



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
3 JUNE 2025

**FAMILIES FIRST REFORMS - KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE, HELPING
FAMILIES THRIVE**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an overview of the national reforms for children's services, Keeping children Safe, Helping Families thrive; and to share details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. This is the first time that details of the reforms have been shared with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Although, reference to them was included within a report on Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers which was presented to the Committee on 4 March 2025.

Background

3. In November 2024, the Government published a policy paper called 'Keeping Children Safe, Helping families thrive'. The paper included plans for comprehensive reform of children's social care in the UK and the Government's commitment to keeping families together and children safe. The Childrens Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which includes legislation to support the reforms, is currently moving through the parliamentary process and is due to reach its final stage later in 2025.
4. The "Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive" paper has four main objectives:
 - a. The first is to prioritise support so that children can remain with their families when it is safe for them to do so;
 - b. The second is to ensure a focus on placing children who cannot remain with their parents with their wider family (known as kinship carers) or with foster carers, instead of resorting to residential care homes;
 - c. Thirdly the Government intend to address concerns about profiteering in children's social care and aim to regulate the market by introducing measures that will require private providers to disclose their finances;
 - d. The fourth objective is to invest in the workforce and in data systems by improving the skills of social care professionals and improving their data

sharing practices to inform evidence-based interventions for better outcomes.

Supporting children to remain with their families when it is safe to do so.

5. Families will be supported to stay together by mandating the offer of family group decision making for every family at the point before it is necessary to initiate care proceedings for a child.
6. To keep children safe, plans are included to improve the sharing of information across and within agencies by enabling the use of a Single Unique Identifier. To better protect children from harm, the policy aims to strengthen the delivery of a local decisive multi-agency child protection model through integrated multi-agency child protection teams, put a new duty on safeguarding partners to ensure education is sufficiently involved in multi-agency safeguarding arrangements, and ensure parents have consent from local authorities to home educate children where there are safeguarding concerns.
7. The corporate parenting duty for children in care will be extended to a range of public bodies that provide housing, health, education and employment services. In order to remove barriers to opportunity for children and young people in care. In addition to this the duty on local authorities will be extend to promote educational outcomes for all children with a social worker through the Virtual School Head role. In order to reduce the risk of homelessness as a barrier to getting on in life, Staying Close support will be provided to all care leavers

Legislating to make the care system child centred, and to tackle profiteering

8. The policy document sets out that some children need the local authority to step in and provide another form of care because it is in their best interests. When residential care is needed it should be a positive experience for children in care and give them the best start in life. The policy sets out how those providing care will be held to account for the quality of the homes they provide and how the number of good quality homes will be increased, both through legislative and nonlegislative changes, so children receive the homes they deserve.
9. The full document, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive is appended to this report.
10. In March 2025, the Government published the Families First Partnership Programme Guide to support the first wave of the reforms. This covers the development of family help, multi agency child protection arrangements and the use of family group decision making. The expectation set out in the guidance is that April 2025 to April 2026 will feature ongoing business as usual service delivery alongside transformational activity and set out that it is crucial that reform is multi-agency and implemented effectively, with improving the safety and wellbeing of children at its heart.
11. The engagement of partners, in particular the Police, Health and Education colleagues to design and deliver the multi-agency aspects of the reforms will be critical to the success of the development of the model.

12. The Children's Social Care Prevention Grant, £270 million of new funding has been made available through the final local government finance settlement to support local authorities working with their safeguarding partners to invest in transformation and expansion of preventative support in the 2025-26 financial year. This equates to £1.4million for Leicestershire to develop an implementation plan for both designing and implementing services to deliver the reforms across Children and Family services.

Leicestershire delivery of the Social Care Reforms

13. The governance for the reforms in Leicestershire has been established through a multi-agency Implementation Board, chaired by the Director of Children and Family Services.
14. Work completed as part of the Defining Childrens Services for the Future programme has placed the department in a strong position to deliver on the reforms, and to have an established design and delivery structure and governance in place. Initial scoping of the new legislation and requirements is being undertaken in order to work through the gaps and areas that need to be developed and reformed in order to meet the new requirements.
15. The establishment of Family Help, Family Safeguarding and Targeted Family Help in February 2024 is in line with the reforms and means that we are in a strong position to build on the strength of this model, to not only meet the reforms but ensure that we build upon strong and safe services for children, young people and their families.
16. Learning from pathfinders, is an important part of the delivery plan in order to ensure that the Department builds the capacity to deliver on the design and initial implementation of the reforms based on good practice elsewhere. Each Local Authority was required to submit by April 2025 a plan for how the reforms will be implemented.

Resource Implications

17. The Department has been allocated £1.4m for the implementation of the reforms. It is not clear yet, what the full costs of implementing the reforms will be in Leicestershire.

Background papers

18. Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 4 March 2025:
<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7890&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

19. None.

Equality Implications

20. The reforms ensure that children, young people and their families are supported at an early opportunity to keep children safe and support families to positively parent

their children. When this option is not safe for the child, they will be, wherever possible, supported to remain with their wider family network. This will ensure that children and young people are given opportunities to thrive and meet their full potential.

Human Rights Implications

21. There are no human rights implications arising from these reforms

Appendix

Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive

Officer(s) to Contact

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