

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 24th SEPTEMBER 2014

POSITION STATEMENT BY THE LEAD MEMBER

CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Since my last statement to the Council in May 2014 I am pleased to be able to report that Children and Family Services have continued to provide prompt and effective support to children of all ages and their families. I receive a weekly briefing from the Director regarding the work of the department and a specific report as necessary every two weeks about children who go missing.

In the past few months the national concerns around the way in which local authorities respond to child sexual exploitation have received high profile. I have sought specific assurance regarding the experiences of our children in care and the safeguarding of the wider children's population. I am continuing talk to our children in care about the quality of their experiences and I also talk to staff to understand their working environment and the pressures they face.

In response to the report by Professor Alexis Jay commissioned by Rotherham council in relation to Child Sexual Exploitation, Ofsted has announced that it will carry out a short programme of thematic inspections of 8 local authorities in order to develop an understanding of the factors which facilitate or hinder good quality practice and effective protection. The thematic inspections will commence in mid-September and be completed by the end of October 2014. A report will be published in late autumn.

The strong working relationship between partners on the Local Safeguarding Children's Board has meant that we are prepared for the increasing focus on safeguarding children from sexual exploitation and the Board is undertaking a review of its own practice in light of the recommendations contained in the Jay Report. Additionally, a new unit is now in place with staff from the Police and Children and Family Services working together in one team, sharing information, expertise and resources to protect and support children and young people from child sexual exploitation.

We can never be complacent about the steps we take to protect children from harm and so, even though I am confident about the quality of our services, I will continue to challenge and seek re-assurance from the department about its work.

At this time of year it is customary for me to tell you about examination and test results so:

- starting with our youngest children when they enter school I am very pleased to be able to tell you that the early years key measure of children achieving a good level of development has increased by 12 percentage points which is 4 percentage points above the national increase.
- At Key Stage 2 this year there is an increase in the number of children reaching the required level in every subject compared to 2013. Reading has increased from 86% to 89%, Writing from 82% to 85% and Maths from 84% to 86%. This increase reflects the hard work put in by young people and their teachers and I'd like to congratulate them on their achievements. We want all young people to reach their potential and the progress made suggests that the strong partnerships we have with schools are benefiting pupils' learning.
- The GCSE and A level results are yet to be properly validated, but I can tell you that GCSE outcomes are likely to reflect the national picture, that A level the performance is looking positive, and that NEET figures are the lowest they have ever been at 2.8%.

Over the last academic year 64 schools were inspected and more improved than declined with a final position of 83% of schools being judged good or outstanding.

The decision by the government to respond positively to the F40 campaign to make school funding more equitable across all local authorities has resulted in Leicestershire being one of 69 local authorities that will receive a share of £390m in 2015/16. It is estimated that the Leicestershire Dedicated Schools Grant will increase by £20.48m which is great news for our schools and children alike.

I would also like to share with the Council some of the other achievements that the department has secured over the past few months:

- You will already be aware of the approval by the DCLG for Leicestershire to be an early adopter of Phase 2 of the Troubled Families programme.
- I can also tell you that the demanding requirements of the Children and Families Act legislation regarding children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities that needed to be met by 1st September have been achieved and that the visit from the Department for Education was complimentary regarding our approach.
- Last week I was involved in the launch of a new Housing Protocol for 16 and 17 year olds that seals an agreement between ourselves, the district councils, and other bodies that will make significant improvements in the way that homeless young people are supported.
- In July our anti-bullying team received a Stonewall Award for its work in combating homophobic bullying in schools.

- Our children in care choir, Beacon Voices, has been invited to sing at the Southbank in London on 7th October as part of the National Achievement Conference. This is a tremendous accolade for our young people and contributes so much to their opportunities to build confidence and self-esteem.
- And finally, the Leicestershire Schools Symphony Orchestra has been invited to play at the Royal Albert Hall on 14 November as part of the Schools Prom. I am really delighted for the young people involved and this will be a great platform for Leicestershire too!