

Children and Family Services

Care Placement Strategy

| 2018 - 2021

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Executive Summary

In Leicestershire we are ambitious for our children and want to do all we can to provide them with high quality services. For our children in care we will provide good quality care and placements to help them reach their potential. The Care Placement Strategy outlines the county council's ambition for how we will design, develop, deliver and commission services of a high quality that place children and their needs firmly at the centre.

The Children & Family Services Continuous Improvement Plan (The Road to Excellence 2017-2022) arising from the Ofsted SIF in 2016 has identified areas for changes and the need for key strategies to be developed in order to improve outcomes and impact for children and young people.

There are a number of national and local drivers which underpin the need for Local Authorities to look innovatively at what is being delivered in relation to children in care. Some of the national drivers are embedded in the legislation, Working Together 2015, and a national focus on child deaths, a focus on adoption and permanence; all in the context of a national and local programme of austerity and funding reductions.

Coupled with rising expectations and the need to do more for less and work better with partner agencies to deliver services, has led to the need for Local Authorities to focus on delivering through transformation and innovation

The majority of Local Authorities have seen an increasing number of care applications and children being accommodated. While the average looked after child rate in Leicestershire has continued to increase over the last four years it still remains significantly lower than those of statistical neighbours. Adoption rates are showing an improved picture however older children with complex behavioural needs continue to present challenges in relation to permanence but also are reflecting a significant increase in spend on external placements.

In developing the Care Placement Strategy work it is necessary to determine what services may be necessary to meet the needs of children both on the edge of care and in care and how permanence for children and young people can be achieved at an earlier stage in the child's journey.

Leicestershire County Council's Children and Family Services has reviewed pathways of care to ensure both internal and external services have a shared understanding of the needs of vulnerable children including children with disabilities and children with complex challenging behaviour and are able to offer flexible responsive services that work towards improved outcomes for children and families in Leicestershire. We are ambitious for our children and young people and are developing and leading services that will make a difference to their outcomes

The Strategy acknowledges the need to co-invest, co-produce and co-deliver services with Partner organisations to optimise outcomes for young people and ensure where possible efficiencies in costs are achieved.



1. Introduction

Leicestershire's Children and Family Services (CFS), in line with many Children's Services Departments, is facing unprecedented challenges in managing the increasing demand, lack of capacity in placement availability and choice, and rising costs alongside the need to respond to financial challenges.

The Department of Education's 2017 publication 'Children looked after in England (including adoption)', reports that at a national level the number of Looked After Children (LAC) continues to increase; and indeed has increased steadily over the last nine years. At 31 March 2017 there were 72,670 LAC in England, an increase of 3% on 2016.

Over the past eight years in Leicestershire the rate of growth in LAC numbers has increased above the national trend lines. Leicestershire's LAC population has increased significantly (by 48%) from 355 LAC on 31st March 2010 to 553 on 31st March 2018.

CFS estimates that Leicestershire's LAC population will increase by a further 18% by 2021, bringing the total number of Children and Young People (C&YP) in its care to approximately 769 by the end of March 2021. The corresponding increase in placement spend has been estimated at £12million by 2021/22.

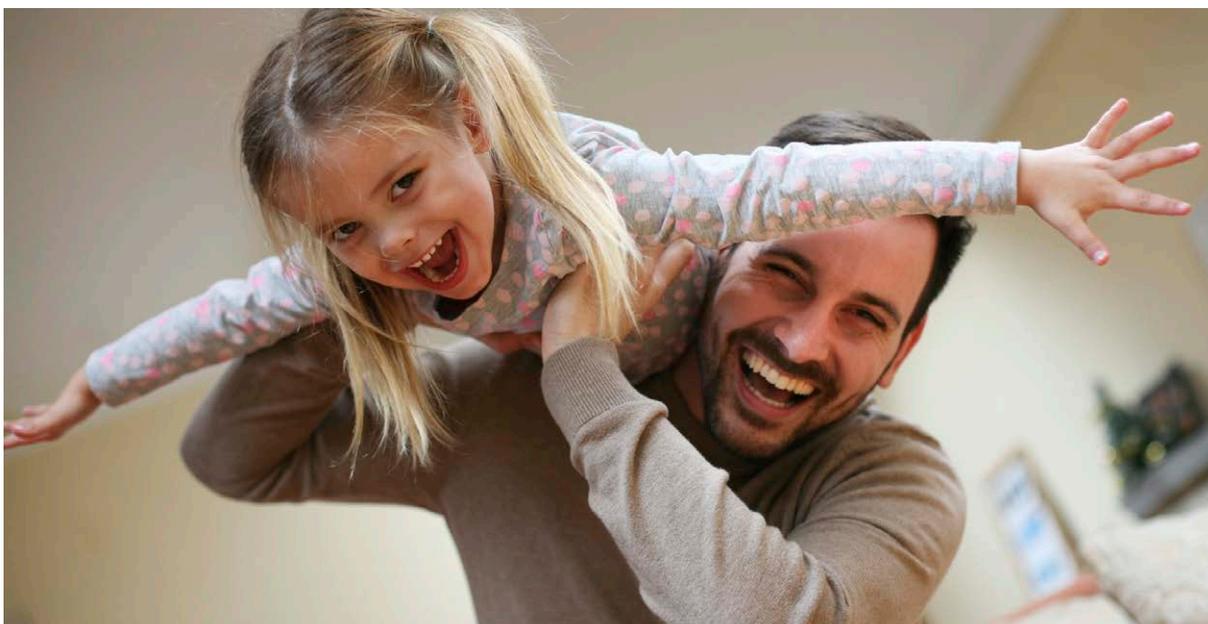
Over the past two years there has been a particularly noticeable trend of older young people coming into care who often have existing behavioural, educational and health needs.

Residential placements make up a significant amount of the service's placement spend. There were 59 children in residential placements on the 31 March 2018 which are 10.6% of the total LAC population and the costs for the end of the 2017/18 financial year are projected as £10.8m, 42% of the total placement spends.

The average cost of residential placement is £3500 per week (compared to £795 per week on average for an Independent Fostering Agency placement) with residential costs reflecting the complexity and level of support each child requires.

Leicestershire has prioritised investment in preventative services to help to avoid the need for children to become looked after. Children who are at risk of family breakdown receive timely and, if necessary, intensive support to help them to remain living with their families.

The Care Placement Strategy offers an understanding of other CFS Strategies as outlined in section 7 and ensures a "golden thread" identifying the overall pathway of services that vulnerable young people may require and ensure that all services are focused on outcomes, prevention and permanence.



2. Improved Outcomes

Research findings reflect that successful outcomes for children and young people are achieved when there is:

- Placement stability
- Timely permanence planning
- Strong multi-agency working strategically and operationally
- Clear and honest approach and strong multi-agency SMART Plan
- Clear pathways to services
- Clear, consistent and timely decision making processes based on a thorough assessment of risk and strengths in family networks
- Clear plan of work based on a thorough assessment and mutually agreed goals; regular reviews of progress and risk factors and for closure and sustainability
- Effective decision making panels and consistency
- Engagement of young people in their plans

Children who remain in care highlight the importance of their relationships with family and siblings. They also describe their relationships with their teachers, foster carers, social workers as central to their wellbeing

Central to the county council's approach is the idea that children and young people are best brought up within their own families. The revised decision making panels will seek to ensure that children will receive an appropriate service as an alternative to becoming looked after, reduce the period of time of being looked after and ensure permanence at the earliest opportunity.

3. Interdependencies to this strategy

- Children and Families Departmental Plan 2017 – 20
- Children & Families Partnership Plan 2018 – 21
- Care Planning and Decision Making Guidance 2018
- Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021
- Increase in-house Foster Carers
- Multi-disciplinary Intensive Support Team Leicestershire (MISTLE)
- Early Help Review
- Disabled Children's Service Review

4. CFS Departmental Vision

“Leicestershire is the best place for all children, young people and their families”

We will describe the outcomes we want to achieve for children, young people and their families and identify measures that can tell us how well we are achieving them in comparison with other English local authorities. We will aim to be the best performing local authority in the country against these measures, and where we are not yet there we will set stretching targets for annual improvement.



5. CFS Departmental Priorities

- All children in Leicestershire are living in safe and 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 potential.
- We focus on improving children’s emotional health and wellbeing.
- Excellent provision and sufficiency to meet the diverse needs of our young people

6. Care Placement Strategy Key Principles

- Develop our local offer to enable children where it is safe to do so to live within their family and reduce the necessity for reception into care.
- When children are unable to live within their family network we will provide them with high quality care and placements that enable them to form secure attachments and reach their full potential.
- To make sure that residential care is only used when it is positive to do so for a young person and this is a planned period towards a family /community based placement. This will reduce our over dependency on long term residential care
- Develop new approaches for young people in residential care to where possible support them to live in family based placements
- Ensure more children and young people in care can continue to live in Leicestershire
- Develop intensive family-based services for the most challenging young people we work with
- Move from largely individualised commissioning to more strategic approaches operating over the longer term.
- Create services which work across the agency boundaries – health, education, police, and social care
- Explore innovative evidence-based commissioning opportunities to test new approaches
- Services need to become more performance focused with clear outcomes measure to evidence impact of intervention



7. Care Placement Strategy Approach

In order to address the challenges presented; the Care Placements Strategy (which is made up of a number of strategies) proposes a number of approaches:

7.1 Edge of Care Strategy

The following cohorts of children may be seen as 'on the edge of care' and are often those children and young people for whom outcomes are poorer and where there is increased uncertainty.

- Repeat pregnancies where unborn babies need safeguarding due to factors associated with the trilogy of risk – alcohol, drugs and domestic abuse.
- Children who experience neglect as the single most important factor leading to the development of behaviours and poor attachments who may experience one or more episodes of being looked after and a number of attempted reunifications with families
- Young people who have been known to services over a protracted period of time, whose behaviour is such that parent(s) no longer feel able to have them at home
- Adoption breakdowns due to the extent of the child's needs and the inability of parents and services to meet those needs often identified as attachment behaviours
- Children with disabilities whose needs are so complex that as they grow and develop, families are unable to meet those needs
- Young homeless people aged 16/17 years for whom local authorities and housing departments have developed protocols in order to have shared accountabilities where it is acknowledged that housing may be one of a number of needs.

Each cohort of children and young people bring with them the need for services to develop specialist knowledge and skills in order to be able to respond appropriately to the complex needs of families.

In addition there is a need to develop services that are flexible, responsive and are able to meet need either through looking after children, achieving permanence or ensuring reunification for those children and young people who have experienced an episode of being looked after.

Research conducted by (Ward et al 2014) defines 'those primarily at imminent risk of becoming looked after'; including young people at risk of abuse or neglect; who are in high conflict with families and thought to be difficult to manage; whose parents have toxic trio issues; who are offenders; or who have previously been looked after.

The Institute of Public Care suggest that additional groups of young people at risk of late entry into care may include: young people with a disability / learning disability previously cared for by their families; and young people at risk of sexual exploitation or sexual abuse.

We aim to:

- Work with children and their families to help support them to remain together when it is safe to do so
- Offer high quality evidence-based practice
- Ensure strong and effective management oversight
- Ensure consistently good services for children and their families
- Provide good quality care when children are looked after
- Act in a timely way to secure permanence for children who cannot be kept safe within their own families

7.2 Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 - 2021

The Fostering Recruitment and Retention Strategy sets out the objectives, targets for growth, and action plan in the context of an analysis of needs, of the Looked After population In Leicestershire County Council in 2017-2021, and those on the edge of care. It is an ambitious strategy, setting out to increase the numbers of in house foster carers by 130 over the next three years.

At Leicestershire County Council in 2016-17, the service lost 24 foster carers, which equated to 14 % of the foster carer population. National benchmarking identifies an average 12% loss, and this recruitment plan has been set with a projected 13 % loss per annum, based on the age of the foster carer population in 2015-16.

Research from the National Office for Statistics published in February 2017 revealed a 38% reduction countrywide in applications to become a foster carer which demonstrates the challenging environment in terms of in-house recruitment.

Inevitably, there is a natural turnover of foster carers and last year (2016/17) Leicestershire's turnover stood at 14% (against a national average of 12%) , reflecting that Leicestershire has a higher proportion of older carers who are approaching retirement and some foster carers becoming adopters. Leicestershire predicts to lose a further 60 carers over the three year period to 2020/21.

The Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy identifies the need to increase the numbers of in house foster carers by 130 over the next 3 years. The priorities for recruitment are focused most sharply on placements for older children, and those with complex emotional, behavioural and health needs.



The Strategy seeks to:

- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement which will meet needs, and support good outcomes
- Meet the recruitment targets set, which are reflective of the needs analysis.
- Contribute to Council savings of £2.9m in Children's Services
- Ensure all Children's Services employees to recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of Foster Carers, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care.

Leicestershire currently has 124 in house foster carers. The Recruitment and Retention Plan looks to increase the number of in-house foster carers through:

- Improved marketing and recruitment of foster carers
- Reviewing and improving the customer journey from enquiry to recruitment to approved foster carer journey
- Increasing the numbers of mainstream and specialist carers
- Review of fostering fees and revising payments policy and structure
- Providing better support for foster carers, including in developing the training offer

The Service is planning a step change in in house fostering recruitment to address expected growth in looked after children.

The Recruitment and Retention Plan describes the expansion of in house foster care to cater for the use of an intensive service to offer more complex need children and their carers the support they need, when they need it.

The Dedicated Placement Support Team focuses on preventing placement breakdown providing intensive support to children and young people at risk of going into residential care. The team provide support and improve stability for young people living in foster care that are experiencing difficulties and who present the most challenging behaviour, preventing them from needing to enter residential care.

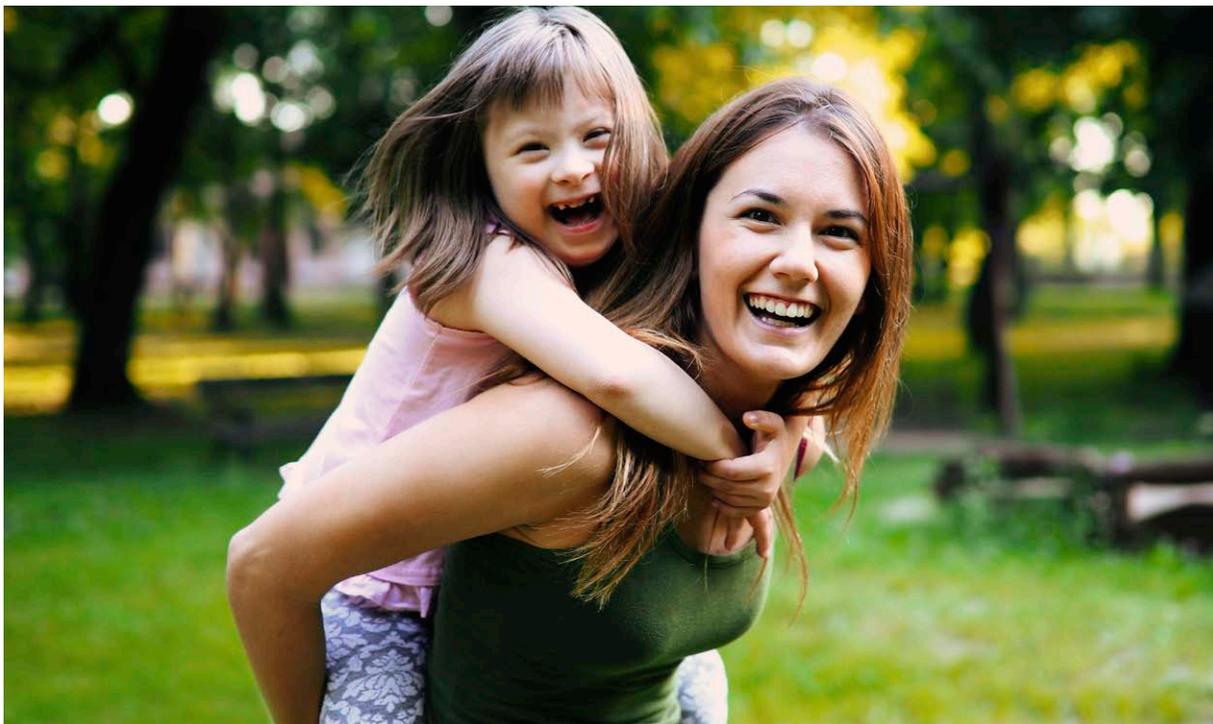


7.3 Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2018 - 2021

The Permanence and Adoption Strategy sets out the objectives, targets for growth, and action plan in the context of an analysis of needs of the Looked After population In Leicestershire County Council, particularly those children awaiting permanence. It is an ambitious strategy, setting out priorities including permanence decision making, recruitment and permanence support.

Summary of adoption activity for 2017-18 (Quarter 1 and 2) is provided below:

- 33 children in adoptive placement, of which 24 children placed in 2017-18
- 10 are interagency matches, of which 2 are sibling groups with older children
- 33 children awaiting adoption, and
- A further 61 Pack A requests (indicating that adoption is being considered)
- 4 adopters approved in this period
- Prospective adopters in stage 1: 11
- Prospective adopters in stage 2: 6
- 12 adoptive families awaiting a match.



The objectives of the Permanence and Adoption plan are to:

- Make effective and timely permanency decisions for children and young people.
- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement which will meet needs, and support good outcomes
- Meet the recruitment targets set out in this strategy, which are reflective of the needs analysis.
- Ensure all Children's Services employees recognise their contribution to supporting the recruitment and retention of connected carers and adopters, and recognising their value as part of the professional service delivered to our children in care.

To achieve the ambitions set the service will:

- Review and revise the role of decision making panels to ensure that children will receive an appropriate service as an alternative to becoming looked after, reduce the period of time of being looked after and ensure permanence at the earliest opportunity.
- Ensure care planning decisions will be tracked and monitored earlier and more effectively through the Child Decision Making Panel to ensure early permanence decisions are made and progressed.
- Monitor and review permanence plans through the Permanence Panel to promote quality planning - focusing on both the child's needs over time and the support the carer will need to meet these needs
- Introduce service standards to guide practice consistency and set aspirational standards

Specifically on increasing the number of adopters the service will:

- Develop a strong brand and reputation reflected in an improved marketing approach
- Offer clear customer feedback and engagement through the early inquiry stages for prospective adopters
- Encourage adopters to work with more complex children
- Deliver continuous improvement and reflection to ensure that systemic strengths are used as platforms for change
- Increase support for adopters and connected carers to establish a positive pathways to emotional health and wellbeing, and better outcomes for the future of the children and young people they are caring for
- Provide improved and creative support post permanence including expanding the service offer for post 3 years placement order.



7.4 Care Leavers

Following the publication of regulations and guidance for the Childrens and Social Work Act 2017 on the 28th Feb 2018, the Council has embraced new duties to care leavers. Under the new regulation, the local authority must provide support to all Care Leavers who request it, over the age of 21 up to the age of 25. The offer of support will be published to ensure young people who are leaving care or who have recently left care are aware of the support they are entitled too. The offer will represent multi-agency corporate parenting support with member champions addressing issues such as:

- Suitable and timely accommodation provision; challenging intentionality (seeing Districts using their discretionary powers)
- The delivery of ambitious education, employment and training
- Emotional wellbeing through enduring relationship based services
- Financial stability.

We aim to:

- Be ambitious for our children and young people, including Care Leavers, striving for Care Plans Pathway Plans that reflect person centred aspirations, SMART objectives and the child or young person's voice.
- Develop a multi-agency corporate parenting offer for all care leavers and embedding a panel for the most vulnerable care leavers.



7.5 Commissioning Strategy 2018 - 2020

The Commissioning Strategy sets out the vision and direction for commissioning activity across Leicestershire's Children and Family Services and how this will be achieved over the next two years as well as establishing the principles and framework which will underpin all our commissioning decisions.

LCC currently source Independent Fostering Service and Residential Care through the East Midlands Regional Children's Framework on a spot purchase basis. This offers some level of reassurance in relation to quality and price but due to the major lack of market sufficiency Placements are also frequently commissioned from Off Framework providers often at a higher cost.

In respect of Commissioning Services that support the care placement Strategy the following Commissioning Priorities have been identified:

- To review Early Help & Edge of Care Service to identify need and demand to identify priority commissioning opportunities in preventing young people coming into care as outlined in Section 1
- To increase local foster care /adoption sufficiency to prevent young people going into residential provision as outlined in section 2 & 3
- To review the current Residential Short Breaks provision available for Disabled Children and develop future Commissioning options to support family's needs and prevent family breakdown
- To commission therapeutic support service to offer 24/7 support to Young People with a focus on step down from residential care to a family based placement. The MISTLE project is delivered by Action for Children and will work intensively with the child or young person and their support network to enable a return to family based care or independence when approaching adulthood
- To develop a Regional approach to SEN Independent Non Maintained (INM) Commissioning
- To review the current supported accommodation contract for Young People at risk of homelessness.
- To review and develop an Inclusion pathways for all learners
- To develop a Childrens Service Partnership to explore opportunities to co-invest and co-design a flexible responsive service delivery model to support the delivery of services that address all aspects of the Care Placement Strategy. The partnership could involve the provision of, the management of or the sub-contracting of services. There would need to be sufficient flexibility to adjust the scope and nature of services to meet changing needs.

8. Governance and Oversight

The intent is to ensure consistency in decision making; robust management oversight and the development of plans that are SMART and that identify the need for services and ensure that these are implemented.

The four panels/meetings for ensuring effective decision making are;-

- Early Help Transition, Oversight and Planning Meeting (threshold for statutory services)
- Family Care and Protect Meetings (strengthening CIN and avoiding family breakdown)
- Children's Decision Meeting (decision to look after, initiate legal proceedings and/or PLO or return for more work)
- Permanence Panel (to ensure that adoption, long term fostering, Special Guardianship Orders, re-unification happens in a timely manner)

9. Success Criteria

Success will be measured in a number of ways:

- Significant proportion of children and young people will be supported to remain within their families, if not with a parent/carer(s) within the wider family
- Resilience will be built to enable this to happen without the need for ongoing services
- There will be a reduction in the number of children and young people admitted to care. When they do come into care we will work in a timely way to achieve permanence for them
- That where re-unification has happened that this is sustained and that the number of repeat admissions is reduced
- Improved assessments and SMART care planning subject to robust management oversight and challenge is evidenced
- Well informed workforce with the skills and knowledge to be able to work with and support children and young people who have suffered profound neglect, physical, sexual and emotional harm, have poor attachments and whose needs have been unmet
- For children who cannot return home that an alternative permanence option is established earlier and that uncertainty for children is reduced
- That in developing tracking mechanisms through the panels that we are able to form an understanding of what works and what other services need to be developed
- Children and families voice is heard and is evident in the design and delivery of services
- Children and young people will continue to give feedback on the services that they receive in order for us to do better
- Families continue to give feedback on the services that they receive in order for us to do better

OUTCOME MEASURES

- To maintain the number of children in care at 42.5 per 10,000 in Leicestershire by reducing the rate of children entering care and supporting others to exit care as appropriate
- To decrease the use of Independent Fostering Agency carers and the private market by increasing Leicestershire's mainstream provision by 65% by March 2021
- To decrease the use of residential care from 10% to 8% through the use of targeted intervention, market development, by increasing Supported Lodgings provision by 45% and specialist placement provision by 100% by March 2021
- All children in care will have a permanence plan by the second statutory review





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