

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 5TH JULY 2023
POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

OFSTED Focus Visit

In May this year, Ofsted undertook a Focus Visit in the Children and Families Services department to look at the local authority's arrangements for children in care, with a particular focus on, how we make decisions for children who come into care, Permanence planning for children in care, including all permanence options and the experiences of disabled children in care.

The inspectors examined documents, looked at case records, talked to parents, carers, and children, and met with frontline staff and senior leaders.

The letter that outlined the findings from the inspection was published on 16th June and recognised that significant improvements have been made since the last inspection in 2019.

In particular, the report highlighted that social work practice with children in care, including those with a disability, is consistently child focused, therefore impacting positively on children's life experiences and their physical and emotional wellbeing. They reported that social workers know their children well and speak with pride and affection about them. Children are visited regularly, and records of visits and work were described as being beautifully written.

Social workers spoken to during the visit were unanimously positive about working in Leicestershire and reported having manageable caseloads that enable them to spend time with children and showed an ambition to continuously improve the lives of children in Leicestershire.

Inspectors also complimented the strong political and corporate support within the County Council for children's services.

Family Hubs

I am pleased to share with Members that over the last two months we have begun to open our Family Hubs across the County. Family Hubs are a 'one stop shop' for parents and carers with 0 to 19 year olds or up to 25 for young people with special educational needs and disabilities. Leicestershire is one of 12 local authorities to receive a portion of the £12million grant from the DfE to transform the way services are delivered for families through the Family Hubs.

The Hubs will offer a broad and integrated range of early help services to support families and build stronger relationships through the delivery of family advice, support services and guidance on issues such as social care, education, mental and physical health.

The Family Hubs are also linked to two important national programmes; reducing parental conflict, a programme funded by the Department for Work and Pensions that raises awareness of the impact of unresolved parental conflict on children and develops practice models to respond to conflict in families; and Supporting Families, the DLUHC funded programme (previously Troubled Families) that provides targeted early help to families with multiple and complex issues.

The full network of Family Hubs, which will make use of existing spaces such as Children and Family Wellbeing Centres as well as libraries across the County, is expected to be open by spring 2024.

Holiday Activity Fund

The Holiday Activity Fund programme is a national programme that supports school age children and young people receiving free school meals. Leicestershire County Council was allocated around £1.5million in 2022/23 to deliver holiday activities and a meal during easter, summer, and winter school holidays. Over this period 4711 children accessed the programme and engaged in a range of physical and enriching activities as well as accessing a healthy meal.

This year we have been allocated a similar level of grant and programmes will be running over the summer, winter and easter holidays. This year we have more providers than ever offering sessions this summer and there is a wide range of exciting activities to take part in, such as zorbing, crafting, football, archery, nerfing, cooking, drama, and dodgeball.

In addition to this, we have introduced free gym passes and coaching sessions that give young people an opportunity to keep active, try new sports, and build on skills they may already have.

Volunteers

Finally, I am pleased to share that the Leicestershire Children and Family Wellbeing Service Volunteer Team has been awarded the 'Investing in Volunteers Award'. This award is the UK quality standard for good practice in volunteer management. The Children and Family Wellbeing Service has a range of volunteers who provide an invaluable role across a range of areas such as mentoring children, young people, and supporting parents, running stay and play centres, supporting our community fridges, being an appropriate adult for young people during a police interview and community panel members. We are very grateful for the support provided across the Department by our volunteers, they are a highly valuable resource and an integral part of the services we offer to children and their families.

Mrs D. Taylor CC
Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services