

Leicester
City Council

WARDS AFFECTED
(City-Wide)

FORWARD TIMETABLE OF CONSULTATION AND MEETINGS:

**Social Services and Personal Health Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet**

**23rd April 2003
16th June 2003**

CHILDREN & FAMILIES SERVICE STRATEGY 2002 – 2005

Report of the Corporate Director for Health and Social Care

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to brief Members on the Children & Families' Service Strategy "Developing Families' Strengths Keeping Children Safe, Looking After Children Well" (See attached document). This strategy is intended to contribute to achieving coherence, co-ordination and direction for children's services within Leicester City and to aid the identification and achievement of specific strategic goals.
- 1.2 The strategy was welcomed by the Social Care and Health Scrutiny Committee when considered at their meeting on 23 April 2003.

2. Summary

- 2.1 The core responsibility of Children's Services is to work with children who are assessed as "in need" and this is reflected in three core priority areas:
- **Developing the strengths within families** to prevent family breakdown, abuse or neglect
 - **Keeping children safe** from abuse and neglect
 - **Looking after children well** when they do have to be cared for outside their own families
- 2.2 These three areas inter-link and the range of services provided should all promote good long-term outcomes for the most vulnerable children in Leicester.
- 2.3 Developing the strengths within families reduces the need to intervene to safeguard children and reduces the need to look after children outside their own families.
- 2.4 Values underpin our work and these are set out in appendix 3.

2.5 Our core work is about providing high quality services for children in need, and supporting the development of preventative services in Leicester with multi-agency partners (see appendix 1).

2.6 The strategic direction of improvement plans for children’s services includes actions to:

- Reduce the numbers of looked after children to enhance our capacity to care well for those who receive this service and to free resources to build capacity in our own services to support children at home
- Ensure that child protection processes are reserved for those children who are at risk of significant harm, but remain committed to high standards of safeguarding services
- Build the range and quality of our family support services and our capacity to plan and meet needs of children in need
- Plan and design services in conjunction with children and families and other agencies and communities.

3. Recommendation

3.1 Cabinet is asked to approve the Children and Families Service Strategy 2002 – 2005 “Developing Families Strengths Keeping Children Safe, Looking After Children Well”.

4. Headline Financial and legal Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial or legal implications arising from this report. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

5. Other Implications

OTHER IMPLICATIONS	YES/NO	Paragraph References Within Supporting information
Equal Opportunities	YES	Throughout
Policy	YES	Throughout
Sustainable and Environmental	NO	
Crime and Disorder	YES	Throughout
Human Rights Act	NO	
Elderly/People on Low Income	NO	

6. Background Papers – Local Government Act 1972

The Children Act 1989

Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need & Their Families
Department of Health, 2000

The Local Preventative Strategy, Interim Guidance, December 2002

7. Consultations

All staff across the two Children’s Divisions have been invited to contribute to the development of the Service Strategy.

All Child Care managers have contributed to the formulation of the document.

8. Report Author/Officer to contact

Andrew Bunyan, Service Director Assessment and Strategy
(Tel: 252 8306)

DECISION STATUS

Key Decision	No
Reason	N/A
Appeared in Forward Plan	No
Executive or Council Decision	Executive (Cabinet)



SOCIAL CARE & HEALTH DIRECTORATE

CHILDREN & FAMILIES' SERVICES STRATEGY 2002 - 2005

**DEVELOPING FAMILIES'
STRENGTHS
KEEPING CHILDREN
SAFE
LOOKING AFTER
CHILDREN WELL**



1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 This document sets out the strategy for the two children's divisions in the Social Care and Health Directorate. The overall purpose of our work is to provide a range of services for children and young people in need.
- 1.2 The strategy for our work with children set out in this document supports the Leicester Preventative Strategy which links the work of all agencies in relation to children (see appendix 2). Having a strategy provides clarity and focus for our work, and helps us to monitor whether we achieve our goals. It is being implemented through a broad range of implementation plans (see appendix 2)

2.0 Our Strategic Direction

- 2.1 Our core responsibility is to work with children who are assessed as “in need” and this is reflected in three core priority areas:
- **Developing the strengths within families** to prevent family breakdown, abuse or neglect,
 - **Keeping children safe** from abuse and neglect
 - **Looking after children well** when they do have to be cared for outside their own families.
- 2.2. These three areas interlink and the range of services provided should all promote good long-term outcomes for the most vulnerable children in Leicester.
- 2.3 Values underpin our work - these are set out in appendix 4.
- 2.4 Developing the strengths within families reduces the need to intervene to safeguard children and reduces the need to look after children outside their own families.
- 2.5 Our core work is about providing high quality services for children in need, and supporting the development of preventative services in Leicester with multi-agency partners (see appendix 1).
- 2.6 The strategic direction of improvement plans for children’s services includes actions to:
- Reduce the numbers of looked after children to enhance our capacity to care well for those who receive this service and to free resources to build capacity in our own services to support children at home
 - Ensure that child protection processes are reserved for those children who are at risk of significant harm, but remain committed to high standards of safeguarding services
 - Build the range and quality of our family support services and our capacity to plan and meet needs of children in need
 - Plan and design services in conjunction with children and families and other agencies and communities.

3.0 Developing Families' Strengths

Our strategic aims are to:

- provide services which are designed to encourage and enhance the capacity of the family to become more able to meet the social care needs of their children. This will prevent existing difficulties from getting worse, and empower children and families to deal with future problems.
- Help families discover and use family and community networks of support, encouraging both interdependence and self-reliance
- Provide services which use the least intrusive method of intervention possible, consistent with safeguarding and promoting the child's welfare
- Maintain children within their own families whenever possible
- Ensure that the balance between children's rights and parental rights and responsibilities is reflected in services
- Improve the participation of children, young people and families in the planning of services and partnership with them about the services they receive

4.0 Keeping Children Safe

Our strategic aims are to:

- Ensure that children in Leicester are adequately safeguarded from abuse, and neglect through prompt assessment and effective child protection planning
- Maintain thresholds for formal child protection processes which ensure that these processes are only invoked when necessary
- Ensure that preventative support services address the needs of children at an earlier stage

5.0 Looking After Children Well

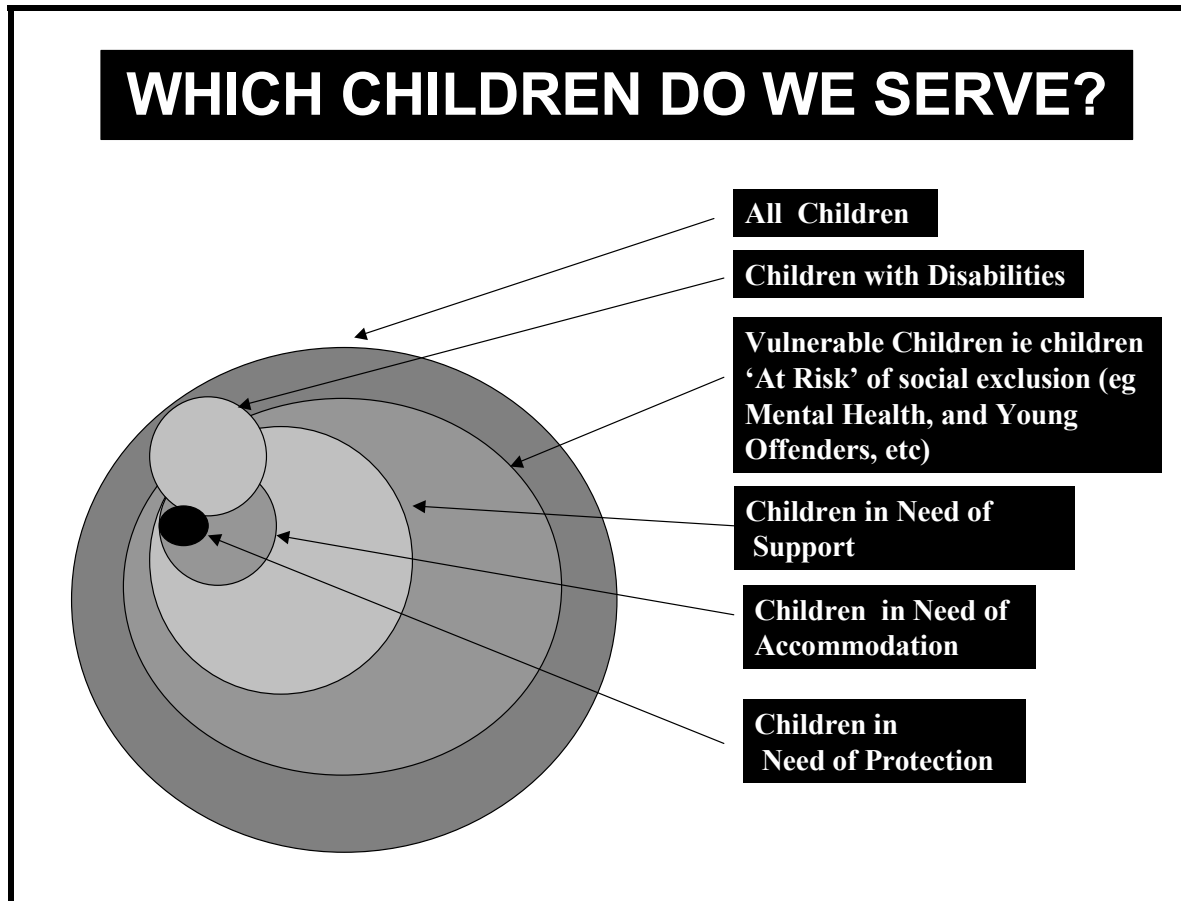
- Providing good quality care and promoting the welfare of looked after children.
- Improving the life chances of looked after children through effective corporate parenting and multi-agency working.
- Our aim is to provide the best accommodation we can for looked after children, ensuring that the right placement is chosen, that there are as few moves as possible, that the child's wishes and feelings are taken into account, and that the planning and reviewing processes are robust.
- Children will not be allowed to 'drift' in care and permanency will be a major consideration as soon as it becomes clear that immediate or short term rehabilitation is not viable.
- Contact with significant others is important and should be promoted.
- Young people leaving care should receive positive preparation and ongoing support.

6 Implementation

- 6.1 **Commitment** - It is vital that staff, have a clear awareness, understanding and commitment to the goals of the strategy. This needs to be promoted throughout the department, and new staff recruited on the basis of their willingness and ability to work towards these goals. The staff Development plan also needs to focus on providing staff with the skills to achieve the objectives of the strategy.
- 6.2 **Resources and Priorities** - Service provision will be focused where need is assessed to be greatest and in accordance with the declared principles and priorities of the department. In particular, this means focusing on services and interventions which enable children to remain with their families, or promote the successful re-unification of families and on improving outcomes for children looked after. Family support services which can demonstrate effectiveness in preventing children falling into the above categories should be provided. Targeting is essential and should be informed by good quality assessments, clear threshold criteria and a robust planning and review systems.
- 6.3 **Multi-agency working:** Good working relationships with other agencies based on a clear understanding of each agency's role and responsibilities are essential for the effective planning, development and delivery of children's services.
- 6.4 **Assessment & Case Management** - The following model should inform our work with children and families:
- **Need:** Clear assessment of need
 - ↓
 - **Threshold:** Determination of how need fits within the department's threshold criteria
 - ↓
 - **Service:** Service/case planning and setting of objectives
 - ↓
 - **Outcome:** Monitoring of outcome and review of service plan
- 6.5 Work with children and their families should be characterised by creativity and dynamism and clear achievable objectives. The task being not merely to describe situations, but to promote positive change which helps to meet a child's assessed need.

APPENDIX 1

- 1.1 It is important to be clear about how we think about the local population of children young people and families, and this is probably best summarised in the following diagram:



- 1.2 Within the whole population of children and young people in Leicester, there are a number of sub-groups as shown above. These groups are not static, and children and young people constantly move between the groups, as their life circumstances change.
- 1.3 Vulnerable children are defined as follows:
- “Vulnerable Children are those disadvantaged children who would benefit from extra help and support in order to make the best of their life chances”¹*
- 1.4 Vulnerable children and young people as a group include those referred to in the Comprehensive Spending Review as ‘Children at Risk of Social Exclusion’, and as ‘Children at Risk’ in the forthcoming Green Paper with the same title.
- 1.5 ‘Children in Need’² are defined in the 1989 Children Act and are generally the main focus of the services we provide. This may change in future, as the impact of a greater focus

¹ Amended version of the definition in the “Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families” Department of Health, 2000

on prevention should reduce the numbers of children in need, giving increased capacity for us to work with more vulnerable children.

- 1.6 Social Care and Health services for children occupy a particular niche in the broad spectrum of services for children and families, with most of them focusing on services for children in need.

² Definitions set out in the 1989 Children Act see sections 17 & 47

APPENDIX 2: HOW THE VARIOUS STRATEGIES RELATE TO EACH OTHER

The Leicester Preventive Strategy is the local interpretation of the interim guidance of Dec 2002. It is the vehicle which enables all of the local agencies which work with and for children young people and families to agree joint aims and objectives, and to work more closely together. It is supported by a number of more specific local strategies, including the Social Care and Health Directorate Children and Families' Service Strategy.



APPENDIX 3: OUR VALUES

- **DIVERSITY:** The race, culture, language and religion of the child and their family will be given due consideration during both assessment and intervention. Individuals and groups, who experience disadvantage and discrimination because of their race, religion, language and culture, status, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, and health status, should be enabled to participate through policies and action which provide for their social inclusion (i.e. anti-discriminatory social work).
- Services should be able to demonstrate appropriateness to a child's race, culture religion and linguistic background.
- **PARTICIPATION:** Children young people and families' views and individual needs must be considered when making decisions with them. Services should facilitate the participation of parents, relatives and other carers and involve them in decisions with their children. Children are entitled to be listened to and respected as individuals, and within the context of their own culture and racial origins. Children are entitled to participate, as fully as their age and understanding enables them, in decisions which affect them.
- Services should acknowledge and respect the contribution of parents and other carers, involve them in decisions about their children and recognise when they need support. Services should enable and empower children and families to exercise choice wherever possible
- **PARTNERSHIP:** Partnership with children young people and families is essential to effective delivery of services which will deliver our priorities. It is also consistent with our values and is expressed by an open and honest approach wherever this is possible without jeopardising the safety of the child or young person. The development of a working partnership with parents is usually the most effective route to meeting children's needs and maximizing participation is encouraged whenever possible.
- Partnership with parents and families can be facilitated, through the sharing of relevant information, case records, and through giving due consideration to their views.
- **PARTNERSHIP – Multi-agency working:** An important element of offering children in need effective services is the development of fruitful partnership relationships with other agencies.
- **The Child's Welfare is paramount:** In all activities the child's welfare is of paramount concern. Children are entitled to protection from significant harm through abuse, neglect or exploitation. In most circumstances, children's needs are best met by being cared for within their families.
- Those children unable to live with their birth families have a right to proper care within a substitute family or within high quality residential care, where appropriate. Those children unable to live with their birth families have a right to proper care within a substitute family or within high quality residential care, where appropriate.