

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 15TH MAY 2024

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES, SAFER COMMUNITIES AND REGULATORY SERVICES

Family Hubs

There has been a huge amount of activity to develop and promote Leicestershire's Family Hubs over the last 12 months. There are now 20 Family Hubs open and 16 Family Hubs in libraries across the County. Following the award of just under £1million in grant funding from the Department for Education, activity has taken place across the Council to develop three key elements of Family Hub programme delivery.

This has included development of a website, <https://www.familyhubsleicestershire.org.uk/> for use by parents and carers, young people, professionals and volunteers. The website has been developed working in partnership with parents and carers, community groups and partner organisations, and young people. Work continues to enhance content.

The second area of focus has been improvements to the Family Hubs buildings and promotion of these as community venues at which all families can seek information and advice, and building on the range of services which are co-delivered from these important community buildings. Public events have taken place throughout the year, launching the buildings under the Family Hubs banner to promote awareness amongst families.

Through partnership working, Family Hubs can now offer a range of services from a number of agencies including DWP benefits advice, Health Visiting and Midwifery, Housing Support, Domestic Abuse Services, adult mental health services, community paediatric clinics, and many others. An additional Community Fridge is opening in Lutterworth, adding to Fridges in Loughborough, Wigston, Coalville and Hinckley. Volunteers continue to support regular Stay and Play sessions in the Hubs for families alongside other open access sessions such as Wellbeing Café and support groups for parents of SEND children.

Finally, through our partnership arrangements, the Family Hubs team have supported the production of Leicestershire's first Maternity and Early Years Strategy, published a Start for Life offer and an updated Early Help Strategy.

Admissions

I am pleased to share that on National Offer Day for First Time Admissions in April 2024, 99.1% of children were allocated places at one of their top three preference schools, including 94.8% who obtained their first preference. Both figures are an improvement on last year, leaving just 60 children for whom the nearest school with

places was allocated. This is really positive news for those children starting school in September who have secured a school place in Leicestershire at one of their preferred schools.

Young Volunteer of the Year – Charlie Tripp (aged 15)

Charlie is a young carer, and a member of the County Youth Council of Leicestershire (CYCLe). Over the last 2 years Charlie has been involved in updating a number of Leicestershire County Council policy documents and creating and delivering a school-based curriculum pack on physical and mental health. He has chaired meetings and interview panels, worked with professionals from health services, and made a video for a charity that enabled children in care to move placements with duffle bags which enabled the council to request 50 of the bags for children in care in the county.

Charlie spends over four hours volunteering each week, as well as being the sole carer for his mum who is disabled due to a car accident when he was just four years old. Charlie has championed the voices of children and young people, especially young carers, and has been part of working groups looking at the impact of being a young carer. He wrote a speech which he shared with Dame Rachel De Souza about being a young carer and has spoken to the press about the importance of identifying and supporting young carers.

The Youth and Justice Service nominated Charlie for the Lord Lieutenant's Award for Young People 2024. On Thursday 25th April 2024, finalists from the four award categories were invited to a special awards ceremony at County Hall where they were presented with certificates and prizes and Charlie was awarded Young Volunteer of the Year.

Protecting Leicestershire consumers and businesses.

Trading Standards East Midlands (TSEM) is a voluntary partnership of the eight local authority trading standards services in the East Midlands all working together to maximise resources to ensure we deliver effective consumer protection to 4.8 million people. Leicestershire Trading Standards utilises this partnership to access enforcement resources made available through National Trading Standards (NTS) where the identified fraudulent practice of concern to Leicestershire is also perpetrated across the region. The TSEM Regional Investigation Team is hosted by Nottinghamshire County Council with all TSEM trading standards services providing additional support to the regional investigation process.

A fraudster conned residents out of £1.5m promising significant energy savings and effective home security through its products and services. Robin MacDonald's company representatives told householders fitting solar panels and heat pumps would save money and falsely claimed that the installations would be funded by the government. However, systems were often fitted badly and did not deliver the savings promised. Another trading arm of the business misled vulnerable customers

into believing an alarm product was directly linked to the emergency services. Following a lengthy 5-month trial at Nottingham Crown Court, MacDonald was found guilty of conspiracy to commit fraud by false representation. Thirty-two of the victims were Leicestershire residents and between them they lost more than £285,000 to the fraud. Sales representatives would use bullying tactics to secure contracts, often staying in the homes of victims for many hours to pressure them into signing contracts for work they did not want or need at significantly inflated prices. Macdonald and two other co- defendants will be sentenced in June.

I am pleased to report that Leicestershire Trading Standards has recently successfully prosecuted a franchise fraud which received significant media attention, with the defendant receiving a three and half year custodial sentence. However, the work for our trading standards officers continues post-conviction with enquiries to ensure assets held by the defendant were traced and recovered to compensate the victims of the fraud. The total amount of compensation paid to victims exceeded £130,000, with the County Council also recovering £30,000 in prosecution costs.

Rutland and North Leicestershire Coroner's Service

In November 2021, following the retirement of the Senior Coroner, the Rutland and North Leicestershire Coroner's Service relocated from Loughborough to Leicester Town Hall as part of an interim arrangement, pending the outcome of a proposal to merge this service with the Leicester and South Leicestershire jurisdiction which is operationally delivered by the City Council. In 2023, the County Council made final submissions to the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) that, in the interests of service users and effective financial governance, the two jurisdictions should be retained, with the Rutland and North Leicestershire Coroner's Service relocating to County Hall. The MOJ has now announced its decision to retain the two jurisdictions, leaving little time from a business continuity perspective for officers to ensure a seamless transfer. A combined court and offices facility is now in operation at County Hall, providing a space conducive to supporting bereaved families and the formalities of the inquest process. All inquests remain listed and a recruitment process for a permanent Senior Coroner appointment is underway.

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