

Education and Childrens Services

SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP

Edge of Care/Care Framework

Practice Guidance

2017

OUR MISSION:

‘To improve children and young people’s lives by working in partnership to raise aspirations, build achievement, and protect the most vulnerable’

Introduction

Leicester City Council had seen a rise in the number of children/young people being Looked After, increased numbers of children and young people made subject to Child Protection Plans and involved in interventions at the Specialist Service level of provision. Despite the significant increase of resources (both financial and other) being invested at this level and diverted in response to this need it did not resolve the issue nor did it fully achieved the desired outcomes for children and young people. It was therefore necessary to review our approach especially in light of the increased financial pressures and the need to provide better outcomes for all the children and young people in Leicester City.

Research has indicated that children/young people and their families have the best possible outcomes when intervention is targeted early and well before they reach Specialist levels of intervention. It is demonstrated that the best outcomes are linked to those children and young people who live with their parents and/or birth families when compared to those that reside in the care system. Thus, our strategy focuses on keeping children/young people at home wherever and whenever possible and to exhaust all other family and friends options prior to considering bringing a child/young person into care. We are focusing our actions on early identification of those whose outcomes are not improving at home to enable appropriate and timely intervention.

Leicester City Council has developed a strong and consistent 'front door'. Our thresholds are clear and workers are able to articulate and communicate this so that the right resources are targeted at the right time to meet the needs of children, young people and their families. Our Duty & Advice Service is the part of our service that provides the first contact and assessment of vulnerable children, young people and their families. We recognise that this is a crucial starting point in a child/young person's journey and thus we endeavour to ensure that for those children/young people and their families that meet our threshold of intervention that they will be offered an assessment and the relevant and right service/provision.

We accepted that there is a critical time factor for returning a child/young person home and thus it is necessary that if a child/young person is in the care of the local authority, resources must be available and mobilised early to facilitate the return the child/young person home when it is safe to do so and in their best interests. When it is right for a child/young person enters into our care, we are robust in our assessment and planning for the child/young person. We establish their security and safety and ensure the establishment of early permanence. We recognise and accept that permanency begins at our front door and is an essential feature throughout the child/young person's journey.

Leicester City Council and its partner agencies are premised on the belief that in most circumstances, children and young people are best cared for within their own

families and thus, the purpose of the Leicester City Council 'Edge of Care/Care' strategy is to support children and young people to remain within their birth families, wherever and whenever possible when it is safe to do so and to ensure that only the right children and young people enter into our care. When children/young people enter into our care, they are given stability, security and every opportunity to grow and achieve.

Within Education and Children Services, our vision is to **support children and young people to be safe, learn, achieve and grow**. Leicester City Council wants to achieve the best possible outcomes for all children and young people. The Edge of Care/Care Strategy will therefore encompass various approaches simultaneously to achieve this:

- at the Early Help level with provision of targeted support and resources to those children/young people who are currently open to Special Services to prevent them being Looked After;
- identify alternative permanent placements other than care for those children looked after by Leicester City Council when it is the best interests of the child/young people; and
- review and assess the permanence/care plans for children/young people in the care of Leicester City Council to ensure their placement(s) best meet their needs now and in their future.

To strengthen our assessment and planning for children and young people, Leicester City Council is incorporating the 'Signs of Safety' model as our framework for our assessment, planning and communication in reference to children, young people and their families. 'Signs of Safety' is a solution-focused and safety orientated approach to casework. It is a comprehensive risk assessment framework that involves everyone in the assessment process (families and professionals). It incorporates harm/danger, existing strengths/safety and future safety in reference to assessment and planning. Utilising this approach will improve the quality of assessments/analysis/intervention delivered to families; improve engagement of families; and improve risk management of vulnerable children/young people as a result of rigorous assessment and safety planning.

The Edge of Care/Care strategy provides the framework for the work currently being delivered and recommendations for future commissioning of services across Leicester City Council to deliver a consistent, coordinated and sustainable service model which meets the needs of children, young people and their families.

For the purpose of this document, 'Edge of Care/Care' refers to children/young people who either:

- are being considered for care but have not entered into local authority care

- have not entered into care as we have assessed and chosen to support them and their families through alternative provisions/services; or
- who are already in the care of the local authority and where permanence has not been identified and secured.

The mission of Leicester City Council and all of its partners working with children/young people and their families is **to improve children's lives by working in partnership to raise aspirations, build achievements and protect the most vulnerable**. We believe that

- Families and communities have many strengths that support parents as the primary carers for their children and contribute to building resilience and independence in families
- Children, young people and families develop resilience if there are protective factors in place such as: a positive relationship with an adult ; good literacy and communication skills; good school attendance; and parents in or actively seeking and ready to work
- Children's needs are best met when help is offered in a universal setting within a socially mixed group, and early on when problems start to emerge.

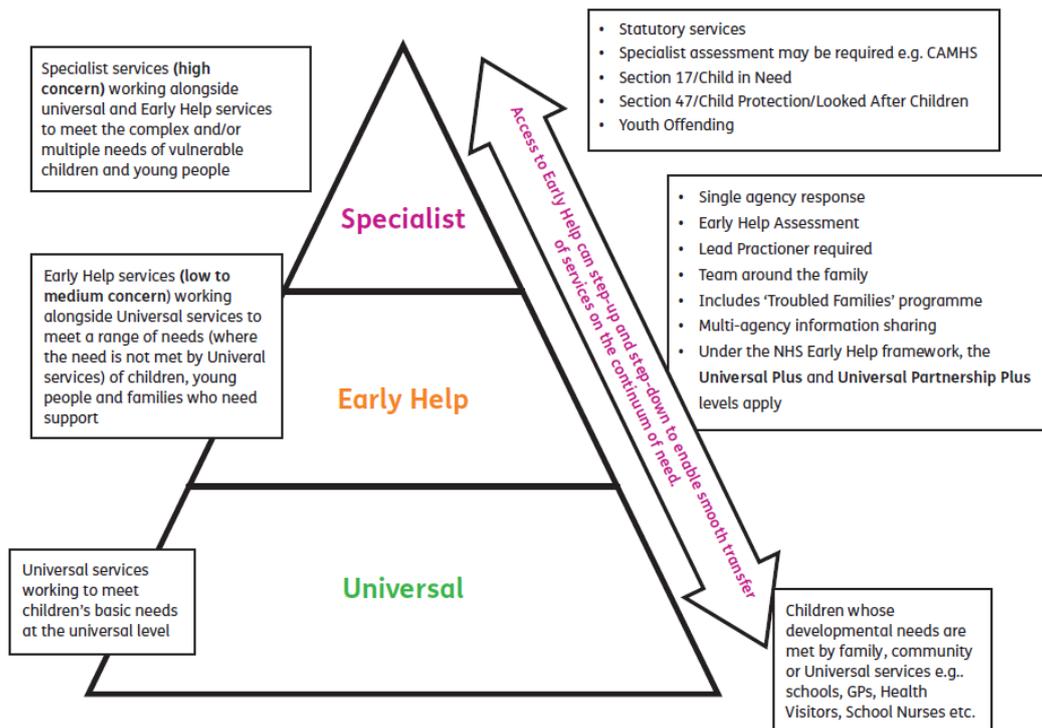
1. Early Help

The Early Help partnership objectives are based on **supporting** children/young people and their families as early as possible with the right provision of resources; **strengthening** the capacity of families and communities to meet the needs children and young people through universal services when and where possible and; improving service effectiveness by intervening to improve key protective factors to help build resilience and support children and young people to **thrive**.

'Early Help' means providing help for children, young people and their families as soon as problems start to emerge or where it is likely that issues will impact negatively on the outcomes for children and young people. Research has continuously demonstrated that early intervention produces the most positive outcomes associated to children, young people and their families. Leicester Children's Trust Strategy 2016 – 2019 provides the framework for how this strategy will facilitate its objectives and also prevent children, young people and their families from escalating to Specialist Service provision. Early Help will also function to support children, young people and their families who will step down from Specialist Services and eventually move to service provision at the Universal level.

Early Help offers help and support at the right time to the right child and their family to prevent any issues from escalating. Working Together (2015) requires local agencies to have effective ways of identifying emerging problems and potential unmet needs for individual children/young people and their families. It necessitates

that services work together to put processes in place for effective assessments of needs for children/young people who may benefit from early help services/intervention. Leicester City Council's Early Help Strategy works across all three levels of service provision (that is, Universal, Early Help and Specialist).



Early Help is an integral part to this strategy and the Leicester City Council Early Help Strategy (2016 – 2019) emphasises this by its approach to partnership working and its commitment to ensuring the right support is available to meet the needs of children/young people and their families at the right time and in the right place for them. It is important that the right provisions are available at this level to prevent escalation when it may not be necessary to do so. This approach is vital to the prevention of escalation into Specialist services and children/young people coming into the care of the authority.

2. Identification and Prevention of Children/Young People from entering Care

A. Identification and Definition of Cohort

With the increasing numbers of children and young people being referred to Children's Social Care and those being subject to Child in Need (CIN) plans, Child Protection Plans (CPP) and being Looked After by the Council, it was necessary to identify those children and young people that may become Looked After so that the right resources could be focused on them and their families to prevent them coming into the care of the local authority. With one of our aims being to reduce the number of children and young people being Looked After and ensuring that only those children and young people come into our care that need to, it is important for us to understand the profile/demographics of the children/young people and their families that access Specialist Services and especially those children/young people that become Looked After. With early identification and ensuring that the right resource/service being put in place, we are reducing the likelihood for children/young people becoming Looked After due to 'missed opportunities' when they are referred and the support offered was not appropriate to the need. We have identified that these children/young people tended to be older and often subject to repeat referrals and the provision of care for this age group often does not lead to improved outcomes. We also saw that a few children/young people entered into the care of the local authority that had not recently been referred to Specialist Services. We are tracking children/young people at the Early Help level in reference to service provision in reference to the identified needs of the child/young person and their families.

We are using available data to create a demographic profile of children/young people that have entered into the care of the local authority and the identified characteristics of the child/young people and their families that access services at the Early Help and Specialist Service levels to inform future commissioning strategies.

Models that focus on the profile of children/young people coming into the care system have been developed which reference to the local parameters of those children/young people, their families, together with other identifiers. The analysis of such data has created a definition and profile of children/young people that are on the 'edge of care'. An example of this is shown in the table below from the Early Intervention Foundation. Although not specific for Leicester City Council, various similarities can be drawn from the data when considering the children/young people that have been and are currently Looked After by the Council. None of the factors were seen in isolation but all interacted to give the authority a picture of the children/young people that were coming into their care system. They then targeted resources/services and commissioning efforts more systematically to better reach this cohort.

Table taken from Early Intervention Foundation 2014

THE PREDICTIVE MODEL

<p>Child:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Gender • Age on first contact with CHS • Ethnicity • Age on first referral • Age on 1st s47 • Youth offending • Primary client group • Presenting needs • Educational attainment • Exclusions and absence 	<p>Family:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sibling demographics • Lone parent families • Known worklessness • Modelled income estimates • Receipt of free school meals • Approach in housing need • Approached as homeless • Sibling youth offending • Mobility • Mosaic segment • Presenting needs
<p>Location:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ward • Levels of deprivation • Household composition • Educational attainment • Housing type • Overcrowding/under occupancy • Social class 	<p>Interventions/Interactions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Housing history • Social care episodes • Outcomes of episodes • Merlins • Length of time known to CHS • Previous CLA/CPP

The development of a predictive model to identify and categorise families at risk informs decision making, through improving prognostic accuracy. This model and others like it, facilitates the catalogue of factors associated to those families most in need of intensive evidence-based interventions and the identification of which services/interventions that might be most suitable for the child/young person and their families. Therefore, it is important that we track children and young people coming into the care of the authority and learn from this cohort so that we are more pro-active at an earlier stage in our approach to commissioning of resources and targeting services to meet their needs. By doing this, we are effectively reducing costs and improving the outcomes associated to the children/young people and their families in Leicester City.

B. Prevention

Leicester City Council is committed to children/young people remaining within the care of their own families when it is safe for them and it maintains and promotes their welfare. In our practice, we are balancing the supposed benefits of being in care against the assessed risks of children/young people remaining with their birth families by considering the long term outcomes, as well as, short term problem

solving and appropriate service provision. Where children/young people do become looked after, we work with families to secure a safe and timely return home with the right supports when it is appropriate to do so. When it is not possible for the child/young person to return to his/her parent(s), we work with the wider family to assess if the child/young person can be brought up in his/her wider family unit. We begin our assessments and planning for the child and young person at our front door and we see this as a vital part of the child/young person's journey and development.

Leicester City Council is currently offering a number of approaches/procedures to agree Looked After status only for those children/young people where it is not safe for them to remain in their family home. All children/young people that are being considered for care must first be brought to the attention of the relevant Head of Service. Thus, no child/young person can become Looked After without agreement by a Head of Service unless the child/young person is subject to a court order and/or Police Powers. In all cases, agreement is needed before a placement is identified. When the placement identified is outside of the local authority and if the placement is considered a higher cost provision, the Head of Service must be informed (as per the decision making framework). Placing accountability at this high level means that only those children/young people that need to be in care are, service provision is identified early and also facilitates better matching of placements for the child/young person early.

Leicester City Council has put processes in place to ensure decisions are being reviewed and tracked in a timely manner. The following are in place and/or being developed:

- Legal Planning Meetings (LPM)

These meetings are held regularly and a legal perspective of whether or not threshold has been met in reference to safeguarding and the initiation of the Public Law Outline (PLO) is determined. Timeframes for completion of work are issued to facilitate the meeting of the 26 week timeframe for the court timetable and to ensure effective and timely decisions are made on behalf of the child/young person. These meetings ensure the right provision is in place for children/young people and their families to prevent court action when it is right to do so. It ensures that we are operating in a safe and fair manner and taking into account all legal and human rights aspects when it comes to the rights of the child/young person and their family.

Service Managers chair these meetings and there is a clear financial and resource accountability for this role to ensure that the necessary decision hierarchy is in place. Documentation and the plans for the child/young person are reviewed prior to the meeting to ensure thoroughness, effectiveness and efficiency in reference to these meetings.

- Multi-Agency Support Panel (MASP)

Provision of senior management oversight to enable decision making to ensure the right packages of support is offered at the right time for children and young people across the continuum of need that promotes family life and protects them within a family setting. Cases that are presented to MASP are as follows:

- Families where despite intervention and allocation of resources still no improved outcomes and increased risk of escalating to CIN/CP
- Threshold resolution; for those cases when agreement cannot be reached and the step up/down procedure cannot be used
- Request for resources when they cannot be successfully accessed outside of the panel. This means that staff should endeavour to access support for families outside the panel, it is only when this cannot be achieved should they present to this panel.

The current remit of this panel allows it to review cases that are 'stuck' from a multi-agency format. This panel reviews cases at the Early Help level and below to ensure the right resources/provisions are available to best meet the needs of the child/young person and their families at the Early Help level and below. This panel will also advise practitioners when cases should be escalated to the next level to prevent delay and to ensure appropriate thresholds of intervention are utilised. The panel facilitates robust planning across Early Help.

- Edge of Care Panel

The Panel will:

- Manage the threshold for access to the looked after system
- Ensure that resources are appropriately identified and allocated
- Apprise future commissioning strategies for Leicester City Council

The Edge of Care Panel will provide a robust overview of all admissions of a child/young person into care and will be accountable to the Director of Social Care & Early Help.

The Edge of Care Panel plays an essential role in coordinating services and packages for children and young people who are on the edge of care. This is where decisions are made to support the family through alternative packages or services rather than admit the child/young person into the care system, either on a voluntary basis or through legal proceedings. The panel will allocate resources according to the needs of child/young person presented.

The services that can be accessed from this panel are those that are high cost and/or resource intensive. All cases should have Service Manager agreement prior to presentation at the panel.

When children/young people are being considered for care, it will act as an additional check point for social workers and other professionals to ensure all other avenues have been sufficiently tested and exhausted before a child/young person is brought into care. Leicester City Council is not seeking to prevent children/young people from entering care but wants to ensure that this is the best option for them.

- Care Proceedings Case Manager post

A case progression manager tracks all section 20 cases, pre-proceedings, court and cases referred for LPMs. This tracking system has been developed to include the tracking of pre-birth cases where safeguarding concerns may be present. The information is currently being tracked using an excel spreadsheet with dedicated administrator support. The case progression manager liaises with the social workers/team managers to facilitate timely case progression. By supporting practitioners, evidence of benefits to this system is being realised, for example in improved links with court teams, CAFCASS and legal teams and it is expected that these benefits will continue and increase.

Leicester City Council is considering an electronic system that is linked to Liquid Logic (our integrated children's system) to facilitate tracking of information, centralise data for easy access and reduce potential for errors.

This process is ensuring Leicester City Council is more responsive and compliant with court and other legislative directives. It also ensures that we are responding to children and young people in a timely manner and not causing undue delays to their care plans and outcomes.

- Safe Families UK

This is an organization that seeks to improve the outcomes of children and families going through crisis. It aims to reduce the number of children going into the care system and provides safe, short-stay hosting for children/young people; befriending support for parents and donations of basic goods and services. The organization relies predominately on volunteers and provides a community response to the crisis/issues being experienced by children/young people and their families. There is evidence to suggest some success in

diverting children/young people from coming into care. This program is operating in a number of local authorities across the country.

Safe Families UK offers support and services to meet a wide-range of needs for children/young people, from before they come into the care, to when they are returned to their families. This service provides a vital link for families in need and connects them with local volunteers who offer help and support when they need it. Safe Families creates links for children/young people and their families to individuals from their own communities that can be there to support them - without the stigma of statutory involvement – and offer them positive connections and role models within their local communities.

- Multi Systemic Therapy (MST)

MST is an intensive family and community based intervention for children and young people aged 11-17, where young people are at risk of out of home placement in either care or custody and families have not engaged with other services. MST teams focus on the whole world of the young person - their homes and families, schools and teachers, neighbourhoods and friends. MST staff work with families intensively for three to five months, including being on call to families 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is an evidenced based practice where therapists use approaches, such as behavioral therapy, cognitive behavioral therapy and structured family therapy to work with young people and their families. Their analysis and research has shown that the MST approach achieves good, long-term results for young people and families.

Leicester City Council operates two MST Standard and one MST Child Abuse & Neglect (MST – CAN) teams. MST-CAN is an adaptation of MST that was developed to treat families who have come to the attention of Children's Services due to physical abuse and/or neglect and who have one or more children aged 6 to 17 years who are subject to a child protection plan. Leicester City Council has seen positive outcomes highlighted in reference to MST – Standard and the impact of MST – CAN will be fully evaluated after its initial program completion in April 2017.

Leicester City Council is also exploring the possibility of developing a second MST – CAN program based on interim findings. MST in Leicester City is demonstrating sustainability in those children/young people and families that it has worked with. The success rate is in line with the national averages for MST. MST is viewed as an effective approach and the local authority continues to explore other options that involve this approach.

- Family Group Conference (FGC)

The use of Family Group Conferences is shown to:

- Increase various outcomes for children and young people
- Enable families to plan and take control of their lives and thus reducing the involvement of statutory services
- Give the child/young person a 'voice'
- Provide a solution focused approach to family intervention
- Place emphasis on the strengths of the family
- Make more use of family and community resources than statutory plans developed at meetings which are dominated by agencies
- Deliver a higher rate of attendance/participation by fathers and father figures
- Enthuse practitioners to highlight its effectiveness with the children/young people and their families to achieve and maintain significant changes
- Prove a cost effective approach that benefits and strengthens the whole family

Family Group conferences can be effective in working with families/extended families where concerns and vulnerabilities are known about a child or young person. Leicester City Council operates a FGC service and is seeking to expand the service to better meet the needs of child/young people and their families.

It is recognised that FGCs are most effective at the early onset of familial contact with services and thus, this service will eventually be targeted at the initial stages of intervention. However, because of the significant numbers of children/young people that are in the care of the Council and the high numbers subject to Child Protection Plans, the FGC service is focused on these children, young people and their families to ensure effective and efficient use of resources. It also facilitates the best possible outcomes for these children, young people and their families.

There is ongoing work to further develop all of these services described above and ensure that they are focus on the right children, young people and their families and achieve the best outcomes for them in the most effective and efficient/timely manner. It is expected that they will effectively monitor all cases coming into the service, provide appropriate provision to children/young people and their families, and prevent Looked After status when it is safe to do so. These services work across all levels to facilitate the right provision at the right time.

Leicester City Council has put in place robust evaluation tools that are consistent and effective across all areas. This is being communicated to all employees, partners, children/young people and their families so that we are transparent as to our approach and our reasons for this. Leicester City Council wants the best possible outcomes for the children/young people and people that live in Leicester City. Leicester City Council wants Leicester City to be a 'good' place for children and young people and with this in mind, we will continue to track and evaluate services to make sure we are providing the right service at the right time and to the right individuals.

3. Permanence

Statutory guidance aims to ensure that looked after children/young people are provided with the most appropriate placement within their local authority when and wherever possible, consistent with their welfare and needs. Best practice emphasises that good quality assessments, care plans and decision making are the cornerstone for an effective commissioning strategy for all placements. Concerns have been identified in reference to the outcomes associated to children/young people placed far from their homes and those placed within residential units. As corporate parents, Leicester City Council wants the best outcomes for our children/young people and care leavers. We want our children/young people to be in good and/or outstanding placements where they can be supported to thrive. For those children/young people that are in our care, we want them to benefit from being in our care and this is demonstrated in our Children's Pledge and in our Corporate Parenting Strategy. We have shaped and written our policies/procedures to reflect this and embed this thinking into our daily practice.

Senior Management regularly reviews our looked after children and young people to ensure options for permanence were identified, secured and appropriate. We are ensuring that the right options are identified for each child/young person taking into account their unique circumstances and characteristics. This is in addition to regular visits, supervision and looked after children's reviews that are in place and robustly reviewed. We have identified children/young people that could be considered for adoption and/or Special Guardianship orders through this process and are actively exploring these options to facilitate permanence for children/young people and to foster better outcomes for them. We also identified children/young people that were in placements outside the Council and could and should be considered for return to Leicester City and/or closer if it is their best interests and safe to do so. In order to facilitate this, we have worked with partner agencies to review our recruitment of foster carers and other placements to identify alternative provision that best meets the needs of our children and young people. Where circumstances within birth families have been successfully altered, we have provided intensive resources and

support to facilitate a return home for some children and young people. Decisions are only taken after extensive assessment to ensure plans meet the best needs of children and young people.

Through this process, the local authority is able to recognise and mobilise resources in a timely manner to ensure the appropriate services are in place to support the children, young people and their families as applicable and appropriate. To assist with this, the following measures are in place:

- Permission to hold extraordinary LPMs when necessary to facilitate the plans identified
- Task and finish group established to ensure actions were being followed through
- Reviewed all panels as to their remit and terms of reference
- Review of cases ongoing and to ensure compliance to recent court judgements
- Review of current policies and procedures including Leicester City Council SGO Offer to ensure relevancy

As Leicester City Council has proven success with MST, we are considering the development of MST – Family Integrated Transitions to work with children/young people where the identified care plan is a return home and/or birth family.

- MST – Family Integrated Transitions (MST-FIT)

The MST Family Integrated Transitions (FIT) model uses standard MST principles with additional components to address the specific issues and contexts of young people returning home.

The model works for 3 to 4 months with young people and their carers while they are placed away from home, thus improving skill level of the current residential or foster carers and also with the young person's family to identify the issues which may present difficulties in order to plan a successful return home. Once the young person has returned home, work continues with the family for a further four months and with other key agencies, such as social care and schools and also to support the family members to develop community based supports and reduce their longer term reliance on statutory services.

- Permanence Case Manager post

This post is similar to the Care Proceedings Case Manager posts described above and with similar functions expect this post with drive permanence for children/young people in the care of the local authority. The two posts will work together and thus track and evaluate outcomes for children and young people.

- Permanence Progression Panel

The Panel will:

- Actively track cases to ensure the care plans for children and young people in respect of their permanence is appropriate and robust
- Agree and formulate plans for funding and monitoring of alternative intervention strategies and plans for children/young people in respect of their permanence
- Inform future commissioning strategies for Leicester City Council

The Permanence Progression Panel plays an essential role in coordinating services and packages for children and young people in reference to securing their permanence. The panel may allocate resources according to the needs of child/young person presented. The panel is another check point to ensure effective and timely permanence planning for children and young people in our care.

Leicester City Council recognizes that not all individuals are the same and thus we have chosen to use a variety of approaches to ensure that we are providing the right provision at the right time for children, young people and their families. We are utilizing established and evidence based approaches to achieve better outcomes for its children/young people and by providing resources and intervention at the right time and place for the child/young person and their families. We aim to provide services at the earliest point to facilitate better outcomes and to target and commission the right resources to the appropriate level of intervention. Ofsted, in their report 'Edging away from care – how services successfully prevent young people entering care (2011)' identify the following key factors:

- Strong multi-agency working both operationally and strategically; this involved strategic analysis and understanding of the needs of this cohort of young people accompanied by investment in services to address these needs
- Clear and consistent referral pathways to services
- Clearly understood and consistent decision-making processes based on thorough assessment of risks and strengths within the family network
- A prompt, persistent, and flexible approach, which was based on listening to the views of the young person and the family and building on their strengths
- A clear plan of work based on thorough assessment and mutually agreed goals; regular review of progress and risk factors; robust and understood arrangements between agencies in respect of risk

management; and clear planning for case closure and for sustainability of good outcomes

Leicester City Council is using its strengths in the above areas and developing its weaker areas to develop our 'edge of care' services to provide interventions with children/young people and their families at the right supports at the right time to facilitate sustainable change and build family resilience. Better identification of the cohort that use our services at Early Help and Specialist levels will facilitate better commissioning endeavors and help us to target resources appropriately. We will focus on better outcomes for our children and young people who are in our care and care leavers by ensuring they are supported and strengthened to thrive. We actively review all our policies/procedures, training and processes to ensure consistency in our communication and approach.

At Leicester City Council, we are continuing to explore what is working for other local authorities and then evaluating whether or not these systems would achieve good outcomes for families in Leicester City. As we continue to define our cohort for those accessing our services and examining the trends, we will consider altering our provision and commissioning needs and thus be proactive in our approach. We are involving our partners, locally and regionally, and sharing our learning. We continue to expand our partnerships and actively listen to our care leavers, children/young people and their families. We recognise and accept that we cannot do this alone and nor do we operate in isolation. At Leicester City Council, we are supporting our children and young people to be safe, learn, achieve and grow. This strategy works in conjunction with this.