



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE - 6 SEPTEMBER 2022**

**CLOSURE REPORT - DEFINING CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES
FOR THE FUTURE PROGRAMME**

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

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of the outcomes and benefits of the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future (DCFSF) programme and to forward the recommendation to close the DCFSF programme, phase 1.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Act 2004 allocates duties to Local Authorities to ensure that children are safeguarded, and their welfare is promoted. This key piece of legislation underpins the work of Children and Family Services with respect to looked after children, children in need and children in need of protection.
3. Furthermore, The Children Act 2004 places a duty upon Local Authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation between itself and organisations and agencies to improve the wellbeing of local children.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 strengthens this important relationship with partners by placing new duties on key agencies in a local area. Specifically, the police, Clinical Commissioning Groups and the Local Authority, work together in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.
5. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 place a duty upon Local Authorities to commission education, health and social care services jointly and provide more streamlined and co-ordinated assessment processes. These key pieces of legislation are key influences for the future work of Children and Family Services supporting children and young people with SEN or Disabilities and our responses to parents and young carers.

6. It should also be noted that the 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' guidance provides a framework for all the relevant legislation and sets out the importance of early identification and response to issues of concern, particularly for vulnerable groups.
7. Other relevant policies include:
 - a) Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022;
 - b) Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2020-2023;
 - c) Road to Excellence – Continuous Improvement Plan 2017-2020;2021-2023;
 - d) Voice and Influence Strategy 2020-2023;
 - e) Children and Family Services – Commissioning Strategy 2016-2020;
 - f) Children and Family Services – Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF).
8. All the relevant legislation and policies outlined above informed the DCFSF programme which help to develop and future proof Children and Family Services.
9. This programme will support the service's continuous improvement plan - The Road to Excellence.
10. At its meeting on 20 November 2020, the Cabinet approved the request to continue to work with the Strategic Partner, Newton Europe to deliver the next phase of the DCFSF Programme.

Background

11. The Children and Family Services Department faces significant challenges due to increased growth and demand on its services. This was reflected in the growth approved within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by the County Council on 7 February 2020.
12. The County Council, following a competitive process, commissioned an independent specialist consultancy, Newton Europe, in February 2020 to work alongside the service to undertake a diagnostic assessment of front-line services and to consequently, work with the Department to lead on the delivery of an overall change programme. This was subject to a satisfactory outcome from the diagnostic assessment, an independent review (The Gateway Review) and approval to proceed from The Cabinet on 20 November 2020.
13. The diagnostic assessment involved working with a cross section of staff within the service to complete a deep dive review of a number of children's cases to

consider if anything different could have been done to prevent the child escalating to a higher level of need and intervention. The main objective of the diagnostic assessment was to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children and young people. The diagnostic assessment explored activity modelling, financial analysis, and benchmarking against other local authorities, across services for children and families, by engaging with frontline staff and partner agencies to explore areas for improvement.

14. The diagnostic assessment was subject to validation by the Department and corporately. The opportunities identified in the diagnostic aimed to contribute to the future proofing of Children and Family Services so that the right interventions, are delivered in the right way, at the right time, to ensure that children, young people and families achieve the best possible outcomes whilst also ensuring that the service is financially sustainable going forwards.
15. Broadly, the opportunities are categorised into four main themes:
 - a) **Children's Pathways** - placing greater focus on earlier interventions and preventing the level of need escalating into higher tier interventions;
 - b) **Timeliness of interventions** - ensuring that interventions are delivered in a timely way as part of a child/young person's journey in order to meet needs at the right time and by the right team;
 - c) **Settings** - ensuring that Children and Young People are placed in the most appropriate setting for their level of need;
 - d) **Children with Disabilities** - ensuring that children and young people with disabilities are supported to achieve greater levels of independence.

Outcomes and benefits

16. The key benefit was fewer children escalating to Children in Need and Child Protection Services by reducing re-referral rates through a more targeted focus on the resolution of risk factors, focusing primarily on domestic abuse. This was achieved through the development of the domestic abuse toolkit to be used by staff when working with a domestic abuse case. The toolkit will be expanded and updated over time, with intervention and resource lists maintained, so that service users continue to receive relevant and appropriate support. In addition, improvement cycles were established and embedded enabling managers to review intervention effectiveness data, understand variances in performance and undertake SMART actions to address performance issues.
17. Through case management changes enacted through the 'Plan/Do/Review' workstream as part of the DCFSF programme, drift and delay in child protection plans has been reduced as a result of the following steps:

- a) Rolling out training material to CFS staff on trauma informed practice, planning with SMART goals and signs of safety.
 - b) Development and implementation of revised Mosaic forms enabling managers to see how SMART the plans of their teams are, the current status of their teams case load, the length of time cases have been open and their team's timeliness in meeting frequency practice guidelines.
 - c) Development and implementation of a caseload management tool to provide a clear view to practitioners and managers of caseloads and plans, the ability to track outstanding actions by flagging cases open longer than expected timescales to support prioritisation and providing a flexible structure to plans so that they are easily communicable to practitioners working with children and families.
18. The DCFSF programme had a focus on supporting kinship carers with the process of applying for Special Guardianship Orders (SGO's) so that children and young people could achieve permanence outside of care. This work was divided into two distinct pathways. Firstly, the carer assessment process was changed so that conversations with prospective carers about SGO's happened earlier with those carers undergoing fostering and SGO assessments simultaneously alongside practice changes so that practitioners could consider carers applying for an SGO even if that carer has been approved for fostering. Secondly, a process using dedicated workers to support Children in Care (CiC) workers and existing kinship carers with a Full Care Order (FCO) in making the decision to apply for an SGO, and then supporting them through the court process, has been established to reduce the current cohort of Kinship Carers supporting children and young people through FCO's.
19. One of the key aims of the DCFSF programme has been to enable the growth of Leicestershire internal foster carer numbers. The programme has delivered a recruitment and assessment pipeline to give a visible end to end process enabling managers to identify current capacity and bottlenecks so they can take actions to address issues at an early stage. Additionally, a method to capture carer withdrawals has been established so that lessons can be learned from the withdrawal of prospective carers in order to increase the conversion rate from Initial Enquiry to Approval over time. Finally, an improvement cycle has been established and embedded to review performance regularly giving the service the tools needed to identify and address the biggest impacts on the growth of foster carer growth.
20. In order to improve the utilisation rate of Leicestershire internal foster carers the DCFSF programme set up a dedicated duty worker for the Team Around the Child, ensuring there was a dedicated ownership for the management of foster carer vacancies to enable strategic matching and forward planning. Additionally, the compliance tracker used for making matches between children

and foster carers has been streamlined to increase efficiency, with a foster carer register being produced in Mosaic to provide a single version of the truth, reducing dependence on offline documents and maximising opportunities for foster carers to be matched with children.

21. The DCFSF programme delivered a workstream to redefine residential care to tackle issues around market sufficiency, where this workstream had the aims of ensuring children get the right placement and that children are stepped down from a residential placement at the right time. To ensure that children get the right placement this workstream developed digital tools to increase the visibility of children at risk of going into residential care, setting up a working group to prevent unnecessary residential starts and started the recruitment of specialist carers. In order to enable children to be stepped down at the right time placement plans were improved to make them more consistent and SMART, and placement reviews were optimised to ensure that children have a plan to permanence.
22. The DCFSF programme principally focused on maximising independence for young people approaching adulthood. This was achieved through the following actions:
 - a) The development of new ways of working to support the development of independence focussed plans with SMART goals with the journey to independence indicated within the plan.
 - b) The provision of SMART planning training which included a training video on planning for adulthood throughout a child's journey to increase independence and resilience.
 - c) The development of a priority cohort meeting focusing on young people from 15 years of age to discuss current support needs and the likely support requirement when nearing adulthood to manage the transition more effectively to adulthood, where support will focus on independence skills that will improve a young person's long-term quality of life.
 - d) The development and implementation of digital tools enabling managers to track the journey of children and young people through our services and monitor progress.
23. At the Programme Delivery Board in March 2022 the programme reported an expected total annualised financial benefit, when at full run rate, of £10.7m which was over and above the target annualised benefit of £8.7m at full run rate. The key performance indicators driving benefits will continue to be monitored closely, and the monitoring of benefits will feed into the annual MTFS planning work, with current programme benefits expected to contribute to MTFS savings of £3.3m in FY 22/23 increasing to £12.2m by March 2026.

Conclusion

24. Paragraphs 17 – 24 describe the outcomes which are being achieved as a result of the DCFSF programme. It can be seen that the new processes put in place are helping children and young people in care to be cared for in the most appropriate settings to meet their needs, are helping to avoid cases escalating so that children, young people and their families don't reach crisis point and are also helping children and young people with disabilities to achieve greater levels of independence so that they can lead happy and fulfilling lives.
25. In addition to the improved outcomes for children, young people and families being achieved through the processes put in place by the DCFSF programme, these outcomes are being realised in a way which will significantly reduce costs to the Council in the long term, with the key performance indicators currently showing that a total annualised financial benefit of £10.7 million is expected for the MTFs when the full run rate is achieved.

Background papers

26. Report to the Cabinet, 20 November 2020 (exempt item).
27. Report to Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 18 November 2020:
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/g6183/Public%20reports%20pack%20Wednesday%2018-Nov-2020%2009.30%20Children%20and%20Families%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

28. None

Equality and Human Rights Implications

29. Public authorities are required by law to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not;
 - Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.
30. All programme workstreams were evaluated and deemed to have a positive impact on the public, improving the department's ability to deliver the right services at the right time.

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