

## **COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 1 JULY 2026**

### **POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES**

This position statement sets out the progress made and the priorities ahead in delivering high-quality, sustainable services for children and families in Leicestershire. Our focus remains on improving outcomes, strengthening early intervention, and ensuring that children, young people and families receive the right support at the right time through effective partnership working.

#### **SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND)**

##### **Accelerated Progress Plan (APP)**

Improving services and outcomes for children and young people with SEND has been a clear priority for the Council and its partners. Following the 2022 Ofsted and CQC Local Area SEND Inspection, the Local Area Partnership implemented an Accelerated Progress Plan to address identified weaknesses, particularly in relation to EHC plan quality, timeliness and quality assurance.

Over the past three years, the partnership has delivered sustained and measurable improvement through strengthened multi-agency working, improved governance, enhanced quality assurance arrangements, transformation of the SENA service, and a strong commitment to co-production with children, young people and families.

At the final review on 17 April 2026, the partnership demonstrated significant progress, including statutory timeliness exceeding 95%. In June 2026, the Department for Education and NHS England formally lifted the Accelerated Progress Plan. This represents a significant milestone and reflects the strengthened capacity, oversight and governance now in place to sustain improvement.

Our priority moving forward is to maintain this progress and continue to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND, ensuring services remain responsive, high quality and sustainable.

##### **Education, Health and Care Plan Timeliness**

Ensuring timely and high-quality Education, Health and Care plans remains a key priority. We have secured consistent compliance with the statutory 20-week timeframe for all initial plans, with average completion now achieved in under 18 weeks.

This progress has been delivered in the context of continued growth in demand for needs assessments and demonstrates the effectiveness of strengthened processes and service capacity.

We will continue to focus on maintaining timeliness alongside further improving quality and outcomes for children and young people.

## **Leicestershire SEND Reforms**

The Council has submitted its SEND Reform Partnership Plan to the Department for Education and NHS England, setting out a clear and deliverable programme through to March 2029.

The plan focuses on two key priorities:

- Strengthening mainstream, early years and post-16 provision through improved education, health and care support
- Expanding local specialist provision to reduce travel, improve access and strengthen children and young people's sense of belonging

Approval of the plan is required to access High Needs Stability Grant funding, which would support up to 90% of historic Dedicated Schools Grant deficits accrued to March 2026. Feedback from the Department for Education is expected in September 2026.

Our priority is to secure approval of the plan and deliver a sustainable system that supports inclusion while ensuring sufficiency of provision within Leicestershire.

## **Belonging in Education**

The Council has concluded consultation on the 'Belonging in Education' Strategy, which provides the overarching framework for education, inclusion and additional needs.

Co-produced with schools, partners and families, the strategy aligns policy and improvement activity to support children and young people to feel a strong sense of belonging in education. It reflects national policy direction, including 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'.

The strategy focuses on strengthening relationships, autonomy and timely support where belonging breaks down. Delivery will be through partnership working, supported by reform funding and a strengthened governance framework.

Our priority is to embed this strategy across the system and ensure that inclusion and belonging are at the heart of all education provision in Leicestershire.

## **TARGETED FAMILY HELP AND CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE**

### **Joint Targeted Area Inspection**

In December 2025, Children and Family Services were subject to a Joint Targeted Area Inspection focusing on child sexual abuse within the family environment. The inspection was undertaken by Ofsted, the Care Quality Commission, HM Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services, and HM Inspectorate of Probation.

The findings highlighted the effectiveness of multi-agency working in Leicestershire. Inspectors recognised that work with this group of children is prioritised, that practitioners understand and identify risk effectively, and that strong relationships are built with children and families. Assessments, safety planning and direct work with children were all identified as areas of strength.

A multi-agency action plan is in place to build on this position. The outcome reflects the strength of partnership working across agencies, and we will continue to focus on sustaining and strengthening safeguarding practice.

### **Children in Care**

Increasing sufficiency and improving outcomes for children in care remains a key priority.

The Council has worked in partnership with Barnardo's over a number of years to develop local residential provision. Seven of the eight planned children's homes are now operational, with the final home due to open by the end of July 2026. All homes are currently rated 'Good' by Ofsted.

Developing local provision enables children to remain closer to their communities and support networks, while also delivering financial sustainability, with projected savings of £2 million over the next four years.

We will continue to review and strengthen sufficiency through both in-house provision and commissioning arrangements to ensure that children receive the right care in the right place.

Alongside this, fostering remains a central priority. Campaigns to recruit and retain foster carers continue, supported by a range of incentives. The Council remains committed to its role as a fostering-friendly employer.

### **Families First Partnership Programme**

The Families First Partnership Programme is the delivery mechanism for national reform of children's social care, with a strong emphasis on early help, multi-agency safeguarding, and supporting families to safely care for children at home.

Progress is being made with strong engagement across the partnership. This includes the secondment of police and health professionals, alongside education colleagues, to strengthen integrated multi-agency working.

The programme is now in the design phase, with two pilot models being implemented over the summer: one focused on the wider family help model, and one on a multi-agency child protection team.

Our priority is to ensure these reforms deliver a more joined-up, preventative system that improves outcomes and reduces escalation into statutory intervention.

**Best Start in Life**

The Best Start in Life programme sets out a whole-system approach to improving outcomes for children aged 0–5 and their families.

The programme focuses on early intervention and delivering accessible, integrated services across health, education and community partners. It aligns with national priorities, including achieving a 75% Good Level of Development by age five by 2028.

Delivery is through Family Hubs and Targeted Family Help services, bringing together universal, targeted and specialist support. There is a strong focus on early help, prevention and parental engagement from pregnancy onwards.

Our priority is to embed a coherent, evidence-led early years system that ensures families receive timely support and that children are well prepared for school and future learning.