

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 21ST MARCH 2018
POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

My position statement covers a number of areas of work across the Department including Child Sexual Exploitation (CSE), Foster Carer recruitment, developments in social care around support for children with complex needs, two new tool kits for schools, a community safety campaign and our Children in Care Achievement Awards.

National CSE awareness day took place on Sunday 18th March to highlight and focus on the vulnerability of young people to sexual abuse and exploitation. To mark this the multi-agency CSE, Trafficked and missing HUB based at Wigston police station held an open day to publicise across agencies the work that is taking place across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to raise awareness, prevent CSE taking place, to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators.

The work of the multi-agency CSE HUB has been recognised and praised by OFSTED. We know that as a result of the robust joint response with the police and other partners we have not only seen the identification of young people at risk increasing but we have supported children through successful convictions of perpetrators and individual work with victims to move forward positively.

The HUB has also taken a lead on identifying and supporting young people who go missing and overseeing the completion of return interviews, undertaken independently by staff within our Listening and Support Service. Over the last few months we have seen reductions in the numbers of children and young people reported missing, alongside better planning and support to young people who go missing and place themselves at risk.

Like other local authorities Leicestershire has seen the number of children in care increase significantly over the last few years. Leicestershire currently has 552 young people in our care. As part of the MTFs strategy, the Department has been working hard to increase the number of foster carers, recruiting carers for specific groups, for example parent and baby placements, and importantly to retain carers once they foster.

As a result of this work enquiries from prospective foster carers (and adopters) continue to grow and this year we are on track to meet our target of an increase of 25 carers this year. In January we launched our revised website “We are Family”, alongside our recruitment and retention activity that has seen use of social media, our Children in Care (CIC) making a film and being part of foster carers training, our improved offer to carers (including training and support), listening to what carers tell

us, play schemes and foster carers and birth children events. These activities make our direction of travel positive.

To support our children in care who experience the most challenges we have worked hard to improve placement stability, leading to a significant improvement for children so that this year we have had 8% of placements disrupted compared to 15% last year, which exceeds our regional comparators. One reason for our success has been the establishment of the Dedicated Placement Support Team, who wrap around a young person and carers to provide intensive support to help stabilise placements and work towards positive outcomes for the young person. Over the last 12 to 18 months the team, working other staff have supported young people to remain in placement, to move successfully from residential to a family type placement, and for others to return home to family or on to live independently.

In February, the County Council's Community Safety Team supported the roll out of the "Ask for Angela" campaign that enables people who might feel uneasy on a date in pubs and clubs to discreetly approach staff and request assistance. The initiative aims to provide customers with a way to remove themselves from an uncomfortable situation while on a date and be supported by staff in the venues involved in the initiative. This is an excellent initiative that is part of a national campaign and is being delivered in Leicestershire in partnership with the Police.

In the last month two new toolkits have been launched for schools. The first is an emotional wellbeing curriculum pack, developed by the young people on our County Youth Council for Leicestershire. The pack has been launched to Leicestershire Secondary Schools as part of their Mental Health Awareness campaign and includes a variety of activities for work with young people aged 11 to 18. Earlier this year I attended a launch of the Trans Inclusion Toolkit for Schools, which is a joint City and County initiative developed in partnership with the Young Transgender Centre of Excellence. The toolkit provides information and guidance to schools and colleges on how to support more effectively transgender and gender-questioning pupils and prevent transphobia.

And finally, in February the Department held the annual Achievements of Children in Care award evenings. This took place over two evenings and was attended by over 300 of our Children in Care to recognise their achievements over the last 12 months. This was a wonderful event for our children in care.

I. D. Ould