

**CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -  
3 NOVEMBER 2014**

**SIGNS OF SAFETY AND LEICESTERSHIRE'S GROWING SAFETY STRATEGY**

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES**

**Purpose of report**

1. The purpose of this report is to provide Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an update on the progress of the Growing Safety Strategy. This Strategy provides a practice methodology for front line staff and was introduced in November 2012.
2. Growing Safety is the County Council's approach to the implementation and use of the practice methodology known as Signs of Safety. This is an approach that has its origins in Western Australia and which is underpinned by considerable academic research.
3. In March 2014 an information report was provided to Overview and Scrutiny Committee which described the Growing Safety Strategy and project delivery model. That report set out the ambition of this strategy, to transform social work practice using this academically validated practice methodology.
4. To note the progress of the implementation of Growing Safety and the intention to bring forward a plan for strategic implementation across the County Council and with our partners.

**Policy Framework and Previous Decisions**

5. Following the national child abuse tragedies of 2008 and 2009 the Government commissioned a review of social work practice, led by Professor Eileen Munro from the London School of Economics. One of the main conclusions of the review was that social workers should be assisted to move their practice from compliance to competence and thus become more confident in their day to day work with children and families by placing the importance of making and sustaining professional relationships at the heart of their practice.
6. Signs of Safety is an internationally recognised practice methodology designed to help workers think their way into and through their work with children and families, providing tools and techniques to create purposeful professional relationships. The approach seeks to create a more constructive culture that empowers families and builds on their strengths. Importantly the approach builds a common understanding of risk with partner organisations, such as the police, schools and colleagues in the NHS.

## **Background**

7. As indicated above the Growing Safety Strategy was introduced in Leicestershire in November 2011. This is Leicestershire's central response to Professor Munro's challenge that social workers should reclaim their practice and move away from an episodic practice model. Leicestershire's approach to implementation since November 2011 can be described as a groundswell model. In other words, the process has been embraced by front line staff and managers and its implementation has been largely driven by their enthusiasm.
8. The principle benefit of the Growing Safety Strategy is that it provides staff with an agreed operating model and a range of tools for working with children and their families. This means that staff increasingly can have an ability to clearly articulate that "because we have done this..., the result has been...." The workers knowledge and enthusiasm for this way of working is evidenced in their written work, meetings and observations.
9. In recognition of Leicestershire staff's enthusiasm and progress with the implementation the County was chosen to host the Signs of Safety International Gathering which was held in May 2014. This five day conference was led by Dr Andrew Turnell the Signs of Safety Co-creator and was attended by Professor Munro, and not only practitioners from Leicestershire and local authorities from this country, but also practitioners from across the world.
10. During this second year (April 2014 – March 2015) of the project we have focussed on the importance of staff forming strong and purposeful relationships with children to ensure that their voice is clearly heard and taken into account in their work. As a result of this:
  - There is much more evidence of direct work with children;
  - Internal Departmental audits show improved consistency in the work with those children by using the Growing Safety tools such as, Three Houses and Wizard/Fairy Tools (Appendix 1);
  - Better focus on children in the case records and in staff supervision;
  - Most importantly, more children are directly involved in work that is about their lives and their safety.
11. It is very encouraging that the feedback we have had from parents and carers about the impact of the introduction of the Growing Safety strategy is positive. Parents and carers tell us directly that they understand what they need to change to keep their children safe and are helped by the plans about their children's safety being clearer.
12. There is a very clear evidence base to the methodology demonstrated by the Department of Education Innovations Project grant of £4.7 million to work intensively with ten local authorities in England, including Leicestershire, over

the next eighteen months, to implement Signs of Safety practice across all their children's services and to re-design the organisations to support better this way of helping children, young people and families.

13. The Implementation of the strategy is supported by input from the County Learning and Development Service. The following people have been trained:
  - The Senior Management Team;
  - All current social care practitioners;
  - Eighty-five Early Help staff;
  - Forty Four Supporting Leicestershire Families.
  
14. In addition the strategy has begun to focus on our key partners and their staff, and as a result presentations have been made to the Family Justice Board, Leicestershire Safeguarding Childrens Board and Leicestershire Police. It is of particular importance that staff from across the partnership have begun to attend Growing Safety training.
  
15. The next stage of the approach is to step up our ground swell implementation to a whole systems model. To this end the County Council is part of a consortium of local authorities whom along with Professor Munro has bid to the Department for Education's Innovation Fund. The objective of this is twofold, to benefit from common learning across the authorities and to ensure that Growing Safety is adopted across the County Council and with our partners at a strategic level.

### **Consultations**

16. At the heart of the implementation of this strategy has been the contributions of staff and the comments of parents and carers. Parents and carers comment that they increasingly understand why their family has a social worker and what they need to do to make their children safe. They say it helps them identify and secure support within their own family networks.

### **Resource Implications**

17. The current implementation of Growing Safety is incorporated into the existing Budget.

### **Conclusions**

18. This is the second year of the Growing Safety Strategy that has had a tangible impact upon the work of staff and their impact on children and families' lives. This has included; better understanding of children and their parents/carers, more evidence that through staff's improved confidence in using the Growing Safety tools that children have been kept safe. There is a real sense of enthusiasm for the approach amongst the staff.

**Background Papers**

None.

**Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure**

None.

**List of Appendices**

Appendix 1 - Three Houses and Wizard/Fairy Tools

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**Equality and Human Rights Implications**

19. The work of the Children and Family Service is frequently with those children and families who are most vulnerable. This practice methodology has significantly improved staff's ability to work effectively with this group.