

COUNTY COUNCIL MEETING – 7th July 2021

POSITION STATEMENT FROM THE CABINET LEAD MEMBER FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

SEND Provision

Over the last three years we have invested £30million of capital to deliver nearly 500 new places for children with special education needs and disabilities in Leicestershire. The provision developed includes resource bases in mainstream schools, 3 new schools, a new post 16 provision in Loughborough, expansion projects for all existing Leicestershire special schools, 2 satellite classroom facilities run by existing special schools on nearby mainstream school sites, 1 new specialist pre-school in and the expansion of another specialist pre-school.

Further developments are planned for the forthcoming year to continue to develop high quality local provision to meet the needs of children with special educational needs and disabilities in Leicestershire.

Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)

I am pleased to inform Members that Leicestershire has agreed to join the voluntary national transfer scheme for unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. The new scheme will introduce a rota across the East Midlands where unaccompanied asylum-seeking children who arrive on the south coast will be placed in accommodation and supported by local authorities across the region. The County Council will take five children a year from the rota. In addition to this, the County Council will also be taking three unaccompanied asylum seeking children to support the critical position that Kent is currently in due to the number of children who have arrived and are currently in Kent and who urgently need placing in accommodation with support provided to them.

Foster Carers

As Members will be aware, Leicestershire County Council has 112 inhouse foster carers and who provide a home and care for our children in care and 35 supported living providers who provide a home for our care leavers. Over the last 18 months these carers have gone above and beyond to provide support for our children and young people over the pandemic. This has included taking on additional responsibilities such as home schooling, managing contact virtually with children`s families and supporting them through this in addition to maintaining face to face contact where it was safe to do. I would like to express my thanks to our foster carers and specialist carers for all they have done over the pandemic.

Our Fostering Service not only provides high quality support and training to our foster carers they also work hard to recruit new carers. Over the last year, despite Covid, the team have successfully recruited an additional 13 foster families. Leicestershire Fostering Service is unique in that it also recruits and supports our in house Supported Lodgings Scheme, recruiting a further 11 carers despite Covid.

Another initiative that is supporting recruitment of foster carers is a Place to Call Home. This is a joint project of nine East Midlands Local Authorities led by Leicestershire County Council. This aims to place unaccompanied asylum-seeking children in homes in the county in which they arrived. The project came about following the growing recognition that a lot of these young people ended up in placements at a distance from the local authorities and social workers who care for them.

The project currently has over 20 carers in assessment, hopefully due for final approval in August and September. However, the project does need more carers to come forward to provide homes for Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking children.

Voice

In Autumn 2020 the children and Family services department launched the Voice and Influence Strategy that evidences the department`s commitment to putting

children and young people at the heart of all of its activities through involving them and their families in the decision-making, planning, commissioning, design, development, delivery and evaluation of services that affect their daily lives. The strategy was developed and influenced by feedback from children and young people. Over the last year the department has continued to engage with and seek the views of children and young people and whilst the Covid -19 pandemic has presented some real challenges to participation work across the department it has also offered some new opportunities to engage children and young people in different ways.

From this engagement activity we know that there have been a number of positives that children and young people have experienced during lockdown as well as the significant amount of challenges, most notably practical issues such as accessing dentists and other services, the impact of feelings of isolation and increased concerns about mental health.

Children in Care have been involved in the development of a Contact Expectations Statement and a Review of Arrangements Expectation Statement to improve the experiences of our children who have contact with their birth families and participate in their Review of Arrangement Meetings. They have also been involved in work to develop residential and fostering provision and in developing referral information used by all social workers for residential and foster providers.

Children and Families have been involved in the development of new practice standards for children in need and in feeding back their views on the work undertaken by the children and Family wellbeing service on how well they were heard and involved in the planning of work undertaken with tier family. 92.3% of families held the view they had either always or often felt listened to by their worker in a way made them feel that their family was really understood.

The Department continues to support the County Youth Council Leicestershire (CYCLe) members and the 3 elected Members of Youth Parliament (MYPs) to progress their campaign activity on improving cancer care for young people, the environment and poverty. The MYPs have been supported to meet with members of parliament, local councillors and senior managers from the Council and organisations including Health to discuss their ideas and share their views.

Performance

Over the last year performance across the Children and Families Department has remained strong, in particular around the delivery of our services to children and their families through targeted early help and children's social care. I would like to take this opportunity to thank staff across the department for their work over this difficult year, they have worked tirelessly to support children and their families and show some real innovation in their approach to delivering services over the pandemic. I would also like to thank all staff who work in schools across Leicestershire for keeping children learning and engaged in education over this difficult year.

Mrs D. Taylor CC