

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 24th SEPTEMBER 2025
POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR
CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

SEND

As Members will be aware Leicestershire currently has 8164 active EHCPs which is an increase of 54% from 2020 and 158% since the introduction of the SEND reforms in 2016. Since January 2025 the Department has received 1305 requests for an EHCP Needs Assessments, a 20% increase from previous levels. This significant increase reflects the uncertainty over the upcoming Schools White Paper, that is expected to make changes to the way in which SEND provision is delivered in local areas.

Whilst we welcome the direction of travel to ensure more children can have their additional needs met in their local mainstream school and support across the system to increase inclusion in schools, the financial challenges impacting Leicestershire as a result of this increased demand are significant.

High Needs Block funding has not kept pace with the increase in requests for assessment, or the subsequent issuing of Education, Health and Care Plans to support children and young people with SEND.

A national increase in EHCPs by 125% against an increase in high needs funding of 59% is leaving Leicestershire with a projected high needs deficit of £118m by 2028/29.

Despite the pressures, I am pleased to share that as a result of hard work across the department over the last year, EHCP needs assessments are now being processed in an average of 24 weeks. A significant improvement compared to this time last year when figures were close to 60 weeks on average.

The Department is also exploring the use of technology to support improved processes and more efficient delivery in order to focus more time on supporting children and their families with SEND.

I would like to express my thanks to staff within the department for their hard work and tenacity over the last year to secure these improvements and work towards getting it right for children and young people with additional needs.

Children in Care

Over the last 5 years the Department has been working with Barnardos to open residential children's homes for our children in care. There are now 6 homes out of the 8 planned homes opened across Leicestershire. The remaining 2 homes will be open before December 2025. These homes are providing support for our most vulnerable children in care through 1 home supporting children who have been exploited, 4 homes supporting children with trauma that has led to emotional and behavioural needs, 1 parent and child assessment home and 1 high need

emergency and assessment home. The two further homes will support children with mental health needs and overnight short breaks. The opening of a 9th home is being considered, with an options appraisal in development.

Building our own homes for children in care not only means we are providing care that meets our children's needs but it is projected to save us £2million over the next four years.

Admissions & School Improvement

The application window for first time admissions into primary school and for transfer to secondary school is open. Whilst we have over 95% of primary and 92% of secondary places allocated to first preferences, parents and carers are encouraged to ensure they select up to 5 choices in order to ensure they secure a place at a school local to them.

I am also pleased to share that 93% of primary schools and over 88% of secondary schools are rated Good or Outstanding by Ofsted for leadership and management.

Music

In relation to Leicestershire Music, I'm delighted that engagement with primary, secondary and special schools remains above the national average at 93% accessing one or more Leicestershire Music services. Over 18,000 children and young people learnt with the service last year, with 20% of them being from disadvantaged backgrounds.

Families First Partnership Programme

This programme is the delivery mechanism for the Government's reform of children's social care services. It has a particular focus on multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and integrated delivery of targeted early help, ensuring families and their networks are at the centre of finding solutions to keep children safe at home. The programme is currently working on three pillars: Family Help, Family Networks, and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams. Family Help builds on work already started to bring together our targeted early help services with dedicated child in need teams of social workers ensuring we have a strong response for families who need help. Family Networks is focusing on how we can draw together the wider support of extended family and friends to support sustainable change and to help children stay safe at home. The Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams are considering how best we work with our statutory partners of health, police and education to ensure timely and efficient decision making, investigations, and review of cases.

The children and Families services department has made a strong start to the programme with excellent engagement across the partnership. This includes the seconding-in of a police officer and health professional, with input from education staff, to build on existing multi-agency arrangements for the protection of children at risk of harm.