



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
19th January 2021**

**UPDATE ON THE DEFINING CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES FOR
THE FUTURE PROGRAMME**

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with details of the outcome of the diagnostic assessment, undertaken across Targeted Early Help and Children's Social Care services and outline the next steps of the Defining Children services programme plan and approach to be taken.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The Children Act 2004 allocates duties to Local Authorities to ensure that children are safeguarded, and their welfare is promoted; this key piece of legislation underpins the work of Children and Family Services with respect to Looked After Children, Children in Need and Children in Need of protection.
3. Furthermore, The Children Act 2004 places a duty upon Local Authorities to make arrangements to promote co-operation between itself, organisations and agencies to improve the wellbeing of local children.
4. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 strengthens this important relationship with partners by placing new duties on key agencies in a local area. Specifically, the police, clinical commissioning groups and the Local Authority work together in order to safeguard and promote the welfare of all children in their area.
5. The Children and Families Act 2014 and the Care Act 2014 place a duty upon Local Authorities to commission education and health and social care services jointly and provide more streamlined and co-ordinated assessment processes. These key pieces of legislation are key influences for the future work of Children and Family Services with children and young people with Special Educational Needs or Disabilities (SEND) and the responses to parents and young carers.
6. It should also be noted that the 'Working Together to Safeguard Children 2018' guidance provides a framework for all the relevant legislation and sets out the importance of early identification and response to issues of concern, particularly for vulnerable groups.

7. Other relevant policies include:

- i) Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2018-2022;
- ii) Children and Family Services Departmental Plan 2020-2023;
- iii) Road to Excellence – Continuous Improvement Plan 2017-2020;
- iv) Voice & Influence Strategy 2020-2023;
- v) Children & Family Services – Commissioning Strategy 2016-2020;
- vi) Children & Family Services – Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework (QAIF)

8. All the relevant legislation and policies outlined above will inform the proposed Defining Children's Services programme which will help to develop and future proof Children and Family Services, ensuring that the right interventions are delivered at the right time and in the right way, improving outcomes for children, young people and families while ensuring that the service is financially sustainable. This programme will support the service's continuous improvement plan - The Road to Excellence.
9. At its meeting on 20 November 2020, the Cabinet approved the request to continue to work with the Strategic Partner, Newton Europe, to deliver the next phase of the Defining Children and Family Services Programme.

Background

10. The Children and Family Services Department faces significant challenges due to increasing demand on its services over the last five years and projected over the next four years. This increase in demands is reflected in the growth approved within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) by the County Council on 7 February 2020. In addition to this the Covid-19 pandemic has placed additional financial pressure on the department, both in terms of staffing costs and the costs of services for children. The long-term impact of Covid-19 on children and families and therefore the potential increase in demand upon services is still not fully understood.
11. The County Council, following a competitive process, commissioned an independent specialist consultancy, Newton Europe, in February 2020 to work alongside the service to undertake a diagnostic assessment of front-line services and to consequently work with the Department to lead on the delivery of an overall change programme. This was subject to a satisfactory outcome from the diagnostic assessment, an independent review (the gateway review) and approval to proceed from the Cabinet.
12. The commissioning process attracted two bidders, with Newton Europe being successful due to their commitment to improving outcomes for children and their clear evidenced based and rigorous performance led approach, which included developing joint ownership and embedding culture change within the department. Of note was their contingent fee model, proposing that they would guarantee to deliver savings, with fees being commensurate to benefits delivered.

13. The diagnostic assessment involved working with a cross section of staff within the service to complete a deep dive review of a number of children's cases to consider if anything different could have been done to prevent the child escalating to a higher level of need and intervention. The main objective of the diagnostic assessment was to identify opportunities to improve outcomes for children and young people. The diagnostic assessment explored activity modelling, financial analysis, and benchmarking against other local authorities across services for children and families, by engaging with frontline staff and partner agencies to explore areas for improvement. 129 staff were involved in case review workshops, 181 cases were reviewed, 50 data tables were joined across four systems with 10 million data lines analysed.
14. The diagnostic assessment was subject to validation by the Department and corporately through a series of engagements leading up to a formal review, the Gateway Review workshop. At this, senior officers from Children and Family Services assessed each of the opportunities in turn, looking at financial and operational confidence, required investment, delivery timescales, change complexity and organisational change capacity, alignment to the Department's vision, impact for service users, wider County Council impact and impacts for external partners.
15. The opportunities identified in the diagnostic will support the future proofing of Children and Family Services so that the right interventions are delivered in the right way, at the right time, to ensure that children, young people and families achieve the best possible outcomes whilst also ensuring that the service is financially sustainable going forwards.
16. The development of the department will be achieved through the implementation of a holistic change programme focusing upon optimising practice, systems, culture, and operational delivery through the delivery of three areas of work alongside additional enabling work.
17. The identified opportunities will ensure that the service maximises improvements that can be made in how the Department delivers its services to achieve the best outcomes for children. Further, the Department will be supported to achieve and sustain a high level of performance across all children's pathways and settings. Finally, to provide expertise and knowledge transfer that could be applied to transformational work in other council departments or services.
18. Broadly the opportunities are categorised into four main themes. These being Children's Pathways (greater focus on earlier interventions and preventing the level of need escalating into higher tier interventions), Timeliness of interventions (ensuring that interventions are delivered in a timely way as part of a child/young person's journey in order to meet needs at the right time and by the right team), Settings (ensuring that Children and Young People are placed in the most appropriate setting

for their level of need) and Children with Disabilities (ensuring that Children and Young People with Disabilities are supported to achieve greater levels of independence).

19. It is important to highlight that the opportunities demonstrate a combination of potential benefits spanning cost/demand avoidance, enhancing quality and outcomes for service users, and improved productivity. The total net annually recurring benefits are estimated to be in the region of £9.3m, with a stretch ambition of £13.1m over the next four years. It is important to note that these opportunities will support the prevention of forecast demand and growth.
20. A joint programme team with staff from across the Department, officers from the Transformation Unit and colleagues from Newton Europe will develop these themes and opportunities into the next phase of the programme.

Diagnostic Assessment Findings

21. The diagnostic assessment identified a number of opportunities for the continued development of the Children and Family Services Department including potentially fewer children escalating to Children in Need and Child Protection Services by reducing re-referral rates through a more targeted focus on meeting the identified needs of children earlier, focussing on case management further to ensure cases are managed as effectively and as efficiently as possible, children in care achieving being placed in their long term placement sooner, growing capacity of internal foster carers and improved matching of children with carers and improving marketing sufficiency and more children with disabilities better equipped for adulthood.
22. To support fewer children entering higher tiers of need within the service, the diagnostic assessment asked what could have been done to prevent children in the cases reviewed escalating to higher pathways. The findings suggested that, as a number of children currently supported at a higher level of intervention have been previously supported at a lower level of need, if some of these children could have been more intensely supported at a lower level it may have prevented their level of need escalating. Furthermore, national research supports that children's outcomes are better if they are supported via early intervention and families can be engaged in making positive change.
23. For the cases reviewed, whilst the current decisions and level of intervention were seen to be correct, it is believed that about a third of children in need cases that were reviewed could have been well supported and their needs addressed in the Children and Family Wellbeing Service or community based Early Help services, potentially preventing escalation to Children's Social care. A number of child protection cases that were reviewed could have been supported and needs addressed either through the Children and Family Wellbeing Service or Children in Need services if families had engaged in early intervention and for some children in care it was believed that if their families could have been engaged in early intervention or strong child in need support they, or the child's wider family network, may have been able to make the sustained change to enable them to have cared for their children.

24. The diagnostic assessment found that more intensive support during previous periods of interventions could have prevented need in about half of the cases reviewed from escalating. It also suggested that a better understanding of the root cause of the issues presented could have also prevented escalation of need.

For approximately half the cases reviewed domestic abuse was a root cause of issues presented by the family, for a quarter of the cases the root cause was adult mental health. The diagnostic also looked at transfer points between teams, and hours of support provided in escalating tiers of need, suggesting these are areas that could be strengthened.

25. The diagnostic assessment found that there were opportunities to further reduce drift in case management. Whilst there was a clear downward trend in the length of time Child Protection cases were open, there were high fluctuations in the length of both Child Protection cases and Child in Need cases; this variation was analysed down to individual case worker levels. The average time a Looked After Child spent in care, at the point of leaving care, has increased over the last four years.

26. The diagnostic assessment also explored whether a permanence option out of care was possible for the children reviewed, concluding that most children were in an optimum placement. The diagnostic assessment suggested that for a small number of children permanence could be achieved through reunifications or special guardianship orders, with this process being completed sooner than current averages.

27. The diagnostic assessment identified that the proportion of internal to external foster carers was much lower than other local authorities. It suggested that there were improvement opportunities in the recruitment of in-house foster carers, reducing the fallout rate of potential foster carers between the enquiry and assessment stages. It also identified an opportunity to shorten the time taken from initial enquiry to approval to fall in line with best performing local authorities. The diagnostic assessment was complimentary of the Fostering webpages and recruitment material, which has led to the doubling of enquiries received since 2016/17. The diagnostic assessment found that the service was better than other local authorities in the training and retention offer.

28. The diagnostic assessment found that there were opportunities to make full use of the foster families that have already been recruited. A review of the allocation of foster carers found that just over half of the current capacity had been used, suggesting improvements in data management to support improved matching rates.

29. Finally, the diagnostic assessment identified that for some young people in residential placements a family-based placement had been searched for but there was not sufficient fostering capacity of the right type to meet the young person's needs. For some older young people in residential placements their needs could be met by supported lodgings placements or foster carers with specific skills and experience if placement sufficiency can be improved.

30. In reviewing cases within the Disabled Children's Service, the diagnostic assessment identified that most children were on the right pathway for their needs. The diagnostic

assessment suggested that some young people could have improved outcomes by them being enabled, at an earlier age, to gain the skills to support their transition to adulthood.

31. The diagnostic assessment also found that spend on support for children with disabilities increased significantly in the years preceding adulthood. In more than half the cases reviewed for children with disabilities that were looked after, the diagnostic assessment suggested that earlier involvement would have changed the outcome. However, it is worth noting that the majority of disabled looked after children cases that could have been avoided were not known to the Children's Social Care service beforehand.
32. As part of the programme, Newton Europe will deliver 100 hours of support to Looked After Children of Leicestershire as part of the Council's procurement process to embed Social Value through contracts. The Children in Care Council is being consulted on how best to use these hours.

The Programme Approach

33. The programme approach will focus on delivering improvements for children and young people through a focus on organisational levers. For each opportunity identified, the programme will assess Structure and Processes (understanding how service and team structures and operational processes impact service users and can be optimised to improve outcomes), Systems (exploring how well data and the IT infrastructure is used to support the achievement of good outcomes for children and young people), Capability and Practice (identifying evidenced based improvements to core practice and capability of staff and teams) and Culture and Behaviours (understanding how organisational and team culture impact the achievement of excellent outcomes for children and young people).
34. The programme will be structured with three projects and underpinned by enabling strands. This work will build upon the progress made against the continuous improvement plan - The Road to Excellence. The three projects are:
35. Pathways – The objectives of this project will be to address opportunities that prevent the escalation of need in lower tiers of service in the department, further reducing drift and providing growth and demand mitigations. This will be achieved through developing and embedding consistency in practice, reviewing case management and supervision processes, aligning practice of the Children and Family Wellbeing Service and Locality Social Work teams, and building a demand led establishment model.
36. Placements – The objectives of this project will be to grow and make better use of internal foster carer capacity, developing alternatives to residential placements and growing the supported lodgings offer. This will be achieved through developing processes which improve the data, visibility and utilisation of internal foster carer capacity, recruiting more in-house foster carer capacity, a targeted review of all

residential cases and finally through the strategic growth of alternatives to residential placements.

37. Disabilities – The objectives of this project will be to develop an enablement focussed culture and practice to support earlier independence focussed transition planning for adulthood. This will be achieved through embedding enablement-based planning and practice, reviewing the most dependent children and families, and the earlier identification of children and families needing support for adulthood.
38. Enabling strands – a data and systems strand will explore improvements needed in systems and management information to support new ways of working. A communications, culture and engagement strand will drive softer changes needed to embed new ways of working with staff and managers.
39. The programme is underpinned by a number of principles, with the key being co-ownership and co-design with front line staff and managers, a robust process for tracking and monitoring improvements and performance as new ways of working are developed and tested, and further principles include aiming for consistency around practice in the design and developing the right environment for continuous improvement.
40. The Children and Family Services department has released a number of frontline staff and practitioners to form the design teams to work alongside colleagues from the Transformation Unit and Newton Europe. These design teams will oversee the development and testing of new ways of working. In line with the design principles stated previously, the design teams will be responsible for developing and testing. The programme will develop solutions which will focus on improving children and family outcomes, promoting resilience and progression.
41. The programme will focus on designing solutions to address findings from the diagnostic assessment. A pilot area will be developed to test these changes, where the impact will be measured, and solutions continuously iterated to ensure maximum benefit for children and their families. It is anticipated this design stage will last between three to six months.
42. Once robust solutions have been developed, these will be rolled out county wide, subject to a formal gateway review, with support from the design teams and advisory groups. This is the implement and sustain stage of the programme, lasting between six to twelve months. In this stage, the key aim is to ensure that the solutions developed are rolled out in a sustainable way, underpinned through robust measurement of key performance indicators, and quality assurance assessments. As the department grows in confidence, support from Newton Europe will reduce, and ways of working will continue to be monitored to ensure that they are sustained. It is expected that the programme will run to November 2021, by which point the department will be able to independently sustain the new ways of working.

Partnership Working and Associated Issues

43. The delivery of Children and Family Services relies on close multi-agency partnership working in particular with the NHS, Schools, Police and external providers of placements. The proposed areas of work in this report will support the delivery of services to children, young people and families who may be also be supported by these external partners. There are well established links operationally between NHS partners, Schools and Police with respect to the safeguarding of children and young people.
44. Partners will be engaged throughout the design and implementation phases as appropriate to ensure that the solutions developed are supported by the system as a whole and positively contribute to established operational links.
45. The vision and operating model for Children and Family Services will be designed to deliver against the strategic outcomes of the County Council and support the overall health and care integration developments in Leicestershire, and across the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland area as a whole.

Conclusion

46. This report outlines the programme and approach that will be taken in delivering Phase 2 of the Defining Children and Family Services for the Future Programme. The programme will build upon the progress of the continuous improvement plan- The Road to Excellence and support the department to manage demand and prevent forecast growth in the region of £9.3m to £13.1m over the next four years.
47. The programme is anticipated to run to November 2021 by which point the department will be able to independently sustain the new ways of working.

Background papers

48. Defining Children and Family Services for the Future – Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 18 November 2020:
<http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/g6183/Public%20reports%20pack%20Wednesday%2018-Nov-2020%2009.30%20Children%20and%20Families%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Commi.pdf?T=10>

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

49. None.

Equality and Human Rights Implications

50. Public authorities are required by law to have due regard to the need to:
 - Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - Advance equality of opportunity between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not;

- Foster good relations between people who share protected characteristics and those who do not.

51. Equality and Human rights implications will be considered fully in the next phase of the programme and any implications will be fully assessed in respect of potential impact of any proposals and the timing of any proposed changes.

52. Specific proposals will be subject to robust engagement with service users and other people affected, and Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessments as necessary.

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

53. None.

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