

Leicester
City Council

MEETING OF THE CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMISSION

DATE: TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2025

TIME: 5:30 pm

PLACE: Meeting Room G.01, Ground Floor, City Hall, 115 Charles Street, Leicester, LE1 1FZ

Members of the Committee

Councillor Batool (Chair)

Councillor Bonham (Vice-Chair)

Councillors Barnes, Cole, Gregg, Dr Moore, Singh Sangha and Westley

Members of the Committee are invited to attend the above meeting to consider the items of business listed overleaf.

For Monitoring Officer

Officer contacts:

Katie Jordan (Senior Governance Services Officer)

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Further information

If you have any queries about any of the above or the business to be discussed, please contact:

Katie Jordan and Julie Bryant, and Governance Services, Governance Services on .
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PUBLIC SESSION

AGENDA

NOTE:

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1. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To issue a welcome to those present, and to confirm if there are any apologies for absence.

2. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members are asked to declare any interests they may have in the business to be discussed.

3. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

[**Appendix A**](#)

The minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People, and Education Scrutiny Commission held on Tuesday 23rd September have been circulated, and Members are asked to confirm them as a correct record.

4. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair is invited to make any announcements as they see fit.

5. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Any questions, representations and statements of case submitted in accordance with the Council's procedures will be reported.

6. PETITIONS

Any petitions received in accordance with Council procedures will be reported.

7. VERBAL OFSTED UPDATE/ CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE, EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

[**Appendix B**](#)

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education will give an update on the current position of the Ofsted and Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan.

8. CHILDREN SEEKING SAFETY [**Appendix C**](#)

9. FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME [**Appendix D**](#)

The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help submits a report to update the Commission on the Families First Partnership which aims to transform Children's Social Care by promoting early coordinated and family centred support.

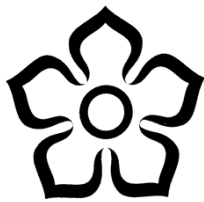
10. EARLY YEARS EXTENDED ENTITLEMENT [**Appendix E**](#)

The Director of SEND and Education submits a report to update the Commission on the government expanded offer of funded childcare to working parents.

11. WORK PROGRAMME [**Appendix F**](#)

Members of the Commission will be asked to consider the work programme and make suggestions for additional items as it considers necessary.

12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS



Leicester
City Council

Appendix A

Minutes of the Meeting of the CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: TUESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool - Chair
Councillor Bonham – Vice Chair
Councillor Singh Sangha
Councillor Gregg

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164. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Sophie Maltby.

165. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members to declare any interests in proceedings for which there were none.

166. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes from the meeting held on 18th June 2025 were included in the agenda pack and asked Members to confirm whether they were an accurate record.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes for the meeting on 18th June 2025 were a correct record.

167. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Chair announced that the agenda items would be rearranged to support a young person attending the meeting.

168. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

It was noted that none had been received.

169. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

170. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCES

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education introduced the report which updated the Commission on the financial position for Education and Children's Services as at the end of the first quarter up to 30th June 2025.

The Head of Finance presented the report. It was noted that:

- A high-level summary of the Education and Children's Social Care budget was provided within the report. The total budget was £119.3m, with a forecast of £116.3m and an underspend of £3m as at the end of June. Of this, £0.8m related to reduced growth and demand for SEND transport, and £2.1m related to vacancies across the directorate. This represented 2.6% of the budget, which is a small percentage. It was explained that while the forecast would be monitored as accurately as possible, the 2.6% underspend may not necessarily continue for the full year.
- Capital forecast information was outlined in the report. Capital schemes were progressing and there were no plans to overspend or underspend on these schemes. It was noted that June was early in the year to judge projects, and one project was currently rated purple while awaiting further developments. The timing of work was dependent on school availability and operational windows.
- Monitoring of savings was discussed, with two savings reported on track.
 - Adventure playgrounds had delivered a saving of £400,000 in the current year, with a further £1m saving scheduled for the following year, which had already been built into the Council's budget strategy.
 - SEND transport was on track to deliver a saving of £900,000, rising to £2.1m in two years.
- Examples of cost mitigation measures were shared. These included investment in in-house residential homes, with two opened in the last two years. This avoided placing children in external placements, generating an annual saving of around £400,000. Work to reunify children in care with their families had also produced an annual saving of £1.3m. The authority was among the first nationally to pilot this approach and expected to expand it further.
- Dedicated School Grants (DSG) balances were reported with a deficit of £22.2m in 2024/25, projected to rise to £43.1m the following year. A special 'override' is in place until March 2028. The authority is awaiting a government decision on how DSG deficits would be addressed. This was a challenge shared by most local authorities. Efforts were being made to manage the impact through a recovery and transformation plan. The council had discussed our position and proposed actions with the Department for Education.
- A transformation plan was in development to reduce the DSG deficit. It was acknowledged that while it would be unrealistic to expect the deficit to shrink significantly, the aim was to stem the growth of the deficit going forward.

In response to members comments, the following was noted:

- Questions were raised on early years provision, noting there had been no spend yet on two-year-olds and asking what spending plans were in place.
- Officers explained that work was required across nurseries to increase capacity to support two-year-olds, though access remained constrained by the academic year and school holidays. The plan was to utilise the full allocation to enable provision across the city.
- Further queries were made regarding the removal of the adventure playground budget, with members asking whether this would shift following the Overview Task Group and whether the money could be reallocated back into adventure playgrounds.
- It was confirmed that the adventure playground funding had been fully removed from the budget. Any recommendation to reinstate funding would need to be agreed by the Executive, with £1m of savings required from elsewhere.
- Members commented on the scale of the DSG deficit, noting that while Leicester's position was challenging, it was not as high as some authorities. It was confirmed that the Government was expected to publish papers next month on the SEND system and the rising national deficit. Local work continued through the SEND Change Programme, including piloting more inclusive mainstream school approaches.
- It was suggested that the DSG recovery and transformation plan may need to return to scrutiny at a future meeting for further consideration.
- Members highlighted the importance of inclusive practice in schools to support children staying in mainstream settings where possible, with appropriate structures and support in place.
- Questions were raised about how many young people were being educated this year compared to last, and how many were subject to child protection plans
- Officers reported that there were around 120 children subject to protection plans, a figure similar to the previous year. There were approximately 609 looked after children, representing an increase of about 100, and around 450 children in need. Demand for early help had increased, driven by pressures such as housing and the cost of living.
- Members welcomed the budget monitoring work and observed that there was no significant overspending.
- Officers explained that education costs were forecast with complexity, and it was suggested that school place planning be invited to scrutiny in early 2026 to inform members. Questions were raised about additional bulge classes in the south of the city, with reassurance given that numbers should even out over time.
- Members asked what risks might skew the financial position. Officers explained that most spending related to staffing and children's social care. While looked after numbers had remained relatively static, circumstances could quickly change, for example through new arrivals under the national transfer scheme, potentially creating costs of up to £1m.
- Members asked whether the Home Office reimbursed the Council for supporting children seeking safety. It was explained that funding was received, but often did not cover full costs. Specialist skills were required to conduct age assessments, and delays in the process sometimes created additional pressures. Once young people turned 18, the Council became their corporate parent, with only reduced central government funding available. Members expressed concern about whether all eligible funding was being claimed.
- A complaint had been received from families regarding SEND transport.

Officers reported that post-16 applications were processed within three working days, and that this year there was an £800k underspend reinvested into school-age SEND transport. Savings were attributed to the competitive procurement of taxi journeys. Members noted that school-age transport was statutory, whereas post-16 provision was not.

- Concerns were raised about the upcoming white paper and how DSG deficits would be dealt with, noting that authorities might be allowed to overspend without it being carried as council debt, possibly to be repaid over multiple years.
- Members asked about the risks if savings were not delivered. Officers explained that growth in spending continued to rise, and while actions were being taken to mitigate this, further funding would still be required in future years. Savings initiatives included reducing the number of children in care through prevention work, building capacity in mainstream schools, and reinvesting underspends on staffing to strengthen family support.
- Updates were provided on the edge-of-care pilot, which had supported 7 young people, 6 of whom had been successfully reunified with families, achieving annual savings of £1.3m. Investment in a new prevention grant was also expected to reduce demand and produce further cost savings.
- Members asked what key financial risks should be kept under review in future quarters. Officers noted that while the current position showed a small underspend of 2.6%, risks included changes in the needs of children, recruitment challenges and higher agency costs, and rising placement costs.
- Questions were raised about the condition of Pindar Nursery. It was confirmed that the nursery was still functioning but required refurbishment, with estates colleagues to be asked for a clearer timeline. Members praised the quality of provision and the dedication of staff and welcomed the decision to move renovations forward.

AGREED:

1. The report was noted.
2. The DSG / High Needs Recovery Programme would be added to the work programme.
3. School planning would be added to the work programme.
4. Looked after children seeking safety would be added to the work programme

171. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

The Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help introduced the report which gave a summary of the five-year Youth Justice Plan for 2025-30.

It was noted that a statutory Youth Justice Plan must be maintained, reviewed annually, and its summary shared with political leadership. Following this, the review was then submitted to the Youth Justice Board.

The Head of Service for Early Help gave an overview of the report. Key points to note were as follows:

- A new approach was being taken after reflecting on previous plans.
- There was now a five-year plan with an annual refresh.
- The board had met to identify priorities over the next 5 years, and the operational priorities for the next year.
- The Youth Justice board continued to have oversight.
- The plan set out the functions, governance and operational aspects of the Youth Justice Service.
- The recent HMIP inspection and the subsequent eight recommendations were also covered by the plan.
- Improvements were in line with the best needs of the young people and victims.
- The plan detailed risks expected over the next twelve months and the ensuing five-year period.
- Ten Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were outlined in the plan. The three top KPIs measured:
 - First time entrants
 - Reoffending rates
 - Custody and remand numbers
- The plan incorporated innovation and best practice.
- HMIP had commended the work with SEND children and young people. SEND panel referrals supported a holistic approach.
- There was an overrepresentation of children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) within the Youth Justice system.
- There was continued investment in the Reach programme, working with those at risk of exclusion, which was a marker for exploitation and future criminal activity. Ten Youth Workers within ten secondary schools provided support to reduce these risks.
- Community cohesion policing work had taken place to support the communities.
- Following a key HMIP report recommendation, a victim working group had been established with a focus on victims and their voice.
- Members were asked to consider and note the achievements over the past year and consider and agree both the strategic and tactical operational priorities over the next five years. Any new priorities would be addressed as they arose.

In response to questions and comments, it was noted that:

- The HMIP inspection outcome was less favourable than anticipated, prompting the following measures:
 - The development of an improvement plan which was presented to the inspectorate.
 - The establishment of working groups.
- The board scrutinised as a partnership and progress updates would come.
- The inspection scheme was new and involved different criteria which had brought fresh insights.
- Scrutiny would come via the management board, HMIP, and also through the Youth Justice Board.
- The board had been strengthened with a new director, having key experience in victim work.
- A quality and performance subgroup to the board was in the pipeline.

- A disproportionality working group scrutinised the data and monitored every child open to the service, and those going through custody. The HMIP report had commended work on disproportionality and diversity.
- The Lundy model of participation, had been adopted and young people were encouraged to shape the service, including with holiday planning and staff recruitment. Children created their own plans with staff, shaped reparation programmes and helped to write and deliver programmes.
- Members noted the strength of the team, but felt statistics were still concerning, in particular the numbers of first-time entrants, reoffenders and custody all being above the national average. Further scrutiny was welcomed.
- The Head of Service for Early Help noted that since the HMIP inspection, numbers of first-time entrants had been significantly reduced and were now in line with the regional average.
- Members were encouraged to take part in the working groups.
- It was noted that Leicester is a deprived area, so mitigating support was necessary to prevent crime.
- It was suggested that a piece of work mapping the city youth provision would be best managed by The Children's Trust.
- Members suggested future partnership with universities to further understanding of youth crime.
- The workforce in place remained stable with experienced staff, coaching and support was in place. An Operational leadership change was noted.

AGREED:

1. That the report is noted.
2. That the executive liaises with The Children's Trust regarding mapping out city youth provision.

172. EDGE OF CARE STRATEGY 2025 - 2027

The Director of Children's Social Care and Education submitted a report on the Edge of Care Strategy which set out the understanding of Leicester's current needs.

The Head of Service for Early Help, Targeted Service and The Service Manager for Family Therapies gave a presentation on the Edge of Care strategy, which referred to children at risk of needing to be looked after. It was explained that this involved factors such as parental relationships, behaviour, income and pressures on the family unit that could affect safety and stability. The strategy also considered children already in care who might be supported to return home safely. It was noted that:

- Most local authorities had an Edge of Care strategy, as this was both one of the most expensive and one of the most challenging areas of provision. Previously, there had been numerous carers available to meet children's needs, but demand on the system now meant there were often only one or two places available. Focus was therefore on making local family connections, including extended family, and strengthening

in-house residential care to support families to keep children within their wider networks. This approach had been relatively successful and demonstrated excellent practice.

- Leicester's service was regarded as exceptional and unparalleled in many parts of the UK. It had developed over twelve years from humble beginnings to a comprehensive local offer, supporting children to stay with their families where possible. This was seen as a distinctive and valuable feature compared with other parts of the country.
- There was no single definition of "edge of care," but it was described as those children whose needs could be met through family-based services and therapeutic support, particularly for those of secondary school age. Issues leading to referrals often related to parental behaviours, over-representation of alcohol use, and undiagnosed conditions such as PTSD or personality disorders.
- The "Safe Steps Home" programme was presented as a key element of the approach. The model had been designed with children and families and included support for young babies and pre-births, recognising that early intervention could prevent children from entering long-term care.
- During the last financial year, the programme worked with around 734 children across approximately 300 families. Of these, 199 children were supported to remain safely at home without ongoing service involvement. It was estimated that without intervention, those children would have entered care. The programme delivered savings three times higher than originally projected by finance, with an estimated £7m saved for the authority. Outcomes were monitored at 6, 12, 18 months and 5 years, with data showing the plans were sustainable and effective over the long term.
- The programme ensured that when children did need to come into care, services could be focused on those most in need. Leicester's decade of experience in this area was highlighted as a source of pride.
- Looking ahead, the next steps included strengthening communication packages and ensuring that support was maintained beyond the initial intensive period, so families continued to develop and apply skills once children returned home.
- It was acknowledged that this was challenging work, but strong evidence from the pilot demonstrated very positive results. Decision-making was now focused on expanding the offer, balancing financial responsibility with the moral imperative to support children and families effectively.

In response to comments raised by Members, the following was noted:

- Members welcomed the strategy and highlighted that keeping children safely at home was the ideal outcome. Questions were raised about how many families were rejected or unable to proceed through assessment.
- Officers explained that only a very small number of families were not eligible, usually where there were high risks such as active abuse, psychosis or sexual harm, which made the intervention unsafe or unsustainable. Some families also chose not to engage. In these cases, safeguarding action would still be taken, and alternative support or placements considered.

- It was acknowledged that despite the success of edge of care services, some children would inevitably still need to come into care when risks were too high. Capacity within the service was also a limiting factor.
- Questions were asked about national averages for carer strike rates, with officers reporting that Leicester remained above the national figure.
- Clarification was sought on how outcomes were measured against Ofsted frameworks. It was explained that inspection findings broadly mirrored the service's own assessments, though there could be inconsistency in how practitioners recorded information.
- Members asked how the service could reduce reliance on very high-cost placements. Officers confirmed that placements were regularly reviewed, with a focus on whether expensive out of area placements were appropriate, or whether children could be safely supported to return home. This work was also linked to therapeutic services and other preventative programmes.
- It was raised about how outcomes were tracked beyond the 12 to 18 months guidelines. Officers explained that cases were reviewed on a weekly basis and that data mining was used to check long-term outcomes, including whether families had been re-referred into the system. While families were not supported indefinitely, evidence showed that many interventions sustained over time, with tracking extended up to five years to demonstrate long-term impact.
- Members heard that a funding bid had been submitted to test what additional evidence-based programmes could work in Leicester, taking into account the city's diversity and demographics. Scrutiny would be updated on the outcomes of this work
- Concerns were raised about how long children remained in contact with services after interventions ended, and whether there was a statutory duty to continue to check their wellbeing. Officers clarified that if a child remained at home, responsibility lay with the family unless a professional raised new concerns.
- Questions were asked about the speed of assessments, with members noting the recommended 10-day timeframe. Officers confirmed that most cases met this target, though engagement with families could create delays. A new policy had been introduced to ensure that where families did not sign consent within two weeks, the case would be escalated to legal and social work teams.
- Members asked how the service ensured equity for children from diverse backgrounds. Officers explained that teams were representative of Leicester's population, with many bilingual staff and access to translators, and services were adapted to reflect different cultural needs.
- It was acknowledged that some families were suspicious of social services. Officers explained that systemic practice involved engaging the family's wider support network, building trust, and ensuring families understood the role of practitioners. This approach had proven successful in securing lasting support beyond the service's

direct involvement.

Agreed:

The strategy was noted, with members expressing the hope that future updates would continue to demonstrate positive outcomes.

173. SEND TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Assistant City Mayor for Children and Young People introduced the item, expressing thanks to the team for their efforts, and their focus on engaging with individual families.

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education gave a verbal update on the current position for SEND school transport. Key points to note were as follows:

- There had been some initial challenges which had been addressed.
- Forecasting had indicated that up to 455 post-16 SEND young people would require assistance during the current academic year. Around 100 of which were transitioning from year 12 to 13, where a policy exemption resulted in a continued offer of school transport assistance.
- Of the applications received to date, 65 had been agreed, 36 were accepted for Personal Transport Budget (PTB) and 11 had been rejected.
- More than half had not applied, follow up work would ensue to understand reasoning.
- There had been a very small number of appeals, most dealt with a stage 1 and 3 pending stage 2 appeal.
- There had not been any legal challenges, either individually or to policy.
- Delays had been experienced in gaining essential information from families and there had been a person-centred approach around this.
- Applications were dealt with swiftly.
- Next year, the deadline for application submission was likely to come earlier to alleviate pressures and allow for efficient processing.

In response to questions and comments it was noted that:

- Members felt that the low numbers of appeals reflected success in taking an individual approach.
- Members expressed concern about the numbers who had not applied for assistance. An exercise was to take place with Connexions to identify support requirements.
- Work was ongoing with internal auditors to understand journey costs in relation to PTBs.
- Families had the option to choose how best to utilise a PTB.
- Parental suggestions had been taken onboard regarding payment scheduling.
- Significant work had taken place to ensure that schools and SENDIASS were able to support families in their applications.
- Work has commenced with schools including Millgate School, support and collaboration plans will form part of the January update.

AGREED:

That the report is noted.

174. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair reminded Members that should there be any items they wish to be considered for the work programme then to share these with their and the senior governance officer.

175. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.55pm.

Appendix B

Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan

Lead Member Briefing: 14 October 2024

Lead director: Damian Elcock

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Helen Sheppard
- Author contact details: helen.sheppard@leicester.gov.uk, 0116 454 1170
- Report version number: v1

1. Summary

Under Ofsted's Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) framework, a short inspection was carried out in Leicester during September 2024. This inspection resulted in the overall rating of 'requires improvement to be good' across all key areas.

Though there were areas of strength recognised, with acknowledgement provided of where previous recommendations had been addressed and significant improvements made, five areas requiring action were identified.

In response to these areas for improvement, an action plan has been developed to drive forward change and strengthen practice. This action plan is being overseen through the Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) governance framework, to ensure there is a cohesive approach to change that aligns to a number of drivers of transformation. Progress has been made to deliver many of the improvements, with new procedures and approaches embedded in practice, though in some areas the impact of the improvement activity is yet to be measured.

To further drive the ongoing improvement activity, Islington Council is providing support as a Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) – focusing particularly on activity related to domestic abuse and sexual violence, care leavers and management oversight. Further improvement will be supported through engagement in the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance peer challenge process.

An annual engagement meeting was scheduled with Ofsted in mid-September but this was postponed until 11 December following the announcement of SEND local area inspection.

2. Recommended actions/decision

It is recommended that members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission note the action plan and the progress that has already been made to deliver the necessary change.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

The full action plan has been shared with Ofsted.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

Inspection process

In September 2024, a team of Ofsted inspectors spent a week on site in Leicester, evaluating practice on the basis of case reviews, discussions with frontline staff and evidence submitted in advance (including policies, procedures and performance data).

Inspection recommendations

The following recommendations were made in the inspection report:

1. The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.
2. The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.
3. The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.
4. Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children's homes.
5. Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.

Responding to the inspection

Acknowledging the areas for improvement identified through the inspection, a detailed action plan was put together to outline the specific activity required to drive the necessary change. This identifies the action owner and outlines timelines for the delivery of activity. The plan also provides a BRAG rating for both the progress on the activity itself and the impact the activity has had. Following submission of the initial plan to Ofsted, it has been reviewed and updates captured.

Governance for overseeing improvement

The delivery of this action plan is being overseen through the Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) governance framework, alongside other key areas of transformation. This ensures that the activity aligns with work being carried out in response to a number of other drivers of change, such as the Families First Partnership Programme and Placement Sufficiency Programme.

Driving improvement with a Sector Led Improvement Partner

Sector-led improvement partners are local authorities that are rated 'good' or 'outstanding' for children's services by Ofsted and that have been selected through a Department for Education (DfE) procurement exercise to deliver this support. Sector-led improvement support can be accessed by any local authority rated as 'inadequate' or 'requires improvement'.

Islington Council, judged to have 'outstanding' children's services in both 2017 and 2020, has been delivering sector-led improvement programmes with children's services since 2018 and has now begun to offer support to Leicester City Council. They have shaped a proposal covering activity focused on the following areas:

- Domestic abuse & safety work
- Care leavers & preparation for adulthood
- Leadership development for SMs & TMs
- Management oversight & managing case work
- Coaching and affinity groups
- Leadership vision planning

Initial scoping conversations have taken place and will be developed further with a visit day on 29 September, when representatives from Islington will attend Leicester in person to further solidify plans to support improvement activity. Through connections made with

Islington, staff in Leicester's workforce have already been able to access specific training and development opportunities.

Ofsted annual engagement meeting

An annual engagement meeting was scheduled with Ofsted in mid-September, but this was postponed until 11 December following the announcement of SEND local area inspection. The self-evaluation of children's services had been updated in advance of the meeting planned in September, critically assessing the strengths and areas for development within the service. When the postponed annual engagement meeting takes place in December, this will function as an opportunity for regional Ofsted representatives to review the self-evaluation, reflect on what is happening in the local authority and inform how they would engage with the local authority in the future. The intelligence gathered from the meeting will inform any plans for future inspection activity and focused visits.

RIIA peer challenge

To further support Leicester's improvement journey, the authority will engage in the biennial regional children's social care peer challenge. Through a structured challenge activity, Leicester will be able to engage in a focused exploration of regional strengths and areas for improvement, with the aim of generating actionable insights, enhancing strategic cohesion, and driving continuous improvement across the organisation. Leicester is in a peer challenge triad with Nottinghamshire and Derby, supported by Lou Williams (a lead consultant). Preparatory work will be taking place ahead of the peer challenge day on 13 March 2026.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications as a result of this report. The action plan identified will be delivered using the existing budget for Education and Children's Services.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 03 October 2025

5.2 Legal implications

The contents of this report are noted as is the action plan. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Signed: Susan Holmes, Head of Law

Dated: 08 October 2025

5.3 Equalities implications

The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are age, disability, gender re-

assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

The report provides an update on the action plan developed following Ofsted's short inspection which took place during September 2024 and focuses on the five identified areas requiring action. The report cites the work currently underway including the support being provided by Islington Council and the preparation underway for the peer challenge taking place in March 2026. The work cited in the action plan should lead to positive outcomes for children, young people and their families/carers who will be from across a range of protected characteristics. The commitment by senior management to the diversity pledges and diversity action plan should ensure equality and diversity considerations are central to our processes, procedures and delivery of services. It is recommended that Equality Impact Assessments (EIAs) are undertaken as appropriate to ensure we are paying due regard to the PSED as part of our decision-making processes.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 2 October 2025

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications arising from this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2246

Dated: 01 October 2025

6. Background information and other papers:

n/a

7. Summary of appendices:

- a. Appendix a Summary improvement plan
- b. Appendix b Ofsted Action Plan – ILACS Autumn 2024
- c. Appendix c Self-evaluation (SEF)

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

No

9. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?

No

An 'Ofsted Action Plan' was shared with inspectors on 12 May, responding to the areas for improvement identified in the short inspection carried out September 2024. The delivery of this action plan is being overseen through the Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) governance, alongside other key areas of transformation. A high level summary is provided below.

What needs to improve	Key activities we are carrying out	Activity RAG	The impact we want our work to have	How we will monitor and measure impact	IMPACT RAG	Updates
The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.	- Implementing a comprehensive performance management framework to support data-driven decision making - Strengthening the practice and recording of management oversight	Green	- Improved quality of management oversight and supervision, progressing plans and reducing drift and delay. - Increased confidence of senior management in adherence to statutory requirements and practice guidance.	- Performance data review in SMT/ESMT/service areas - Spotlight audit activity - Reduced length of pre-proceedings/care proceedings - Numbers of escalations/complaints	Amber	Through senior management oversight at dedicated panels for complex cases we have seen a reduction in the number of young people placed in unregulated placements and effective, comprehensive risk management plans for our most vulnerable care leavers which are reviewed on a regular basis. As a result of holding regular performance/quality assurance session which reviews emerging trends/themes and identifies actions to address areas for

What needs to improve	Key activities we are carrying out	Activity RAG	The impact we want our work to have	How we will monitor and measure impact	IMPACT RAG	Updates
						improvement, several KPIs have improved over the last twelve-month including single assessments completed in timescale, children seen alone in a child protection visit.
The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.	• Reviewing and developing step up/step down processes • Improving awareness of the early help offer • Reviewing all re-referrals and NFAs at regular intervals • Strengthening performance reporting	Green	• Improved timeliness of recording of contacts and referrals • Families getting the right support at the right time • Confidence that appropriate curiosity and understanding of children's lives is informing decision making at the front door	• Performance data • CASP performance meetings • Spotlight audits • Feedback from step up/step down panel	Amber	Timeliness of response and understanding of threshold and intervention offer across community based Early Help and Children's Social Care has improved as a result of the weekly step-up step-down meeting. This provides a good foundation for the development of the Family Help service. Regular quality assurance of re-referrals and no further action has led to increased

What needs to improve	Key activities we are carrying out	Activity RAG	The impact we want our work to have	How we will monitor and measure impact	IMPACT RAG	Updates
						oversight and thematical learning. Data input improvements have increased accuracy of information.
The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.	- Strengthening pathway plans - Reviewing all forms and paperwork - Developing practice around child protection plans, enabled through audits and strengthened use of performance data - Focusing on aspirational care planning - Piloting a family version of care plans	Green	- Improved quality of care plans, which reflect children's identity and aspirations - Sustainable planning at all levels of statutory intervention - To increase awareness and use of Local Offer - Increase engagement of care leavers	- Spotlight and collaborative audits, - Feedback from CYPF - Commendations - Website monitoring - Consulting with Care Leavers - Reviewing pathway plans - Care Leavers Support Group	Amber	As a result of the work that has been carried out, there is a now a high level of completion of pathway plans and we are assured that these are reviewed by managers. Where identified as necessary, targeted advice and support has been provided to individual members of staff. This is to be reinforced by focussed training on quality strengths-based care and pathway plans to be delivered across the workforce. This continues to remain an area of focus, to further develop the quality and

What needs to improve	Key activities we are carrying out	Activity RAG	The impact we want our work to have	How we will monitor and measure impact	IMPACT RAG	Updates
						consistency of practice in this area.
Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children's homes.	- Ongoing QA of external provision and unregulated placements - Reviewing visiting frequency, risk assessments, advocacy referrals and safety planning for new placements - Strengthening HoS oversight of unregulated/unregistered placements	Green	- Unregulated placements only to be used and agreed in exceptional circumstances. - Children and YP in these placements have increased support and input, with clear safety plans to meet needs.	- Spotlight QA - LAC reviews - HOS monitoring and oversight - Feedback from CYPF	Amber	The number of unregistered placements remains low and any such arrangements remain under regular review with management oversight. Robust management oversight and RAG rating processes provide assurance that vulnerable care leavers are appropriately supported.
Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.	- Strengthening practice around involving prisons in pathway planning - Improving engagement with reluctant care leavers through work with Connexions - Reviewing and promoting support for care leavers living outside Leicester	Green	Increased engagement with care leavers in custody and improved pre-release pathway planning	- Care leavers visited in custody - Oversight QA of Pathway Plans - Multi agency pre-release plans - Housing, EET & re-offending	Green	Extending our local offer to the care leavers living outside the city has improved access to this support. The appointment of an additional 16 plus EET worker has further strengthened the support that is provided.

What needs to improve	Key activities we are carrying out	Activity RAG	The impact we want our work to have	How we will monitor and measure impact	IMPACT RAG	Updates
						Oversight of care leavers in custody has strengthened through managerial auditing of pathway plans, supported by the update of operating standards and the identification of a single point of contact within the probation service. A dedicated support worker from Turning Point supports young people with substance misuse. A joint protocol is in development with the housing department.

Ofsted Action Plan – ILACS Autumn 2024

The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.	2
The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.	6
The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.	8
Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children’s homes.	11
Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.	13

23

Colour	Descriptor	
	Activity	Impact
Blue	Action completed.	Impact to date seen as very good & any outstanding issues fully identified.
Green	Action on track.	Evidence of some good impact.
Amber	Action mainly on track, though in early stages.	Impact of work is limited.
Red	Action, although agreed, not yet implemented.	Impact of work seen to be very limited or no impact to date.
NA	RAG-rating not applicable as work not yet scheduled to commence or already concluded.	

What needs to improve						
The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.						
Section Lead		Damian Elcock and Kate Wells				
What inspectors found		- Performance management arrangements are not consistently underpinned by accurate and up-to-date information. For example, data in relation to initial contacts at the front door or to measure the timeliness of response to children identified as living in private fostering arrangements is not accurate. This means leaders do not have a sufficiently precise understanding of the volume and pace of service responses to children. - Managers in all tiers of the organisation are not consistently maintaining a tight enough oversight and grip to ensure that effective, timely support is provided to children and care leavers. - The quality and impact of frontline management oversight and supervision are not consistently strong enough to ensure that children receive the right support at the right pace to help keep them safer and improve their experiences. A culture of ‘high support’ from managers is not backed up by ‘high challenge’ to consistently improve the impact of support that is provided to children and care leavers. Supervision records are often very brief and do not show sufficient tracking of children’s progress.				
Ref	Action	Action owner	Due by	Status	BRAG rating	
					Activity	Impact
1.	Implement a comprehensive performance management framework to support data-driven decision-making					
1.1.	Agree a core data set for leaders to review on a regular basis	Damian Elcock	June 25	Closed	To now be captured as part of Families First work to ensure performance is captured in line with new approach to service delivery	
1.2.	Establish regular reporting into SMT of performance and quality assurance, with team level data delved into during supervision	All HoS	August 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
1.3.	Set thresholds of where to expect performance to be (minimum	Damian Elcock	July 25	Closed	To now be captured as part of Families First work to ensure performance is captured in line	

	expectations), with reporting of exceptions against this				with new approach to service delivery	
2.	Strengthen the practice and recording of management oversight					
2.1.	Create management oversight template and guidance to evidence risk and safety	Keral Patel	June 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
2.2.	Review and relaunch case recording template and guidance	Keral Patel	August 25	In progress	Amber	Amber
2.3.	QA activity around management oversight/case recording - Collaborative QA with CSWT TMs to identify strengths, support needs and systems improvements	Julia Khoosal	September 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
2.4.	Design skills audit to confirm strengths and areas for development of frontline team managers	Keral Patel	June 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
2.5.	Complete skills audit to identify support and training needs	All HoS	July 25	Closed	Skills audit design (2.4) completed but determined not to be impactful to implement so action closed	
2.6.	Launch buddying offer / Reflective 1:1 session for new managers	Keral Patel	May 25	Complete	Blue	Green
2.7.	Refresh case supervision template with clear progression of actions	Kate Wells	Mar 25	Complete	Blue	Green
2.8.	Review and reissue personal supervision, supervision agreement and quality conversation expectations	Keral Patel	May 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
2.9.	Undertake spotlight audit of case supervision (building on ongoing dip	ESMT	September 25	In progress	Amber	Amber

	sampling in CIN managers performance meeting) and embed in feedback cycles					
2.10.	Adapt LL forms so management oversight regarding decision making is clearer, including: a. Update PWP form b. Add comment boxes for management authorisation to relevant forms c. Update LPM form d. Review strategy discussion form	Kate Wells	a. Dec 24 b. Jan 25 c. Mar 25 d. May 25	a. Complete b. Complete c. Complete d. Complete	Blue	Green
2.11.	Focus on purposeful use of pre-proceeding, including: a. Increased oversight and tracking by case progression manager, SM and HOS b. Work with legal regarding reducing expert assessments c. Skilling social workers up in different assessment tools d. Early identification of alternative carers through network meetings	Kate Wells	a. March 25 b. Dec 25 c. Dec 25 d. June 25	Complete/BAU	Green	Green
2.12.	Capture all management oversight re HoS chaired panels and trackers on LiquidLogic	All HOS	Ongoing	Complete/BAU	Blue	Green
2.13.	Review escalation process and put tracker to be in place with SM and HOS oversight	Julia Khoosal	April 25	Complete/BAU	Blue	Green
The impact we hope this work will have		Improved quality of management oversight and	How we will monitor and measure impact		Performance data review in SMT / ESMT / service areas	

	supervision, progressing plans and reducing drift and delay. Increased confidence of senior management in adherence to statutory requirements and practice guidance.		Spotlight audit activity Reduced length of pre-proceedings / care proceedings Numbers of escalations / complaints
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What needs to improve						
The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.						
Section Lead		Kate Wells and Amy Smith				
What inspectors found		- Inspectors found a small number of examples of delays in contacts being responded to and entered on the electronic recording system. In these examples, the date of contact is shown as the date the contact has been created, not the date it was received. This means some children wait a number of days before their contact is responded to, and performance data in this area is not accurate. - Responses by the CASP to contacts and referrals do not always demonstrate sufficient professional curiosity or fully consider family history. This means that children are not always receiving the support they need.				
Ref	Action	Action owner	Due by	Status	BRAG rating	
					Activity	Impact
4.	Brief team managers regarding issues with responses to contacts and referrals (including understanding and addressing any drivers of delay, ensuring the date recorded is date of contact)	Kate Wells/ Karen Dawson	In weekly CASP performance meetings	Complete	Blue	Green
5.	Ensure key messages re curiosity, history, what is keeping the child safe, day to day experiences and child's voice are evidenced in referral and decision making via - team meetings / performance meeting - reiteration of service expectations - focused curious questions for managers	Karen Dawson/ Kate Wells	April 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
6.	Review all re-referrals and NFAs at regular intervals	Karen Dawson / Kate Wells	Ongoing	Complete/BAU	Blue	Amber

7.	Review performance reporting and set what is to be picked up in the reports	Kate Wells (CSC)	LAC visiting: May 25 Contacts/referrals: Sept 25	In progress	Green	Red
8.	Review and develop step up/step down processes reviewed to ensure timely and effective application of threshold, including review of all step up/step downs and update to guidance	Kate Wells / Amy Smith	April 25	Complete	Blue	Blue
9.	Improve awareness of EH offer and service structure within CASP, alongside relationship building across CASP and clusters	Amy Smith / Kate Wells / Karen Dawson / Vibha Gohil	May 25	Complete	Blue	Green
10.	Complete spotlight audit of front door contacts/referrals	Julia Khoosal	June 25	Complete/BAU	Blue	Green
The impact we hope this work will have		Improved timeliness of recording of contacts and referrals Families getting the right support at the right time Confidence that appropriate curiosity and understanding of children's lives is informing decision making at the front door	How we will monitor and measure impact		Performance data, CASP performance meetings, spotlight audits, feedback from step up / step down panel	

What needs to improve						
The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.						
Section Lead		Julia Khoosal and David Thrussell				
What inspectors found		- The quality of plans varies and while they identify needs, actions are not always sufficiently specific in terms of timescales and the outcomes being sought. Overoptimism about the sustainability of change means that some children are stepped down from child protection plans too soon. - The quality of children's plans is variable. Stronger plans are detailed, taking careful account of children's wishes and feelings, reflecting their religious and cultural needs. Weaker plans lack this level of detail and specificity. - LCAs are not always clear about what the local offer is, and a small number of pathway plans contain out-of-date information about the offer. This means that young people will not be clear about all their entitlements and may miss out on them. - The quality of pathway plans is highly variable. Some pathway plans demonstrate a strong understanding of the young person's views and needs and are very specific and detailed about how the young person will achieve their ambitions. Other written plans lack detail and do not reflect the range of work being undertaken to support the young person. When circumstances change for a young person, pathway plans are not updated to reflect the meaningful change in circumstances.				
Ref	Action	Action owner	Due by	Status	BRAG rating	
					Activity	Impact
11.	Review, update and promote the Local Offer for Care Leavers	David Thrussell	June 25	Complete	Blue	Green
12.	Strengthening Pathway Plans - Audits Review practice guidance for plans Arrange SOS Training and recording Strengthening family networks to engage hard to reach care leavers	David Thrussell	June 25	Complete/BAU	Green	Green
13.	Review of all forms and paperwork, including: a. Development of assessment that spans EH/CSC	Kate Wells	September 25	Closed	Action to be picked up as part of the Families First Partnership Programme	

	b. Clarity about what could be changed / what can't (link to v25 LL update and future updates)					
14.	Child Protection Plans					
14.1.	Ensure that any cases stepped down to CIN have clear actions identified and actions are completed prior to closure	Charlene Collins/Helen Smith	April 25	Complete/BAU	Blue	Amber
14.2.	Re-audit step downs	Megan Hill, Sarah Hanlon, Julia Khoosal	April 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
14.3.	Review of performance data re: re-referrals for CP – via ChAT and Performance Data. Identify themes.	Kate Wells with Karen Dawson, Charlene Collins, Helen Smith, Megan Hill	Bimonthly	Complete/BAU	Blue	Amber
15.	Care Plans					
15.1.	Focus on aspirational care planning: All care plans to focus both on longer term goals and steps to get there and actions to be taken in the next 6 months to progress this. - LAC service event focusing on care planning (26 th March 2025) - Good quality care plans shared - Ensure holistic assessments / intervention for CYP are integrated (CYPJS, EHCP). Clearly reference / analysis in care plans.	Rina Begum	Service event / Good quality plans shared March 25 Integrated care plans expectations - September 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
15.2.	QA of care plans and feedback from LAC reviews	Rina Begum	December 25	Not yet started		
15.3.	Family version of care plans shared, piloted and reviewed	Rina Begum	September 25	In progress	Green	Amber

The impact we hope this work will have	Improved quality of care plans, which reflect children's identity and aspirations Sustainable planning at all levels of statutory intervention To increase awareness and use of Local Offer Increase engagement of CL	How we will monitor and measure impact	Spotlight and collaborative audits, Feedback from CYPF Commendations Website Monitoring Consulting with Care Leavers Reviewing pathway plans Care Leavers Support Group
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What needs to improve						
Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children's homes.						
Section Lead		Kate Wells and David Thrussell				
What inspectors found		- The frequency of visits and monitoring activity for the small number of children living in unregistered children's homes do not provide adequate assurance about the care that they receive. - A small number of children have been or are living in unregistered children's homes. These placements are only made in emergencies when no suitable option is available. Placement searches continue and children are moved to more appropriate homes as soon as this is possible. However, during their time in unregistered homes, some of these children are not being visited more frequently by their social workers considering their potential vulnerability. IRO oversight is not regular and robust enough for these children. - When young people say they do not want support, this is sometimes too easily and readily accepted, without persistence to provide the support they may need. While based on a well-intentioned desire to recognise an adult's right to self-determination, this approach can lead to risks to more vulnerable care leavers not being identified or adequately addressed.				
Ref	Action	Action owner	Due by	Status	BRAG rating	
					Activity	Impact
16.	Unregistered/unregulated placements expectations and process signed off at SMT and shared across division (to include unregulated fostering placements)	Kate Wells	February 25	Complete	Blue	Green
17.	Monthly HoS oversight of unregistered/unregulated placements oversight and monitoring	Kate Wells / Mike Evans	Ongoing	Complete	Blue	Green
18.	Review visiting frequency, risk assessments, advocacy referrals and safety planning for all new placements	KW / ME / HL / JJ / RR	From March 25	Complete	Blue	Amber

19.	Invite IRO SM to monthly meeting to report on oversight of new and existing arrangements	KW / JJ / RR	From March 25	Complete	Blue	Amber
20.	Ongoing QA of external provision and unregulated placements via Placement and Commissioning Team and Care experienced consultants	Hannah Lacey / Sam Merry	December 25	In progress	Green	Green
21.	Spotlight audit to assess impact/adherence to expectations and QA processes	Sarah Hanlon	December 25	In progress	Amber	Amber
The impact we hope this work will have		Unregulated placements only to be used and agreed in exceptional circumstances. Children and YP in these placements have decreased support and input, with clear safety plans to meet needs.	How we will monitor and measure impact		Spotlight QA LAC reviews HOS monitoring and oversight Feedback from CYPF	

What needs to improve						
Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.						
Section Lead		David Thrussell				
What inspectors found		- Most care leavers in custody have very brief pathway plans that leave most actions to the prison service or family members. LCAs do not pull those actions together into a cohesive plan, instead noting that others are doing things. As a result, LCAs do not always show drive and ambition to ensure that those care leavers in custody have their health, education or other needs met. Sometimes it is not clear how young people in custody are being helped to prepare for release. - When care leavers are not in education, employment or training, the planning and support provided to them is not always sufficiently ambitious. Their plans do not clearly or sufficiently set out what steps need to be taken and by whom to bring some structure and meaningful activity to their lives. - Most care leavers are in suitable accommodation and care leavers said that they like where they live and feel safe there. When care leavers are homeless, they are appropriately supported to find temporary, and then more permanent, accommodation. A very small number of care leavers living away from Leicester, who are vulnerable because of their histories and specific needs, are not adequately supported to find accommodation when they are at risk of becoming homeless. This means the local authority cannot be assured that they have somewhere suitable to live.				
Ref	Action	Action owner	Due by	Status	BRAG rating	
					Activity	Impact
22.	LCAs will liaise directly with Prison OM Involve prisons in pathway planning Pro-active use of consent forms to support access to prisons Liaison with LLR to discuss best practice Agree action plan with NPS and CYPJS Collaboration with regional Always Hope Project for Care Leavers in Custody.	David Thrussell	December 2025	In progress	Green	Green
23.	Work with Virtual School Team and Connexions Team to improve engagement with reluctant care leavers	David Thrussell	December 2025	In progress	Green	Green

	Encourage and promote Job fairs. Use WA broadcast system to promote EET opportunities Promote LCT ASDAN. New dedicated ET worker appointed to support NEET young people and care leavers.					
24.	Review and promote support for Care Leavers living outside LA Continue to promote band 1 status for returners to the city	David Thrussell	June 2025	Complete	Blue	Green
The impact we hope this work will have		Increased engagement with care leavers in custody and improved pre-release pathway planning. QA of all Care Leavers completed with Action Plan. Care Leavers out of area have been allocated housing out of area.	How we will monitor and measure impact		Care leavers visited in custody Oversight QA of Pathway Plans Multi agency pre-release plans Suitable Housing, EET engagement	

CYPE Scrutiny Commission

Children and Young People
from Abroad Seeking Safety

CYPE Scrutiny Commission: 28 October 2025

Lead director: Laurence Jones

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All.
- Report author: David Thrussell, Head of Service, Corporate Parenting
- Author contact details: 0116 454 1657
- Report version number: v3.

1. Summary

- 1.1. This report provides an update on children and young people who come to Leicester having arrived from abroad seeking safety, often referred to technically as “Unaccompanied Asylum- Seeking Children”. The report relates specifically to children and young people who are looked after by the council or supported as care leavers and does not reference all new arrival families entering the city who do not receive support from children’s social care, or children from abroad seeking safety who are placed in Leicester by other Local Authorities or who as young adults over 18 years move to Leicester.

2. Recommended actions/decision

- 2.1 The Children Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission are asked to note the information in the report.

3. Detailed report

- 3.1 Leicester City currently supports 52 Children Seeking Safety who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and are eligible for support as Children Looked After (01 October 2025). This represents a small proportion of the 608 children and young people who are currently looked after by the council and is an increase of 6 additional looked after children since the last report to CYPE Scrutiny in January 2025. Of these 52 Children Seeking Safety currently looked after, 3 young people were spontaneous arrivals to the city, 13 from Home Office supported hotels when they identified as children seeking safety, and 36 have arrived via the National Transfer Scheme.
- 3.2 There are three main pathways for Children Seeking Safety. Most children and young people are identified and transferred to Leicester as part of a

National Transfer Scheme overseen by the Home Office. The scheme is based on a formula of 0.1% of the total child population of the city. The National Transfer Scheme was set up following increased number of arrivals of children and young people at ports, and the surrounding authorities unable to manage the numbers. The initial allocation of children to come to Leicester was based on the population of children already in Leicester and totalled 59. The Home Office have recently re-calculated this and increased this across the UK, and we will now be allocated 87 children. We anticipate that as we get close to our cap of 87 young people and other Local Authorities get close to their caps that the Home Office will increase the allocations again nationally.

- 3.3 As Children Looked After the Local Authority has a duty as Corporate Parents to ensure these children's social care, health and education needs are met until their eighteenth birthday when they become eligible for further assistance and support as adult care leavers up to age 25.
- 3.4 Most children and young people coming to the city seeking safety remain older adolescents. The largest group of young people who are being supported are aged 17 although the ages range from 15-24 years. The Leaving Care Team currently supports 69 young adults aged 18-25, who arrived unaccompanied from abroad and became eligible for care leaver services. This represents a small increase in the total number of 477 Care Leavers currently being supported.
- 3.5 The numbers of children seeking safety are impacted by seasonal factors with higher numbers in summer months. There is an annual trend in children becoming eligible care leavers from 01 January each year where age assessments are required, as children seeking safety from abroad with an undetermined age are provided with a designated date of birth as 01 January.
- 3.6 Adult arrivals who are seeking safety and then claim to be under the age of 18 years following their arrival are subject to age assessments. This requires additional professional social worker time, independent support, and interpreter services, and may result in a young person either becoming looked

after or ceasing to be looked after and not eligible for further support. Additional social work staffing capacity in children's social care has been agreed this year to support this process.

- 3.7 The Looked After Children's Team have completed three full age assessments in 2025, two of which concluded with accepting the claimed age, and one concluded that the individual was an adult. Two legal challenges concluded in 2025, and one continues from 2024.
- 3.8 Adults who have not had their age assessment verified and who subsequently have their asylum claim declined can either make their way to the originating country independently or can join a Home Office scheme to return them home. They have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) other than specific Home Office grants. Migrant Help assist those leaving Home Office accommodation regardless of their determination decision.
- 3.9 The overwhelming majority of children seeking safety are male with the Children Looked After Service currently supporting only one female child and the leaving care team two adult young women. Children and young people seeking safety come from a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The largest single group are from Afghan heritage, followed by Iranian and Sudanese heritage, and a significant number with Kurdish heritage.
- 3.10 As the age profile of children and young people seeking safety is mainly over 18 years, most of the young people being supported live in semi-independent accommodation in the community, with a smaller number of young people living in foster care or children's residential homes. These arrangements are subject to the same safeguarding and quality assurance systems that are in place for all children looked after and care leavers. This includes regular care plan and pathway plan reviews by a named social worker or leaving care advisor, visiting arrangements, tailored support agreed with the young person, and access to advocacy support.

- 3.11 Children and young people who are seeking safety are supported with integration into their local communities in accordance with their religious and cultural preferences. This may include support offered by churches, mosques, and temples together with services offered by local voluntary and community groups such as the Centre Project that provides a dedicated youth space with advice and support for young people seeking safety.
- 3.12 Children who are seeking safety and who are looked after by the council are supported by our Virtual School Team to integrate into local schools and are provided with a range of curricular and extra-curricular activities that are provided to all our children looked after. Our Virtual School work with a range of organisations to provide additional post curricular enrichment activities.
- 3.13 The Virtual School have worked with partners in the authority to address the increasing need for English for Speakers of other Languages (ESOL) provision for our young people seeking safety. As local training providers and colleges are often full or do not admit midway through the year, a new project was launched in January 2025, to extend our ESOL offer as part of the DfE grant funded Staying Close and Connected programme for care leavers. The Adult Education Centre have provided ESOL teachers to support our young people to access the course and to provide enrichment activities that will help to prepare them for life in Leicester and beyond. We have been able to secure this funding for an additional academic year through Staying Close, Staying Connected. The previous cohort of 17 students have all secured places at Leicester College, supported by their allocated Post 16 Officer.
- 3.14 The Educational Psychology Service Emotional Well-being in Education (EWE) project supports interventions for children in care including children and young people from abroad seeking safety in Leicester. Partners at Bullfrog Arts support the 'Journeys' programme that works alongside young people. 'Journeys' explores and connects our Children Seeking Safety with their country of birth and with the other young people who have also sought safety here in Leicester.

- 3.15 The Virtual School Educational Psychologist provides consultation, assessment, advice and support for children in care including children and young people from abroad seeking safety in Leicester. Working with the ESOL provision at the Adult Education Centre, the educational psychology service is providing a further 10-week intervention in the Spring Term.
- 3.16 Young people who are seeking safety and are eligible for support will be provided with careers advice from our Information Advice and Guidance (IAG) Service. The service is part of the team of professionals who are notified as soon as a young person is placed in Leicester and will work with the individual and colleagues to find the appropriate education or training provision. Careers advice will continue to be provided to the young person once they are in education or training, and an IAG adviser is part of the Personal Education Plan process.
- 3.17 Children seeking safety who come to Leicester having arrived from abroad may have experienced trauma and have complex unmet health needs. As with all children looked after, children seeking safety will be provided with an initial health assessment by a designated health professional to identify their health needs which will inform their care plan. Children who arrive from abroad will be provided with translators and interpreters to attend health clinics and be referred to specialist health services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services where appropriate.
- 3.18 A Regional Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Pilot was launched in December 2024 supported by East Midlands Councils to identify local foster carers for Children and Young people from Abroad Seeking Safety. The scheme offers training for any carers who are new to caring or are going through the recruitment process, or for approved carers who may be interested in caring for Children and Young people from Abroad Seeking Safety. Once enrolled, carers will have access to the training for 12-months so that they can re-visit the information contained within the modules to refresh their knowledge at any point in that time.

3.19 The Children's Rights and Participation Service have identified the need to ensure the views, feelings and wishes of children and young people from abroad seeking safety must be a priority. The Service recognises that children and young people seeking safety are a marginalised community and face significant barriers to participation. This could prohibit them from accessing support from children's rights and advocacy officers, and/or accessing groups such as the children in care council or the care experiences consultants (care leavers). To overcome these barriers, the Service has established an offer for children seeking safety. The offer provides monthly sessions at a community space or youth centre in the City to offer a safe, inclusive space to build social networks, understand their rights and share their experiences. Nine children and young people seeking safety from abroad attended the first session. The Service will continue to recruit to this group and ensure that this cohort of children are given their space, voice, audience and most importantly some influence over decisions that are made about their lives.

4. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

4.1. Financial implications

4.1.1 The Home Office provides funding to local authorities in respect to their costs of supporting unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC). This is on a case-by-case basis. The projected claim for 2025/26 is expected to be £2.4 million for 60 cases.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 13 October 2025

4.2. Legal implications

4.2.1 This report is for information purposes only, as such there are no direct legal implications as a result of the report. In terms of statutory duties however, it should be noted:

Sections 17, 20, and 22 of the Children Act 1989 place clear duties on the Local Authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in need and those looked after by the LA. The report references 52 looked-after UASC and 69 care leavers, meaning the council has corporate parenting responsibilities under s.22 and must ensure care, health, and educational needs are met. Failure to provide appropriate accommodation, support, or protection could expose the council to Judicial Review and/or Human Rights Act challenges.

- 4.2.2 Age assessments are a significant legal risk area and numerous assessments have been challenged; the LA must ensure robust procedure, record-keeping, and adherence to the Home Office and ADCS Age Assessment Guidance (2023) and relevant case law.
- 4.2.3 UASC are a highly vulnerable cohort. Under Working Together to Safeguard Children (2018) and Section 47 duties, the council must ensure proper identification and response to safeguarding concerns (e.g., trafficking, missing episodes) and coordination with police, health, and voluntary sector partners.
- 4.2.4 Under the Modern Slavery Act 2015 the LA have a duty to notify the Home Office if they encounter a potential victim of modern slavery. This duty, which applies in England and Wales, typically involves making a referral into the NRM for a child.

Signed: Amy Owen-Davis, Principal Solicitor, Social Care and Safeguarding,
Legal Services

Dated: 17 October 2025

4.3. **Equalities implications**

- 4.3.1 The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and

those who do not. Protected characteristics under the public sector equality duty are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

- 4.3.2 In keeping with our PSED, we are required to pay due regard to any negative impacts on people with protected characteristics arising from our decisions (and this would include decisions on how we deliver our services) and put in place mitigating actions to reduce or remove those negative impacts.
- 4.3.3 This report provides an update on the work being carried out across services that support Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children who are in the care of the council or are care leavers eligible for assistance. These children are especially vulnerable and face distinct challenges.
- 4.3.4 When delivering services, the protected characteristics of children and young people, such as age, race, religion or belief and sex have been considered. Collaboration with statutory partners, as well as voluntary and community organisations/group, plays a vital role in offering holistic support and assisting these young people in integrating into society.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 9 October 2025

4.4. **Climate Emergency implications**

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 10 October 2025

- 4.5. **Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)**

None

5. **Background information and other papers:**

- 5.1 **This report is accompanied by a presentation on the support services and local offer to children and young people seeking safety.**

6. **Summary of appendices:**

7. **Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

No

8. **Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?**

N/A

Appendix D

Lead director: Damian Elcock
Lead Member Briefing
Families First Partnership Programme

Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All
- Report author: Helen Sheppard
- Author contact details: helen.sheppard@leicester.gov.uk, 0116 454 1170
- Report version number: v1

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Families First Partnership (FFP) programme is a national initiative introduced by the Department for Education (DfE) in March 2025. It aims to transform children's social care by promoting early, coordinated and family centred support.
- 1.2. The FFP programme will support safeguarding partners to bring together targeted early help, child in need and multi-agency child protection into a seamless system of help, support and protection. This includes services and workforces, such as family support workers, social workers and other specialist and alternatively qualified practitioners, coming together to support families.
- 1.3. The aims of the Families First Programme are:
 - Strengthened family resilience with greater stability and reduced escalation of need
 - Effective prevention and early intervention as proactive support reduces the need for statutory services
 - Whole family approach improving family networks and community connections, considering wider drivers of need (housing, health, work)
 - Better integration and coordination of services to support this, and to strengthen evidence-led decision-making
- 1.4. Leicester City Council has been making progress towards the delivery of the Families First Programme, driving towards the piloting of the Family Help model in one cluster from November 2025. The pilot aims to understand what works well and what needs improvement, in order to inform wider system changes, support the roll-out of Family Help and capture learning to inform the development of other roles. This pilot will inform a wider roll out in April next year.

2. Recommended actions/decision

- 2.1. To note the details shared in the cover report and supporting presentation.

3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement

- 3.1. A Young People's Shadow Board has been established to ensure that young people's voices are central in the co-design of Families First services. Young people have shaped the vision statement for the programme – "We put families first to support thriving communities in Leicester".
- 3.2. The governance for the delivery of the Families First programme ensures that staff are given opportunity to shape delivery (including both through workstreams and membership of the practitioners' forum). Divisional briefings have been carried out

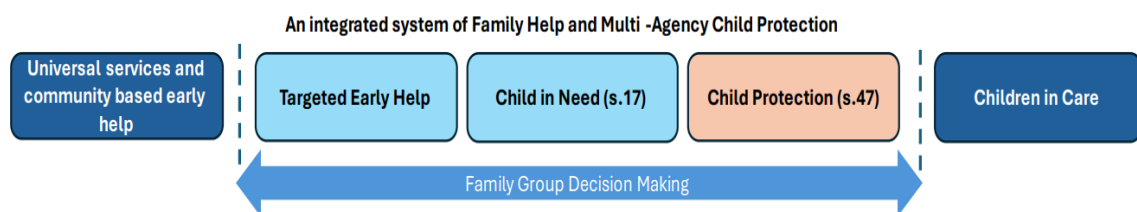
with the wider workforce to communicate key updates and offer the opportunity to feed back.

- 3.3. The IMPOWER team has taken the lead on engagement with partners, building on foundations of partnership work established in the multi-agency IMPACT Board and through seconded health and police roles.

4. Background and options with supporting evidence

4.1. Families First Partnership Programme Overview

- 4.1.1. The Families First Partnership Programme is focused on shaping a system in which practitioners from social work, police, health, education and beyond work together to promote the wellbeing of children and keep them safe from harm.
- 4.1.2. The programme places a strong emphasis on early intervention to prevention crisis as well as utilising a whole family approach to ensure the needs of the adults in the household are also important.
- 4.1.3. The vision for an integrated system of Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection is summarised in the diagram below:

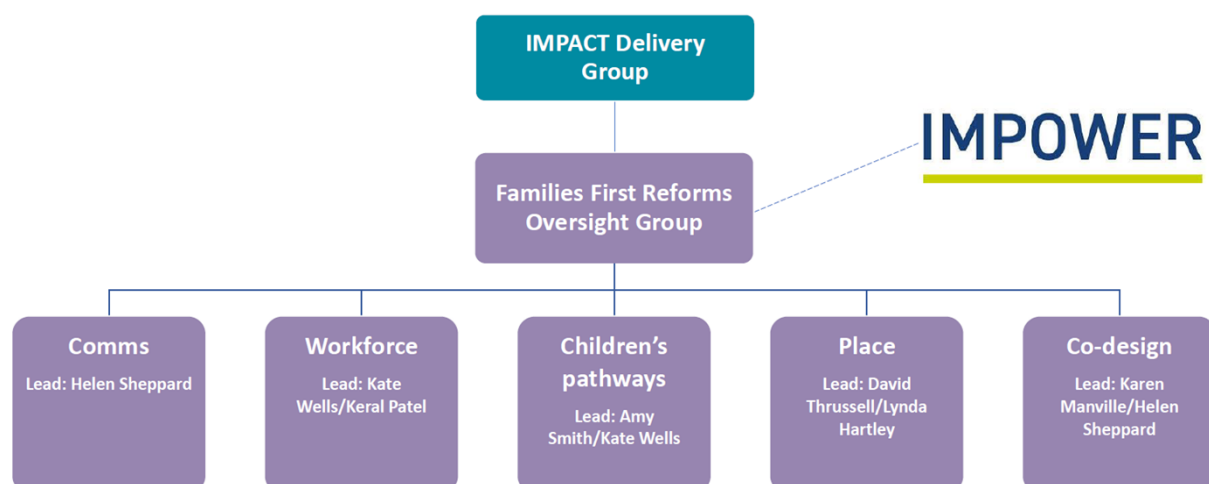


- 4.1.4. There are three key components of the Families First Partnership model: Family Help, Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams (MACPT) and Family Group Decision Making which can be understood as follows:
- 4.1.4.1. **Family Help:** Combines targeted early help and child-in-need services into single, multidisciplinary Family Help teams that utilise a proactive, early intervention approach. The locality-based teams will bring together professionals from different services to support families before problems escalate.
- 4.1.4.2. **Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams:** Co-located teams of professionals across services (including police, health, education and social services) working together to protect children at risk. The teams will ensure consistent oversight through a lead child protection practitioner and tailor responses to local needs, including support for parents and carers.
- 4.1.4.3. **Family Group Decision Making:** Ensures that family networks are actively involved, with support provided to enable family networks to help children stay safe and thrive at home. The approach empowers families to be part of the decision-making around their child's care. It is embedded across the system and used especially before legal proceedings, with clear guidelines on when it should or should not be used.

- 4.1.5. The Department for Education has laid out the following key aims for delivering the Families First Partnership Programme in 2025-26:
- 4.1.5.1. Setting up multi-agency governance and strong programme management structures to effectively deliver reforms
 - 4.1.5.2. Carrying out local design so that services and systems are tailored to local needs and contexts in order to be effective
 - 4.1.5.3. Co-designing with partners to share knowledge and design joined up and effective services that use resource effectively and improve outcomes
 - 4.1.5.4. Co-design with children, young people, families and the community to ensure services are accessible and meet their needs
 - 4.1.5.5. Using evidence effectively so that services are using evidence-based approaches that respond to local population needs assessments
 - 4.1.5.6. Designing end-to-end reform that support changes in systems, culture and practice
- 4.1.6. In Leicester, Early Help teams currently operate in each local area, based across multiple community hubs while Child in Need (CiN) teams are located centrally, separate from the Early Help teams.
- 4.1.7. In the new approach, aligned to the Families First Partnership Programme, Early Help and CiN teams will merge into a single Family Help Team within each locality. These teams will work side by side and include both qualified social workers and early-help practitioners, with a blended management structure.

4.2. Progressing and piloting the Families First approach

- 4.2.1. Governance has been established to drive forward the Families First approach, as captured in the diagram below:



- 4.2.2. Together with support from consultants from IMPOWER, aiding in ensuring the appropriate changes are made at pace, the workstream leads have been shaping thinking to inform a pilot of the Family Help model.
- 4.2.3. The pilot is being designed to trial how locality-based Family Help works and feels for staff, families, communities and partners.

- 4.2.4. The pilot aims to understand what works well and what needs improvement, in order to:
- Inform wider system changes
 - Support the roll out of Family Help
 - Capture learning to inform the development of other roles
- 4.2.5. A workflow has been shaped to test in the pilot. It is not yet decided whether the Single Assessment Team will remain centrally located or be based in the clusters. The pilot will help us determine how this works.
- 4.2.6. Based on capacity and demand analysis, it has been determined that the approach will be piloted in the South cluster (where Saffron Lane and Eyres Monsell Children's Centres are located).

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance

Dated: 15 October 2025

5.2 Legal implications

The contents of this report are noted as is the action plan. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Signed: Susan Holmes, Head of Law

Dated: 08 October 2025

5.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a statutory duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't.

Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED). This statutory duty requires them, when carrying out their functions, to pay due regard to three key needs:

The Families First Partnership (FFP) program aims to improve children's social care by promoting a more integrated, family-focused approach to early help and child protection. It emphasises early intervention, multi-agency collaboration, and ensuring that children and

families access the right support when they need it, with the goal of keeping children within their family networks whenever possible. The development of services in Leicester, in response to these government reforms, is expected to lead to positive impacts for people across many protected characteristics. The current pilot is designed to trial how locality-based Family Help works and feels for staff, families, communities, and partners. Therefore, monitoring and evaluation will be important to assessing its impacts on people.

Important that we understand and account for the diverse backgrounds of families when providing support. Families with children in need are often those experiencing poverty, poor health, and unstable housing. Some groups face greater challenges, the FFP program aims to address inequalities by providing targeted support. These initiatives should, collectively, lead to positive impacts for people from across a range of protected characteristics.

Signed: Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh, Ext 37 4148

Dated: 6 October 2025

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no significant climate emergency implications directly associated with this report. As service delivery by the council and partners generally contributes to the council's carbon footprint, any impacts could be considered within delivery of related projects, such as encouraging the use of sustainable travel options, using buildings and materials efficiently and following the council's sustainable procurement guidance, as appropriate and relevant.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 372246

Dated: 01 October 2025

6. Background information and other papers:

n/a

7. Summary of appendices:

- a. Map of clusters
- b. Families First presentation

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?

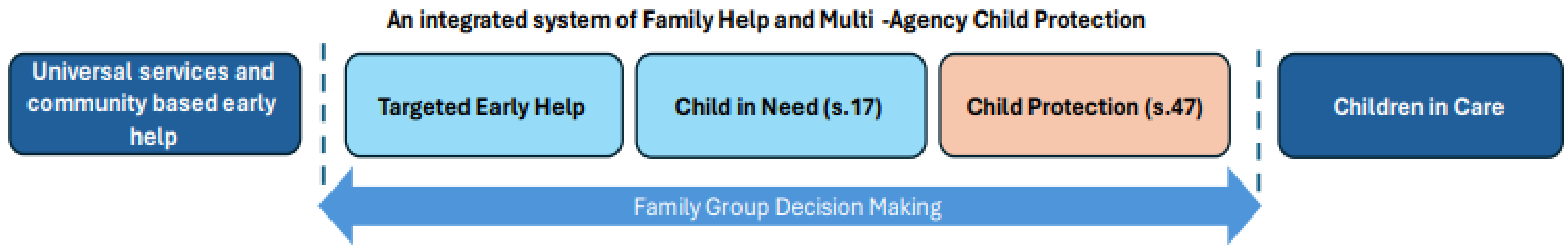
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9. Is this a "key decision"? If so, why?

No

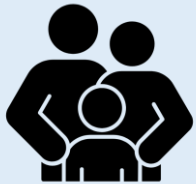
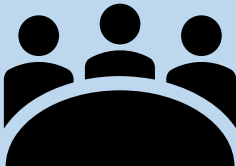
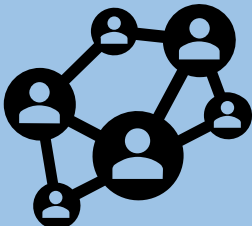


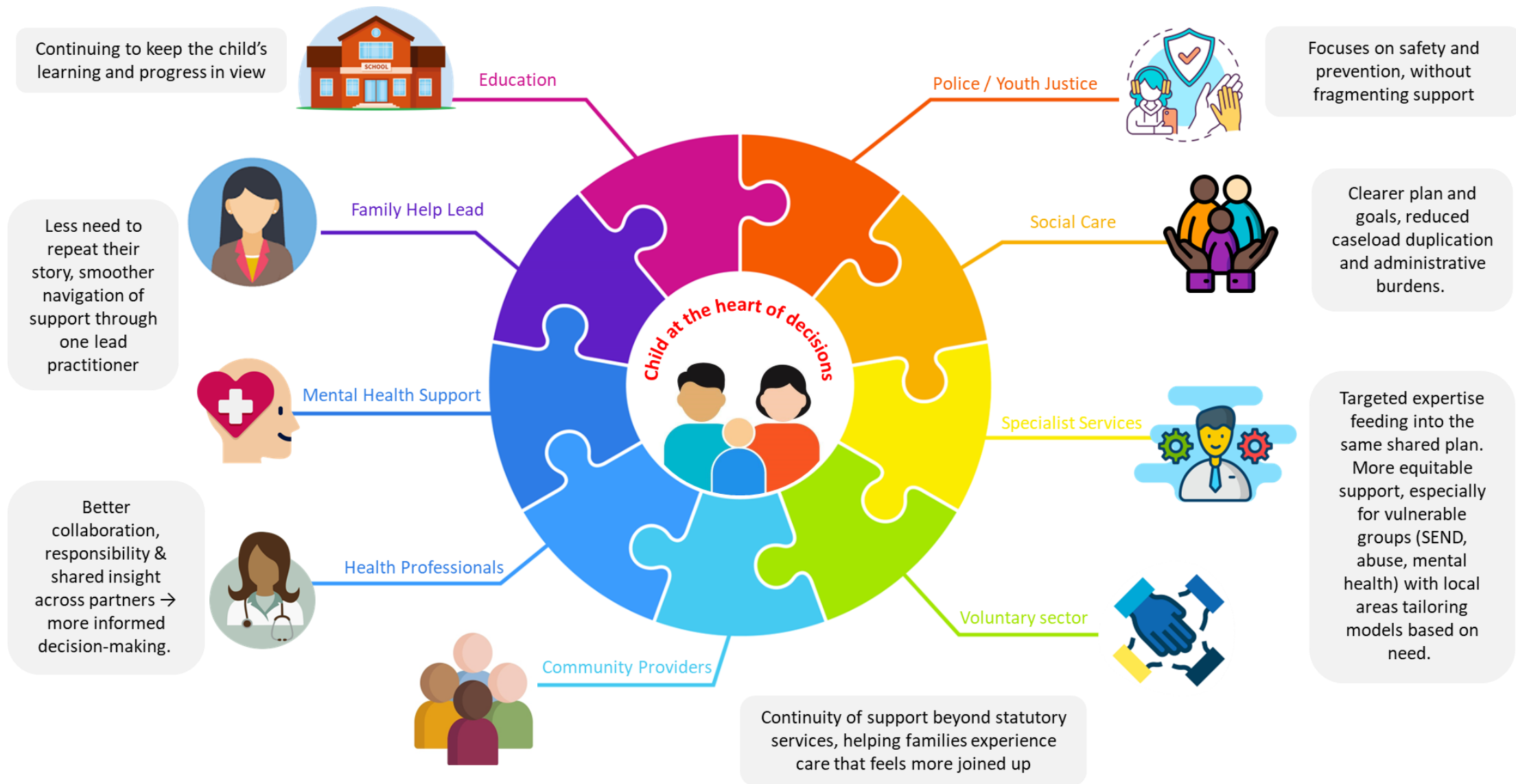
Families First Partnership Programme Update

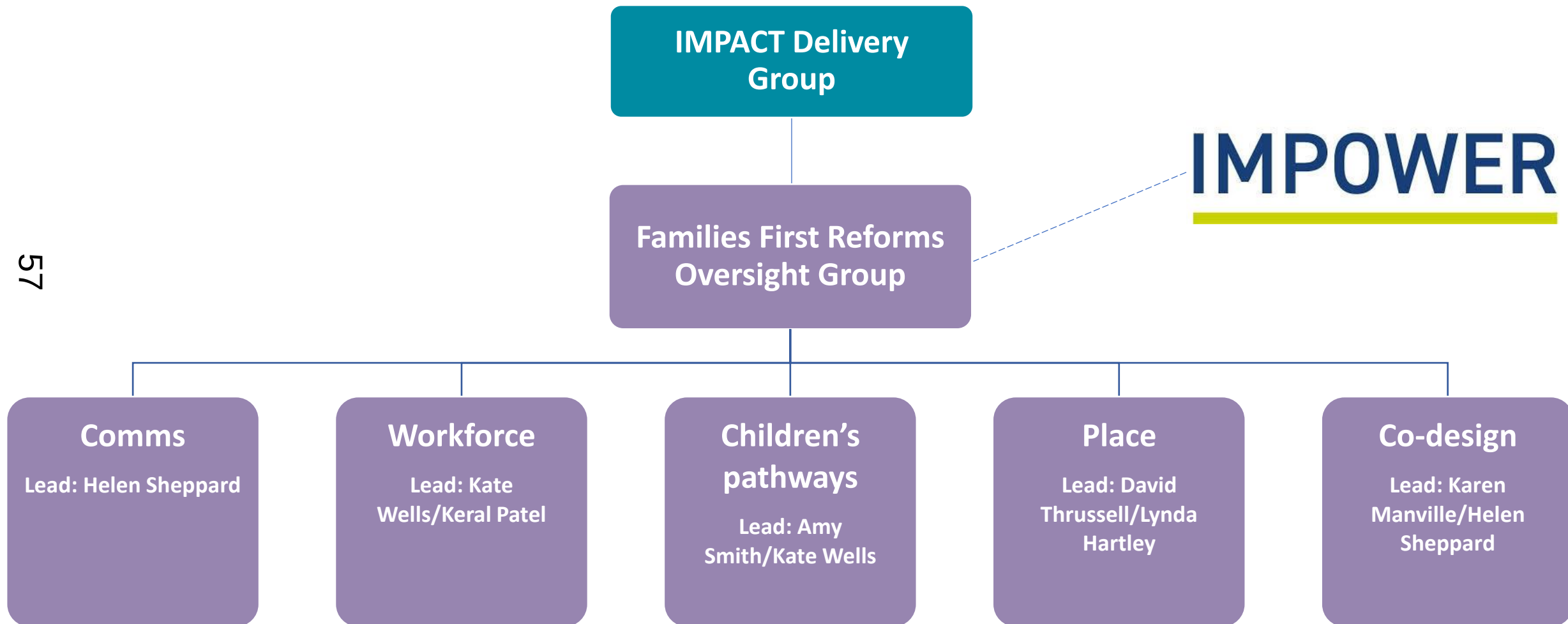


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- Practitioners from social work, police, health, education and beyond work together to promote the wellbeing of children and keep them safe from harm
- Strong emphasis on early intervention to prevention crisis
- Whole family approach to ensure the needs of the adults in the household are also important

	Family Help	Combines targeted early help and child-in-need services into single, multidisciplinary Family Help teams that utilise a proactive, early intervention approach. The locality-based teams will bring together professionals from different services to support families before problems escalate.
	Multi-agency child protection team	Multi-agency child protection team (MACPT) involves co-located teams of professionals working together to protect children at risk. It ensures consistent oversight through a lead child protection practitioner and tailors responses to local needs, including support for parents and carers.
	Family networks	Family networks actively involved, with support provided to enable family networks to help children stay safe and thrive at home. The approach empowers families to be part of the decision-making around their child's care. It is embedded across the system and used especially before legal proceedings, with clear guidelines on when it should or should not be used.





To trial how locality-based Family Help works and feels for staff, families, communities and partners.

The pilot aims to understand what works well and what needs improvement, in order to:

- inform wider system changes
- support the roll-out of Family Help
- capture learning to inform the development of other roles

Pilot – what will be tested

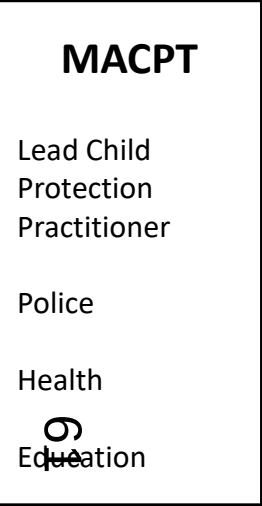
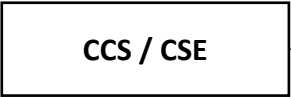
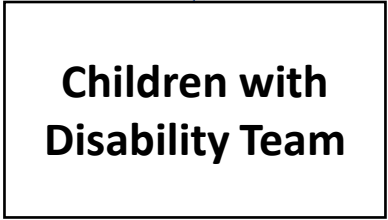
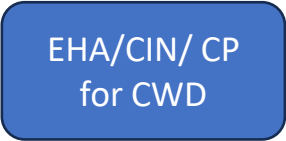
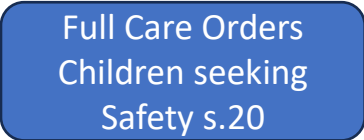
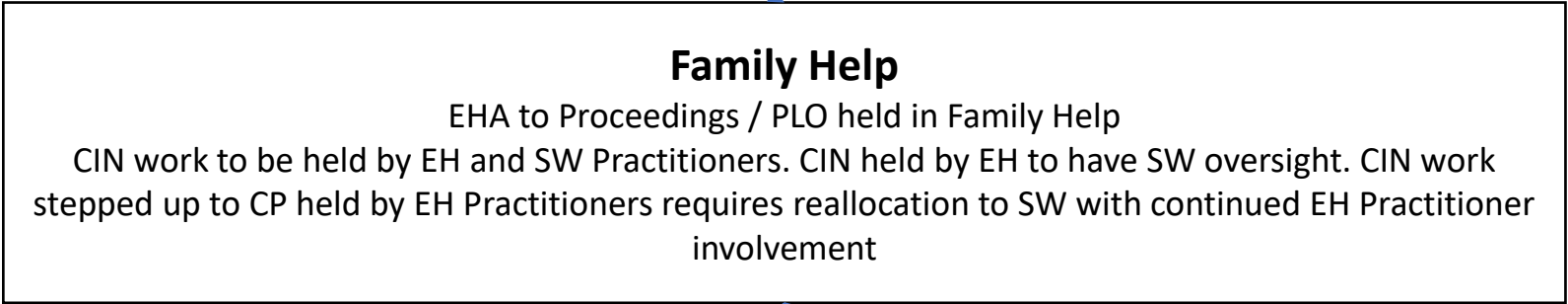
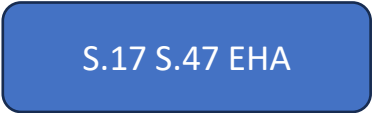
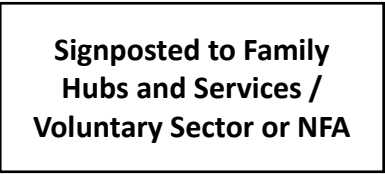
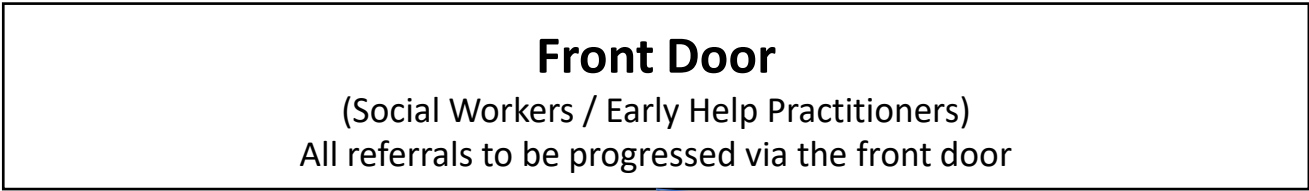
59

- Impact of the new working structure in a cluster
- Testing workflow option
- Family help lead practitioner role
- Single assessment approach
- Thresholds and transition points: CIN <-> EH
- The requirements for locality-based working (practicalities)
- Impact for children, families, and other services
- Connectivity and collaboration between staff, partners and communities
- Training and support needs for all roles in Family Help to feel confident
- Optimal team size
- Admin and support structures
- Impact of the front door
- Role of partners (health, police)

Pilot – what will be considered

g

- MACPT and LCPP roles
- How practitioners can expand their role and skillset in Family Help
- Qualitative impact e.g. reduction of Children on Child Protection plans
- How cultural change is understood and its link with roles
- Language and inclusivity of terminology being used
- How staff who may not be part of the testing phase fit in
- Ongoing communication about progress and learning
- Children with Disabilities
- Feedback loop





1. Introduction	2
2. Reflections from our people	3
3. Context	4
4. Response to Families First Partnership	11
5. Early help and prevention	14
6. Children in need of help or protection	16
7. Children in care	18
8. Care leavers	20
9. Impact of leaders on practice	22

[1] Introduction

At Leicester City Council we are committed to supporting children, young people, adults, and families to live the best life so they can be safe, be independent and be ambitious for themselves. In providing children's services we place children, young people and families at the heart of practice and strategy. We are proud of the passion our workforce have for making a real difference, using innovative approaches and working collaboratively with children, young people, families, communities and partners to provide support.

[a] Leadership

Following a period of significant change within the senior leadership team in Children's Services throughout 2023 and 2024, stability has now been firmly established. Over the past twelve months the team has grown in maturity and demonstrated a unified approach to cultivating a supportive environment for the workforce while effectively navigating external pressures. The sense of stability within the leadership team is underpinned by the experienced and well-established extended senior management team. Since January 2025, scrutiny to decision making has been provided by a new lead member for children and young people, offering fresh perspectives and challenge.

[b] Culture

Staff follow principles of appreciative inquiry and the Signs of Safety framework to inform a collaborative, strength-based approach. We strive to enable children to live with their families and aim only to intervene in children's and families' lives to give them the right level of support when they need it. Our workforce considers contextual safeguarding, trauma informed approaches and adverse childhood experiences in their work. We are proud of the work we have done to develop the use of the Lundy model of participation which ensures that our work is shaped by the views of young people and their families. The voice of the child is integral to the improvement of services in Leicester.

“ As our time together comes to a close, I wanted to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude for everything you've done for me. Your support, patience, and genuine care have made such a difference in my life, and I truly don't know where I would be without your guidance.

From the very beginning, you made me feel seen, heard, and understood. You never judged, only listened—and offered support when I needed it most. Your dedication and kindness never went unnoticed, and I hope you know just how much of an impact you've had.

Thank you for being a steady presence during times that felt uncertain. Your compassion, encouragement, and honesty helped me grow in ways I didn't think were possible. I will always carry the lessons and strength you've helped me find within myself.

Although it's hard to say goodbye, I'm leaving this chapter with a lot more hope and confidence than when I started. And a big part of that is because of you.

Wishing you all the best in everything you continue to do—you truly change lives, and I'm so grateful to have been one of them. ”

Reflections shared with a social worker by a young person when turning 18

[2] Reflections from our people

65

Shafali
Parent voice

Since joining the Parent Carer Panel last year, I've seen first-hand how powerful it is when parents and professionals come together. Volunteering has given me insight into how projects are created from the ground up, and it's been inspiring to see how passionate people at Leicester City Council are about giving children the best start in life and making sure parents feel supported. I believe more people should get involved—everyone comes from different walks of life and has faced different challenges. By including a wide range of voices, we can make sure nothing gets missed.

Jaden
Young person voice

As a Care Experienced Consultant I have had opportunity to connect with other young people, express myself and build my confidence while also having an impact on improving services for children and young people in care. The Rights and Participation workers have helped me overcome challenges and I was really proud to be nominated as Young Person of Courage at the Lord Lieutenant Awards last year. I am very grateful for the opportunities I have had and am thankful for the staff. I have enjoyed my time being involved with the Care Experienced Consultants and would recommend it to anyone.

Laurence Mackie-Jones
Strategic Director Social
Care and Education

In children's social care, we are driven by a shared purpose: to make a meaningful difference, to serve our communities, and to be part of something greater than ourselves. We recognise and celebrate the passion, practice, knowledge and talent that exists across our department and we are dedicated to empowering every member of our workforce to develop their skills and shape service delivery through their professional experience.

Sir Peter Soulsby
City Mayor

We are deeply committed to safeguarding and supporting children, young people and families across Leicester. Our priority is to deliver high-quality services to those who need them most. Recognising the persistent challenges faced by families, we actively collaborate with communities to address social and economic inequalities, striving always to ensure that every child and young person in Leicester has the opportunity to thrive and enjoy the best possible start in life.

Cllr Elaine Pantling
Deputy City Mayor, Social
Care and Anti-Poverty

Despite the pressures that come with the drive to enhance service delivery, the unwavering passion and dedication of the workforce in Children's Social Care, Early Help, and Prevention empower them to deliver meaningful and lasting positive outcomes for children, young people, and families across Leicester. By adopting rights-based and trauma-informed approaches, the focus remains firmly on building responsive, inclusive services that truly meet the diverse needs of children and families.

[3] Context

[a] Childhood in Leicester

Over a quarter of Leicester's population (about 101,000 people) is aged 0-19. One of the youngest cities in the country, Leicester is also one of the most ethnically and culturally diverse. Children in Leicester are more likely to live in low-income families and experience poverty than they are in other cities in England. The city is among the top 20% most deprived areas of the country and, when considering housing costs, 41% of children are living in poverty. Linked to the high levels of deprivation, children and families in Leicester have poorer health and a life expectancy that is below the average in England.

[b] Delivering services in partnership

We are proud of the strength of joint working arrangements across Leicester City Council. A clear and cohesive approach has been adopted across the whole council, with strong recognition of the part all services play in ensuring children and families can achieve good outcomes.

Our local partnerships with the NHS and police are also strong. The effectiveness of these partnerships is reflected at an operational level with joint working arrangements for key decision-making. Through the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership, the three safeguarding partners provide leadership and joint accountability for the protection, support and representation of those in greatest need. There is good engagement of partners through our Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) Board and officers have been seconded from the NHS and police to support the implementation of the Families First Partnership Programme.

We continue to be an integral part of Quality Assurance across the region. Leicester City currently chairs the newly created LLR Performance Group providing oversight and review of performance data across the region.

[c] Working for Leicester City Council

At Leicester City Council we have a diverse and inclusive frontline workforce that reflects our city. We are proud of our reputation of being a good organisation to work for. Historically we have benefitted from a stable workforce with manageable caseloads, providing a bedrock of stability which enables our staff to build relationships with children and families.

We continue to feel the effect of the shortage of experienced social workers which has impacted our social work teams. In response we have quickly introduced innovative approaches to continue to provide good support to children and young people. Even in the face of these challenges, our workforce is made up of a permanent management team and predominately permanent staff. We have completed a successful international recruitment campaign with 15 social workers joining us in 2024-25 which has complimented our well-developed social work apprenticeship and ASYE programmes.

We place a significant focus on supporting staff and developing people within their roles. The work of our 'Centre for Professional Practice' coordinates the continuous professional development offer for the division. This offer is comprehensive and well developed, providing opportunities for staff at all stages of their careers. As well as having ready access to training opportunities, our staff have opportunities for reflection to support their wellbeing. In addition to regular supervision, our workforce benefits from group learning and reflective spaces such as learning reviews.

We are pleased that Ofsted could see that our extensive learning and development offer has an impact on practice, with recognition given that the variety of training on offer makes it accessible to the workforce.

[d] Spotlight on equality, diversity and inclusion

Leicester has a long history of welcoming new arrivals, from the Romans 2000 years ago to people from all over the world today. Consequently, it is one of the first UK cities where no single ethnicity forms a majority. As both an employer and service provider, it is crucial that the council understands, respects and embraces this rich diversity. There is an ambition to make equality more visible so that everyone – whether working for the council, with the council, or as a person using council services – is always treated fairly and with respect and dignity.

Our social care and early help workforce utilise a practice framework that prioritises cultural competence and understanding of lived experiences. This approach ensures diversity is considered in everyday practice. We were proud to see the impact of this in practice when HMIP inspectors noted that practitioners within the Children and Young People's Justice Service were confident in assessing children's protected characteristics and analysing their diversity needs, showing a good understanding of the impact of the child's culture and their heritage.

A net of diversity in leadership pledges focusing on promoting inclusive practices, engaging diverse families, investing in staff training and ensuring accountability have been made by Laurence Mackie-Jones (Strategic Director for Social Care and Education). These pledges are underpinned by an Equality and Diversity Action Plan which commits to making Leicester a leading anti-racist and inclusive organisation. Key actions include staff consultation, benchmarking, the development of training for managers and fostering anti-racist communities of practice. Further focus is being placed on anti-racist practice, psychological safety, respect, trust, inclusion and support through work being done in partnership with Islington Council in their role as Sector Led Improvement Partner.

Further to the work being done within the local authority, a number of programmes being delivered on a regional footprint are strengthening inclusive practices:

- The Active Bystander Programme empowers individuals to intervene confidently in situations where negative behaviours like microaggressions, bullying, and harassment, promoting a safer environment staff and service users
- The Beyond Barriers Leadership Development Programme nurtures diverse leaders in order to expand the diversity of leadership teams
- The Reverse Mentoring Programme reverses traditional mentoring dynamics by pairing junior colleagues from underrepresented groups with senior leaders, facilitating honest dialogue and deeper insight into the challenges faced by minority groups in the workplace

71% of the school population is made up of global majority groups

55% of Leicester's population is from a global majority background

More than 41% of Leicester's population were born outside the UK

Over 180 languages are spoken by pupils in Leicester's schools

<1/3 of the workforce at Leicester City Council identifies as being white

[e] Spotlight on participation

In Leicester we put children and young people at the heart of everything we do, and the Signs of Safety Practice Framework supports this work and principle. We believe that children and young people should:

- Be listened to
- Have their experience understood
- Be given choices
- Feel heard

We are proud of our extensive offer of services to support participation, which includes the following:

- Young People's Council – we support young people elected by their peers to represent young people across the city. Young People's Council representatives have been actively involved in scrutiny meetings, the City Mayors Community Forum and full council meetings.
- Care Experienced Consultants – we enable young people aged 15-25 to represent the voices of young people in care and those who have left care.
- Peer Reviewers – we have trained care experienced young people in Quality Assuring Children's homes and currently have a cohort of eight Peer Reviewers with different experiences of being in care.
- Young Recruiters – we have trained eight young people as young recruiters, offering opportunities for young people to be part of the recruitment and interview selection processes across Social Care and Education.

We have a strong track record of enabling young people to contribute to the design and influence of different issues/services, with recent examples including:

- Consultation on the development of Libraries and Community Centres
- Consultation with Public Health regards vaping and smoking
- Co-design of Families First services

“Leicester has been leading the way in child participation in the UK for some time, fully integrating the Lundy model across its work with children and young people.” Professor Laura Lundy

The Lundy model

Using the Lundy model of participation, a rights-based approach to participation, we listen to and act upon the views of young people and their families to inform our intervention, decision making and service development, undertaken within a rights-based context.

Space: Children and young people must have access to safe spaces to meet so they have equal opportunities to formulate and express their views.

Voice: Children and young people must be supported to make their voice heard and express their views in a way that they decide is best.

Audience: We must ensure that children and young people's voice's will be listened to by the most appropriate audience, someone with the power to make decisions.

Influence: We must ensure that children and young people are able to have influence and have their views acted upon, where appropriate, and that the practitioners who work with children and young people can show them how they influenced decisions about their life. It is important that we explain clearly to children and young people when decisions made about them are different to what they said they wanted.

[f] Performance management and quality assurance

The quality assurance framework promotes a culture of continuous learning and improvement within the local authority and across the partnership, informed by audits and linked to training. We have developed a range of quality assurance activities which focus not only on compliance but also evidence the quality of the support we provide to children and families.

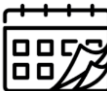
We have worked to increase the sharing of learning from quality assurance activity and, working closely with the Learning and Development Team, are implementing learning pathways to ensure that recommendations are taken forward. This includes sharing learning with team managers which we are developing, and quarterly reporting to lead member briefing as well as with the wider workforce through briefings, targeted lunch and learn sessions, learning from reviews sessions and 7-minute summaries (relating to individual practice and thematic learning).

Despite the focus placed on sharing learning, the impact on practice is yet to be seen consistently. To help address this, we are increasing the capacity of the Quality Assurance Team by recruiting an additional Quality Assurance Manager to further strengthen links between the team and frontline practice and practitioners.

Through our performance management and quality assurance activity we have identified some fantastic examples of good practice, but we know that we need to address consistency and raise standards of practice in some areas. It remains a priority to continue to work to develop a high support / high challenge environment.

Good quality performance data is used effectively to identify potential strengths and weaknesses, and our analysis of this data enables us to explore underlying practice issues and take appropriate action. Together, these performance management and quality assurance activities enable senior managers to have an effective line of sight to the quality of frontline services.

Performance headlines - highlights

	Recent reduction in child protection plans from 51 to 48 per 10k
	Children achieving permanence through adoption (13%) or SGO (13%) significantly above statistical neighbour average
	Short term placement stability for children who are looked after 6%, significantly lower than statistical neighbour average
	Long term placement stability for children who are looked after 69%, higher than statistical neighbour average
	14% re-referral rate, lower than statistical neighbour average

Performance headlines – areas for targeted activity in the next 12 months

	The numbers of care leavers in education, employment or training have reduced by 10% over the last 18 months. In response we are working closely with the Virtual School and Connexions to understand any local and national drivers for this decline and review our approach to supporting care leavers who are NEET.
	The numbers of care leavers in suitable accommodation have reduced by 10% in the last 18 months. In response we are reviewing the joint protocol with housing to ensure we have appropriate sufficiency and meet a wider range of needs.

[g] Focus on improvement following inspection

The Ofsted judgement in 2024 that Leicester's Children's Services require improvement was understandably disappointing for both the senior leadership team and the wider workforce. There is a firm commitment across the organisation to drive meaningful improvement based on our understanding about where improvement is needed. Our priority continues to be supporting staff, ensuring the safety of children in Leicester and delivering the best possible service to every child and family in need.

In direct response to the identified areas for improvement, we have developed a comprehensive action plan designed to strengthen practice and drive forward positive change. This plan is monitored and guided through the IMPACT governance framework, which ensures a cohesive and strategic approach to transformation that aligns with multiple drivers of change.

To further support our improvement journey, we are collaborating closely with Islington Council, who are serving as our Sector Lead Improvement Partner. This partnership brings valuable expertise and external perspective to our work. Additionally, our engagement with the Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance, the Department for Education, and the Local Government Association reinforces our focus on both getting the basics right and fostering innovation. We are also working with a critical friend from a neighbouring authority who sits on our IMPACT Board. Together, these collaborations help us to rethink traditional approaches and build a sustainable foundation for continuous improvement.

Our focus on driving improvement also extends to our Children and Young People's Justice Service (CYPJS) which was subject to inspection by HMIP in March 2025. As the third authority to be inspected following changes to HMIP's inspection framework, the process was a learning curve for both the service and the inspection team themselves. The overall rating was determined to be requires improvement, with eight recommendations for change made (three for the Leicester City CYPJS and five for the Leicester City Youth Justice Management Board).

The three recommendations for the CYPJS focused on improving assessment, planning and delivery to ensure consistent, high-quality work that keeps children and communities safe. The inspection also echoed findings from the ILACS inspection, highlighting the need for stronger management oversight of cases and more robust quality assurance mechanisms.

Through improvement work to address the comments made by HMIP, we have already seen a significant reduction in our first time entrants, with strong evidence of our early intervention packages reducing the numbers of children entering the court system. There is now a strategic representative at the Leicester City Youth Justice Management Board responsible for overseeing victim improvement work and supporting the strategic victim working group. There has also been investment in training to support staff with assessment, planning and delivery in line with HMIP recommendations.

[h] Responses to areas for improvement

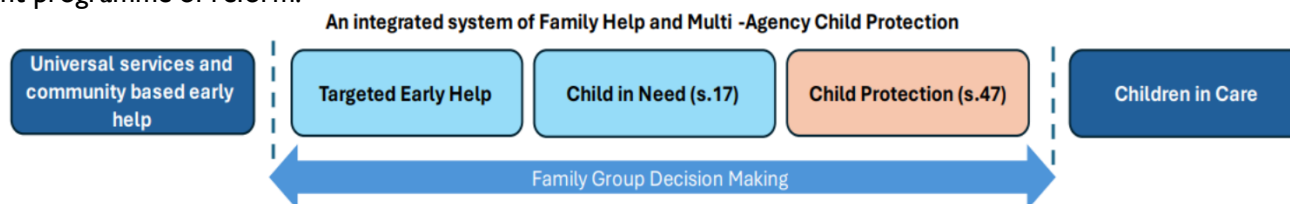
Area for improvement	Response	Impact
The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision. 71	- Implementing a comprehensive performance management framework to support data-driven decision making - Strengthening the practice and recording of management oversight	Through senior management oversight at dedicated panels for complex cases we have seen a reduction in the number of young people placed in unregulated placements and effective, comprehensive risk management plans for our most vulnerable care leavers which are reviewed on a regular basis. As a result of holding regular performance/quality assurance session which reviews emerging trends/themes and identifies actions to address areas for improvement, several KPIs have improved over the last twelve-month including single assessments completed in timescale, children seen alone in a child protection visit.
The timeliness and robustness of responses to contacts and referrals.	- Reviewing and developing step up/step down processes - Improving awareness of the early help offer - Reviewing all re-referrals and NFAs at regular intervals - Strengthening performance reporting	Timeliness of response and understanding of threshold and intervention offer across community based Early Help and Children's Social Care has improved as a result of the weekly step-up step-down meeting. This provides a good foundation for the development of the Family Help service. Regular quality assurance of re-referrals and no further action has led to increased oversight and thematical learning. Data input improvements have increased accuracy of information.

[h] Responses to areas for improvement continued

Area for improvement	Response	Impact
The quality and consistency of care plans and pathway plans.	• Strengthening pathway plans • Reviewing all forms and paperwork • Developing practice around child protection plans, enabled through audits and strengthened use of performance data • Focusing on aspirational care planning • Piloting a family version of care plans	As a result of the work that has been carried out, there is now a high level of completion of pathway plans and we are assured that these are reviewed by managers. Where identified as necessary, targeted advice and support has been provided to individual members of staff. This is to be reinforced by focussed training on quality strengths-based care and pathway plans to be delivered across the workforce. This continues to remain an area of focus, to further develop the quality and consistency of practice in this area.
Arrangements to identify, safeguard and support the most vulnerable children in care and care leavers, including children in unregistered children's homes.	• Ongoing QA of external provision and unregulated placements • Reviewing visiting frequency, risk assessments, advocacy referrals and safety planning for new placements • Strengthening HoS oversight of unregulated/unregistered placements	The number of unregistered placements remains low and any such arrangements remain under regular review with management oversight. Robust management oversight and RAG rating processes provide assurance that vulnerable care leavers are appropriately supported.
Support for care leavers who may be more reluctant to accept help, including those in custody and those facing homelessness.	• Strengthening practice around involving prisons in pathway planning • Improving engage with reluctant care leavers through work with Connexions • Reviewing and promoting support for care leavers living outside Leicester	Extending our local offer to the care leavers living outside the city has improved access to this support. Further improvements have been seen with the appointment of a dedicated EET advisor and the development of a joint protocol with the housing department. Oversight of care leavers in custody has strengthened through managerial auditing of pathway plans, supported by the update of operating standards and the identified of a single point of contact within the probation service.

[4] Response to Families First Partnership

The Families First Partnership Programme outlined by the government aims to transform the whole system of help, support and protection for children and families and represents a significant programme of reform.



[a] Understanding the drivers for change

73		Neighbourhood and partnerships	We want to know our communities well so that we can provide collaborative, partnership support and strengthen neighbourhood and partnership working
		Codesign	We want to have services that are designed for all, by all, with the voices and experiences of children and families central to decision making and the workforce actively engaged in the journey of change
		Highly skilled and motivated workforce	We want to have a highly trained, motivated workforce that is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to meet the needs of children, families and communities
		Early support and consistent experience	We want to provide services that provide timely, consistent and relationship-based support that is responsive to families' needs, reduces stigma ensures seamless access to services and prioritises early intervention for better, long-term outcomes
		Family networks as a tool for change	We want to support families to build on the strengths in their networks to keep children safe and help them to thrive
		Integrated multi-agency services	We want to develop multi-agency collaboration to support the streamlining of processes, better information sharing, improved efficiency to ensure the consistent delivery of services that enables social work expertise to be focused on the highest level of need

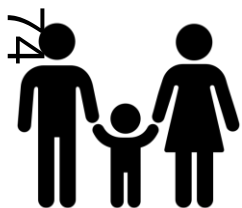
[b] Our vision for Families First Partnership in Leicester

In delivering the Family Help approach, we envision that the right professionals are involved at the right time and that consistent services are provided regardless of where the family's plan sits.



For children

The vision is that children will experience consistent, relationship-based support from trusted professionals who explain their involvement clearly. They will be surrounded by wraparound support, including family and community networks, without needing to repeat their story and feel heard, seen, and valued, with their voices actively shaping decisions and actions. We want children to see real change and follow-through from plans, helping them feel empowered and supported in achieving their own goals as well as be respected for who they are, including their culture, identity, and individuality. At the core, we want children to feel safe, loved, and connected, with a strong sense of belonging.



For families

As a result of the transformation, our vision is that parents and carers experience continuity of support and only tell their story once. They will feel better listened to and understood, with their perspectives respected and valued as well as being more connected to practice around children through their role in networks. We want parents and carers to access support more easily, with services that are delivered locally and designed to be more accessible. Parents and carers will understand the network of support that is available to them, knowing who is there to help and how to reach them.



For the workforce

We anticipate that the Families First programme will increase the confidence of the workforce tapping into the network of support around families, working as one team. Our vision is that the workforce will be better integrated with communities, with strong knowledge of and connection to local social resources. We hope to see the development of a shared sense of accountability for outcomes, with collective responsibility across agencies, alongside the development of a shared understanding and appreciation of each others roles, strengths and contributions. We want to see growth through skill sharing and knowledge development informed by a skills audit and learning and development programme, enabling a strengths-based, collaborative workforce both within the local authority and partnership. The workforce will benefit from reduced bureaucracy through streamlined processes, such as using one shared assessment. Alongside a shift to working from a community base rather than centralised locations, we anticipate that some roles will experience further change with the expectation to undertake additional tasks.

[C] Our foundation for developing the Families First approach

A foundation of strong practice exists with Leicester's integrated front door and through the appropriate application of thresholds by staff across early help, prevention and social work teams (as evidenced by the use of step up/step down processes). We have effective assessment and planning templates that, with some minor adjustments, will form a robust, streamlined child and family assessment/plan. Shared approaches such as the Lundy Model, Signs of Safety and Trauma Informed Practice are well embedded across Children's Services.

Existing governance structures, partnership boards and participation forums will be built upon to co-design services and drive change. We are working in partnership across Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention, SEND and Education to improve joint planning and consistent responses for children to meet need. Strong relationships and effective multi-agency practice are evidenced through the Children's Trust Board, Family Hubs Programme and Safeguarding Partnership, which will be further developed as we deliver transformation. An Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) Board has been established to bring together key partners to drive progress on the reforms, with buy in established and partner commitment to fund seconded posts to support the programme team gained (e.g. police, ICB). An experienced Transformation Programme Manager has been recruited and Public Health has committed additional project resource – demonstrating city wide agreement on the programme's priority.

A challenge exists in terms of our data systems not talking to each other effectively, which can leave gaps or result in replication in information about those we support. The most significant challenge is driving such a substantial programme of reforms within the children's services space while partners are undergoing change programmes themselves, for example the ICB change agenda and police drive to deliver neighbourhood policing. In recognition of these challenges, we have brought in external support from IMPOWER to boost capacity with some key elements of our change programme.

We have a vibrant voluntary and community sector that is seeking to engage as part of the change, though this is not yet coordinated across the city. We will seek to tap into the knowledge of other sectors of the council which work closely with the VCS as well as inviting representatives to be part of co-design.

To support the introduction of the Families First approach, we have used the prevention grant to invest in the social work establishment, family decision-making and the Functional Family Therapy service – supporting the Safe Steps Home work – as well as to provide a dedicated resource for supporting transitions into adult social care.

[5] Early Help and Prevention

What we are proud about

- Driven by a strong project delivery team, the Family Hubs model is well embedded at sites across the city. The multi-agency service offer has been strengthened by increased opportunities for co-location and considerable growth within the partner network. The Family Hubs website now clearly communicates the offer with both families and partners, supporting access to the breadth of Family Hub services.
- Effective collaboration with partners supports the delivery of Early Help services. There has been growth in the completion of externally led Early Help Assessments, in which an Early Help Coordinator supports a professional well known to a family to complete the assessment. Through the Partner Support Panel, we have strong evidence that partners have a sound understanding of thresholds and are reassured that they have the confidence to take on a lead role as they know that support is available to them.
- 76 • Building on a strong foundation, the Children's Assessment, Support and Prevention Team has continued to develop its processes, with the Step-Up Panel now embedded to provide robust scrutiny and oversight as well as drive professional curiosity and ensure that the right support is provided at the right time.
- Reflecting our commitment to the Lundy model of participation and recognising the importance of hearing the voices of people with lived experience, our Parent Champions and Young Champions approach is well developed and enables volunteers to share their experiences and connect their peers with local services.
- There is high family engagement and strong, measurable outcomes from the family therapies offer. The provision of these family therapies is supported by a LiquidLogic referral pathway which is now fully embedded and has improved the speed, clarity and accessibility of referrals.
- Our youth carer offer is strong with bespoke group sessions.

The Youth Support Service utilises a trauma-informed approach to support successful outreach work in communities to reduce anti-social behaviour and youth criminality. The Early Intervention team is highly successful in diverting children from statutory youth justice. Q1 25/26 has reported the lowest number of first-time entrants in several years (almost half compared Q1 24/25)



The Black Girl Magic group for girls aged 11-19 from African, African Caribbean and mixed heritage celebrates and supports young Black girls through various workshops and activities. The group has recently recorded a podcast on their achievements.



What we are worried about

- We are delivering change and improvements for families at pace but the systems do not always keep up with the speed of change. Further work is required to ensure that the technology we use is able to adequately record and interrogate the work that is being done.
- There are staffing gaps in key services, with recruitment still required for two FFT roles critical to meeting demand for reunification work and the Family Decision Making service remains understaffed.

How we have made a difference

- The local authority has been identified as an exemplar of good practice by central government teams in areas such as the introduction of frenotomy clinics under the Family Hubs approach and the work done with families affected by imprisonment. These areas of work have made a real difference for the families that benefit from working with the service.
- By ensuring that we have processes in place to support the timely progression of cases and connectivity between services, we are able to make sure that where there needs to be a transition between practitioners this is a smooth experience for families. This provides a strong foundation as we begin to develop the Family Help approach.
- Our use of externally led early help assessments means that families receive support from people that the children and families know best, increasing engagement.
- Family therapies teams have effective working relationships with police, schools, IROs and social workers. Teams are visible in risk forums and daily partnership discussions, ensuring proactive, coordinated responses to risk.
- The CYPJS is effective at recognising and responding to the diversity needs of the children they work with, meaning they tailor support in line with the child's culture and heritage.

Our plans for the next twelve months

- We want to boost membership of our volunteering programmes, such as the Parent Champions, to ensure that they are sustainable and will last into the future.
- In response to the confirmation of ongoing funding for Family Hubs, we will continue to develop the support for families, considering opportunities for joint work with a university to support evaluation of work relating to sleep support.
- We are shaping a service review for children with disability service to ensure that the offer is well integrated with family help framework (multi-discipline, multi-agency) and that there is a proportionate graduated response for children with disabilities. Together this will ensure there is a clear offer for children with disabilities alongside more timely access to support.
- Recognising that we are approaching a period of change under the Families First Partnership reform, we will focus on supporting staff morale and providing ongoing effective support to families while the transformation takes place.
- To ensure that all partners are aligned in a consistent, system-wide approach to early intervention, referral thresholds and decision making, we will launch the Family Therapy (Edge of Care) Strategy.
- We will strengthen evaluation and strategic reporting in relation to family therapies, including the development of live outcome dashboards showing reunification success, placement stability and financial impact.
- In line with the HMIP improvement plan, we will continue to deliver the action necessary to address the areas for improvement for the CYPJS. We will also develop and embed the pilot Prevention panels within CJPYS with the support of the VRN.
- To inform the commissioning intentions for domestic abuse and sexual violence, we will complete a detailed needs assessment.

[6] Children in need of help and protection

What we are proud about

- Effective partnerships with health, education, the police and voluntary sector ensure that children and families receive the right help at the right time. We have developed joint practice and scrutiny around cohorts of children with more vulnerabilities (e.g. Children missing education, children with significant health needs, homeless 16-17 yr olds).
- Our specialist multi agency Child Criminal Exploitation Hub has an extensive prevention offer combined with co-working with social work teams, enables effective information sharing, joined up responses and early intervention.
- Our strengths-based practice framework complimented by our focus on co-production informs our effective partnership work with parents to support them to make changes in conjunction with their networks. Our workforce is skilled at adapting to individual needs and understanding, utilising tools such as family-owned safety planning and words and pictures explanations.
- Strategy meetings are well attended by key partners and appropriate actions are identified to ensure children are safeguarded. Once immediate actions to safeguard children have been taken, thorough S47 enquiries are completed.
- At all stages of child protection processes, we benefit from high levels of quoracy which enables multi agency information sharing, effective decision making leading to consistent application of thresholds across the partnership. Quoracy and reports are regularly monitored, and any gaps addressed through effective partnership working forums.
- We have good oversight of those children in Public Law Outline processes, ensuring the right decisions are made at the right time to ensure safety and best outcomes for families, using pre-proceedings effectively, exploring family members and frontloading assessments. We have improved our grip and timeliness in pre-proceedings over the past 12 months.

“ I just want to use this medium to sincerely appreciate C for reviving my family. Reuniting my daughter and I was quite a big deal for me. Though it wasn't easy to comprehend and accept the situation at the very start, working with C has really helped me to know best about parenting which is actually working comparing to the way I was brought up. I'm 100% satisfied about C's inputs which will continue to enlighten my parenting. I wish her all the very best in her career. And to let her know that she has impacted my daughter positively who is not sure to forget about her in a hurry. Thank you ever so much C. ”

Feedback received from a parent commenting on the support received from their social worker in the Single Assessment Team. C, the social worker commended, is part of the cohort of internationally recruited social workers and the feedback is illustrative of the positive impact of that recruitment.

“ We just want to give our feedback on how supportive you have been through all of this it has been very stressful for us but we got there, you have always answered any questions we needed to know and our rights as parents you've been amazing to work with.... it's not all about all about coming round to tell us what to do its the laughter we have to make us feel safe and happy too so thank you so much!! ”

Feedback received from parents commenting on the support from their social worker within the Child in Need service

What we are worried about

- There are vacancies for experienced social workers in the Child in Need service that we have not been able to recruit to permanently. The difficulties in filling these posts has led to challenges in allocating more complex cases and impacts on staff resilience. We are conscious of the challenges for our workforce adapting to the changes resulting from the implementation of the Families First Partnership reforms.
- There is an increase in complexity in family circumstances requiring Safeguarding and Early Help intervention in terms of housing challenges, poverty, immigration status, language needs, neurodiversity, mental health, substance misuse. This requires more intensive and often longer intervention to get the right outcomes for families.
- There has been an increase in demand for statutory social work services from 23/24 - 24/25, reflected in the increased number of assessments, S47s, initial child protection conferences and child protection plans. QA activity assures us that this is reflective of increasing need and there is regular auditing across the frontline social work services to test application of threshold. This increased demand has also placed pressure on partner capacity, which can be seen most significantly in some delays to the timeliness of strategy discussions. Work across LLR and the police is being undertaken to address this.

How we have made a difference

- A focus on the Lundy Model of Participation and direct work with children is a strength. In the past year there has been an increase of children directly participating in their Child Protection Conferences (from 5% to between 10-20%).
- We have welcomed two cohorts of international social workers to Leicester (15 workers in total) supported by a comprehensive support and development offer which has increased our permanent social work workforce, leading to increased consistency of relationships for children and families.

- Over the past 12 months, we have had a focus on frontline supervision and management oversight, improving forms and processes to ensure decision making is effectively reflected on children's files. Mentoring has been offered to all new frontline managers, with a range of development options supported. QA activity has offered targeted support and assessment of impact.
- Improved monitoring and active tracking of families on CPP plans over 18 months, those in pre-proceedings and within care proceedings has improved timely decision making.
- Our LADO service receives consistently good feedback from partners about the decision making, support and guidance provided. This ensures better, safer recruitment and employment processes across the city.

Our plans for the next twelve months

- Manage the smooth development of Family Help and Multi-Agency Child Protection teams whilst maintaining focus on quality and performance.
- Comprehensive training and development plan for all staff to improve consistency of practice and clear understanding for all within Family Help (Early Help and Children's SW teams) regarding threshold and practice expectations, using QA to inform particular areas of need and development.
- Focus on management, leadership and supervision skills training and mentoring building on QA work and systems changes this year.
- Work across the partnership to address capacity ensuring effective and timely strategy discussions.
- Continued work with our health and education colleagues to better identify children and young people with more complex health needs to ensure that they have an effective joined up response to their needs and access to continuing care and continuing healthcare funding to support their individual needs.

[7] Children in care

What we are proud about

- We undertook a comprehensive survey 'Leicester Asks' (Summer 24) of all our children (5-25yrs) designed by our young people. 87% of children identified that they were happy where they lived most of the time and 100% of 5-11yr olds said they had an adult they could trust and they felt safe. 90% of 12-17 yr olds said they feel safe and their carers notice how they feel.
- We have a very active co-production and participation forums for our young people, who are involved in service re-design, consultation work, training and improving child focused practice across the system.
- Development around initial viability assessments and the integration with our Case Progression support has improved timely identification of suitable alternative carers enabling more children to remain within their family networks. We have also made effective use of edge of care services to support children to return to their parents at the end of care proceedings.
- Where it is safe to do so, we support children and young people to return to live within their family networks and have seen 9 children positively returned home to live with their families in 2024-25. Thanks to investment in the Functional Family Therapy Welfare Team we offer bespoke intensive support where required through the 'Safe Steps Home' programme. 13 children have also secured permanence with foster carers via Special Guardianship Orders.
- Our seven in-house children's residential homes are all currently rated good or outstanding by Ofsted. Since 2022, thanks to the successful outcome of multiple bids for joint funding from the DfE, we have been able to continue to invest in our residential provision. Starting from an in-house capacity of 36 beds, we have now opened Holly House with an additional five places and Hillview is due to add a further six by spring 2026.
- Where children in care are known to the Children and Young People's Justice Service (CYPJS), effective joint planning is undertaken to meet need and ensure safety.

Hey Stacy I just wanted to message and say thank u for all your understanding with me whilst this has gone on. I honestly just want Frankie happy and I do understand that with my circumstances I might not always make him happy. It just hurts :(I have had to swallow a hard pill in accepting I am not a great mum... I was... But over the past few years i lost myself. You are a lovely social worker and appreciate all the advice and help u have given me x

17:30

Feedback from a mother to the social worker following the final court hearing where the care plan of adoption was agreed and concluded highlighting the skill of the worker in helping the birth mother navigate and make sense of the process

“ I just wanted to pass on a compliment for A. She really has the girls' best interest at heart and is so supportive and understanding to J. I feel very confident in her abilities and the care planning for both girls. Very personable, efficient and a pleasure to work alongside. An excellent Social Worker. 😊 ”

Feedback received from a Supervising Social Worker from the National Fostering Group

In addition to the investment in Holly House and Hillview, we have recently received further DfE funding which will allow us to increase our capacity to 53 in-house residential beds over the next two years, with a specific offer for children with complex health needs and challenging behaviours.



Holly House



Hillview

What we are worried about

- There are increasing numbers of children who require specialist provision (due their mental health, neurodiversity and criminal exploitation) and there are sufficiency challenges as to how we will meet their needs both as a result of the national placement shortage and the needs for multi- agency wrap around support.
- Despite significant efforts and investment, foster carer recruitment remains a challenge. This impacts our capacity to effectively match carers to meet children's needs.
- Improvement in consistency is still required to ensure that work with all children is responsive, ambitious and meets their needs, with clear evidence of decision making, change and planning being explained to and understood by children.

How we have made a difference

- Despite the national challenges we have a high ratio of our children living in our in-house foster and residential homes having increased fostering capacity through capital investment, new residential developments and wrap around support. This enables us to have better oversight and offer more support to meet our children's needs.
- Development of a child friendly care plan has improved the consistency of care planning, supporting children and families to feel understood, to understand why they are in care and how everyone will work together to achieve the plan.
- Development of a second community 'Families Together' (contact service) base, designed specifically to support Family Time for older children and larger sibling groups which has enabled children in care, their siblings and parents to maintain and develop better family relationships.

- We have reviewed and enhanced our practice for children placed in unregulated settings. There is an automatic offer of advocacy and we actively work with settings and the professional network to ensure oversight and safety for our young people. We have care experienced consultants trained to undertake QA visits to these settings to ensure they best meet need.
- We have improved the GSCE outcomes for our looked after children; with 23% successfully achieving a grade 4 or above in maths (up from 13% in 2024).

Our plans for the next twelve months

- To implement the recommendations of the Leicester Asks survey – focusing on increased consistency in care planning, explanations, direct work and children knowing their own story.
- To increase our recruitment and retention of mainstream and more specialist foster carers, with effective multi agency support being provided to meet the needs of our children.
- To reduce our use of out of area children's homes and IFA and increase our in-house residential homes to enable more children looked after to live locally and improve the opportunity for better supported transition for care leavers into the local community.
- Working with community partners to expand our Keeping in Touch offer for children in care and those leaving care with plans for adoption and Special Guardianship. Working with the local judiciary and CAFCASS to respond to changing adoption guidance and build confidence in our ongoing support for permanence arrangements such as adoption or Special Guardianship.
- Development of a 'corporate grandparenting offer' to ensure ongoing commitment and support to our care experienced young people as they become parents.

[8] Care leavers

What we are proud about

- The highly experienced leaving care team includes care experienced adults who are able to use their lived experience to support their work. Continued investment in the workforce has enabled the expansion of the team to include additional advisors.
- Through the Staying Close, Staying Connected pilot we have strengthened our local offer. The care leaver offer itself has been reviewed and enhanced in collaboration with our care leavers and our partners.
- Most of our care leavers continue to live locally in good quality housing and accommodation and are engaged in their local communities. All care leavers receive priority banding for housing.
- There are good working relationships with the Virtual School and the Information, Advice and Guidance Service to support care leavers. The appointment of an additional 16 plus EET worker has further strengthened the support that is provided.
- Young people from abroad seeking safety benefit from a strengthened local offer which includes additional ESOL support for care leavers.
- Contact is maintained with all care leaver 21 years and older to promote the local offer and care experienced young people are provided ongoing support through a dedicated duty system up until they are 25.
- The Leaving Care team has strong arrangements in place to support joint working. This includes both within the council, such as with the Transitions team, and also external partners. There is a single point of contact for the Probation Service who audit all cases of young people in custody. We have a dedicated support worker from Turning Point for young people with substance misuse.

In 2023 we received funding to deliver a pilot of the Staying Close, Staying Connected programme. A package of support focused on education, employment, training and mental health support was shaped for those care experienced young people with an 'amber' RAG rating and those who had entered the country as children seeking safety. The programme was underpinned by multi-agency working, with representation from the Leaving Care team, Virtual School, Children's Homes and NHS partners. The following outcomes were reported:

- 58% of the cohort moved from NEET to EET within 3 months
- 33% of the cohort recorded improved mental health within 3 months
- 56% of the cohort recorded improvements in substance misuse
- 66% of the cohort were deemed to be in safe & stable accommodation by the end of the pilot



Groups of young people from the Staying Close, Staying Connected pilot enjoying trips away: a Tall Ships Expedition and a residential

What we are worried about

- The numbers of young people with more complex needs who are entering care over the age of 16 are increasing.
- An increasing number of care leavers are experiencing barriers to their engagement in employment, education and training due to both their physical and mental health needs and a reduction in local EET provision.
- There remains inconsistency in quality of case recording and pathway plans and further support is required to address this.

How we have made a difference

- Our Staying Close and Connected Pilot for looked after children aged 16 plus and care leavers has exceeded the targets that had been agreed with the DfE. This has enabled additional wrap around support to be delivered to care leavers with additional health, education and accommodation support needs.
- Through the expansion of the group work offer more care experienced young people can access monthly drop-in sessions, residential opportunities and dedicated peer mentoring support in partnership with Goal 17.

Our plans for the next twelve months

- We are seeking to further strengthen our local offer for young people transitioning to adulthood through an integrated Preparing for Adulthood Strategy, recognising the more complex needs of some of our care leavers.
- We will work to strengthen our local Education, Employment and Training Offer with our partners, including increasing the number of local apprenticeship opportunities and supported internships.
- We will evaluate the impact of our Staying Close and Connected pilot in collaboration with our local Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Integrated Commissioning Board with a view to developing a sustainable model to support care leavers with more complex health needs transitioning to adulthood.
- We will facilitate workshops on case recording, safe practice to improve consistence of case recording and pathway planning, building resilience for care leavers.
- We will recognise and promote the achievements of our care leavers through a Celebrating Success event.

[9] Impact of leaders on practice

What we are proud about

- There is continuing commitment from corporate and political leaders to meet the needs of vulnerable children and young people, evidenced by investment in placement sufficiency and increasing the social work and support team establishment. The investment in the workforce has enabled our successful of approaches to social work recruitment and training including Frontline, apprenticeships, extensive ASYE support programme and overseas recruitment
- Regular senior management oversight of social worker caseloads ensures they remain manageable. Senior management oversight is also provided through dedicated panels for complex cases, e.g. unregistered placements, care leavers in custody and placement with parents. The senior management team holds fortnightly performance/quality assurance sessions to review emerging trends/themes and identify actions to address areas for improvement.
- ~~Effective~~ Effective regional collaboration at the DCS and Tier 2 officers' level is supporting innovative practice, such as through the East Midlands Beyond Barriers management development programme to improve the diversity of the leadership workforce.
- Frontline practice is influenced positively through the delivery of twice-yearly practice weeks themed on emerging learning from case audits, complaints and compliments, rapid reviews and CSRs.
- A series of regular face-to-face departmental briefings and team visits ensures we keep the workforce informed on the planning for the rollout of the Families First Partnership Programme, with the Practitioner's Forum offering opportunities for co-design.
- Strong governance arrangements are in place across the local partnership through our Children's Trust Board, Improvement Planning and Children's Transformation (IMPACT) Board, playing a role in quality assurance of practice and providing robust challenge where appropriate.

“

I will actively promote inclusive practices within all children's services, ensuring that every child, regardless of their background, identity, or abilities, has equal access to resources and opportunities for growth and development.

I will engage with children and families from diverse backgrounds, ensuring their voices are heard and represented in decision-making processes. I will work to create platforms that empower all families to contribute to the development of services that meet their unique needs.

I will prioritise ongoing training and development for all staff on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion. This will ensure that our team is equipped to understand and address the diverse needs of the children and families we serve.

I will implement robust monitoring and evaluation processes to assess our progress in achieving diversity and equality in children's services. I will be transparent about our outcomes and hold myself and my team accountable for creating a truly inclusive environment for all children.

”

Laurence Mackie-Jones, Strategic Director Social Care and Education Diversity in Leadership Pledges

What we are worried about

- The large-scale reform of children's social care will impact on resources (senior leadership team capacity, recruitment and retention) and public perception of the council's support for families, as well as the capacity of key safeguarding partners to resource MACPTs.
- Continuing demand pressures and the impact of that on space for great practice – e.g. placements for children with complex needs (especially mental health needs not meeting Tier 4 criteria).
- Recruitment and retention of experienced social workers.
- Impact of visa regulation changes on recruitment of staff for our in-house residential children's homes – especially as we increase our capacity.
-  Impact of city-wide housing availability challenges in supporting children to remain within extended families.

How we have made a difference

- Increased visibility of senior leadership team through regular briefings, team visits etc delivering increased connectivity with frontline practice.
- Investing in developing stronger relationships with political leaders has helped to secure additional investment to support key priorities over the next three years.
- Committing additional funding to increase social worker establishment by 12 FTE to meet to growing demands on our support.
- Invested in additional therapists for our Functional Family Therapy team to increase our capacity to support reunification to birth parents/family - successful in 80% of supported cases to date.

- Strengthening oversight of pre-proceedings and care proceedings – average timescales in PLO and care proceedings significantly reduced with increased numbers of cases stepped down and children remaining at home.
- Securing continued financial support for building works in foster carers homes to increase internal fostering capacity – increased number of children placed locally.
- The voices of our Young People's Council, Children in Care Council and Care Experienced Group have a significant impact on service planning/delivery and quality assurance.

Our plans for the next twelve months

- Make best use of SLIP support from our colleagues at Islington Council to drive practice improvement and more effective management oversight.
- Draw on available regional Peer Review opportunities to benchmark progress against our Ofsted Areas for Improvement.
- Successfully launch our Family Help service and Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams.
- Launch a mandatory first-line manager training programme to support new and aspirant team managers in creating a culture in which good practice can thrive.
- Commission a leadership development programme for middle managers (Service Managers) and revising our approach to performance management, focusing on outcome for children and families.
- Launch and deliver on our Diversity Action Plan and begin to increase the diversity of our leadership group.
- Continue to improve our placement sufficiency through delivering on our two new residential projects following successful DfE Capital bids.

SEPTEMBER 2025

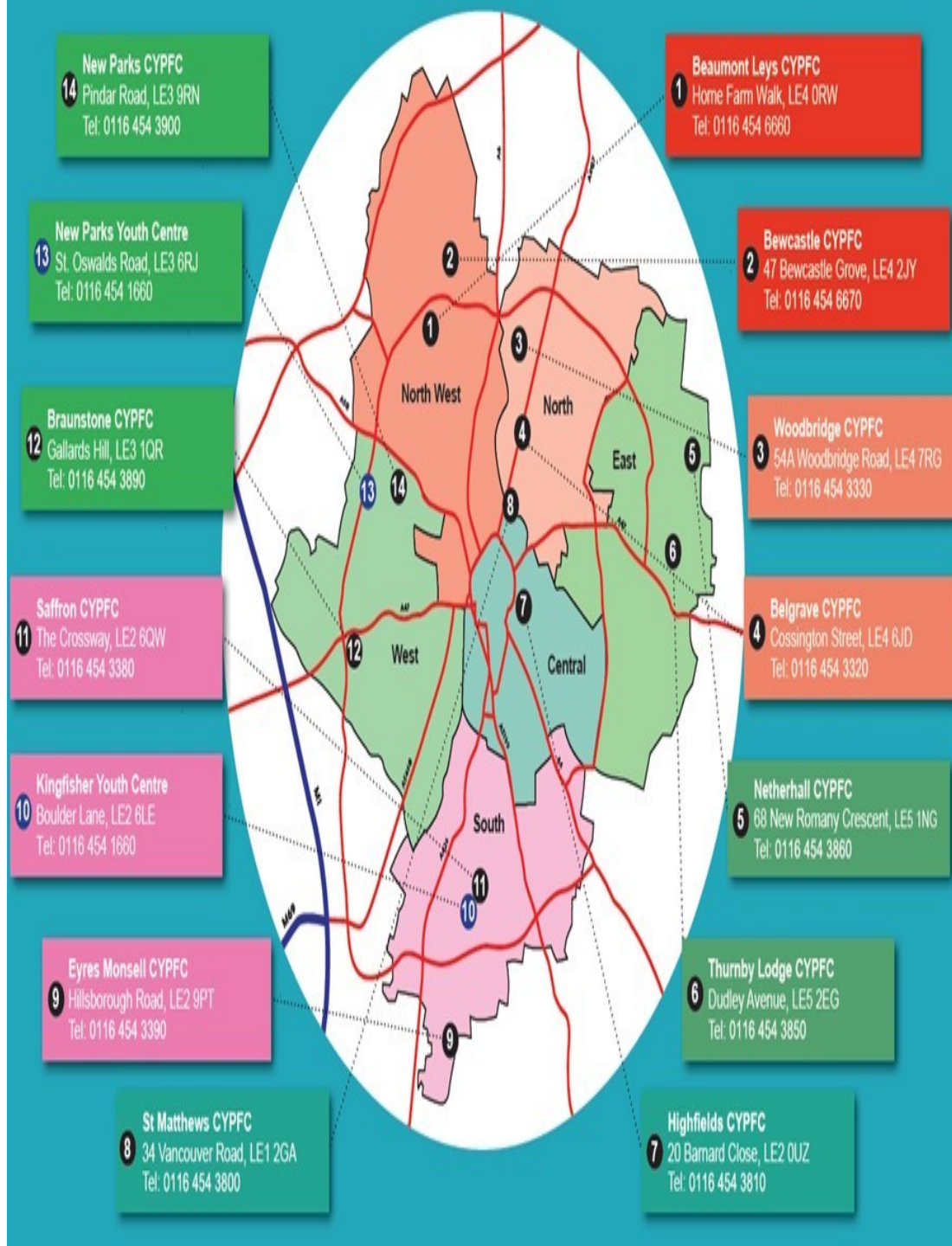
Leicester City Council's Self-Evaluation



98



Leicester Children, Young People and Family Centres (CYPFC) and Youth Centres



Responding to the Expansion of Funded Early Years Entitlements in Leicester

Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny
Commission

Date of meeting: 28 October 2025

Lead director/officer: Sophie Maltby

Useful information

Ward(s) affected: All

Report author: Claire Lakin

Author contact details: claire.lakin@leicester.gov.uk

Report version number:1.0

1. Summary

1.1 Between April 2024 and September 2025, the government expanded the offer of funded childcare to working parents.

- 15 hours per week for 2-year-olds from eligible working families (phased in from April 2024)
- 15 hours per week for 9 – 23-month children from eligible working families (phased in from September 24)
- 30 hours per week for all children aged 9 months to 2 years from eligible working families (implemented in September 25)

These entitlements are in addition to those already offered

- 15 hours per week funded early education entitlement (FEEE) for all 3- and 4-year-olds, this is the Universal Entitlement.
- 30 hours per week for 3- and 4-year-old children from eligible working families.
- 15 hours per week for 2-year-olds from families receiving additional forms of government support.

The full details of all funded childcare can be seen in **Appendix 1**.

1.2 Although not compulsory, these are an entitlement for qualifying children, making it free or affordable for parents to access childcare and to help improve children's outcomes and readiness to start school.

1.3 The Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities in England to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare, and this includes securing provision of Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE) places, for eligible young children under compulsory school age.

1.4 The local authority works with providers in the early years childcare sector to ensure there is sufficiency of childcare places in the city. The local authority relies on the private, voluntary and independent (PVI) sector in responding to our sufficiency duties.

2. Recommended actions/decision

The Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission is invited to:

Note, comment on and make recommendations regarding the sufficiency position for early years and childcare places in the city, following the full implementation of expanded entitlements to funding childcare.

3. Detailed Report

Providers

3.1 As per the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment, Market Position Statement for FEEE places as at Spring 2025 (MPS-Spr-25), the number of providers delivering funded entitlement places were as follows:

- **113 PVI providers**
- **44 Childminders**
- **75 mainstream state-funded schools** (LA maintained, Academies and Free schools) with 66 having nursery (F1) and all having provision for 4-year-olds* in their reception classes. (* from the autumn term after the child's 4th birthday).
- **1 Ofsted registered specialist nursery (for 0–5-year-olds).**
- **6 Special Schools** with a limited number of potential places for children in F1 and F2 age groups.

Capacity (Supply)

3.2 Indicative Overall Capacity (Supply) of FEEE places for MPS-Spr-25, derived from the capacities at any one time is as follows:

FEEE entitlements	9-23MO (30) WP	2YO (30) WP	2YO (15) TYF	3 and 4YO (15) UE	3 and 4YO (30) WP
Indicative supply	746	1,039	1,457	5,466	2,113

3.3 Additionally, the schools' capacity information shows a total of 4,933 places for 4YOs (full school day) in state funded school reception classes. The apportionment of the capacity figures is indicative because, the PVI sector, to some extent, subject to staffing, other resources and demand, offer places flexibly across the FEEE categories. The capacity with PVI providers for 2-year-old, 15 hour places and 3 and 4 year old, 15 and 30 hour places is being used fluidly to meet the increasing demand for the expanded entitlement places.

Demand for the expanded entitlements

3.4 Working parents must meet set eligibility criteria and apply for a code to access the extended entitlements, this therefore makes demand very fluid. We have indicative demand figures from analysis of the 30 hour extended entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds, as this has been embedded for a number of years. DfE are also able to provide local authorities with numbers of codes claimed each term, so over forthcoming terms we will be able to more accurately predict demand.

Based on the data from 3 and 4 year old entitlements, the maximum potential demand is as follows:

- **2-year-old working parent places: 1100**
- **9–23-month-old working parent places: 1375***

** as the age range for this entitlement covers 15 months, a factor of 1.25 has been applied to the estimate demand figure for 2 year old places.*

Sufficiency

3.5 Comparing the maximum estimated demand for the expanded entitlement places to the indicative capacity (supply) of FEEE places shows that we do not have enough places overall. However, in practice, whilst there will be some pressure at ward (local) level, we have not had any significant concerns raised by providers or parents up to date.

This is because:

- The indicative capacity in the PVI sector for 2-year-old (15-hour places) and 3 and 4 year old places (15 and 30 places), where it represents a surplus at individual provider level, is being used fluidly to meet the increasing demand for the expanded entitlement places.
- The actual demand and take-up of places for the 9-23 month working parent places is significantly lower than the maximum estimate. It is expected to grow as the entitlement is established over time, but unlikely to reach the level of maximum take up due to the duration parents tend to take as maternity leave, before potentially utilising childcare.
- Average take up for 2024/2025 against potential demand is 54% 9-23mth olds and 85% for two year olds, however this was for 15 hour entitlement. Validation of codes for autumn term indicates 62% of the target demand for 9-23mth olds and 99% of 2 year olds.

3.6 Now that the expanded entitlements have been fully phased in, we will revise and update our demand estimates, ward level apportionments and indicative capacity based on the actual take-up figures for Autumn Term 2025. This will give a new baseline for the sufficiency of funded entitlement places.

Growth and Development

3.7 As well as focusing on areas where there are indicative deficits for 9–23-month (30 hour) and 2-year-old (30 hour) places, we know from local intelligence and government guidance that we need to give priority to places for children with SEND and to retain 2 year old (15 hour) places for children from families receiving additional forms of government support. This is because, alongside other factors affecting the capacity for FEEE places, the growth in demand for the expanded entitlements will adversely affect the availability of 2-year-old (15 hour) places for children from families receiving additional forms of government support and places for children with SEND.

3.8 The historical data for the entitlements shows that qualifying working families have less of a barrier to access provision outside of their home ward or cluster. Therefore, the impact of the indicative deficits at ward level may not be as significant for children from working families as they will access surplus capacity in other wards and clusters.

3.9 We continue to monitor the sufficiency of places in localised areas and work with the children centres and SEND services to monitor the position and support parents who raise concerns about the availability of suitable provision for 2-year-olds from families receiving additional forms of government support and for children with SEND.

Early Years Capital

- 3.10 The DfE has given local authorities a capital funding allocation to support development of early years places for the implementation of the expanded entitlements. We are supporting providers to create additional capacity with the use of this funding, in line with the priorities identified through our data analysis.
- 3.11 We have £557,968 of capital funding to support providers to create early years and wrap around places. Our target is to support creation of around 400 early years places by end of the Spring Term 2026. The application process is still open and so far, we have committed £250 - 300K to support providers to create around 250 - 300 places for under 2-year-olds and 2 year olds. We continue to work with the sector to develop places.

DfE School Based Nursery Capital Grant

- 3.12 The government has launched a School-Based Nursery (SBN) capital funding programme for eligible state-funded primary-phase schools to bid for capital funding to create or expand nursery provision. Proposed school nursery expansion projects will require the local authority's agreement to ensure a balanced and sustainable approach. We are working with the schools and DfE to ensure local area sufficiency needs are prioritised and where appropriate, encourage schools to work collaboratively with the PVI sector to deliver provision.

Delivering a stretched funding offer

- 3.13 The funding team works with PVI providers to support them to offer the funded early education entitlements over a 'stretched offer' over 48 or 51 weeks in the year, rather than the academic terms, which will help them effectively extend their overall capacity for FEEE delivery and offer this choice, especially for the working parent entitlements.

Risks and Challenges

Sustainability

- 3.14 Providers can plan for the expected annual increases in statutory living or minimum wage levels but, due to the ongoing economic crisis, their businesses have experienced unexpected and unprecedented levels of increases to other operating expenditure. Although the government has increased the hourly funding rates, including rates for Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP), Disability Access Fund (DAF) and Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) for qualifying children, the limitations of the government funding has affected provider sustainability and growth especially in areas of deprivation where the demand would be mainly for 2 year old (15 hour) places for children from families receiving additional forms of government support and the universal entitlement places for 3 and 4 year old (15 hour). The local authority must factor for these challenges when supporting growth for inclusive places for all FEEE categories.
- 3.15 The governments Best Start in Life strategy sets out intentions for an early years funding review in 2026

Local authority actions to respond

- 3.16 We build business support into our service delivery to the sector, through resources, training and targeted guidance and support for business and financial planning. We

engage with the sector to guide and shape their delivery models to enable them to be as sustainable as possible.

- 3.17 Our ongoing assessment of sufficiency and market position statement underpins the growth and development work we are undertaking (outlined in 3.7-3.13), to encourage the market to respond to the needs and demand in the city and to allocate resource and capital funding accordingly.

Quality

- 3.18 The quality of provision is an essential factor when considering sufficiency as Ofsted inspection outcomes determine a providers' ability to deliver FEEE places. Good quality early education experiences have a positive impact on a child's overall outcomes and the local authority aims to ensure that every child in Leicester gets the very best start in life and is given every opportunity to learn and develop so that they are ready to begin school and achieve their best.

Local authority actions to respond

- 3.19 The local authority offers training, advice and guidance, in response to statutory duties, to new and existing providers by providing universal and targeted support to develop the workforce and improve quality. Helping them to meet the Early Years Foundation Stage (the regulatory framework), meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), and disadvantaged children and respond effectively to their safeguarding responsibilities.
- 3.20 Providers delivering funded early education places, sign up to an agreement (based on statutory guidance) which sets out terms and conditions for delivery of places and the quality expectations. If quality outcomes fall below these thresholds, then the local authority provide intervention, training and guidance for improvement to be made.

Recruitment

- 3.21 Providers in the sector, nationally and locally, are experiencing challenges with recruitment and retention of appropriately qualified and experienced staff. As a result, many providers cannot operate to their potential registered capacity based on space availability. Recruitment challenges can particularly affect providers' ability to offer places for children with SEND and other vulnerable children, including 2 year olds from families receiving additional forms of government support, who may require additional staffing input to meet their needs.

Local authority actions to respond

- 3.22 The DfE have an early years careers; [Do something big - Early Years Careers](#) campaign across the sector which our service promotes and engages with. The early years' service provides recruitment and retention training and support to the sector and is working collaboratively with [Leicester Employment Hub](#) to promote careers in early years and childcare and the use of apprenticeship levy to support employers with developing the workforce.

Data systems changes

3.23 There are planned changes for the children's services data system used to claim funding and we will need to carefully manage this to ensure continued service for the sector

Local authority actions to respond

3.24 The change to the new data system is being managed by a project team, who are planning the transition, to mitigate risk and manage effective implementation.

5. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

5.1 Financial implications

Early Years Funding is provided from the Dedicated Schools Grant: Early Years Block which is £42,531,268 for 2025/26. This is planned to be spent in full to deliver funded hours at early years settings.

The Department for Education have provided £557,968 of capital funding to support providers to create early years and wrap around places. This is planned to be utilised to support the creation of early years places.

The School-based Nursery (SBN) Capital Grant for 2025 to 2026 is available for eligible state-funded primary-phase schools and maintained nursery schools to apply for up to £150,000 of capital funding to create or expand a school-based nursery. This is the second phase of the school-based nurseries programme. It has an increased focus on supporting disadvantaged families to access early years provision.

Signed: Mohammed Irfan, Head of Finance, Social Care, Education and Public Health

Dated: 14 October 2025

5.2 Legal implications

Commercial Legal Comments:

It is understood that there are some programmes already underway relating to the use of the DFE funds in respect of wraparound funding for childcare and expansion capital grant.

There are potential legal implications if providers and schools do not use the capital funding for the purpose it is intended. To mitigate this, all providers and schools which are allocated capital funding will be required to sign a grant funding agreement. This will outline the terms and conditions of funding, including specific clauses to help mitigate the risks associated with capital projects not being delivered within the agreed conditions and timescales.

Capital projects will be monitored by officers and failure to comply could result in clawback of funding from providers and schools.

The Council must also ensure in allocating funds/forward funding that it complies with the Subsidy Control Act 2022 (SCA 2022), to ensure fairness in awarding public subsidies. Guidance should be obtained from legal services to ensure that service is compliant in carrying out the awarding process.

Signed: Mannah Begum, Principal Lawyer, Commercial and Contracts Legal Services

Dated: 14 October 2025

5.3 Equalities implications

The Council must comply with the public sector equality duty (PSED) (Equality Act 2010) by paying due regard, when carrying out their functions, to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between people who share a 'protected characteristic' and those who do not.

Protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender re-assignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

This report outlines the status of early years and childcare provision in the city, following full implementation of expanded entitlements to funding childcare for working parents. It highlights ongoing areas of work, such as continuing collaboration with providers on training, recruitment challenges and ensuring reasonable adjustments are carried out where needed. It also considers the financial impact on providers and the importance of raising awareness among parents about their entitlements.

The Council needs to ensure that expansion of childcare places is not limited to already well-served areas but is distributed across the city. Failure to do this could result in gaps in provision, particularly in underserved communities and areas of deprivation. Furthermore, the city's demographic profile should be taken into account when reviewing the distribution of places. If any areas of concern are identified, appropriate measures should be implemented to address these issues.

Signed: Sukhi Biring, Equalities Officer

Dated: 16 October 2025

5.4 Climate Emergency implications

There are no direct climate emergency implications associated with this report. It is possible that some children may have to travel by motor vehicle to attend reception classes which would increase emissions associated with school attendance however it is unlikely to be significant, particularly as these journeys are likely to be incorporated into their parents existing commuter journeys.

Signed: Phil Ball, Sustainability Officer, Ext 37 2246

Dated: 14 October 2025

5.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

6. Background information and other papers:

Childcare sufficiency assessment – latest Market Position Statement for Leicester City

[Childcare sufficiency assessment | LCC Family Hub](#)

Information on funding to available to support childcare costs

[Help paying for childcare | LCC Family Hub](#)

Eligibility checker for parents

[Childcare support checker | Best Start in Life](#)

Early Years Expansion capital grant

[Capital grant for early years childcare expansion | LCC Family Hub](#)

DfE School Based Nursery phase 2 information

[School-based Nursery Capital Grant 2025 to 2026 - GOV.UK](#)

7. Summary of appendices:

Appendix 1 - Detail of funded childcare offers

8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)? No

9. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why? – No

Appendix 1

Detail of funded childcare offers

The Childcare Act places a duty on local authorities in England to secure, as far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare to meet the requirements of parents in their area who require childcare, and this includes securing provision of funded early education entitlement (FEEE) places, for eligible young children under compulsory school age. New entitlements have been phased in between April 2024 and September 2025, expanding the government-funded childcare offer to working parents.

The funded entitlements are as follows:

- 570 hours per year of FEEE for all 3 and 4 year olds, this is the Universal Entitlement. *[3 and 4YO (15) UE]*
- further 570 hours per year of FEEE, making it a total of 1,140 hours a year Extended Entitlement, for qualifying 3 and 4 year old children from eligible working families. *[3 and 4YO (30) WP]*
- 570 hours per year of FEEE for qualifying 2 year olds from families receiving additional forms of government support. *[2YO (15) TYF]*

Expanded entitlements phased in between April 2024 and September 2025:

- 1,140 hours per year of FEEE for qualifying 2 year olds from eligible working families (phased in from April 2024 with entitlement being 570 hours per year until September 2025). *[2YO (30) WP]*
- 1,140 hours a year of FEEE for qualifying children aged 9-23 months from eligible working families (phased in from September 2024 with entitlement being 570 hours per year until September 2025). *[9-23MO (30) WP]*

The annual entitlements of 570 hours or 1,140 hours are also referred to as '15 hour' or '30 hour' entitlements as these can be accessed over a maximum of 15 or 30 hours per week 'term time' i.e. over 38 weeks per year. Alternatively, the 570 or 1,140 hours can be 'stretched' over 48 or 51 weeks per year.

Note: children in state-funded school reception (foundation 2 or F2) classes are considered to receive their entitlement in full and are not eligible for any additional funded hours on top of their reception class hours.

Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission (CYPE)
Work Programme 2025 – 2026

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendations / Actions	Progress
18 June 2025	Overview of CYPE		
	Families First Programme	That regular updates on the progress of the Family First Programme would come to the commission.	
	Social Care and Education Performance Dashboard	The improvements be an agenda item at a future meeting.	
	Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan	Quarterly updates be added to the work programme.	
23 September 2025	SEND Transport Update	Members to be notified and details circulated once white papers are released.	
		Update to come to the commission on the outstanding 200 children	
	Children's Services Finances	DSG/ high needs recovery programme added to the work programme.	
		School planning added to the work programme	
	Edge of Care		
	Youth Justice Plan		

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendations / Actions	Progress
28 October 2025	Verbal Ofsted update/ Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan	To include impact monitoring on the Fostering Service microsite launched on the Council website which includes the fostering offer.	
	Children Seeking Safety		
	Families First Programme	Presentation	
	Early years extended entitlement	2 years offer take up	
	Children's Centres – Verbal update		
	Performance Dashboard		

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendations / Actions	Progress
20 January 2026	SEND Transport Update	Outcome specifics gathered on Travel Training, applications, appeals and outcomes.	
	Fostering Annual Report	To include costs relating to Customer Relationship management tool, the Ofsted thematic report, information on family finding events and more detail on advertising techniques for recruitment.	
	Corporate Parenting Annual Report		
	Performance Dashboard		
	Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report		
	Leicester Safeguarding Adults Board Annual Report		
	HNB Task Group Report		
3 March 2026	Families First Programme?		

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendations / Actions	Progress
14 April 2026	Performance Dashboard		

Forward Plan Items (suggested)

Topic	Detail	Proposed Date
Children from Abroad Seeking Safety	6-monthly report.	
Youth Services – overview		
Academies – Performance Report		
Needs Assessment in Relation to Families in the City		
Children not in state-maintained schools e.g.: Academies, Independent, Faith schools		
Multi-Academy Trusts – Overview		
Update from local DfE Officer		
Fostering Annual Report	Fostering Service microsite launched	
Fostering Community Champions update	Deferred from 26 March 2024	
Corporate Parenting Update	Annual report.	

Fostering Service – Marketing Strategy		
SEN support and funding		
Pupil Place Planning (Primary and Secondary)		
Early Years Childcare Sufficiency Report		
Children in Care Council/Care Leavers		
School Holiday Activity and Food Provision		
Education Govt reports e.g.: white paper / green paper		
Ofsted Inspection reports		
Children's Social Care – Recruitment Issues		
Mental Health impacts on children	Likely to be examined jointly with other commissions	
Informal Scrutiny on DSG High Needs Block	To commence following the full report to the Commission.	
Leicester Children's Services – Self Evaluation		
Covid impact and response to early childhood development		
Families First Programme	To remain on work programme.	
Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan		
SEND Transport	Update to come to the commission on the outstanding 200 children in January 2026.	
DSG/ high needs recovery programme		
School Planning		
Sufficiency in Mainstream and Special Schools	Add Homefield info (following Special meeting May) as an appendix with the report.	

