

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 21 MAY 2014

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEAD MEMBER CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Over the past year we have continued to respond to new and demanding national policy affecting services for children and their families, in particular from the Children and Families Act and the review of School Funding arrangements. I am pleased to be able to tell the Council that we have met the significant demands for swift change whilst continuing to maintain high quality and modernised service provision. Some examples of our innovation from the last few months are:

- On 29th April our Care Leavers Charter was launched in this Chamber, fulfilling our promise to support our older young people in care towards independence;
- Earlier in April we hosted a three-day international conference, together with Professor Eileen Munro, about ‘Signs of Safety’, the methodology that we now use in our social care assessment process;
- During March over 8000 young people in schools were able to see ‘Sophie’s Choice’, a specially commissioned and powerful piece of theatre about child sexual exploitation and how to stay safe;
- Also in March our Children in Care choir, Beacon Voices, performed on stage at Wembley Arena to an audience of 5000 people;
- In February we saw the opening of Ashmount Special School;
- And in January we celebrated the achievements of our Children in Care over two evening events at Loughborough University.

I am pleased to report on progress we have made with our partners in Leicestershire Police in responding to children and young people who go missing from home and particularly those who go missing from care. This work has brought together police and staff from the County Council, provided them with new guidance and supported them through the delivery of bespoke training. All of this has resulted in a reduction of 63% of children and young people who go missing from Leicestershire’s care. But there is further work to do, especially in relation to those children and young people who go missing from private children’s homes that are the responsibility of other local authorities.

Our partnership working is also strong as a result of our work to support our most ‘troubled’ families through our Supporting Leicestershire Families service, which has now been in place for just over a year. During that time 338 families have been supported by our 51 Family Support Workers who are based in localities across Leicestershire. As a result of the intensive support provided domestic violence and incidents of anti-social behaviour have reduced, children are attending and achieving in school and parents are now in employment.

In the recent Government announcement, Leicestershire was praised for its significant achievements in meeting the Payments By Results targets to turn around 810 families by March 2015. On 1st May it was announced that Leicestershire had achieved 78% of this target placing us second of all local authorities in the country if you exclude the Scilly Isles.

At the beginning of this statement I referred to the Children and Families Act and the review of School Funding arrangements. The former places exceptional demands on the local authority to transform the way in which it supports children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, young carers, and children and young people being fostered and waiting to be adopted. Responding to the new requirements of the Act at the same time as implementing the savings required as a result of reduced resources is challenging and requires radical change but I am confident that there are plans in place to achieve what is required.

Following pressure over a number of years to deliver fair funding for Leicestershire schools, I am pleased that the Department for Education announced in March that Leicestershire will benefit from £350m of additional school funding in 2015/16. Whilst the final allocations are not expected to be announced until June, the consultation indicates an additional £17.2m in school funding – this is welcomed by the County Council and schools alike. The campaign for fairer funding is not over, the introduction of the national funding formula has been delayed and I will continue to campaign to ensure that Leicestershire receives the fair funding our schools deserve.