already reviewing these pressures as part of its new Transformation Programme of work.

The third block of funding will be for early years and there is much less known about how this funding will be allocated or governed. There will be separate consultation about this later in the year.

Finally, there will be a new central schools block created for LA services such as admissions. However, the current central Education Services Grant will be removed and the consultation recognises that LAs will need to look for alternative funding sources to meet some of its statutory duties.

The consultation period is short and ends on 17th April. We have already convened an emergency meeting of the Schools Forum to consider the consultation and to plan for the transition from current arrangements to new arrangements. There will be significant financial pressures on many of our secondary academies, where there is currently surplus capacity whilst waiting for the population bulge to work through the system. We are working with these academies to facilitate discussions between the Education Funding Agency and the Regional Schools Commissioner to find short term solutions and a meeting has been arranged on 5th April.

I will ensure that Members are kept informed about the progress of these changes and the impact for Leicestershire and actions that will be required.

In the meantime there continues to be much to recognise with regard to the work of Children and Family Services including a range of high profile activities and events over the past month including:

- The launch of CEASE; our local Campaign to Eradicate Abuse and Sexual Exploitation. There was significant media coverage of this event and I would encourage all elected Members to sign the CEASE Pledge.
- We have followed this up through our new blog called [keepingchildrensafe](#). This highlights the excellent safeguarding work that is taking place across Leicestershire and enables us to support the new national campaign to encourage people to report child abuse. The next part of this campaign will be profiled in Leicestershire Matters.
- Additionally, we have, in the past couple of weeks, had media teams working alongside our staff in First Response – our first point of contact for

referrals about suspected safeguarding matters. There has been wide ranging media coverage in the press and on local radio plus East Midlands Today. All of this activity helps to ensure that Leicestershire residents understand our work and are confident in the services that we provide to protect children and young people.

Finally, last week, in this Council Chamber, we hosted an event about the education of our children in care, led by the HMI Ofsted lead. She was extremely complimentary about our local work, as well as the regional and national leadership that we are providing in this important area of our business. All of this work, combined with our continued national high performance for Supporting Leicestershire Families means that Leicestershire County Council continues to have a high profile for the excellent work that we do with children, young people and their families.