

Education and Childrens Services

SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP

Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children and Young People in Care

2017 - 2020

OUR MISSION:

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

Leicester City Council's Pledge to our Children and Young People in Care

Children and young people in care are one of the vulnerable groups in our society. It is our responsibility as Corporate Parents to support each of them as individuals in order to enable them to achieve their full potential. In Leicester City Council, we take our role as Corporate Parents seriously and this is emphasized through our Children's Pledge.

Our pledge contains five promises to our children and young people:

- To be fit and healthy
- To stay safe from harm
- To have a good education and enjoy their hobbies
- To help you prepare for your future
- To listen to you

Introduction and Vision

Leicester City Council – Education and Children Services' overarching vision for looked after children and young people is the same as for all of Leicester City's children and young people – **supporting them to be safe, learn, achieve and grow**. To facilitate the achievement of this vision, the primary outcomes we seek to achieve is to support the resilience of families and reduce the need for children and young people to enter into the care of Leicester City Council.

Commissioners of services for children/young people in the care of Leicester City Council face a number of challenges over the coming period. The most pressing of these are:

- To ensure accommodation of sufficient quality and volume which satisfies our ambition to improve outcomes for children and young people in care and;
- To reduce costs of providing accommodation and support in line with reducing budgets across Leicester City Council and partner organisations.
- To ensure the needs of children and young people can continue to be met during a period where admissions are rising and the complexity of need is increasing.

Leicester City Council – Education and Children's Services is committed to the continued investment in early intervention, prevention and Edge of Care strategies and services to avoid wherever possible unnecessary admissions into care. The priorities identified by the Department and its' partners are as follows:

- That children and young people are supported to remain with their families and communities wherever possible and enter the care system only when absolutely necessary;

- That children and young people who are admitted to care will receive high quality support to remain in care only for as long as is necessary to ensure successful reintegration to their families and communities and;
- That were children and young people do spend time in care the experience is a positive one which will help them to realise their potential and achieve successful outcomes.

Planning for children and young people in care will continue to be carried out jointly with all relevant partners to ensure a focus is maintained to improve the full range of outcomes, particularly in improving health and numbers of care leavers in education, training and employment.

Children and young people that are coming to the attention of Children's Services are presenting with complex needs and risky behaviours that are putting them at increased risks now and into their future. Our assessments, planning and our care arrangements will need to be more intensive, robust and specialist to support the emerging needs of children and young people currently within and those that will be entering into our care. Also, our sufficiency planning needs to account for this trend as a possible long-term feature of Leicester City Council's care population.

Building on the information and analysis within this strategy it has been necessary to consider how these challenges might be addressed over the coming period. This Placement and Sufficiency Strategy for Children/Young People in Care 2017 – 2020 thus identifies how Leicester City Council will meet existing and new challenges and ensure that children and young people in the care of Leicester City Council experience the highest possible quality of service provided within the context of achieving maximum value for money.

The Sufficiency Duty

The Children Act 1989 (section 22g) requires local authorities to take steps that are reasonably practicable to secure sufficient accommodation for children and young people under their care who cannot live at home and whose circumstances indicate that it would be in their best interests to be accommodated within the local authority's area – for example, in order to stay at the same school or near to other family where contact can easily take place. This is commonly referred to as 'the sufficiency duty'.

Additionally, national guidance clarifies the responsibilities of local authorities under section 20 of The Children Act 1989 and Part 7 of The Housing Act 1996 with regard to young people aged 16 – 17 years at risk of homelessness or requiring accommodation. Following the House of Lords judgement in R (G) v Southward (2009), reference was made in particular, to the function of children's services and housing services when young people seek help from or are referred to local authorities because of homelessness. In these circumstances, the local authority

needs to assess the need for, and in certain circumstances provide accommodation under, section 20 (Children Act 1989) to these older young people. In this circumstance the young person becomes a 'looked after child'.

This means that Leicester City Council has a duty to ensure that there are sufficient and appropriate placements and also a range of placements within our area to meet the different needs of our looked after children and young people. We also have a responsibility to ensure that we take the necessary steps to develop and maintain a good provision to meet the needs of children/young people locally as far as is possible.

We have explored the past and current trends in reference to placement needs of our looked after children/young people and used this as a predictor of our future needs – short and long term and thus their likely changing profile and their future needs. Our objective is to close the gap in current provision, identify what we need to meet the needs of our looked after children/young people and source new provisions and/or tailor existing provision to meet the needs as appropriate.

National Drivers

Statutory guidance aims to ensure that looked after children/young people are provided with the most appropriate placement within their local authority area wherever possible and where this is consistent with their welfare and the promotion of their well-being. Guidance emphasises that good assessments, care plans and decision making are the foundation for effective communication strategy for placements. Nationally, there are concerns about the well-being and poorer outcomes associated to children and young people placed far from their homes and particularly those placed in residential units.

Leicester City Council wants better outcomes for all our children and young people looked after by the Council. We want our children and young people to be in good to outstanding placements in which they thrive, recover resilience and benefit from having been in our care. Where children and young people remain looked after, we want them to have a good stable placement as a secure base for them to make good progress and achieve better outcomes.

Prioritising our approach to Placement and Sufficiency

It is well understood that the needs of children and young people can only be met effectively if they live in care environments that provide the highest quality of care and support. That support must be both physical and emotional. Research tells us that in the vast majority of cases, care is best provided within a family home setting. It is within family settings that children and young people are able to live most like

their non-looked after peers and where they can be best prepared and equipped physically and emotionally for adult life. There will be some occasions when children and young people's needs cannot be met within a family setting and at these times specialist alternatives will be accessed for as long as is required.

We also realise that wherever possible and safe to do so, young people should be placed within Leicester City, allowing them to have regular contact with their birth families, friends and their local communities. However, in order to meet the needs of those children/young people who cannot be placed locally we will need access to some external placements outside Leicester City, to accommodate children/young people who may have some very specialist requirements.

Placement stability however, is about much more than having sufficient accommodation for looked after children/young people. Many children who come into the care system have had very traumatic experiences and need immediate support with their emotional wellbeing. A great number also need access to mental health services as well as support throughout their educational career.

It is recognised and accepted that all of this must be achieved in the most cost effective way. Our partners must work together through their active participation in new and innovative ways that will maximise sustainable outcomes and service provision within increasingly tighter financial constraints.

Service provision should have a clear focus and be established in order to prioritise the following:

- The prevention of children entering care by the use of early intervention and providing services which explore alternatives to entering care
- Ensuring that planning when children/young people enter care is in place in order to support the potential for children/young people moving out of care as soon as possible
- Permanency arrangements are made as soon as possible for those children/young people remaining in care

Prevention

In Leicester City Council, we realise that the child's own family is usually the best place for bringing up children and young people. There are unique advantages for children/young people experiencing family life in their own birth family and in most circumstances children/young people's needs are best met by being cared for within their immediate or extended families. Leicester City Council recognises that children/young people should always be supported within their own family, with the assistance of early intervention and support services when necessary, unless there are clear reasons why this might not be consistent with their safety and wellbeing.

Resources are tightly focused on the need to prevent care wherever possible in order to mitigate demand within the care system and to build on the evidence that children/young people's outcomes are generally better when they can be supported within their natural ecology.

Planning for moving out of care as soon as possible

Leicester City Council understands that there will always be some children and young people for whom being in local authority care offers the best and safest arrangements for their wellbeing and development. Difficult judgements are needed in balancing the right of a child/young person to be with their birth family, and their right to protection from abuse, neglect and potential harm. However, we also know that it has long been recognised, both locally and nationally, the outcomes for children/young people who are brought up in the care system have not been good when compared to their peers not in care and this must be improved. We need to make a significant impact upon

- The average rates of children/young people in care having frequent placement moves
- Improving their health and education outcomes
- Preventing their risk of offending
- Reducing the instances of substance and alcohol misuse by children/young people in our care;
- Reducing instances of children/young people in care being missing from home,
- Reducing the risk of sexual exploitation of children/young people in care.

Additionally, when young people leave care we need to make an impact on care leavers who are not in education, employment and training, or in appropriate accommodation.

It is for this reason that we must continue to ensure children/young people leave care as soon as possible once it is safe and appropriate for them to do so.

Permanency

We know that increasing placement stability for children/young people in care is a major driver for much of the improvement activity within looked after children services nationally. Leicester City Council aims to establish and sustain high levels of placement stability and, in particular, make effective use of alternative permanence arrangements such as Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs). The use of this and other arrangements for alternative permanence arrangements will continue locally but is included as part of our sufficiency planning because in the

right circumstances they can keep children/young people out of the formal care system, which helps to normalise their experience of growing up.

Children and young people who live in stable homes have a greater opportunity to achieve good outcomes. Where children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, our aim is to find appropriate permanent placements for children and young people, as early as possible, and support them to remain there.

Principle and Aims

If challenged the local authority should be able to demonstrate that it has done all that is reasonably practicable to secure sufficiency. Leicester City Council, therefore, has a duty to provide a range of high quality local placements which meet needs.

The underpinning principle of our approach is to ensure that the right children/young people are admitted to care, at the right time in order to secure the best possible outcomes for children and young people.

- Early Help provision, Child in Need services and Child Protection Plans will be the first consideration in meeting assessed needs, and will be promoted to facilitate children remaining within their immediate family network where this is safe.
- Early intervention and family support play an important role in de-escalating family problems, keeping children out of care and we will continue to invest in these services accordingly.
- Where children/young people cannot be supported within their immediate family, kinship care arrangements will be explored as a preferred alternative arrangement.
- Foster care arrangements will be put in place as a first option where family and kinship care arrangements are not possible and this is assessed as being the best option for the child/young person.
- Residential care will only be put in place where family and kinship care arrangements are not possible, where foster care arrangements are not able to meet needs and only when residential care is assessed as being the most suitable option for the child/young person.
- Wherever possible, children/young people will be placed in, or very near to, Leicester City to facilitate the ongoing support to family/kinship networks and local services.
- Meaningful support will be provided to facilitate the rehabilitation to family and extended family networks from being in care when this is in the best interest of the child/young person.

- Services to promote permanency for children and young people within their families or alternative substitute care will be promoted at the earliest opportunity.
- We share the same aspirations for Children in Care as any other good parent (Corporate Parenting and Leaving Care Strategy).
- We will identify and implement the commissioning actions necessary to ensure that Leicester City Council and our partners can satisfy the duty to provide sufficient accommodation and support to meet the needs of children and young people in our care.
- We will identify the actions necessary to fulfil this ambition in the context of mounting pressures on the resources available across the Council and to ensure that resources are allocated in a way that achieves optimum value for money.

Monitoring Progress

There are a number of key actions that arise from this strategy and they will be addressed and monitored through the Corporate Parenting Executive which reports directly to the Corporate Parenting Forum. Information and data will also be collated through regular performance management systems and reporting. Progress will be reviewed regularly by these groups. It is important that these objectives are delivered to make a positive difference to the lives and prosperity for all our looked after children and young people.