



This 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.

'At Leicestershire County Council, we believe that our children deserve forever homes and that their parents and carers need access to the best support, training and resources to provide our children and young people with the best possible care. We will work together with our children and carers to ensure we achieve this – We are family.'

Executive Summary

All local authorities have a statutory duty to ensure there are sufficient placements and care options to meet the needs of children and young people in care. Whilst every effort will be made to promote children and young people returning to parental or family care (called connected or kinship care), this will not be a safe option for some children. In such circumstances, Leicestershire will seek to find other options for children, including permanence within an adoptive family.

Growth in Leicestershire's Looked after Child (LAC) population means there is a corresponding increase in need for connected carers and adoptive homes within the context of concerns about the longer term suitability of connected carers ability to meet children's needs as their developmental needs change and national difficulties in the recruitment of adopters. Concern about the support to connected carers and the difficulties they may face is increasingly highlighted in the family courts. Without connected carers who seek permanence for the child through a Special Guardianship or Child Arrangement Order and adopters, there is the risk that children remain in foster care longer than would otherwise be necessary and result in increased costs to the authority.

As such, on the basis of best outcomes for children and managing the demand, the Permanence and Adoption Strategy is one of the key drivers for care planning, underpinning practice and procedures.

The Permanence and Adoption Strategy is one of five documents setting out the Care Placement Plan for Leicestershire County Council.

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.

Introduction

The Permanence and Adoption Strategy forms part of the Care Placement Strategy, detailing the recruitment, assessment and approval activity to meet the projected growth in permanence decisions for adoption and connected placements for Leicestershire County Council, until March 2021 is contained below.

The Permanence and Adoption Strategy is part of the overall Care Placement Strategy 2018-2021 and is integrally linked with other key strategic plans and strategies for the Council:

- ✓ Children and Families Departmental Plan 2017 – 20

- ✓ Children & Families Partnership Plan
- ✓ Care Planning and Decision Making Guidance 2018
- ✓ Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017 – 2021
- ✓ Permanence and Adoption Strategy 2017 – 2021
- ✓ Commissioning Strategy 2018- 2021

The Adoption and Permanence Strategy is a dynamic document, geared towards supporting recruitment and support of new adopters and connected carers to meet the assessed needs as determined by the Looked After Children's needs analysis.

Key linked planning documents are:

- Adoption Marketing Strategy (available on request)
- Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017-2021
- Ofsted findings 2017
- 2016-17 Adoption Statutory Report
- 2016-17 Fostering Service Annual Report
- RAA project findings on best practice 2017
- CRCF UEA Success factors in adopter recruitment 2013
- Adoption Leadership Board: view on Adoption and Permanency Data 2017 - England
- Adoption Leadership Board, note on recruitment October 2017.

Principles

- Where it is right to do so, all children will be supported to remain within the care of their families or communities with connected carers
- Where this is not possible, early permanence with adoptive families or foster carers will be sought to promote a sense of emotional wellbeing and a sense of belonging
- Children and young people's voice will be respected and we will actively seek their engagement in decisions about their needs, their future and the provision of services

- Parents and carers are an integral part of the service, to be involved in planning for the child and service provision to ensure that the very best care is provided to our children and young people
- High quality placements and provision of support to parents and carers to meet the needs of children and young people.

Priorities

- *Permanence decision making* - the effective support and management oversight of children, young people and families where consideration is given to or the decision has been made to look after a child/young person. Discussions around permanence for a child or young person must be considered at the earliest opportunity.
- *Recruitment* - ensuring that where-ever possible family and friends (called connected carers) are considered and matched to care for children, when a child is unable to live with their parents. Where this is not possible, permanence through adoption or local authority care (as set out in the *Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017-2021*) must be considered and achieved at the earliest opportunity.
- *Support* - It is acknowledged that children and young people, who have had difficult beginnings, require excellent placements and care, to establish a positive pathway to emotional health and wellbeing, and better outcomes for the future. With this in mind permanence should always be achieved with thought to the child's current needs, future needs and the knowledge, skills and experience of the adoptive parents or connected carers. Where the adoptive parents or connected carers require support and training to meet the needs of the child, this should be set out in the support plan and appropriate ongoing opportunities for learning made available to the adopters.

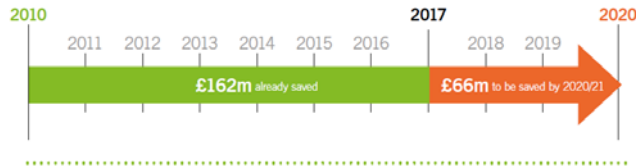
Objectives

- To make effective and timely permanency decisions for children and young people.
- Create sufficient placement options to enable choice of placement for looked after children in Leicestershire County Council, which will meet needs, and support good outcomes, now and into the future.
- Meet the recruitment targets set out in this strategy, which are reflective of the needs analysis.
- For all Children's Services employees to 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.

- Contribute to Council savings of £2.1 M in Children's Services by having the most cost effective and efficient strategy.

Drivers for transformation



The County Council's annual report (2016/17) ['Transforming the way we work'](#) provides a good overview of the scale and complexity of challenge.

Our strategic aims



"Each year, the achievements continue to stack up – and that's down to the hard work across our services," Byron Rhodes, Deputy Leader of the Leicestershire County Councils

Monitoring Progress and Continuous Improvement

The performance and progress in recruitment and retention of adopters and connected carers will be monitored monthly, through agreed performance reports. The information will be used by managers and teams to review how recruitment and assessment is progressing, and to make changes informed by the evidence of their work and actions, to maintain a focus on achieving the targets set. The same performance information will form part of the reporting data set provided to DMT, for information about Fostering and Adoption Performance, and capacity for placements.

All services and provisions will strive to reach our vision:

Leicestershire is the best place for children and families.

What we will do to achieve this, how we will do it and what success looks like across children's social care is set out in Leicestershire County Council's Continuous Improvement Plan 2017-2020: ['The Road to Excellence'](#). Key relevant areas of the Plan are highlighted below:

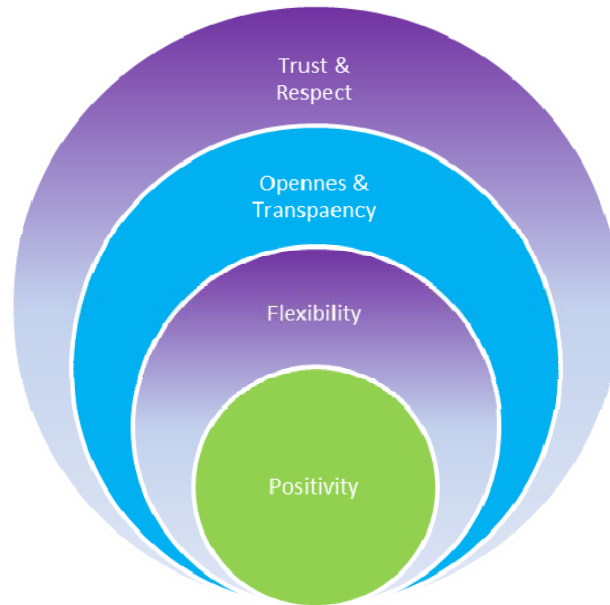
What we will do:

- High quality evidence-based practice
- Strong and effective management oversight
- Ensure consistently good services for children and their families
- Enable families when safe to do so, to successfully parent their children
- Enable children to live within their family networks
- 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

How we will do it:

- Embedding excellent practice
- Developing policy and performance
- Taking the right action, at the right time
- Being a learning organisation.

The monitoring and improvement processes are in line with the corporate values:



Positivity

We find the best way to get things done. We challenge ourselves to deliver high quality services and inspire others to deliver results.

Trust and Respect

We enable our staff to take ownership and be accountable for their own performance, actions and decisions. We value diversity and listen to the view of others.

Flexibility

We are adaptable in order to support the needs of the business – working collaboratively and supporting colleagues.

Openness & Transparency

We are honest with the people we work with and serve. We share information and communicate clearly.

Operating Model

The Recruitment and Retention Strategy is part of the overall Care Placement Strategy and is integrally linked with other key strategic plans for the Council.

Each service area will develop a Service Delivery Plan setting out:

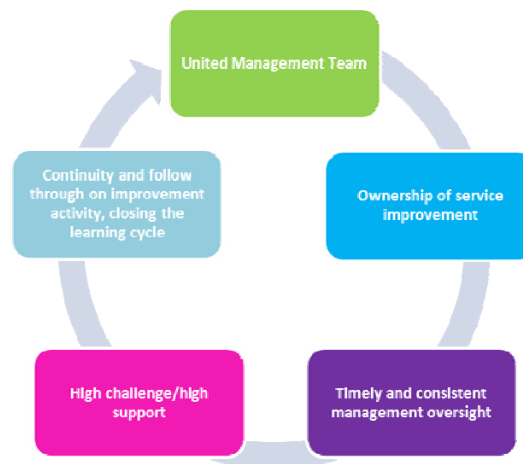
- The 2017-18 performance and 2018-19 targets
- Aspirations for our children, young people and the service
- How performance will be challenged and supported
- Risks.

The Service Managers directly responsible for implementation of this strategy are Children in Care (CiC Permanence Teams, Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children Team, and Care Leavers Team) and Permanence (Adoption and Connected Care), Fostering Retention and The Virtual School.

By the end of 2020-21, it is expected that:

- Recruitment and stability targets set out in this strategy have been achieved
- Signs of Safety/Wellbeing will be consistently and confidently used in placement stability meetings, when considering a planned move for a child or young person, when risks increase or there has been a critical incident, in support planning for adoption, Specialist Guardianships, fostering and for Pathway Planning for Care Leavers.

In order to achieve the above, the following aspirational leadership performance and target behaviours have been identified:



Children in Care (Looked after Children), Care Leavers and Permanence

“There are more young people in long-term foster care than ever before, and we need to recognise that as a permanent option and make sure the resources and support are there to support the carers, and that is whatever the legal status,”
Community Cares, Oct 4 2017



Demand on a National, Regional and Local Level

Approximately 137,000 children and young people under the age of 18 years live in Leicestershire. This is 20% of the total population. Around 11% of these young people are living in poverty and around 12% are from minority ethnic groups compared with 22% in the country as a whole. The largest minority ethnic groups of children and young people in the area are Asian or Asian British and Mixed. The proportion of children and young people with English as an additional language in primary schools is 8% (NA 20%) in secondary schools is 7% (NA is 16%). The proportion of children entitled to free schools meals in primary schools is 9% (NA is 17%) and in secondary schools is 8% (NA is 15%). There are currently 3462 children and young people with an EHC Plan and 152 with a SEN, total 3614 and in line with the national average of 2.8% of all pupils. As of 25 October 17, 546 children have child protection plans and 553 children are in care, which reflects an upward trajectory over several years for both, whilst Children in Need rates have fluctuated over the years.

During 2017 Leicestershire County Council cared for an average of 56 unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) at any one time. Of these approximately 25 were children in care and 28 supported as Care Leavers. Most UASC who arrive in Leicestershire are between the ages of 16 and 18 years of age and then 14-15 years of age. Most are male. Where UASC are female, there is a stronger link to child sexual exploitation. Most UASC originate from Afghanistan, Eritrea and Iran with significantly lower numbers from Iran, Sudan, Egypt, Vietnam, Albania, Ethiopia, Iraq and the Somali Remote Islands. UASC arriving within Leicestershire borders are usually placed in Leicester City, Leicestershire or the City. For a short period Leicestershire County Council participated in the National Transfer Scheme, resulting in the care of UASC placed in Northamptonshire, Kettering, Luton, Hertfordshire and Peterborough.

A focus on preventing the need for children to become looked after is well established in Leicestershire. Decisions are overseen by a panel structure, to ensure decisions are appropriate, resources are allocated to keep children within their families and communities (when it is right to do so) and to ensure that decisions are made in timely ways. The final decision is made by a suitably qualified manager. Although the number of children entering care is increasing, the rate is still below statistical neighbours and national averages and the local authority is confident that only children who need to be in care become looked after.

Placement stability is in the top quartile nationally at 7.7% as a result of service improvements including dedicated resources and focus on listening to carers, enhanced training, engagement events for carers and offering targeted support to the most vulnerable Looked after Children.

Following the publication of regulations and guidance for the Children 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 advertised in an offer. 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, and
- Financial stability.

High Level Data¹:

Indicator	2017/18	LCC 2016/17 End of Year figure	England 2016/17	Statistical Neighbours 2016/17
Number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan	394	432	593	466
Children subject to a Child Protection Plan rate per 10,000	39	31	43	34
Number of children in care	552	509	-	-
Number of children admitted to care	216	253	381	290
Rate of children in care per 10,000	40	37	61	48
Number of UASC in care (excl. former)	25	29	-	-
Rate per 10 000 UASC	2	2.1	3.9	3.8
Rate of children discharged from care per 10,000	13.4	15.9	26.5	20.1
Adopted	13%	16%	14%	15%
SGO	10%	22%	12%	10%
Returned Home	26%	23%	27%	26%

Children in Care (Looked after Children) and Care Leavers Performance

Monthly performance information helps the Service benchmark and drive quality provision of care through focused management activity. A summary of performance on 31 March 2017 is listed below:

- 553 Children in care compared to 492 for 2016-17
- 75.7% Social work visit in timescales compared to 95% for 2016-17
- 56% Care Plan updated in last 6 months compared to 88.8 % for 2016-17

¹ Further information about the profile of Looked after Children in Leicestershire is available as an Appendix 1

- 78.8% Children in Care (all children) Health Assessments compared to 75% for 2016-17
- 86.8% Children in Care Dental Checks compared to 74% for 2016-17
- 7.7% Placement stability (3+ placements in the last year) compared to 9.4% for 2016-17
- 78.6% SDQ completion compared to 45% for 2016-17.

In relation to Care Leavers, performance indicates good outcomes across the board:

- 90.6% Pathway Plans updated in last 6 months compared to 88.8 % for 2016-17
- 50.7% EET compared to 49% for 2016-17
- 88.2% Suitable Accommodation compared to 87.8% for 2016-17; and
- 92.3% 'In contact' compared to 93% for 2016-17.

A new 16+ Team in the Child in Care Service was established to support positive outcomes and in response to Ofsted recommendations relating to the decline in achievement and outcomes for care leavers aged 19 years and older.

In March 2018 Care Leavers were asked how the service and Care Leaver's Offer could improve to best support their need. They told us:

- 'I knew everything at the right time'
- They feel they needed more help with creating a CV
- They feel that they would like to be employed by the local authority
- They feel that they should be made more aware of support that they can have
- Some of the YP would like to have known more information about Leaving Care Grant on before they are 16
- They feel they need more of a push for training courses
- They would like more information on benefits
- More information on the local area as sometimes they are new to an area and struggle and local health care
- They would like more budgeting advice
- One young person spoke about being able to remain in foster care and that they liked this and didn't feel pushed out
- They would like to be peer mentors.

Service Strengths:

- Most children are living in stable and secure placements with long-term stability in line with the national average.

- Children are only placed out of county when necessary to meet their needs.
- Children are seen and the voice of the child heard – good practice is embedded in the service
- For Looked after Children with more complex needs, dedicated support is available to the child and carer through the Dedicated Placement Support Team.
- Care Leaver performance continues to be very impressive for Suitable Accommodation and In Contact.
- NEET is above regional comparator authorities
- The Children in Care Council is strong with 28 young people regularly participating.
- The Virtual School's focus on outcomes is solid, ensuring children and young people have creative opportunities for growth and a sense of achievement.



“This is a photo of me at my graduation... use this photo to encourage Children-in-Care... let them know they can do it,”

Developmental Areas:

- Children in care have an in-date Care Plans (target 100%)
- Care Leavers have in-date Pathway Plans (target 100%)
- The quality of Care and Pathway plans reflects person centred aspirations, SMART objectives and the child or young person's voice (target 100%)
- Sustained completion of health assessments in timescales (target 95%)
- Improved completion of dental (target 70%) and Strengths and Difficulties questionnaires for emotional wellbeing (target 100%) and evidence of consideration in care planning
- NEET for care leavers aged 19+ years is significantly improved (target 50%)
- Further promotion of a culture of aspiration and opportunity for our children through improved relationships between our cares, supervising social workers, the child's social worker and the Virtual School
- Engagement of children, young people and carers in all decisions about their needs and ambitions (target 100%).
- Ensuring assessment, planning and interventions draw on Signs of Success; that the model is consistently applied and enables children to benefit from strong relationships with their social workers
- Signs of Safety and Success will be consistently and confidently used in placement stability meetings, when considering a planned move for a child or young person, when risks increase or there has been a critical incident, in support planning for adoption, Specialist Guardianships, fostering and for Pathway Planning for Care Leavers.



"I don't think I could do it if it wasn't for my friends," Izzy.

Children in Care and Care Leavers Key Pressure Points and Needs

- Assessments, Care Plans and Pathway Plans that reflect analysis, theory, the views of the child or young person and are SMART
- Continued and strengthened management oversight at key decision making points and performance management
- Use of Permanence Panel to ensure timely permanency decisions and to quality assure the assessments and support plans.
- Implementation of the revised EET strategy
- Developing a multi-agency corporate parenting offer for all care leavers and embedding a panel for the most vulnerable care leavers.

The CiC and Care Leavers Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment is attached as Appendix 3

Adoption and Permanence – ‘We are Family’

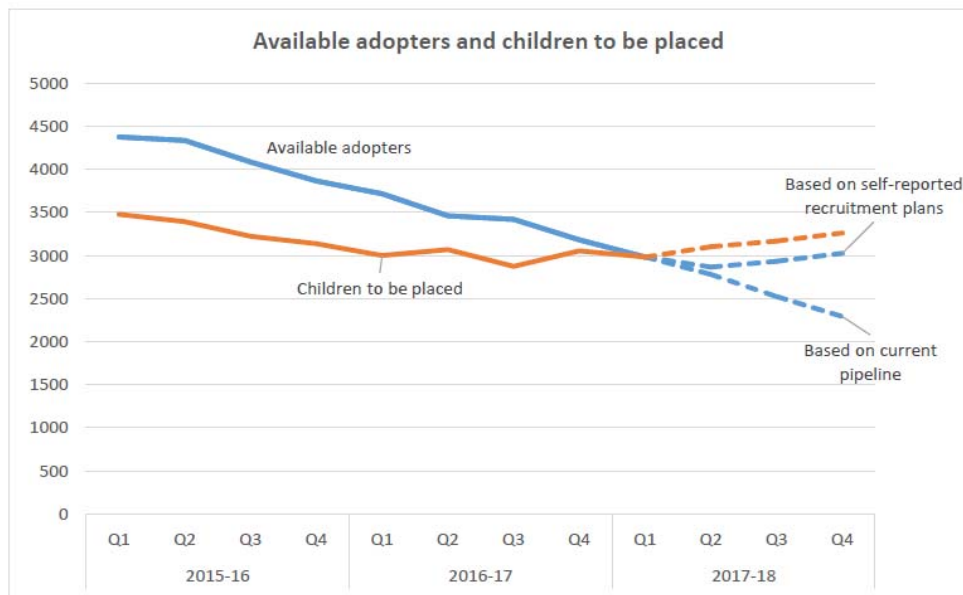


Adopter recruitment and demand on a National, Regional and Local Level

The number of adoption orders made each year between 2013 and 2017 has been higher than at any other point in the last 20 years. In 2013 there was a fall in the number of decisions for adoptions and placements orders made, believed to have been in response to the Supreme Court Judgement Re B, followed by the Court of Appeal Judgement Re B-S. However, since then, the number of decisions for adoptions and placement orders made has stabilised, with a small upward trend in both measures. Approximately 4000 placement orders are being granted each year.

As of October 2017, there were more children needing to be placed than available adopters. This is due to a fall (approximately 15%) in the number of children placed for adoption in recent quarters, meaning more children waiting and the low number of adopters being approved or in the process to be approved. This may be linked to the number of sibling groups and the complexity of need, making simple comparison against the measure 'children waiting' difficult.

Using the national reported data of adopters starting stage 1 each quarter with an assumption of 80% approval success, the table below sets out the likely national picture and shortage of adopters.



Locally, Leicestershire County Council's Adoption Agency (henceforth referred to as the Agency) implemented a recruitment freeze between April 2015- April 2016, based on the number of children with adoption plans and the number of available carers. The Agency continued to respond to spontaneous enquiries. 21 adoption households were available at the end of March 2016.

Summary of adoption activity for 2016-17 is provided below:

- Number of children at the point of approval for adoption 53
- 10 Adopters were approved in this period.
- Ethnicity of adopters – White British
- 31 children were placed with their prospective adopters during this period (28 Leicestershire children and 3 Rutland)
- 21 Leicestershire County Council approved adopter matches
- 10 interagency matches
- 5 sibling groups placed – 4 sets of 2 sibling groups, 1 set of 3 sibling group.
- 18 children were awaiting adoption placements

- Requirement of adoptive families for 2017-18 (in order to make good placement matches taking the forecasted numbers and profiles of children in proceedings into account) was estimated to be 70.

Summary of adoption activity for 2017-18 is provided below²:

- Number of children at the point of approval for adoption 39
- 18 adopters approved in this period
- Ethnicity of adopters: 16 White British 2 Asian Indian
- 34 children were placed with their prospective adopters during this period
- 16 Leicestershire County Council approved adopter matches
- 16 interagency matches
- 30 children awaiting adoption, and
- 8 adoptive families awaiting a match
- Prospective adopters in stage 1: 15
- Prospective adopters in stage 2: 28

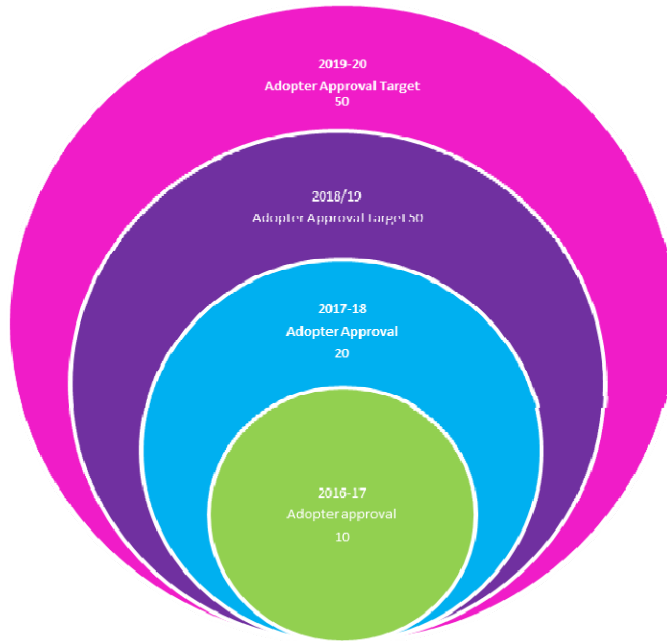
"Thank you so much for all the support - it really has made a difference... I felt I could trust you, and that you would always give a balanced and understanding, compassionate response...The advice you gave me on understanding and managing my daughter's behaviour (and on my own!), giving me much more confidence - you've been a rock!!

Message from Adopter J to the Adoption Support Worker



² Adoption - Profile of the Children in Leicestershire is available as Appendix 2

Adoption Recruitment Targets for Growth



Adoption Performance

In relation to Leicestershire's performance, the Adoption Agency continued to provide a good service to children and adopters within our service during 2016-17.

The scorecard helps the Agency to benchmark against national performance. A summary of this performance is listed below:

A1 - Average time in Days between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family for children who have been adopted

	Adoptions	Average days
Year end 2016	46	493.5
Year end 2017	34	368.8
Year end 2018	26	329.9
Average for 2016-2018		413.4
<i>Average for 2015-2017</i>		<i>466</i>

A2 - Average time in Days between a LA receiving court authority to place a child and LA matching child

	Adoptions*	Average days
Year end 2016	45	187.8
Year end 2017	31	147.0
Year end 2018	26	135.2
Average for 2016-2018		162.0
<i>Average for 2015-2017</i>		<i>171</i>

* A2 excludes relinquished children

A3 - Percentage of children who wait less than 14 months between entering care and moving in with Adoptive family-

Result 2014-17 Adoption Scorecard = 66%



In November 2017 Ofsted completed an Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Leicestershire. A summary of Ofsted's findings in relation to permanence and adoption is listed below:

Strengths:

- Public Law Outline processes are used consistently and effectively to assist timely decision-making
- Options for children to live within their extended family are appropriately explored
- When returning home is an option, this is appropriately explored
- Assessments of prospective adopters were of a good standard.
- All prospective adopters spoke highly about engaging in the process, reporting that it was realistically challenging and prepared them well. Support during the assessment process was described as 'brilliant' and 'excellent'.
- The adoption panel provides robust oversight
- Children are well matched with their future adoptive parents
- Children are mostly placed within timescale
- The local authority placed more children with adoptive families than the national average during 2015-16
- The local authority has been successful in the adoption of children from minority ethnic groups, brothers and sisters and very young children.
- Once matched, adoptive children are speedily placed with their new parents.

Developmental areas:

- Routes to permanence other than adoption are much less secure, particularly for those children and young people living in foster care.
- Family finding for foster children needing permanence is not always successful, requiring a greater number of Leicestershire foster carers who are able to provide homes to older children
- Children experience too much uncertainty during this process. Assessment and planning needs to be timelier, with greater team manager oversight and requires increased engagement of the children, young person and the current carer. Panel processes need to strengthen communication with children
- Delays in the early stages of adoption planning relating to early identification of the permanence pathway for the child and ambitious decision making need to be addressed
- Too much time is spent on the early stages of adoption planning and in placement matching. Tracking has started too late to prevent delays and is impacted on by limited availability of reliable data
- Efforts to secure adoptions for older children and those who have disabilities have not always met with success
- Support plans for adoption families fail to demonstrate specific needs of adoptive children and families, birth parents and adopted adults
- Post-care support for both adopters and special guardians fails to consider children's and carer's future needs and identify avenues for support over time
- There was no post-approval training and support offer and no support groups for either children or adults facilitated by the local authority.

- When subject to Special Guardianship Orders, cases are routinely closed 3 months after the making of the order, without a clear plan as to how future issues should be addressed.

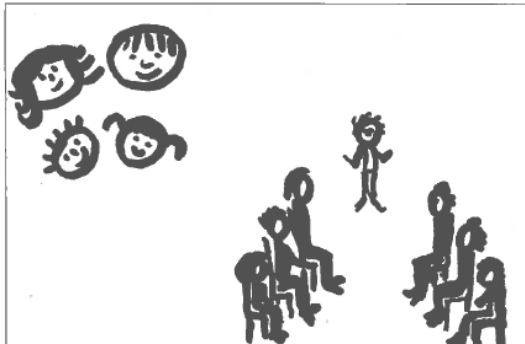
Adoption Key Pressure Points and Needs

- High number of adopters needed (ambitious targets in a difficult market)
- Adoptive homes, for children with health needs and disabilities
- Adoptive homes for ethnic matches
- Adoptive homes for siblings
- Adoptive homes for older children
- Foster to Adoption homes
- Delays in early stages of adoption planning
- Assessment for and provision of good adoption support


Adoption Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment are attached as Appendix 3

The following storyboard represents the quality and consistency of post adoption support that Leicestershire aspires to offer:


Our Vision for Families




The Cook family adopt Kieran and Kayleigh. They attend regular workshops through Children and Families Service



When there are problems at school, The Cook parents are able to ring up a worker who they know from a workshop they attended to get advice and support.



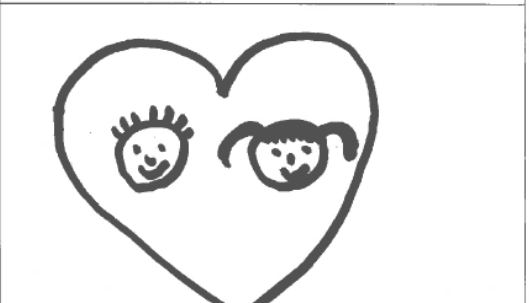
School are also able to ring up a helpline for advice and guidance on adoption and Trauma from virtual schools.



The Cook family are assessed by a social worker alongside advice by clinicians when they need help. This enables everyone to get the right support in place quickly.



As Kieran and Kayleigh grow up they might try risky behaviour and become involved with CSE. Parents can ring for advice and because they are known to the service, support can be put in place quickly which means they are more likely to remain at home



All this means that The Cook parents feel supported. Kieran and Kayleigh get the support they need from home, school, social workers and clinicians. The children feel safe and secure.

Changing lives – Insights into a Princess Batman (letter from an Adopter)

“I do hope you and the team are well.

I just wanted to drop you all an email as a year ago last Thursday, 12th October 2017, A literally walked into house and changed our lives forever. It has been a simply incredible year and we simply cannot thank you all enough for all the support and assistance that you have given us.

Every day is an adventure with A and she treats life as one big, exciting journey to which she always ready to voyage.

We could not be more proud of her and things she has already accomplished and the incredible little girl she is. We know that none of this would have been possible without the incredible love and guidance shown to her by the foster family and from your incredible team.

You should be incredibly proud of the work that you all do understand the amazing impact you have on so many lives...

We have always said that, when she is old enough to understand fully, we will explain to A just how important you all were in bringing her into our lives and that her life now would not have been possible without every single one of you.

We thank you all from the bottom of our hearts and hope to meet up someday soon so you can see for yourselves just what a beautiful person she is.

I will pre warn you that A has just discovered the amazement of dressing up so you may well see her as Princess Batman. Nothing warms your heart more than seeing the caped crusader with clip clop shoes and a tiara.”



Connected Carers and Permanence

'Family and friends carers play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust if they cannot, for whatever reason, live with their parents,' Family and Friends Care: Statutory Guidance



Family and friends carers play a unique role in enabling children and young people to remain with people they know and trust. These children may or may not be looked after by the local authority. Many children who live with family and friends do well in life, but others are vulnerable to failing to achieve good outcomes. Many family and friends carers need support to enable them to meet the needs of the children they care for.

In Leicestershire, the Kinship Team works with the family or connected network of the child, who are putting themselves forward to care for a child or young person who otherwise would be placed with a mainstream foster carer. The team completes an assessment of the family member or connected carer and takes a report to panel with a recommendation about registration as a foster carer for a specific child/children. The team also provides support to the carers following placement.

Connected carers are approached on a case by case basis, in respect of named children only, as and when the need arises and as such, are not actively recruited.

Regardless, connected carers play an integral part of our sufficiency strategy as:

- They enable children to remain with people they know and trust
- The positive assessment of connected carers helps the service to reduce its reliance on Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) provision - which per child placed equates to an avoided cost of approximately £15,000 per year.

Connected Carers on a National, Regional and Local Level

According to the National Statistics (Fostering in England 2015-16: key findings) the agencies participating reported there were 5,985 family and friends and connected people households as at 31 March 2016, an increase of 4% from 5,735 on 31 March

2015. These households made up 13% of all active fostering households as at 31 March 2016.

Locally, for the same period, these households made up 30% of all active fostering households (mainstream and Independent Fostering Agency) and Leicestershire has consistently maintained a higher proportion of connected carers (as of 30 September 2017-18, these households made up 27% of all active fostering households).

In the last 12 months, 45 young people were discharged from care onto a Special Guardianship Order (SGO).

Connected care - Profile of the Children in Leicestershire



**Leicestershire County Council
Connected Carers –
‘We are family’**

Age profile of children subject to a Children Arrangement Order, Residence Orders and Special Guardianship Orders in receipt of support packages:

Years	Number of children CAO	Number of children RO	Number of children SGO
0-2	13	3	15
3-4	21	4	30
5-6	11	2	35
7-8	24	2	34
9-12	24	6	81
13-15	12	17	25
16-17	5	2	11
18+	0	6	7
Total	110	42	238

Connected carer activity:

During 2015-16 81 assessments were completed and 45 Regulation 24 (of the Fostering Regulations) placements were agreed. These included placement of single children and sibling groups and a parent/child connected arrangement. An overview of activity is provided below:

81 full assessments
8 negative assessments
45 Reg. 24 placements

During 2017-18 an average of 83 children per month were placed with an average of 53 connected carers. In addition to the above activity and success, the department continues to provide means-tested financial support to 238 children who are subject to Special Guardianship Orders, 110 who are subject to Child Arrangement Orders and 42 subject to Residence Orders.

An overview of activity during 2017-18 is provided below:

84 full assessments
13 negative assessments
27 Reg. 24 placements

Connected Carers Performance

In November 2017 Ofsted completed an Inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers in Leicestershire. A summary of Ofsted's findings in relation to permanence and connected care is listed below:

Strengths:

- Public Law Outline processes re used consistently and effectively to assist timely decision-making
- Options for children to live within their extended family are appropriately explored
- When returning home is an option, this is appropriately explored

Developmental areas:

- Routes to permanence other than adoption, are much less secure
- Children experiences too much uncertainty during this process
- Tracking has started too late to prevent delays and is impacted on by limited availability of reliable data
- Post-care support for special guardians is weak and fails to consider children's and carer's future needs
- There is no post-approval training offer and no groups for either children or adults facilitated by the local authority.

- When subject to Special Guardianship Orders, cases are routinely closed 3 months after the making of the order, without a clear plan as to how future issues should be addressed.

Self-evaluation of the service completed in 2016-17 identified further strengths and developmental areas:

Strengths:

- Staffing is relatively stable and vacancies attract experienced staff and a mix of skills and experience
- Assessments are timely
- Flexibility – the commissioning of assessments to meet the demand (high numbers, tight timescales)
- Regular events for connected carer and access to all training offered to mainstream foster carers

Developmental areas:

- Quality of viability assessments (Reg 24 placements) – lack of analysis, focus on the child's needs now and in the future and the carers ability/suitability to meet these needs
- In terms of Reg. 24 placements, the regulations allow for 16 weeks to complete assessments with a possibility of an 8 week extension if checks are not complete. However, the reality is that most assessments are completed under much tighter timescales than this with the most extreme this year being an assessment due to be completed in 4 weeks.
- Support plans generally lack focus on the child's current and future needs and the support the carer will need over time to meet these needs.

Connected Care Key Pressure Points and Needs

- Delays in early stages of care planning
- Tracking and monitoring or permanence decisions
- Quality of viability assessments
- Quality of support plans
- Assessment for and provision of special guardianship support.

Connected Care Recruitment Targets for Growth

	Growth over 3 years 2018-21	Annual Growth
Number of connected carers	75	25

Connected Care Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment is attached as Appendix 3



Strategic Priorities for Permanence

- a. *Permanence decision making* - ensuring that where-ever possible family and friends (called connected carers) are considered and matched to care for children. Where this is not possible, permanence through adoption or local authority care (as set out in the *Foster Carer Recruitment and Retention Strategy 2017-2021*) must be considered and achieved at the earliest opportunity.



Priority activity includes:

Effective and timely intervention	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.
	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.
	Permanence plans will be monitored and reviewed 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.
	The introduction of service standards to guide practice consistency and set aspirational standards.

b. Recruitment and matching-



Priority activity includes:

Marketing will be integral to the Agency's plan	<p>The use of detailed and active marketing plans;</p> <p>The use of integrated marketing expertise;</p> <p>The use of sophisticated data.</p>
Building reputation and brand	Identifying selling points and using this in advertising to potential adopters and web presence.
A strengthened web presence	The development of a lively, informative and interactive website as the most important single source of adoption enquiries.
Cherish enquiries and potential adopters and connected carers	<p>Timely, informative and supportive responses to potential connected carers;</p> <p>The use of key messages of encouragement to communicate to the enquirer;</p> <p>Keeping enquirers informed;</p> <p>Completion of timely assessments</p>
Encourage adopters to consider more complex children	Targeted advertising and information to help prospective adopters and connected carers envisage a shared life with a more complex child;

	<p>Accepting enquirers with their existing aspirations and finding ways to encounter children as 'real', leading them to imaginatively consider children;</p> <p>Promoting contact between enquirers and established adopters in various stages to help enquirers feel that adoption of children with complex needs is achievable;</p> <p>Providing opportunities for prospective adopters to learn and reflect and reach realistic assessments of their own capabilities and desires.</p>
<p>Increasing resources and opportunities through relationships</p>	<p>Continuous improvement and reflection to ensure that systemic strengths are used as platforms for change and addressing developmental areas;</p> <p>Creating opportunities within the service, across services, with partners, other local authorities and voluntary adoption agencies to share knowledge, expertise and resources including marketing and family finding.</p>

- c. *Support* - It is acknowledged that children and young people who have had difficult beginnings require excellent placements and care, to establish a positive pathway to emotional health and wellbeing, and better outcomes for the future. With this in mind permanence should always be achieved with thought to the child's current needs, future needs and the knowledge, skills and experience of the adoptive parents or connected carers. Where the adoptive parents or connected carers require support and training to meet the needs of the child, this should be set out in the support plan and appropriate ongoing opportunities for learning made available to the adopters.



Priority activity includes:

<p>Accessible and timely post permanence support</p>	<p>Improved support plans focusing on children's current and future needs and growing carers knowledge, skill and safety networks</p> <p>Expanded service offer post placement, pre 3 years placement order</p> <p>Expand service offer for post 3 years placement order</p> <p>Introduce a flexible emotional resilience offer (including therapeutic provision for emotional wellbeing and CAMHS offer)</p> <p>Expand the training offer and align support with the Virtual School offer</p> <p>Identify adoption champions in the Child in Need Service.</p>
<p>Creative support offer</p>	<p>Improved use of adopters and special guardianship carers as informal support facilitated by the local authority through support groups and events</p> <p>Greater alignment with the Virtual School programmes</p> <p>Seek alliance with voluntary adoption agencies.</p>

Improved communication	Improved Web presence Regular adoption and special guardian news letter
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Marketing

A Marketing Plan is separate to, but linked to the information in this Plan. The marketing strategy sets out the marketing approach required to generate the interest in targeted sections of the public, who may consider becoming adopters for Leicestershire County Council.

Prospective Adopters are Customers- they are selecting which agency to register with, and will search for the one that best meets their needs.

The Marketing Strategy seeks to pursue the most effective methods by which customers will choose to come to Leicestershire, over and above other agencies available to them, to pursue their goal of becoming an adopter.

There is dedicated marketing support to the Fostering and Adoption Service, with the Marketing Officer spending approximately half of the working week in the service, and remaining linked to other key services available through the corporate Communications Team.

The Marketing Strategy is focussed on achieving the overall targets for growth, set out in the Market Position Statement, and is focussed particularly on “leads” based on market research which will become enquiries, which can then be picked up by the Recruitment team.

The Marketing Strategy and budget allocation will be held and decided by the Recruitment Manager and Marketing Officer, with overall budgetary responsibility held by the Service Manager for Fostering.

The Marketing Strategy will be signed off by the Head of Communications and Head of Service for Children in Care.

There will be a monthly report on marketing activity, and performance, which will be presented alongside the other performance reports for the Fostering and Adoption Service Head of Service and respective service managers. In particular, website and social media analytics will be generated, and analysed, for peak performance metrics, and direction of future resource allocation.

Appendix 1: Needs Analysis - Profile of Looked after Children in Leicestershire

Number of children in care: **552**

Age profile of the children in care 2017-18

Age (Group)	
0 - 1	74
2 - 4	57
5 - 9	101
10 - 15	210
16 - 17	110
Grand Total	552

Ethnicity profile (percentage) of the children in care 2017-18

Ethnicity (Group)	
Asian or Asian British	14
Black or Black British	6
Black or Black British Any ..	2
Mixed	41
Not stated	2
Other ethnic group	18
White British	457
White Other	12
Grand Total	552

Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker children in care 2017-18:

Child currently UASC?

Null	527
Yes	25
Grand Total	552

Assessed as disabled:

Child disabled?

Null	514
Yes	38
Grand Total	552

Duration in Care as of 31 March 2017:

Time LAC	
<12 months	193
12 to 24 months	124
24 to 36 months	54
3 to 4 years	38
5 years +	143
Grand Total	552

Appendix 2: Adoption - Profile of the Children in Leicestershire

Ages profile of the children at the point of approval for adoption

Age of Children	Number of children 2016-2017	Number of children 2017-2018
0-2	34	24
3-4	15	7
5-6	3	6
7-8	1	1
9+	0	1

Ethnicity profile of the children at the point of approval for adoption

Ethnicity of Children	Number of children 2016-2017	Number of children 2017-2018
White British	43	34
White Other	0	3
Asian Indian	1	0
Asian Other	0	2
Mixed – White/Black Caribbean	2	0
Mixed – White/Black African	4	0
Mixed Other	2	0
Chinese	1	0

Disability profile of children at the point of adoption approval

Disability of Children	Number of children 2016-2017	Number of children 2017-2018
Yes	0	0
No	53	39

Sibling profile of children at the point of approval for adoption

Size of Sibling Group	Number of children 2016-2017	Number of children 2017-2018
0	27	27
2	17	12
3	8	

Approved Adopter Profile 2016-17

No of adopters approved: 10

Ethnicity: 10 White British

Approval for siblings: 2 of 10

Approved Adopter Profile 2017-18

No of adopters approved: 18

Ethnicity: 16 White British & 2 Asian Indian

Approval for siblings: 3 of 18

Please scroll down

Appendix 3 Service Self-Assessments

CiC and Care Leavers Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment

<i>What are we Worried About?</i>	<i>What's Working Well?</i>	<i>What Needs to Happen?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanency process is unclear. • Too much duplication in reports, particularly around accommodating a child & permanence. • Not all 16 + young people have a PA • The induction process for new staff is inconsistent • Life story work is not being done consistently. • Contact workers are under pressure. • Commitments to SoS leads are not always consistent in their practice or attendance at practice lead sessions. • SoS is not consistently used or not used effectively leading to a tick box of the model being used but not understood effectively • SoS - Consistency and quality to Pod meetings • Staff lack confidence in chairing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teams have restructured resulting in being able to concentrate solely on statutory responsibilities for children in care, leading to improved performance management and focus on specific practice • Experienced staff are committed to working for LCC • SoS being used and when completed consistently leads to clearer outcomes for children • Performance is much improved. We now need to improve consistently across all teams • Auditing – key themed audits and warm audits, and summits leading to improvement in specific outcome (Suitable accommodation, completion and quality of Pathway Plans and Care Plans, use of trajectories for timely response) • Direct work is creative and a positive experience for children and Voice of the Child is consistently used in our work • The Children in care Service is a strong stable team. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One Team Manager takes lead responsibility for performance reporting across the 2 CiC teams • Further training/summit meetings to ensure permanence is understood & forms are not repetitive • Improved participation in Pods and quality (use of SoS Group Supervision) • To use Pods for 'EARS' and highlight good practice as well as difficult and complex cases • All staff to refresh on Pod SoS Group Supervision training • All staff to use new pro forma for pathway plans • SOS conferences - sharing good practice in CiC • Team meetings to be used for training on SOS • Consistent use of trajectories in planning and reviews • Continued staff support through caseload analysis and management

<p>SOS meetings</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Chronologies not being consistently completed to inform assessments. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social Workers feel supported by their Team Managers • Supervision are frequent and views as a priority • SoS is supported and key focus on this as a model of practice throughout the department • Practice Summits and SW Conference recognise positive practice • Appreciative enquiry is used to drive improvement and value staff • New pro forma for Pathway plans introduced, with more focus on outcomes • Increased management oversight on cases especially where delay is a factor and permanence is not being progressed • Most staff have completed the core or 3 days SOS training 	<p>oversight of pressures</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Better and consistent inductions for new staff • Creativity in care planning – if we have SMART plans we will be clearer what the child’s individual needs are • More learning from Audits and LSCB SCRs/serious incidents • SW development – more role modelling and observing practice opportunities • We want PDRs to be effective and focused on individual workers alongside CFS targets
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Adoption Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment

<i>What are we Worried About?</i>	<i>What's Working Well?</i>	<i>What Needs to Happen?</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Adopters have to contact first response (post 3 years). • Adopters find it hard to ask for help. • Families on CIN plan – shaming/blaming 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Immediate post placement support (permanence team). • Virtual schools service • Schools are getting on board with attachment based approach (numbers of exclusions being reduced). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One multi-disciplinary post adoption team. • For families, the first contact with the service needs to be with a professional who is adoption informed.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discrepancy between what is offered for first 3 years and after this. • No clear post adoption offer. (Families and other agencies confused/frustrated). • Timescales – delays in families receiving services/therapeutic intervention • Family breakdown. • No longitudinal approach • Therapy delivered in “chunks” • ASF SW role. • Knowledge held in silos (independent therapists). • Therapy – not being reviewed. • Lack of interagency working. • Parents not accessing what is on offer – stigma/shame/SW role. • Expertise in work force is dispersed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition from assessing worker to post placement support worker. • Peer support (Coram) – Stay & Play • Sustained relationships with families. • Training for staff – DDP (Coram) • A lot of experience in the work force. • Adoption Support Gateway – clinical assessment of therapeutic need, focus on what will create change and sequencing interventions. • Relationships with CAMHS • Partnership meetings: Coram, CAMHS, LCC, LC • Adopters asking for help more. • Increased knowledge – professionals and families re. impact of trauma on the brain. <p>CAFF Support Group.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ongoing learning and development - workshops for adopters to (preventative work) • Skilled post adoption social workers – taking an overview, providing family support, reviewing therapy – longitudinal approach – families can dip in and out. • Early assessment/intervention. • Evidenced based interventions team gathering evidence about what works. Use of outcome measures. • Using feedback from families to inform practice. • Clinical expertise as part of multi-disciplinary team. (Clinical Psychology Systemic Psychotherapy, OT – Sensory Integration, Theraplay/DDP/NVR) • Collaboration/learning together. • Assessment of potential adopters to be psychologically informed (close links between assessing worker and the post adoption service) • Social Work/Family support/Direct Work • Case Management • Life story work.
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		Dedicated adoption worker in Virtual Schools Team
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Connected Care Signs of Safety, Service Self-Assessment

<i>What are we Worried About?</i>	<i>What's Working Well?</i>	<i>What Needs to Happen?</i>
<p>Increase in the number of external assessors being used due to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An increase in the amount of court directed connected assessments, with short turn around (often where a negative viability has been completed) • Regular Courts requests for several different assessments for the same children. • The number of post approval cases is increasing, increasing supervising social worker case loads and resulting in assessing workers retaining some approved carers. • Capacity is compounded by reduced capacity due to staff turnover and sickness. • Viability assessment quality is 	<p>The Kinship team remain committed to ensuring that assessments are completed in a timely manner and remain child centred.</p> <p>Improved support offer and improved capacity:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have recruited a post SGO support worker who is a qualified play therapist. • We have recruited an additional SGO social worker. • Increased senior practitioner capacity, leading to increased oversight of post support is more consistent and to increase quality assurance of viability assessments. • The senior practitioners will drive and develop the use of SoS within the team. • Improved support offer - We have introduced quarterly newsletters to ensure that kinship carers have up to date information and a point of contact and there are regular kinship 	<p>All staff and carers to receive training on developmental trauma to enable them to understand the lived experience of our children and to better predict future support needs.</p> <p>To continue to develop our post support offer.</p> <p>To continue to develop relationships between fostering panel members and workers.</p> <p>To ensure that Kinship carers receive the same level of access to the team through regular get-togethers with the support of workers</p> <p>To progress and develop the use of SoS within the team to improve assessment of carers, their needs and support plans.</p>

<p>variable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Limited post SGO support offer. • There has been some tension between fostering panel and kinship team workers particularly in relation to negative recommendations. 	<p>support groups held.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved training offer – the fostering training offer has been opened to all connected carers. • A joint training day was held with the fostering panel. This was positively received and enabled workers and panel members to share concerns and experiences. 	
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The Road to Excellence

Our vision - Leicestershire is the best place for children and families

What we'll do

Our priorities

- High quality evidence-based practice
- Strong and effective management oversight

Our focus

We will:

- Ensure consistently good services for children and their families
- Engage them in a timely and proportionate way to bring about better outcomes
- Enable families, when safe to do so, to successfully parent their children
- Enable children to live within their family network
- Provide good quality care when children need to be looked after
- Act in a timely way to provide permanence for children who cannot be kept safe by their families
- Robust commissioning and contract compliance

How we'll do it

Embedding excellent practice

- Consistent use of signs of safety model
- Application of our practice framework
- Application of new work standards
- Inclusive practice
- High quality of assessment planning and recording
- Rigorous decision making
- Quality supervision
- Compliant commissioning and contracting

Developing policy and performance

- Review and improve key policy documents
- Effective use of accurate data
- Effective management oversight
- Appropriate caseload size

Taking the right action, at the right time

- Ensure a strong 'front door'
- Achieving permanency for children
- Quality pathway plans
- Good post adoption and therapeutic support
- Young people enjoy education, employment and training
- Help to keep families together

Being a learning organisation

- Quality assurance framework
- Develop progression routes for social workers and managers
- Learning from improvement activity
- Clear communication disseminates learning
- Workforce strategy supports a learning organisation

What success will look like

- Increase in number of school age children who receive specialist support for emotional wellbeing
- Performance indicators evidence improving outcomes for children and young people
- Routine audit shows consistent application of thresholds, improved quality of assessment and care planning and strong management oversight at all stages of a child's journey
- Feedback from children, young people and families evidences quality and positive impact of interventions
- All of the above are clearly influencing service design and delivery
- % of children subject to a repeat child protection plan for a second or subsequent time reduces year-on-year
- Length of time children are subject to a child protection plan reduces year-on-year
- Length of time that children are looked after before a permanency decision reduces year-on-year
- Number of appropriate and proportionate post adoption support packages increases year-on-year
- Number of support packages offered to birth parents increases year-on-year
- Proportion of children in care and care leavers in education, employment or training increases year-on-year
- Improved timeliness from contact to completion of assessment
- % of children remaining in the same placement for three years or more

Four behaviours that underpin everything

Voice

Listening to and responding to what the child and family tell us

Signs of safety

'Doing with' and not 'doing for' or 'doing to'

Outcome focussed

Striving to improve children's and families' lives

Leadership

Everyone is responsible and accountable