



Leicestershire County Council

Self-Evaluation

February 2018

Growing Quality in Children and Family Services – the Road to Excellence

Leicestershire County Council Children & Family Services - Self-Evaluation 2018

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Overview of Local Services

There are currently 453 children subject to child protection plans reaching a peak in October 2017 and these numbers have now started to steadily reduce to the current figure. Similarly, the number of children in care is 544 which is an increase over the last four years but has now stabilized. Whilst children in need rates have fluctuated they have not seen such large increases and are currently 1,780 excluding CP and LAC. There are currently 3462 children and young people with an EHC Plan and 152 with a SEN, total 3614 and in line with the national average of 2.8% of all pupils.

Children's Social Care and Early Help use the 'Signs of Safety' practice model and framework and this also influences other service areas as well as other agencies. The department is moving toward a single integrated Front Door, with Early Help already part of its arrangement and working closely with health and the Police. A SEND Early Help Hub is in place where parents can receive advice and information about education, health and social care services as well as advice on benefits and funding, access to community groups and services as well as help with applying for Early Help Short Breaks. The levels of need for access to services are laid out in the LSCB 'Threshold for Services'; the LSCB is shared with Rutland.

One of the identified risks is the demand against budget both main stream and in the High Needs Block with financial pressures of £5million on a budget of £61.7m

High Level Data



CFS quarterly dataset Q3 2017-18v



171231 Monthly Performance Table - I

High Level Structure Chart and Description

The DCS has been in post since July 2016. A new Directorate Management Team structure has been introduced over the last year. The Assistant Director (AD) for Children's Social Care was made permanent in January 2017 having started on an interim basis in July 2016 and the AD for Education and Early Help appointed in January 2017. The third tier changed in April 2017 with the appointment of a new Head of Service for Children in Care who had previously held the post as a temporary one. In the same month a Head of Service for Early Help and Safer Communities was recruited to. Safeguarding and Performance was amalgamated under one Head of Service in May 2017. The Head

of SEND and children with disabilities was permanently recruited to and took up post in June 2017. A permanent Head of Service for Fieldwork was appointed to in July 2017 replacing an interim person and the team was completed by the appointment of a new post of Head of Service for Practice Excellence in October 2017.



Names Jan18 CFS
Org Structure.pdf

The prioritisation of children's services within the council which was identified within the 2016 SIF has been made tangible by an initial investment of £2.5 million to recruit 39 additional staff mainly social workers to reduce caseloads but also key staff to assure quality, meet practice standards and promote professional development. Management capacity has also been increased. PA support to Care Leavers has been increased to enable better support. These increases have subsequently been supplemented by further resources to cover anticipated financial pressures within the LAC system over the next 4 years as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy. This includes resources to develop new more cost effective services to better manage the pressures and provide enhanced outcomes for children and young people.



Financial Position
2018.doc

Review of Last Year and Outcomes

All the 17 recommendations from the SIF Inspection 2016 form the OFSTED Continuous Improvement Action Plan 2017 to 2020 This provided the rationale for the investment in the service and is used to monitor progress being reported to the Children & Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, The Childrens Partnership, LSCB etc. Progress against recommendations is measured on a monthly basis at an extended SMT meeting chaired by the AD Social Care.

The Road to Excellence Plan on a page was agreed in February 2017. This plan outlines the overall vision for children and family services and the priorities, behaviours and outcomes that the service will deliver over the next 3 years. A key driver for this plan has been the production of the Growing Quality in Social Care document that was signed off in June 2017 following extensive engagement and consultation with staff and managers across the service. It was formally launched at the Social Work Conference in June and is intended to ensure that existing and new staff have a real appreciation of both the context and aspirations of the overall improvement journey.



Plan on a
Page2017.doc



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1. Embedding Excellent Practice
2. Being a Learning Organization
3. Taking the Right Action at the Right Time
4. Developing Policy and Performance

Strategic Leadership

There is a clear focus on Children's Services in Leicestershire with political leaders, the Chief Executive, senior managers and partner agencies prioritising Children's Services and sharing an ambition to improve outcomes for children. Leadership is one of the four behaviours that underpins everything and is evidenced at all levels:-

- Children's Services receiving additional funding of £2.5m to support progress and improvement¹ (in the context of the council needing to make overall savings)
- Good progress in the development of key strategic plans (CFS Departmental Plan, Children and Families Partnership Plan and CSC Improvement Plan (The Road to Excellence). Each sets out clear areas for focus and expected milestones to drive improvement in children's services.
- CFS DMT, along with the Lead Member, undertakes an annual programme of practice observation visits to teams across the service
- Senior Leadership Team have maintained a programme of Annual Conversations² - providing challenge and support to maintain a good pace of work.
- The committed and experienced Lead Member has a relentless focus on improving outcomes for children and young people and is highly visible in a range of forums to maintain a good line of sight with the front line
- There are constructive working relationships between the judiciary, CAFCASS and the local authority. Regular meetings between senior managers and the Judge as well as active participation in local Family Justice Board and the LSCB help to ensure practice issues are well understood across the partnership arena.
- Although timeliness of issuing care proceedings is still a particular focus for improvement but will be addressed by the new Children's Decision Meetings

¹ Original business case available alongside decisions made at Cabinet

² Schedule and notes of Visits and Conversations available

- This has all ensured improvements set out in The Road to Excellence are on track³, although some areas have not progressed as satisfactorily as others, indicating that resourcing and framework improvements are yet to achieve their full impact. In addition, there has been insufficient time since the recent appointments of some key roles within the senior management team for this to have had the anticipated impact.
- Work has been undertaken with Frontline who have run a focus group and conducted a survey and feedback of 86% is that leaders are focused on improving outcomes for children

Embedding Excellent Practice

The department's commitment to a learning culture is evident in its establishment of a new Practice Excellence team that includes a senior leader as well as a Principal Social Worker and a Learning and Development lead alongside four new posts who will contribute to practice development and learning and improvement work. Once established, this new team will provide training, coaching and co-working alongside practitioners to build the workforce's skills and confidence in different areas of practice. The team will also close the 'learning loop' – taking learning from quality assurance activities and supporting managers to embed this into day to day practice.

An explicit Practice Framework⁴ sets out the expectations for staff about how they will work with children and families across the continuum of need. Alongside this the department has developed a quality assurance framework 'Growing Quality'⁵ which seeks to describe to the workforce the shared responsibility in assuring the quality of work. The systematic application of this is being embedded and good progress has been made in the delivery of quarterly thematic audits.

The Practice Development Group draws together practice leaders from all service areas to ensure the voice of workers can help shape the development and improvement of provision. They are leading on a number of strands of development work including the development of practice standards applicable for teams and services, a refresh of the induction programme and the review of the supervision policy.

Leicestershire is fully committed to putting the voice of children and families at the heart of everything we do⁶. We engage with children and young people and ensure their participation, involvement and influence over the shape of service delivery by working collaboratively with a range of young people's representative groups, including Children in Care Council (CiCC) and the Supporting Young People after Care Group (SYPAC). There are two children's rights officers providing an effective advocacy service for children looked after and for children who are the subject of a child protection conference and a wide range of activities are facilitated by a participation officer. The Corporate

³ Latest OSC Road to Excellence Report available

⁴ Practice Framework Cabinet Paper

⁵ [Growing Quality](#)

⁶ Voice Strategy

Parenting Board is co-chaired by CiCC representatives and has contributed to shaping priorities for services, including smoother transitions for children leaving care for independence by working with district councils on housing issues. Learning from complaints is used to inform practice improvements and feeds into the training programme. The Assistant Director and Lead Member attend the CIC Council Meetings and other officers attend for set topics.

In respect of Voice, consultation took place with parents and young people to inform the SEND Strategy and the key messages are incorporated into the *Voices that Matter* section. Consultation has also taken place with parents and young people in respect of developing resource provision for CYP with autism. A Voice worker has been recruited to SEND and the plan is to consult with parents in respect of short breaks.

Direct work, children being seen and the voice of the child heard are key elements of good practice culturally embedded across services from strategy through to practice. The vast majority of cases demonstrate children being seen and their voices heard at assessment, reviews and through timely visits. Assessment, planning and interventions draw on Signs of Safety practice and work is being undertaken to ensure that it is consistently applied, supports direct work with children and enables many children to benefit from strong relationships with their social workers who know them well⁷.

Older children are supported by a children's rights officer to attend and contribute to their child protection conferences and increasing numbers appear to be doing so. As a result, children are empowered and have their voices heard within the child protection process⁸.

The children in care council (CiCC) is strong with approximately 28 young people regularly participating in work to ensure their voice is heard and they are represented in key service developments. Examples include their involvement in FC recruitment and training, Family Justice Board event and the recruitment to key posts across the service.

More recently warm auditing has been developed to include feedback from children and families. This will be fed back via learning loop into practice improvement and the voice of the child is a real strength within the service.

For children in care there is a termly newsletter alerting all pre-16 to activities organized either by the Virtual School or partner agencies, in order for them to be brought up in a culture of aspiration and opportunity. This termly newsletter is intended to inspire children to think about their future and engage in educational experiences through these activities; longer term it aims to increase the number of successful transitions into adulthood for care leavers and an eventual reduction in NEET levels.

⁷ Fidelity surveys available

⁸ CRO Report available

Being a Learning Organization

Following the Ofsted SIF inspection in November 2016 the audit framework has been reviewed and updated. There was a period of piloting the new arrangements SMT agreed a commitment to the revised framework in October 2017. A schedule of quarterly thematic audits have been agreed to take place in all teams and at all levels of management designation, and now are all conducted using 'warm audit' methodology i.e. alongside the practitioner; and involve family feedback. Regular learning audits will also take place in specific service areas and from January 2018 the Principal Social Worker will be working alongside teams to help them make the most of learning from these audits. The audit steering group maintains oversight of all stages of the audit cycle and has identified that closing the learning loop requires further strengthening. This will be achieved through current with the CSC auditing lead is doing to support the auditors and will be built on by the newly appointed Principal Social Worker and Advanced Practitioners in the new Practice Excellence Service.

The development of a virtual team to undertake 'appreciative inquiries', also demonstrates the department's commitment to constructive learning. The team is a group of workers and managers from across Early Help and Social Care who are learning together about the application of 'appreciative inquiry'. This is congruent with Signs of Safety practice. The team have committed to the delivery of 6 inquiries for 2017/18 and are on track to deliver this. An annual report from the team will share themes and learning more broadly through a range of methods.

Practice summits are planned events which bring together colleagues across the department and may include partners from other agencies where appropriate. Topics are identified through the process of self-assessment, peer reviews, inspection audit activity or manager feedback. Summits are planned to help unpick 'stuck' issues collaboratively, especially when our data (quantative or qualitative) does not match what managers see on the ground or progress on improvement has stalled. Practice Summits have taken place in relation to permanence and suitable accommodation and both have helped to improve performance in these areas. Each year one of these summits focus on the learning gained from appreciative enquiries.

Leicestershire has responded appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, including establishing a detailed action plan to respond to inspection findings and continued development of its own continuous improvement action plan. Areas for urgent improvement, such as the First Response Service, have seen increased resourcing immediately and thorough oversight through a project group chaired by the AD for CSC. A review of First Response has been undertaken by Senior Managers (December 2017) to stocktake the strengths and areas for development; areas for development will be worked upon with practitioners and managers in that area of service as part of the ongoing commitment to service improvement. Further work is needed to ensure that changes in First Response are communicated so that all teams, services and partner agencies have a shared understanding of developments.

Leicestershire also comprehensively considers a range of information and evidence in its analysis of service deficiencies or new demands, as demonstrated in its joint strategic needs analysis (JSNA)⁹, and manages service risks well through its risk register¹⁰.

Developing policy and performance

The last 12 months have seen significant change in that CFS migrated to a new CSC Information Management System (MOSAIC) and a new business intelligence and performance reporting system. Such major changes have created better opportunities for addressing both issues around the quality of information and data and better performance management but this will require further development, including the development of appropriate automated performance reports for fostering, adoption, caseloads and management oversight. In the meantime, the department has continued with a clear performance cycle that includes monthly performance meetings that are tied to improvement priorities and a number of performance issues have been successfully progressed. This includes placement stability and care leavers in suitable accommodation¹¹.

Management oversight of practice and supervision has been a key priority within the department with explicit quality statements set out in Growing Quality. Close oversight of supervision frequency has seen good levels of supervision and staff have continued to feedback that managers are supportive. However, case file audits still show some inconsistency in the quality of management oversight, indicating that development plans are yet to demonstrate their full impact. Growth in management capacity has had positive impacts across the service, particularly in First Response; where all levels of staff including AYSE report more confidence in their practice; this accords with a survey undertaken by Frontline across services where staff are reporting opportunities for learning (92%) and a real focus by managers on outcomes for children with 96% reporting encouragement to focus on outcomes for vulnerable children and their families.



CFS Growing Quality
in Social Care 2.0.pdf

The department has positioned management oversight as a cornerstone to making improvements across the board with clear management standards incorporated into Growing Quality. The frequency of supervision has been monitored on a monthly basis which has helped to secure a compliance of 78.7% across Early Help and Children's Social Care (Nov 17) despite performance being affected by the recent turnover of staff whilst recruiting to permanent posts takes place. The quality of supervisions and management oversight is largely monitored through case file audit and 87% of cases audited in June 2017 were graded Good or Outstanding for management oversight. Work continues

⁹ JSNA

¹⁰ CMT Risks Register Reports

¹¹ Appendix A, performance reports section

to ensure that supervisions are sufficiently directive or reflective. Consequently a learning programme for senior practitioners and team managers that includes training and mentoring approaches to develop supervisory skills and competence is being proactively developed.

Leicestershire has prioritised a commitment to manageable caseloads so that the average number of cases per social worker has ranged from 17 to 19 cases since January 2017¹². There are some outliers to this with some individual workers showing caseloads in the early 20's, which will be addressed through agreed additional capacity. If individual workers go above the agreed number of cases this is reported to HoS for oversight/review. Social Worker caseloads within agreed number have been achieved in First Response, Children with Disabilities Team, CSE and Children in Care Teams. Management capacity has been sustained through interim arrangements and, more recently, permanent appointments. The recruitment to certain service areas and posts has been difficult, but is being addressed via work on a recruitment and retention strategy to be finalized by the newly appointed Head of Practice Excellence. Turnover of staff and the proportion of agency workers over the last 12 months has been more of a challenge than in previous years which is reflected in a number of local authorities.

Key elements of the Recruitment and Retention Strategy¹³ have been approved by the departmental management team endorsing some new policies designed to both retain staff and to make Leicestershire attractive to the market. These include:

- 3 days for CPD for all workers
- A market premium for those posts identified as most persistently difficult to recruit
- Routine 'exit interviews' to inform understanding of turnover
- 3 annual conferences per year to develop shared 'pride in practice'
- Social work career pathway to be developed and launched by early Autumn 2018

Further work and consultation is taking place in relation to aspects of the strategy and these are two examples of things being considered:-

- Creation of peripatetic posts to help ease pressure or fill gaps in the short term
- Encouraging short term 'placement exchanges' to share skills across the teams and allow workers to become 'refreshed' through a change

Leicestershire is committed to engaging staff in development of services as well as hearing from staff through staff surveys, visits to teams by Senior Managers and development of practice forums. It is anticipated that with the employment of a Head of Service for Excellence, Principle Social Worker and Advanced Practitioners that this will be further developed and embedded as described above. The survey undertaken by Frontline reflects that staff feel very positive about their involvement in development of services as well as a continued focus on improving support to children and their families (93%).

¹² Appendix A, caseload report

¹³ Workforce Return November 2017

A workforce strategy¹⁴ is in place for the local authority and a range of learning approaches are utilised that has positive feedback from staff. Targeted support to ASYE workers began in December 2016 and a review of ASYE training was completed in April 2017. A review of the current learning and development offer for the department is underway to inform a revised offer linked to the knowledge and skills framework for social workers. Targeted training for managers and practitioner conferences has also been delivered to complement more formal training. These strands will still need bringing together to develop clear learning pathways and progression for front line staff and managers and the new service area, Practice Excellence, will need to be more fully established and embedded to provide tailored support to the workforce to strengthen practice skills and build confidence.

Taking the Right Action at the Right Time - Child's Journey

Early Help

We have strong Early Help Services, underpinned by our Early Help Offer which includes group work, brief intervention, targeted intervention intensive intervention by a family support worker. We have recently restructured our Early Help Services to introduce an Early Help Information and Assessment Service. The service assesses referrals where families may require early support, so that intervention can be offered at the earliest opportunity. This includes the development of our Early Help Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Support Service. Whole family working is embedded across Early Help services. The wide range of agencies involved in work with families is coordinated through the Team around the Family processes, and co-located locality teams. Evaluation of early help services indicates positive impact for the majority of children and families with most assessments of good quality, with clear, outcome-focused plans and strongly featuring the voice of the child¹⁵. A themed audit undertaken in June 2017 has made a finding that earlier escalation of cases from Early Help to Social Care is warranted in order to ensure a timely response to concerns.



LCC Children and Families Early Help Of



Leicestershire Partnership Early Help

First Response

The department has focused heavily on front door arrangements in its First Response service over the last year. All processes within First Response have been reviewed in order to deliver a consistently timely and proportionate response to children in line with the LSCB threshold

¹⁴ [Workforce Strategy](#)

¹⁵ Early help Strategy, PBR evaluation, service audits

document¹⁶ and Working Together to Safeguarding Children 2015. Consistently timely throughput of work has not yet been achieved due to considerable increased demand on the service, with a small number of lower-level cases falling outside of local timescales¹⁷. However, reorganisation means that the department has an accurate view of contacts, referrals, workloads, stages of cases and timeliness. Such management oversight is driving forward improvements so that assessment timeliness has improved since implementing the new model of working. There are some excellent examples of assessments within First Response with further work being undertaken to ensure that they are consistently good.¹⁸ Words and Pictures (SOS) are evidenced within the work being undertaken.

First response is responsible for the screening and response of all referrals to the department, ensuring that contacts and referrals are properly differentiated between, and aligned with statutory requirements. Since, Ofsted there is a new team structure allowing for improved management oversight. OOH is also located within First Response and was reviewed in April 2017 in order to strengthen the arrangements.

In December 2017 there was a Senior Management Team review of First Response which along with their own self-evaluation has identified a clear and ongoing plan to build upon improvements. Children in specific circumstances e.g. domestic abuse and CSE are more integrated. The department has developed a specialist resource to deal with domestic abuse notifications and the pilot has been in place since October 2017, including the delivery of Encompass. This enables a joint approach with the police as the screening occurs at the police station so strengthening partnership arrangements.

Return Home Interviews are conducted by the team based within 'early help'. Matrix management arrangements at senior management level enable a shared understanding of service provision and delivery.

Assessments for children and young people who meet the criteria are undertaken by the assessment team which currently sits adjacent to First Response. There has been a significant increase in the number of assessments being undertaken and therefore the % completed in a timely manner is not showing the progress anticipated however there are higher numbers. Signs of Safety are now being better incorporated into assessment, analysis and plans. Plans i.e. child in need or child protection are allocated to Strengthening Families or Child Protection Teams respectively; currently in each of the four localities. Findings from the neglect audit June 2017 show a need to improve the escalation of cases in a more timely way from Early Help and Strengthening Families.

Children who are at risk of significant harm are quickly identified and protected and the department has established a solid and effective joint-working partnership with other agencies. Work has been undertaken on technology to facilitate the inclusion of all agencies at the strategy meetings with some further work needed to ensure that these are consistently recorded to demonstrate full attendance.

¹⁶ [Threshold document](#)

¹⁷ Appendix A, Contract, Referral and Assessment Performance Reports

¹⁸ Appendix A, First Response Audit Report

Work has been undertaken to ensure not only the timeliness of assessments but the quality of assessments across children's social care, with new practice standards enabling all staff to be clear about expectations; this will take time to embed but there is learning from practice being shared. There is some evidence of robust work undertaken in Early Help which prevents escalation as well as a timely response when circumstances deteriorate. There is a need to more clearly express how the continuum of need is illustrated in order to offer improved clarity for staff and children and families.

Improvements in support and protection plans have been underpinned by the department's commitment to Signs of Safety practice so that families are clear about what needs to change and how they will be supported. Plans are generally SMART and kept under timely review where there is good multi-agency attendance and contribution, as well as family engagement and a child focus. Work has been undertaken to ensure that IRO's offer good challenge and support and this is now happening in the majority of cases and timeliness of ICPC's has maintained good performance at just under 97% within 15 working days. The recent 'alerts' system established by the IRO service also draws together thematic issues of practice so that strengths can be built upon and improvements addressed.

The rate of repeat child protection plans remains a key line of enquiry for Leicestershire and is subject to robust senior management oversight. The local authority has already utilized a range of methods to unpick reasons for this and is responding to the findings that the majority of cases are neglect related and have come back into CSC after a significant period of time (over 2 years). Such neglect cases tend to have two features of the 'trilogy of risk' and consequently the department has focused on addressing entrenched neglect with these features as a priority along with partner agencies. A JTAI Thematic Audit of 24 case files based around the neglect theme was undertaken in June 2017 and findings have been disseminated to aid learning and improvement. The use of the Neglect Tool was found to be an omission in most cases and therefore has warranted a re-launch to ensure consistent usage. The MARAC and MAPPA are effective and a good range of services are in place to support victims and perpetrators of domestic violence and substance misusers¹⁹.

Work has been undertaken to strengthen CIN planning for cases stepping down from CP. CIN practice guidance were produced and rolled out across the workforce to strengthen LCC offer and approach to working with CIN and how cases should be monitored and reviewed. A review of CIN cases in SEND has taken place and in line with Ofsted recommendations, all CIN within that service will be allocated to qualified social worker to ensure stronger overview, and multi-agency working. Work has been undertaken to ensure that all children with a disability where there are safeguarding issues, are properly and promptly responded to in line with statutory requirements. The LSCB has included this as a priority within the 2017/18 Business Plan.

Leicestershire continues to promote awareness of child sexual exploitation (CSE), female genital mutilation and trafficking, and this has impacted on the number of appropriate referrals. A multidisciplinary CSE team leads on safeguarding and protecting children at risk of CSE, being trafficked or having gone missing or run away. Decision-making reflects a clear child focus on risks, supported in most cases by good use of a CSE risk assessment tool. Work undertaken by the team is appropriately tailored to individual needs and reduces risk. Operational

¹⁹ 360 Project, Women's Aid and Turning Point are examples.

practice is strong with regard to children missing from home or care, with the Listening and Support Service coordinating return home interviews and regular meetings taking place to consider missing episodes and to agree risk management plans as well as consider thematic analysis. All children missing from care are offered a return interview and the uptake is 77%²⁰ with issues of children placed out of authority going missing being addressed at the appropriate level.

The department has a clear grasp of pupils missing from education, with trends and patterns understood, including prevalence in schools with higher incidents and excellent communications with schools. For children electively home educated, staff conduct monitoring visits or make contact by telephone to ensure appropriate educational activity and social care teams identify and prioritize visits to families that may be considered vulnerable. Children who have medical needs are supported back to full-time education by specialist tutors.

Children in Care

A focus on preventing the need for children to become looked after is well established and although the numbers of children coming into care is increasing, the rate is still well below statistical neighbours and national averages. Children only become looked after when it is clearly in their best interests²¹ and these decisions are based on clear, risk-based assessments that can be challenged by the current Family Care and Protect meetings and Placement and Additional Resources Panel, and will be by the Children's Decision Making Panel from January 2018. When children become looked after, there is effective placement matching which results in placement stability that is in the top quartile nationally at 7.6%.

Growth in Leicestershire's Looked After Child (LAC) population meant that there is a corresponding increase in the need for connected carers and adoptive homes; on the basis of best outcomes for children and managing the demand, Leicestershire's Permanence and Adoption Strategy (2017 – 2021) is one of the key drivers setting out the objectives, targets for growth and action plan in the context of an analysis of needs of the CLA population, particularly those awaiting permanence. There has been a significant increase in adoption activity 2017 – 2018 and the adoption scorecard has seen Leicestershire scoring well against national performance.

Since its introduction, Permanence Panel has been providing a mechanism for decision making for permanence via long term foster care which is statutorily compliant. 7 children were match with long term foster carers in 2016-2017 and a further 3 in 2017-18 up to December 2017. Embedded awareness of the matching process has advanced this year with 56 referrals for matching paperwork requested for children whose permanence plan is long term foster care; work on tracking and timeliness will be covered by the revised panel structure.

There is some recognized pressure points in terms of the quality and timeliness of assessment and planning of children on the edge of care, in care and returning home shows some variation. Assessment quality has seen some clear improvements when recently audited and plans

²⁰ September 2017

²¹ Into Care Audit

are generally SMART. The service is not complacent and via the development of clear practice standards, being worked to progress can be monitored. This will see measurable progress continue.

In March 2016 decision making panels were introduced to improve management oversight at key decision making points and of resource allocation. Ofsted commented on the improvement oversight of decision making. The permanence panel has driven the permanence campaign and held a practice submit to engage managers in driving permanence planning at all stages in particular for matching children in long term foster placements. Further work is underway to strengthen this area in particular the PLO process/ LPM process. From January 2018 'Children's Decision Making Panels' with a focus on decision making around PLO, timeliness and timescales, resources e.g. assessments, and decisions to look after a child and/or initiate care proceedings will be chaired by a HOS. It is anticipated that this will improve consistency and vest the decision making at Head of Service level and improve planning and permanence. The Permanence Panel will approve matching e.g. children with long term foster carers and ensure that CIC have a permanence plan in place by the 2nd Review.

Permanency is a strand of the Growing Quality campaign this year. It is anticipated that the revised Permanence Panel outlined above will address the issue of delay for children who cannot be adopted or return home, as well as address clearer decision making about those instances where short-term placements become long-term placements without clear planning. Therefore, the department is conducting a rolling review of all placements to ensure permanence decisions are made and progressed.

A Permanency audit was conducted during November and December 2017. The audit sought to evidence the understanding, timeliness and quality of permanence. It is positive that in all cases audited, a range of options were being considered as part of permanency planning. Out of the 25 cases audited, 16 were graded overall as good (64%). Plans are still showing inconsistencies, which was a theme from the Children Coming into care audit (August 2017). However, there has been an improvement from the previous audit of 41% of plans rated as good and 64% of plans were rated as good within the Permanency audit.

Most children are living in stable and secure placements with the long-term stability measure in line with the national average. Children are only placed in out-of-authority placements when this is necessary to meet their needs. There is a robust commissioning and placement selection processes followed by good arrangements for monitoring quality, with both social workers and the children's rights officer visiting children in these placements.

A dedicated team support commissioning activity so that placement planning is responsive and the authority has a good understanding of its placement needs²². Close working relationships between social work and commissioners have supported improved need identification, better placement matching and good contract monitoring so that and the majority of placements are appropriate and of high quality. Where this has not been the case, the department has taken action in its procurement of placements and subsequent matching.

²² Sufficiency Strategy (Market Position Statement June 2016)

The fostering and adoption panels are effective and the agency decision-maker provides well-considered recommendations and challenge to plans and matches.²³

The number and proportion of children leaving care through adoption appears to be declining, although timeliness is improving. The department has restarted its adoption campaign which will not only help overall numbers, but also helpful in securing more difficult adoption places such as for older children and children who have disabilities.

The service has driven foster-to-adopt placements so that a number of children have benefited from avoiding placement moves and achieving secure carer attachments.

A specialist assessment team undertakes all assessments of prospective adopters and foster carers. Feedback from participants is consistently positive and the training offer is appropriately reviewed to meet the needs of both adopters and foster carers. The Recruitment and Retention Strategy for Leicestershire's Fostering Service (2017 – 2021) sets out the objectives, targets for growth and an action plan based upon an analysis of the needs of the looked after population. In addition to known pressure points there is a commitment to being able to offer choice for children and young people as well as addressing particular pressure points arising from children with specific needs.

The post-adoption support offer has been refreshed alongside a range of accessible resources developed for carers and increased capacity has been put in place with the establishment of a permanent post. In addition, a pamphlet for independent advice to birth parents is now in place, a dedicated post-adoption support worker has been employed and an adoption newsletter is now used as part of a communications and support strategy. A policy on post-adoption support is included as part of our local procedures and this will be used to develop further staff guidance.

Care Leavers

Outcomes for care leavers as denoted by EET (52%) and In Suitable Accommodation (90%) are currently better than similar local authorities and 'in contact' figures have remained positive over the year (90%)²⁴. A new 16+ Team in CiC has been established to further improve these outcomes with an increase in the number of Personal Advisors to improve the quality of direct work and pathway plans. The latter remains an improvement priority in terms of quality, being up-to-date and being of key importance to the young people themselves²⁵.

Transition to independence is well supported and the department has taken steps to overcome common issues by working strategically with partners, for example district councils in relation to housing although there is further work to be done. Personal advisers ensure that care leavers who have specific mental health or substance-misuse issues, or disabilities have an ordered transition to adult services and also

²³ Adoption Panel and Fostering Panel minutes and local tracker

²⁴ 2016/17 903 return and local Care Leavers dashboard

²⁵ Service audit

provide effective, personalized and bespoke support and guidance to enable care leavers to secure further or higher education, employment or training. The latter has been strengthened by the revision of the local NEET strategy so that there is a specific focus on care leavers and the Virtual School routinely sharpens post-16 plans and support for this cohort. However, the department's ambition means that the current level of NEET care leavers, especially at older age groups, is too high and requires improvement.

Managers and staff are committed to promoting care leavers' voice with an effective Supporting Young People After Care (SY PAC) group and have in place a good range of activities to draw them together. The service celebrates the achievements of care leavers and this is highly valued by the young people that attend.

Children's Departmental Strategic Priorities - Safety, Health and Education



CFS Departmental
Plan v0.4.doc

The Children's Departmental Plan has a number of strategic priorities and measures that will form the basis, together with the Continuous Improvement Plan, of the priorities over the next 12 months. For each of the 5 strategic priorities within the departmental plan, progress will be measured and 'Signs of Safety' maps have been used to outline current achievements, where there are still challenges, what we are planning to do and how we will know when we are making progress. The priorities are:-

- All children in Leicestershire are living in stable environments and have secure attachments
- Every child gets the best possible start in life
- Provide early intervention through working with families to build strength, resilience and confidence
- Every child should have access to good quality education to ensure they achieve their maximum potential
- We focus on improving children's emotional health and wellbeing

The focus on improving children's emotional health and well-being, services for children needing specialist support from CAMHS remains challenging, and is therefore a key Children and Family Partnership priority. For children in care who do not meet the threshold for CAMHS, funding for counselling sessions to a number of children and the introduction of CAMHS consultation sessions has received very positive feedback. There has also been an introduction of more information/training and support at foster carer support groups (hubs) that address emotional health and reduced supervising social worker caseloads to improve accessibility and support when such issues arise. We also have specialist assessments to inform care planning and the Placement and Additional Resource Panel and Complex Care Panel with

Health services consider children's needs as part of placement planning. We have reduced waiting times for emotional support to children in care and our Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ) measure is in line with the England average at 16.

The local authority and its health partners have remained focused on improving children's access to health assessments and dental checks. However, data recording issues means that performance for both shows a decline and is now below statistical neighbours at 67% and 76% respectively and is one of the measures of success within the departmental plan.

Further work is needed with partner agencies specifically health and education in relation to children and young people with complex needs to ensure that there is proper signed up agreement at the point of placement, to appropriate shared funding arrangements. There is also a need to improve transitioning arrangements for young people open to the Children with Disabilities Service to ensure that transition planning is effective and so that children, young people and their families are not left without assurance about the plan at the point of transfer to Adult Services.

For young people needing accommodation, further work is needed to develop constructive relationships with housing departments and an update of policies with the intention of improving appropriate transitions to independence from care and access to tenancies with a LA guarantor, alongside ongoing practical and emotional support of the Leaving Care Service.

Schools work well with the local authority on anti-bullying and the CiCC also developed an anti-bullying leaflet. Children who go missing from care form part of missing arrangements already referred to above. All domestic abuse referrals coming to the attention of the police are screened, as noted above and schools are informed that there has been an incident within 24 hours.

There are high educational aspirations for children in care with schools working well with the virtual school (The Fox Academy). In line with the national picture, attainment and progress gaps between all children and those looked after remains too wide but Leicestershire performs relatively well in all measures including exclusions and absence²⁶. Schools value the input of virtual school staff, including training for teachers and governors, and PEP review meetings are effective with clearly expressed actions and outcomes with children's progress is extremely well monitored.