



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
2 SEPTEMBER 2025

CHILDREN IN NEED OF HELP AND PROTECTION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of work in the Children and Family Department in relation to children within Leicestershire that require Help and Protection. The Committee will be aware that these children are identified within the Children Act 1989 and are more commonly referred to as Children in Need (CIN) and Children in Need of Protection (CP).
2. This report also provides a summary of the Local Authority's performance in relation to this cohort of Leicestershire's most vulnerable children.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

Whilst the key piece of legislation in respect of Children in Need and those in need of protection is The Children Act 1989; there are many other key pieces of legislation and regulations pertaining to this group of children. Some of the key pieces of national legislation and guidance which govern the safeguarding of children and young people are:

- Children Act 1989;
- UN Convention on the Rights of the Child;
- Education Act 2002;
- Adoption and Children Act 2002;
- Children Act 2004;
- Children and Families Act 2014;
- Children and Social Work Act 2017;
- Working Together to Safeguard Children (2023, updated June 2025);
- Social Work England Professional Standards (updated 2025);
- Statutory Guidance on Promoting the Health and Wellbeing of Looked-After Children (2023);
- Statement of Changes to the Immigration Rules (HC 997, July 2025) – relevant for social work involving migrant children and families;
- Liberty Protection Safeguards (LPS) – implementation expected to replace Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DoLS), with implications for children aged 16+.

3. The Children Act 1989 provides the most comprehensive framework for the care and protection of children. It remains the defining document for Local Authority Children's

Services, defining legal statute, partnership working with parents and the overriding principle that the welfare of the child is the paramount consideration.

4. The Children Act 2004 complemented the 1989 Act and reinforced the message that all organisations working with children have a duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.
5. The 2023 edition of Working Together to Safeguard Children, updated in June 2025, strengthens multi-agency working and introduces national multi-agency child protection standards, a whole-family approach, and clearer expectations for cooperative relationships with parents and carers

Background

How Services for Children and Young People in need and in need of protection are delivered in Leicestershire.

6. Following a detailed service redesign in February 2024, Children's Social Care in Leicestershire underwent a significant realignment to refocus its attention on achieving better outcomes for children. In addition to a strong First Response service, services are delivered across Family Help and Family Safeguarding locality-based teams. Children with a disability are supported via a specialist county wide service that sits within Family Safeguarding.
7. The Families First Partnership Programme and the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill (2025) signal a transformative shift in children's social care, placing greater emphasis on early intervention, multi-agency collaboration and family-led decision making. Local authorities are expected to embed Family Help Teams and Lead Practitioners to deliver a seamless offer of support for children in need and those at risk of harm. The Bill introduces a statutory duty to offer Family Group Decision Making (FGDM) meetings before initiating care proceedings, empowering families to propose solutions that safeguard children while maintaining family unity. Additionally, the legislation mandates the creation of Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPTs), integrating professionals from health, education, police, and social care to respond collectively to significant harm. These reforms require children's services to restructure front door arrangements, enhance information sharing, and adopt a more holistic, preventative approach to safeguarding and wellbeing.

First Response Central Duty

8. First Response Central Duty (FRCD) is the front door to Children's Social Care services (CSC) in Leicestershire and has responsibility for the screening of all contacts into the Service, new referrals, provides an assessment service who respond to the most vulnerable and high-risk cases, provides an out of hours children's social work team and Child Sexual Exploitation. It works closely with the Target Family Help triage team who provide a response to requests for Early Help including access to group work programmes and parenting programmes. This includes the extended domestic abuse team who offer an early offer in response to emerging domestic abuse related incidents to divert families by provision of advice and support.

9. FRCD is centrally based in County Hall and is made up of two dedicated services for screening incoming information and subsequently undertaking assessments of need, including responding to immediate safeguarding concerns which require coordinated safeguarding responses. These two services are supported by business support teams who contribute to the complex administration of the process including uploading new information into the recording system and starting workflow in line with statutory requirements.
10. The Screening Service has four Team managers, four Senior Practitioners and eight social workers. The Assessment Service has five teams working across a five-week rota to manage allocation of work in a way that is responsive to unplanned emergencies whilst maintaining the process of assessments within statutory timescales. These teams are made up of five team managers five Senior Practitioners and five social workers.

Assessment.

11. In the year April 2024-March 2025, the number of contacts received by First Response was 28,124. On average across the year, 24% of all of these contacts meet the threshold to be progressed as a referral to Children's Social Care and may require an assessment under S17 or S47 of the Children Act 1989. It should be noted that First Response provides the gateway into both Targeted Family Help and Children's Social Care (CSC). The number of contacts, in 24/25, that have proceeded to referral in CSC was 6,754. This was an increase from 6,236 in the previous year.
12. Re-referrals are measured to ensure that children are not being referred on numerous occasions because their needs have not been appropriately assessed. During 24/25 the figure for re-referrals is 26.4% of total referrals. This was above the local target of 22% and Year To date in 25/26 this has now improved to 22.5% close to this target Audit work across services is in place to review learning against this target to drive continued improvement.
13. Once a referral is accepted, consideration is given for a full assessment of the child's circumstances to be undertaken by the relevant service area. Year-on-year since 2016, the number of Single Assessments completed has increased significantly. Over the last twelve months, 6,516 assessments have been completed across the service, which is approximately 545 per month. This compares with 4,491 assessments completed during the previous year showing an increase of 2025. The timely completion of assessments within 45 days is measured. In 24/25 83.7% of all assessments were completed within 45 days. This is under the target of 85% and subsequent work has seen this improve to the current figure for 25/26 of 86.8% and over 91% in June 2025. There is further work underway to drive processes across the Service.
14. Strategy Discussions are multi agency decision making forums that consider whether a child is at risk of significant harm. They, along with Section 47 enquiries, occur across First Response, Localities and the Disabled Children's Service. In 24/25, 2962 Strategy Discussions were completed across children's social care. On average 72% of these lead to the initiation of a Section 47 enquiry, this is a formal statutory intervention as set out in Section 47 of the Children Act 1989 to safeguard children. 2,028 Section 47 enquiries were completed in the year leading to 728 children

subsequently being considered within a multiagency initial child protection conference.

15. It is of note that Section 47 enquiries do not always directly correlate with the number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan as the enquiries can occur during any part of the child's journey.
16. The number of children who are subject to Child Protection Plans as of 1 August 2025 is 552. This is an increase compared to 427 children at the end of August 2024.

Family Help

17. In 2024, the Children and Family Services Department created a new service – Family Help that sits alongside Family Safeguarding. This new service was created in response to wider national agendas, such as the Independent Care Review, Stable Homes Built on Love.
18. Family Help was established to focus on timely support at appropriate levels of intervention for children in need, with elements of practical hands-on approaches with more intensive one-to-one support. Where needed children can move seamlessly between what was the old Children and Family Wellbeing Service and the old Children's Social Care children in need locality teams ensuring no delay in support.
19. Family Help is a service that is relationship-based, offering consistency for children and their families. Where Child in Need level support is required, this work may be allocated to either a Social Worker (Family Help) or a Keyworker (Targeted Family Help). Where it is a Keyworker, the work will always have a social work oversight and direction from the Senior Social Work Oversight Practitioner, Ofsted have had oversight of the model and were confident in its strength.
20. Targeted Family Help is the side of the Service that has a focus on targeted earlier intervention. Targeted Family Help is one of many services that makes up the wider early help system in localities – many organisations, such as schools, health visiting, voluntary sector, faith communities, district councils, deliver 'early help' to families.

Family Help Teams

21. *Five Locality Family Help Social Work teams:* One Team Manager, one Senior Practitioner, Social workers (three or four per team dependant on locality) and a Senior Social Work Oversight Practitioner who is supervised by the social work Team Manager and has robust social work oversight of all children in need allocated to a Targeted Family Help Keyworker.
22. *Five locality Targeted Family Help teams:* One Team and Partnership Manager (Oversee CIN integrated model and all aspects of Targeted family help), two or three Team Leaders (who supervise all Keyworkers alongside other Targeted workers and partnership tasks) and three or four Keyworkers who have Child in Need led plans or Targeted led (early help) plans.
23. *Targeted Family Help Triage Team*, which forms the "Front Door" alongside the First Response Children's Duty team; they work closely together to ensure families get the support that best meets their needs.

24. *SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS)*, which is managed through the Family Help Triage Team, and provides independent information, support and advice to parents and young people who are experiencing difficulties with education.
25. *Teen Health 11-19 Service*, supports young people through a range of group offers, one-to-one support and drop-in sessions, via all secondary schools in Leicestershire and in community settings. The team has now extended its offer to post-16 support.
26. *Extended Domestic Abuse Team*: A preventative service that works countywide with families involved with First Response, Family Help and Family Safeguarding as well as other agencies including schools, to try and promote a way of working which better supports the whole family where there are concerns about domestic abuse.
27. *Brighter Futures*: A team which supports parents who have had recurrent children removed from their care, the Service provides intensive support alongside other professionals to reduce future children being removed. The team consists of a Team Leader and three Keyworkers.
28. There are currently (July 2025) 688 children subject to Child in Need plans, of which 550 sit within the Family Help service; 50 children subject to child in need plans sit within the Families Together team, Child exploitation team or the family safeguarding team and are allocated to social workers within those teams. There are a further 90 children who are open on Child In Need Plans within the Children's Disability Service.

Family Safeguarding

29. In February 2024, Leicestershire County Council undertook a strategic restructure of its Family Safeguarding Service to enhance its capacity to respond to children and young people at risk of significant harm. The revised model delivers a specialist child protection and court work service, aligned with the departments commitment to providing the Right Service at the Right Time.
30. The Service is designed to support families through targeted intervention under child protection plans, with a focus on achieving sustainable change. Where significant risk remains and change has not been evident, practitioners initiate Public Law Outline (PLO) processes.
31. The PLO process is applied nationally to provide a framework to manage high levels of risk within the community using specific 'pre-proceedings' processes. This is intended to divert cases from court and enhance the coordination of planning with the provision of free legal advice to parents, clear timescales for change and structured oversight. PLO also provides timescales and structures for applications to court and the management of court proceedings for both immediate issues that cannot be supported in pre-proceedings or when that intervention brings insufficient change. This all aims to bring the best possible outcomes for children using structured and timely intervention. The enhanced specialisation and oversight to local PLO work has led to demonstrable improvements in the timeliness and quality of work, reducing delays for the most vulnerable children.
32. Family Safeguarding operates across four locality areas:

- i. North: Loughborough and Coalville
- ii. South: Wigston and Hinckley

33. Social Workers and Senior Practitioners hold caseloads focused on child protection, pre-proceedings, and court work. Support and Assessment Workers undertake parenting assessments for children subject to child protection plans or court orders. Support Workers play a vital role in supervising family time and delivering life story work for children involved in care proceedings.
34. This integrated and specialist model reflects the department's strategic priorities around early permanence, timely intervention, and strengthening family resilience, while ensuring robust safeguarding for children at risk.
35. The specialised child protection service means that work is focussed specifically on child protection and court work. When children are identified as being at risk of immediate harm, action is taken without delay to safeguard them. The case decision making panel is well embedded. Decision-making at this panel is proportionate and leads to appropriate actions, including the decision to initiate pre-proceedings or court applications to safeguard children.
36. Within Family Safeguarding and Disabled Children's Service, there are 511 children subject to Child Protection Plans of which 82 Children are subject to Pre-Proceedings. There are currently 140 children subject to care proceedings.

Children's Disability Service

37. The Disabled Children's Service plays a critical role in ensuring that children and young people with disabilities receive the support they need to thrive. These services are designed to uphold the rights of disabled children, promote their well-being, and enable them to live safe, fulfilling lives within their families and communities. The work of these services is underpinned by legislation such as the Children Act 1989, the Children and Families Act 2014, and the Care Act 2014, particularly in relation to transition planning. In Leicestershire, the Disabled Children's Service support children subject to Child In Need Plans, Child Protection Plans, Looked After Children and Care Leavers.
38. There are two teams and one Service Manager The teams consist of 1 x Team Manager, 1 x Senior Practitioner, Social Workers, Support and Assessment Workers and Personal Assistants.
39. As of 14 August 2025, there are 177 children open to the Service. Of these 177 children, 90 are subject to a Child In Need plan, 10 are subject to Child Protection Plans, 37 are Children in Care, 18 incoming assessment, and 22 are Care leavers supported under (Section 24 Children Act 1989).
40. At the heart of the Service is the responsibility to carry out statutory assessments to determine eligibility for support. These assessments consider the impact of a child's disability on their daily life and the family's ability to meet their needs. Where eligible, the Service develops tailored care plans that may include access to short breaks, personal care, direct payments, and specialist equipment. These interventions are designed to support children to remain at home, participate in community life, and achieve their potential.

41. A key function of the Children's Disability Service is to ensure that children with disabilities are safeguarded from harm. Research shows that disabled children are at greater risk of abuse and neglect, and the service works closely with child protection teams to ensure robust safeguarding measures are in place. This includes contributing to child protection plans and, where necessary, initiating care proceedings.
42. Another vital area of focus is transition planning. From the age of 14, the Service begins preparing young people for adulthood, working in partnership with education, health, and adult social care services. The aim is to ensure a seamless transition that supports continued access to education, employment, housing, and health services, while maintaining the young person's independence and well-being.
43. The Service also plays a central role in multi-agency collaboration, contributing to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and working alongside schools, health professionals, and voluntary sector organisations. This integrated approach ensures that support is coordinated and responsive to the child's evolving needs. There are two Designated Social Care Officers (DSCO's) who drive this area of practice.
44. In addition to direct support for children, the Service provides guidance and advocacy for families, helping them navigate complex systems and access the services to which they are entitled. This includes emotional support, signposting, and practical assistance, recognising the vital role families play in the care and development of their children.

Background papers

45. None.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

46. None.

Equality Implications

47. There is no requirement to include an EHRI assessment as the report does not propose any changes to the Council's policies, procedures, functions and services.
48. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

49. There are no equality implications arising from this report.

Appendices

50. None

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