



CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE:
1 SEPTEMBER 2026

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES DEPARTMENTAL PLAN
2026 – 2029 PROGRESS UPDATE

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Committee with a progress update on the Leicestershire Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 - 29.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026 – 29 was presented to the Committee at the meeting on 20 January 2026. At that meeting, the Committee requested a progress report be presented after six months.
3. The Cabinet approved the draft Plan at its meeting on 3 February 2026.
4. The Plan for 2026-29 was developed in order to fulfil statutory duties and to provide a basis for the Children and Family Service's vision, planning, commissioning and delivery of services until 2026. The Plan and associated actions provide a vehicle for Children and Family Services to work together on shared priorities and to maximise resources and expertise.
5. The Children and Family Service Departmental Plan 2026 – 29 is aligned to the County Council's Strategic Plan for 2022 - 26 and aims to set out how the Department will contribute to the delivery and achievement of the Council's strategic outcomes.
6. It also aligns to Leicestershire's relevant partnership plans including Leicestershire's Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy and Children and Families Partnership Plan.

Background

7. The Children and Family Services Department developed a new Departmental Plan for 2026 - 29, setting out a refreshed vision, priorities and ambitions for its services. The Plan provides the strategic framework for service delivery, setting out the department's ambitions and priorities to contribute towards improving outcomes for the children, young people and families of Leicestershire:

- a) Support children and young people to 'Build Strong Foundations':
 - Focus on development, readiness for learning and learning as a driver of wellbeing for all children and young people.
 - Work in partnership to offer support and opportunities to children in their own communities, to help them reach their full potential, and transition well into adulthood.
 - Work in partnership to identify those children and young people who would benefit from support and provide a shared response to them.
- b) Support children and young people to 'Be Safe and Belong':
 - Work with families to ensure risk is understood and reduced, and targeted support is provided at the right time, in the right place by the right service and agency.
 - Develop and use partnerships to prioritise safety for children and young people and to ensure it is understood that safeguarding is everyone's responsibility.
 - Create an understanding of belonging across partnerships so that children feel they matter and can maximise positive opportunities and links in their families, early learning and education settings and communities.
 - Empower families to build positive relationships and support systems to create safety for children to live within their family or family network.
- c) Support children and young people to 'Enjoy and Achieve':
 - Ensure children and young people have access within their communities to good quality early learning and education that enables them to achieve their full potential.
 - Develop a shared understanding of the impact of inequalities and trauma across partnerships, and a shared approach to supporting vulnerable children.

Monitoring and Reporting Progress

8. Progress against the Departmental Plan is monitored through established Children and Family Services governance arrangements. Oversight is provided by the Departmental Management Team and senior management teams, with regular review of delivery against agreed priorities, actions and outcomes. These arrangements help to ensure that evidence of impact, areas for improvement and emerging risks are considered as part of the Department's wider improvement activity.

Annual service delivery planning

9. At the start of each financial year, each service area prepares an annual service delivery plan setting out the key actions and developments needed to support delivery of the Departmental Plan. These plans are reviewed, quality assured and signed off by Heads of Service and Assistant Directors to ensure they are aligned with departmental priorities and available resources. Progress against service delivery plans is monitored quarterly by senior and departmental management teams. This enables the Department to identify progress, address delays or risks, and take corrective action where required.

Performance reports

10. Key performance indicators are monitored through a structured reporting process that operates throughout the year and across all relevant service areas. Performance is reviewed monthly at service level through Improvement Cycle Meetings, with summary updates provided to the Senior Management Team each month. In addition, bi-monthly service performance reports are prepared for the Departmental Management Team. These reports review performance over time and benchmark progress against regional statistical neighbours. This process enables the Department to maintain oversight of performance, identify and respond to areas of concern, and target improvement activity where required.
11. Performance evidence has helped to demonstrate clear progress and positive impact against the departmental plan, including:
 - Early Help (via Targeted Family Help) interventions are achieving agreed outcomes for most families, helping to improve family resilience and reduce the need for escalation.
 - The reduction in escalation from Child in Need plans, improved reunification outcomes for children in care, and continued strength in placement stability indicate that children and families are receiving more effective and timely support.
 - Workforce stability has also improved, strengthening continuity of relationships for children and families and supporting more consistent practice. Between 2023 and 2026, social worker turnover has reduced, vacancy levels have fallen, and agency usage has decreased. This improved stability, combined with sustained investment in learning, quality assurance and performance management, provides a strong foundation for delivering the remaining ambitions within the departmental plan.

Continuous Improvement Plan and Self-Evaluation Framework

12. The Department's Continuous Improvement Plan (CIP) and Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF) set out the department's ambitions around early help, safeguarding, permanence, inclusion and workforce development, into specific improvement activity, measurable actions and milestones. This activity is delivered mainly by Children's Social Care and Targeted Family Help services and there is a clear golden thread from the Plan to the CIP and SEF and into individual Service Delivery Plans, team objectives and frontline practice.
13. Progress is routinely assessed through the SEF process, which brings together performance information, quality assurance activity, audit findings, inspection outcomes and the voice of children and families to evaluate the impact of services. Underpinning this is the Department's "Achieving Excellence Through Purposeful Practice" plan, which defines the values, behaviours and culture expected across Children's Services. This ensures that the way staff work with children, families and partners is aligned with the ambitions set out in the Departmental Plan, promoting relationship-based, child-centred and evidence-informed practice. Together, they provide a coherent performance and improvement structure that links strategic priorities directly to the experiences and outcomes of children and families.

14. Progress monitoring is supported by a comprehensive performance, assurance and scrutiny framework, providing managers and elected members with regular oversight of both service performance and the impact of improvement activity. A performance report is routinely presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, providing analysis of key local and national performance indicators, emerging trends and areas requiring further focus. This is complemented by a suite of statutory assurance reports that provide deeper insight into the quality, effectiveness and impact of services for children and families, including:
- Annual Report of the Safeguarding Children Partnership provides assurance regarding the effectiveness of multi-agency safeguarding arrangements
 - Independent Reviewing Officer Annual Report, which scrutinises the quality and effectiveness of planning and outcomes for children in care
 - Adoption Agency and Fostering Agency Annual Reports, which monitor progress against our sufficiency, permanence and family-based care ambitions
 - Complaints and Compliments Annual Report, which ensures the experiences and feedback of children, young people and families directly inform service improvement.

Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs

15. Progress against the Departmental Plan priorities for Education, Inclusion and Additional Needs (EIAN) is monitored through a structured framework of strategies, transformation programmes and service delivery plans. This includes the SEND and Inclusion Strategy, the recently approved Belonging Strategy, Attendance and Inclusion programmes, and wider partnership activity with schools, health partners and communities. Together, these provide the basis for tracking delivery, reviewing performance and assessing the impact of activity on outcomes for children and young people.
16. Progress is reviewed through established governance and reporting arrangements, including performance dashboards, departmental performance reports, programme boards, Wand reports to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee. These arrangements enable senior leaders and members to monitor delivery against agreed priorities, understand areas of risk or underperformance, and identify where further action or assurance is required.
17. Reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee also provides a mechanism for reviewing progress in key areas of work. For example, the Elective Home Education report was presented in June 2026, and the Belonging Strategy includes a commitment to quarterly reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. This supports transparency, enables members to have oversight of progress and impact, and provides assurance that delivery remains aligned with the Departmental Plan.
18. Examples of progress include:
- Waiting lists for Inclusion and Attendance services have reduced despite increased demand, meaning children are being seen more quickly and receiving earlier support to access and attend mainstream provision.

- Leicestershire has continued to track below the national average for permanent exclusions in both primary and secondary schools since 2021/22, indicating that support for mainstream schools is helping more children remain in education.
- The average time to complete a needs assessment and finalise an Education, Health and Care Plan is currently 18.7 weeks. The Service has remained within the statutory 20-week timescale since January 2026, despite an increase in requests, meaning children and young people are receiving support more quickly.

Alignment with key strategies and plans

19. Progress against the Plan is also considered alongside relevant departmental, corporate and partnership strategies and plans such as the Children and Family Services Voice and Influence Strategy and Leicestershire's Best Start in Life and Families First Programme plans. This helps ensure that delivery remains coherent, avoids duplication and supports shared priorities across the Council and its partners.

Consultation

20. The Children and Family Service Department continually seeks feedback from children, young people and families across Leicestershire, through direct work and group work undertaken with children and families, through specific engagement activity, transformation activity and through children and young people's forums. The Plan was informed by feedback from children, young people and families on their needs and experiences and input has also been sought from the Children's Youth Council for Leicestershire (CYCLe), SEND CYCLe, Young Carers CYCLe, Children in Care Council and Family Hub parent/carer groups.

Resource Implications

21. The Plan provides the context within which Children and Family Services' budgets are produced, and the Department will continue to ensure it makes the best possible use of its resources.
22. Delivery of the Plan will require the Department to maintain and develop effective working relationships with a range of partners, including but not limited to colleagues across all other County Council departments, District Councils, Health, Police, Leicester City and Rutland Councils and the voluntary and community sector.

Conclusions

23. Processes are in place to give departmental management and elected members a clear line of sight from the strategic priorities in the Departmental Plan through to operational delivery, providing assurance that progress is being actively monitored through robust governance mechanisms, and that the ambitions set out in the Departmental Plan are being translated into measurable improvements in practice, service quality and outcomes for children, young people and families across Leicestershire.

Background papers

Draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026-29, Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 20 January 2026:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=8410&Ver=4>

Draft Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2026-29, Cabinet, 3 February 2026:

<https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=8304&Ver=4>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

24. None

Equality Implications

25. The Children and Family Service's Departmental plan is for all children and young people living in Leicestershire and their families. The plan would not seek to discriminate against any child or young person but rather to ensure that the needs of all children and young people are met, therefore there is the potential for all children, young, their families to experience a positive impact as a result of the plan.

26. There are no equalities implications arising from this report.

Human Rights Implications

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

Appendices

Children and Families Departmental Plan 2026 -29

Officer(s) to Contact

Sharon Cooke
Interim Director of Children and Family Services
Tel: 0116 305
Email: sharon.cooke@leics.gov.uk

Mala Razak
Children and Families Partnership Manager
Tel: 0116 305 8055
Email: mala.razak@leics.gov.uk