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[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

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.

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.

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.

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 set 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 Childrens 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.

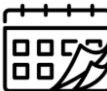
We have worked to increase the sharing of learning from quality assurance activity and, working closely with the Learning and Development Team, are implementing learning pathways to ensure that recommendations are taken forward. This includes sharing learning with team managers which we are developing, 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

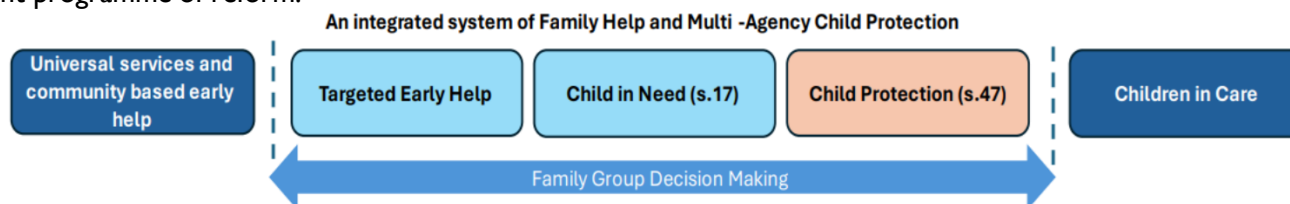
Area for improvement	Response	Impact
The range and accuracy of information used by leaders to evaluate service performance and the quality and impact of management oversight and supervision.	- Implementing a comprehensive performance management framework to support data-driven decision making - Strengthening 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

	Neighbourhood and partnerships	We want to know our communities well so that we can provide collaborative, partnership support and strengthen neighbourhood and partnership working
	Codeign	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.
- 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.



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 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



ARTICLE 12: I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE LISTENED TO, AND TAKEN SERIOUSLY



ARTICLE 12: I HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE LISTENED TO, AND TAKEN SERIOUSLY

