



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
COMMITTEE**

**2 JUNE 2020**

**CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION**

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

**Purpose of report**

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

**Background**

3. Whilst the key piece of legislation in respect of Children in Need and those in need of protection is The Children Act 1989, there are many other key pieces of legislation and regulations pertaining to this group of children. Some of the key pieces of national legislation and guidance which govern the safeguarding of children and young people are:
  - (a) Children Act 1989;
  - (b) UN Convention Rights of the Child;
  - (c) Education Act 2002;
  - (d) Adoption and Children Act 2002;
  - (e) Children Act 2004;
  - (f) Children and Families Act 2014;
  - (g) Working Together to safeguard children 2018;
  - (h) Children and Social Work Act 2017.
4. The Children Act 1989 provides the most comprehensive framework for the care and protection of children. It remains the defining document for Local Authority Children's Services, defining legal statute, partnership working with parents and the overriding principle that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

5. The Children Act 2004 complemented the 1989 Act and reinforced the message that all organisations working with children have a duty in helping to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.

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

6. Following a detailed service redesign in October 2018, Children's Social Care in Leicestershire underwent a significant realignment to refocus its attention on achieving better outcomes for children. This redesign strengthened the First Response Service and combined the strengthening families and child protection services to create four distinct locality service areas primarily responsible for children subject to Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP). One of the primary reasons for this was to reduce the potential move of cases and new workers being introduced to children and families at points that the case escalated to child protection or stepped down to child in need.
7. It is of note that this was a significant change in the way Leicestershire County Council delivers services to children.
8. On 1<sup>st</sup> April 2020 the Department brought together targeted early help services, delivered through the Children and Family Wellbeing Service and children's social care services under the Assistant Director for Children's Social Care (now Assistant Director for Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care). This move was undertaken to increase the alignment of front-line services for children and families and to continue to develop the practice model across the Department.
9. All data provided in this report is taken from Tableau for May 2019 – April 2020.

### **First Response (FRCD)**

10. First Response is the front door to children's social care services (CSC) and Children and Family Wellbeing services (CFWS) in Leicestershire and has responsibility for the screening of all contacts into the service, new referrals, provides an assessment service who respond to the most vulnerable and high-risk cases, provides an out of hours children's social work team and a number of specialist teams responding to Domestic Abuse and Child Criminal and Sexual Exploitation.
11. In the last 12 months (May 19-April 20), the number of contacts received by First Response was 22184. On average across the year, 24.6% of all of these contacts meet the threshold to be progressed as a referral to Children' Social Care and require an assessment under S17 or S47 of the Children Act 1989. It should be noted that First Response provides the gateway into both Children and Family Wellbeing services (Targeted Early Help) and Children's Social Care (CSC). The number of contacts, year to date, that have proceeded to referral in CSC is 5479.
12. The numbers of contacts and referrals remain relatively stable. Re-referrals are measured to ensure that children are not being referred on numerous occasions because their needs have not been appropriately assessed. Over the previous 12 months the figure for re-referrals is 20.3% of total referrals. This is seen to be an acceptable measure and Leicestershire is performing well against outstanding shire Local Authorities who report 21.25% re-referrals. However, over recent months this

has risen to 28.5% per month. Audit work across services is being completed to understand and address this increase

13. Once a referral is accepted, consideration is given for a full assessment of the child's circumstances to be undertaken by the relevant service area. Year on year since 2016 the number of Single Assessments completed has increased significantly. Over the last twelve months 5150 assessments have been completed across the service, which is approximately 430 per month. This is showing a year on year increase in the demand on Children's Services. The timely completion of assessments within 45 days is measured and has been an area of focus and improvement in LCC. During the period May 19 to April 20, 85.1% of all assessments were completed in 45 days and there is evidence of positive progress particularly in First Response, where completion rates are in the high 90's %. There is further work underway to drive processes across the Localities.
14. Strategy Discussions are multi agency decision making forums that consider whether a child is at risk of significant harm. They, along with S47 enquiries, occur across First Response, Localities and the Disabled Children's Service. In the last twelve months, 2172 Strategy Discussions were completed across the service. Out of these 2172, it was agreed that 1621 met the criteria for Section 47 enquiries. 839 of these enquiries progressed to an Initial Child Protection Conference.
15. It is of note that S47 enquiries do not always directly correlate with the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan as S47 enquiries can occur during any part of the child's journey.
16. The number of children who are subject to Child Protection Plans is 529 as of 17 May 2020. To reference, at the same point in May 2019, there were 443 children subject to Child Protection Plans.

### **Locality Fieldwork**

17. There are four geographical locality areas in the county, with multiple Social Work Pods, based in Coalville (3 Pods), Loughborough (4 Pods), Hinckley (3 Pods) and South Wigston (4 Pods). From these bases Pods provide full geographical Social Work cover to all areas of the County. Service growth, due to increased demands led to an additional two Pods (1 in Loughborough and 1 in South Wigston) to be permanently created within Locality Fieldwork. These costs are included in the growth requirements for the Department for 20/21 onwards.
18. Fully staffed, a Social Work Pod consists of one Senior Practitioner, two Social Workers, one Support and Assessment Worker, one Family Intervention Worker and one support worker. A Team Manager is responsible for two Pods. Two Localities now have three Team managers and two have four. The exception is the Children with Disability Service who have two Social work Team Managers and one Occupational Therapy Manager who provide a County wide service. Pods are set up to work collaboratively within localities providing an enhanced offer to Children in Need and Children in Need of Protection.
19. The Locality Pods undertake ongoing statutory work with children and families who come under CIN and CP and work with a number of Looked After Children who do

not yet have a plan of permanence and are often leading the case through legal proceedings.

20. Cases are ordinarily transferred to Locality Pods from the First Response Service and stay in the Localities until they are transferred to Children in Care, Children and Family Wellbeing Service or are closed to statutory services.
21. To meet increasing demand the service has needed to develop and recruit additional staff capacity to ensure continuity of business. These posts have been agreed as part of growth monies for 2020/21.
22. As of 17 May 2020, there are 1807 children open to Locality Fieldwork, including the Disabled Children's Team broken down as follows: -
  - North Locality :391 Coalville and 387 Loughborough
  - South Locality :303 Hinckley and 540 South Wigston.
  - Disabled Children's Team: 186 (Countywide)

Within Locality Services and the Disabled Children's Team, 529 children are the subject of Child Protection Plans, 107 children are the subject of pre-proceedings, 107 children are subject to care proceedings and 1053 are Children in need.

23. There has been a significant increase in children requiring services under Child in Need and Child Protection in the last twelve months. Deeper analysis is ongoing to identify the trends underlying the increase and to forecast future demand. However, we can attribute several service developments to this increase in relation to;
  - The Road to Excellence- continuous improvement plan
  - Relaunched and revised threshold guidance.
  - More robust identification of abuse and risk.
  - Deeper implementation of and Increase awareness around Child Criminal Exploitation.
  - Improved training offer to staff to enable better assessment and planning
  - Improved communication and protocol between Children's Social Care and Partner Agencies.
  - Individual service performance and action plans.
  - Increase in the duration of Care Proceedings.
  - Focus on children and young people living with neglect
  - Refocus on Children in Need.
24. Performance within the service is closely monitored with all managers having daily access to Tableau and performance reports. Team managers, Service managers and Heads of Service attend a monthly meeting chaired by the Assistant Director that looks in detail at the performance and quality assurance activity within the area of service. Progress is acknowledged and blocks to progress discussed. Managers are therefore held accountable for driving performance.

### **OFSTED**

25. In October 2019, Leicestershire Children's Services underwent it's ILACS inspection with OFSTED. The report states that the authority keeps the most vulnerable young

people safe from harm. Although the impact of leaders and services for children in care and care leavers were judged to be Good, overall LCC remained 'requires improvement' - around half of all councils inspected have this rating. Inspectors also praised several areas such as steps to tackle child sexual exploitation and prevention work to stop families' problems growing. Action is being taken to address the issues identified which include consistent management oversight and more prompt support to families. This work forms the Continuous Improvement Plan- The Road to Excellence.

26. This inspection evidenced clear recommendations to be incorporated in the continuous improvement plan and is influencing the work with children and families in Need and in Need of Protection, particularly in relation to consistency in practice and the response to children in particular circumstances, for example children within the Public Law Outline. The Ofsted action plan previously presented to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee addresses in detail the work being completed to strengthen work in relation to Children in Need and those in Need of Protection.
27. OFSTED recognised both in their most recent inspection and the focussed visit to the First Response Team in 2018 that the Council is on a clear improvement journey and that significant improvements had been made since the inspection in 2016.

### **Recruitment and Retention**

28. One of the fundamental challenges nationally to all local authorities is the recruitment and retention in social work of a suitably qualified and experienced workforce. In LCC over the last two years this has been an area of considerable focus and this Committee has received regular up dates on the progress made.
29. The following table shows the progress made since 2017 in reducing the turnover rate, the vacancy rate and the use of agency staff.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Baseline (2017)</b>	<b>December 2018</b>	<b>March 2019</b>	<b>June 2019</b>	<b>Nov 2019</b>	<b>Feb 2020</b>
<b>Turnover rate<sup>[1]</sup></b>	19.6% (38.8)	13.3% (31.3)	13.3% (31.3)	13.3% (31.3)	13.5% (37)	13.5% (37)
<b>Vacancy rate<sup>[2]</sup></b>	18.5% (50.2)	9.8% (23.5)	4.6% (13.5)	9.6% (25)	6.7% (18.5)	8.8% (24)
<b>Agency rate<sup>[3]</sup></b>	18.7% (49)	17.5% (48.5)	14.2% (41)	16.9% (53)	18.4% (61.6)	20% (68.6)

30. Since then, it is important to also note that this has been at a time of growth so the number of posts being recruited to has increased significantly. The service has

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[1]

covered this additionality with agency staff pending permanent recruitment to ensure that children and families received timely services. Whilst progress has been positive it should be noted that the area providing greatest challenge in recruitment to and retention in posts, particularly of experienced staff, is within the Locality teams. Currently, within these teams and First Response there are 45 vacancies. Focused recruitment is taking place in these areas to attract and retain experienced staff, including being part of the national return to social work programme. In addition, as part of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy, a bespoke development programme for middle managers in social work will be available during summer 2020.

31. In addition, the exploration of a specialist trauma response to better manage the emotional support needs of workers in the aftermath of a critical incident or traumatic event as part of developing resilience as a department.

### **Conclusions**

32. The Committee is asked to comment on the report.

### **Background Papers**

33. None

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

34. None

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

35. There is no requirement to include an EHRI assessment as the report does not propose any changes to the Council's policies, procedures, functions and services. The report is for information only and details the outline of the SEND inspection framework.

### **Other Relevant Impact Assessments**

36. None

### **Appendices**

37. None

### **Officer to Contact**

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