



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL'S RESPONSIBILITY TO CHILDREN
IN CARE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care, including children seeking asylum. The report will outline progress achieved and the development plan going forward.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The functions of local authorities in relation to children who are 'looked after' by them are set out in the Children Act 1989 and associated regulations and guidance; the principal regulations are the Care Planning, Placement and Case Review regulations 2010.
3. The Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022-2025 outlines Leicestershire's commitment to the seven corporate parenting principles set out in the Children and Social Work Act 2017.

Background

4. The Children in Care service work with children who have a care plan of long-term care (fostering or residential). There are children who are identified as children in care who do not yet have a long-term care plan or have a care plan of adoption. This report is focusing on children in the Children in Care Service with a care plan of long-term care including children in the Disabled Children's Service.
5. 'Our Promise' to children in care and care leavers was launched in 2019 and sets out the commitment that Leicestershire County Council and its partners will provide the best support, guidance and care to children in care and care leavers. It demonstrates that the Service values them for their individuality, provide stability and offer aspirational life chances as a good parent provides for their children. An annual report for Our Promise is completed to evidence the partnership working and impact for children and young people.

6. The most recent Ofsted Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) in April 2024 judged the Council's services to children in care as outstanding. The report identified:
 - a. 'Most children in care receive an outstanding service that results in their life experiences significantly improving. Social workers and managers are aspirational for the children in their care and demonstrate a determination to improve children's experiences'.
 - b. 'Children are seen regularly and are seen alone where appropriate. Manageable workloads mean that skilled social workers can spend quality time with children to get to know them well and build strong and enduring relationships with them. Social workers speak highly about the children they work with, and they positively beamed when talking about children's progress and achievements'.
 - c. 'Disabled children are supported to develop trusting relationships with their social workers. Workers recognise when children are not happy and invest time in understanding why, advocating on children's behalf. Workers are rightly proud of the progress children make and are ambitious for them'.
 - d. 'Children in care benefit from creative, insightful and beautifully presented life story work. This shows children how their life experiences are valued. This work is routinely carried out with children at their pace and to their timescales, and this assists them to understand their journey. Purposeful direct work is also of a high quality and reflects children's individual circumstances, wishes and feelings. Social workers are extremely skilled at helping children to understand why decisions have been reached and what the plans are for their longer-term care'.
7. A Continuous Improvement Plan 2024-2027 'Achieving Excellence through purposeful practice' is built upon the Road to Excellence 2021-2023 plan and both have steered the direction of work and development in the service areas of children in care. The core values of 'Aspirational, Being Curious and Collaboration' and the associated behaviours of 'professional kindness, active listening, outcome focused and being accountable'; are central to all engagement with children and their networks.

Children in Care

8. As of 29 April 2025, Leicestershire County Council had 717 children in care. This includes children who became looked after due to being unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. 82 are children who became looked after due to seeking asylum (UASC), 388 are children with a care plan of long-term care in the Children in Care service and 41 in the Disabled Children's Service.

Service Overview

9. The children in care service comprises of four teams. Each team has a manager, five social workers and a senior practitioner. A Service Manager is responsible for this area of the service. There are currently 717 children in care in Leicestershire.
10. The children in care service supports children with a long-term care plan of foster care or residential care. The Service focuses on ensuring that all children have a

stable and caring and safe home where their needs are understood, and the right support is provided.

11. The children in care service works in partnership with a range of partner agencies and services to ensure that the holistic needs of children in care are met. These include, health, education, virtual school, fostering, police, youth justice and child exploitation service.
12. The Service Manager for Care Leavers and UASC has two Children in Care teams for unaccompanied young people, one team undertakes the specialist legal assessment for age disputes and holds a number of children in care and the other team works with children in care. The teams are currently working with 82 children seeking asylum.

Service Priorities

13. The Children In Care service ensures that all children have a good understanding of their own life story and the decisions that have been made for them. That they are supported to have meaningful and long lasting relationships with their network supported by the use of cultural genograms and network meetings.
14. The Service is aspirational and ambitious for children in care and focus on ensuring that all visits to children are purposeful and support them to achieve their best outcomes. This is built on strong relational practice where direct work with children and families is central to giving the right support at the right time.
15. The Children In Care service work with increasing complexity of need due to the trauma experienced by children. Complex risk and need require a multi-agency approach with a co-owned safety plan to ensure that the Service is providing the right safety and support with robust management oversight.
16. Opportunities for permanence are offered to children when it is right for them. This can include rehabilitation home, permanence in care and permanence through adoption or Special Guardianship Order. The S is determined that children will have a sense of belonging where their identity and sense of self is supported to thrive.
17. The Children In Care service ensures that the voice of children and carers inform services and the support offered. Children's voice and influence is supported by providing opportunities where their views are heard through direct work, in their Personal Education Plan and in their Review of Arrangements and in participation events such as the Children in Care Council.

Service delivery over the last 12 months

Children understanding their identity and their life experiences

18. The Service has focused on increasing the number of children who have a cultural genogram which fully explores all important relationships and the strengths and

vulnerabilities of them. These support identity discussions with children and families and support developing meaningful networks for children in care.

19. Life story work is an opportunity to support children to understand their experiences and decisions that have been made for them and often this supports them to comprehend how they feel. The Life Story Guidance developed in 2022 is well embedded and this focuses on ensuring that all children have life story work completed and that this is an ongoing process. Therapeutic Life Story work is delivered within the Service in order to strengthen the offer for children in care. The service also recognise the changing needs of children as they grow older and have developed a 'Moving Forward Letter', which gives greater detail of their experiences and decisions both before becoming a child in care and since.

Achieving Permanence and a sense of belonging for Children in Care

20. A key focus in the Children In Care service is for children to achieve legal permanence through a Special Guardianship Order in what has been their long-term foster home. The SGO Team was established in 2021 and provides specialist assessment and support to children and carers to achieve a Special Guardianship Order, which ends a Care Order for children, and then they are no longer a child in care.
21. Since April 2024, 13 children have achieved legal permanency via Special Guardianship through this route. Since the Team was established in December 2021 35 children have achieved permanence through SGO. There are currently six active cases progressing through to an SGO.
22. Over the last 12 months, the Department has introduced a support worker whose key role is to support the identification of long-term placements for children ready to step down from residential homes or who are in short term foster homes. Profiles for children have been developed in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of children's personalities as well as their needs. Two children have been successfully supported to move from residential home to a foster family in the last six months.

Rehabilitation Home

23. The SGO Assessment Team service offer has extended to include undertaking work where a return home to parent(s) has been assessed and agreed as the plan, or where children/young people have already returned home (planned or unplanned), and revocation of the Care Order is the goal. The SGO Assessment Team will facilitate network meetings and ongoing reviews to ensure that the network and safety plans are robust and tested. The team ensure that there is a SMART trajectory to ensure timely decisions and assessments to progress to achieving revocation of the care order. The team are currently progressing seven children to revocation and have achieved five revocations in 12 months.

Family Time Pilot

24. Family Time is the opportunity for children to spend time with birth family when they are unable to live with them. The Children in Care Service currently has a pilot

focusing on both the approach and support offer for family time for children in care. The key areas are:

- i) ensuring that the family time is meaningful and purposeful for children and family members
- ii) for family members to be supported to develop their own approaches and skills engaging with their children
- iii) regular review of the family time offer and ensure this changes with the child and families changing strengths and vulnerabilities.

25. The Family Time pilot supports the broad consideration of permanence and reunification when this is right for the child. The regular review ensures that the needs of the children remain central to decision making and the children in care service are proactively driving the care plan

Robust and effective age assessments

26. An age assessment is a process used to determine a person's age when there's a dispute or uncertainty, particularly when it comes to unaccompanied minors or asylum seekers. This assessment aims to ensure appropriate care, safeguarding, and treatment based on a person's age. The Service undertakes age assessments when children with disputed ages by the Home Office are moved to Leicestershire through the National Transfer Scheme and when a brief enquiry of age by the Service indicates that they are not their stated age.
27. Home Office policy states that unless the claimant's physical appearance/ demeanour 'very strongly suggests that they are significantly over 18 years of age', they should be treated as a child until a holistic assessment can be made by a local authority. The Service aim to complete a [Merton-compliant age assessment within 28 days](#). This is a social worker-led assessment that adheres to standards established by the courts
28. Age assessments are being completed within timescales which has meant less delay in decision making for young people. Robust challenge on the quality of the assessments is meaning there are no current judicial reviews.

Impact

29. Children in care all have a Care Plan which gives clear actions around how to support them to achieve their best outcomes. Plans are reviewed every six months. As part of this plan there are expectations for the frequency of visiting by the social worker which are at a minimum of six weekly unless otherwise agreed. The Service is measured against the timeliness of both plans and visits. 100% of Care Plans are currently in timescale and recorded visits in timescale is currently 90%. Other key data which is measured is the health data of which Review Health Assessments are currently 90% in timescale and dental checks are at 90%.

Resource Implications

30. The work to support unaccompanied asylum seeking children is provided by the Home Office.

Background Papers

31. Corporate Parenting Strategy 2022 – 2025:
<https://trixcms.trixonline.co.uk/api/assets/llrcs-leicestershire/8bb67275-2f3f-476c-91db-049bf6dd2dbc/corporate-parenting-strategy-2022-2025compressed.pdf>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

32. None.

Equality Implications

33. All assessments and services provided for Children in Care and Care Leavers are done so in a framework of respecting equality and diversity for young people. The Children and Family Services department is committed to equality and ensuring the human rights of all users, and importantly to support those young people who have arrived here from other countries as unaccompanied children.

Human Rights Implications

34. There are no human rights implications arising from this report.

Officer(s) to Contact

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