Speech, Language and Communication (SLC)Strategy (2021-2025)

Supporting children and young people's voice, agency and wellbeing through responsive interactions

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Leicester City Council

Foreword

Councillor Elly Cutkelvin - Assistant City Mayor - Education and Housing

From birth all children want to communicate. They look, then smile and babble. Good communication skills help children grow socially, do well in education and throughout their lives. Our new SLC Pathway will help all parents/carers, family members and those who support them to encourage and develop good communication. This SLC strategy has been developed with parents and professionals to pull together and improve speech, language and communication for all our children. In recovery from COVID-19 we will work together to create more opportunities for inclusive communities where children and young people are encouraged to interact, play, express their creativity and grow in confidence to deal with uncertainty and make the most of possibilities.

Martin Samuels – Strategic Director, Social Care and Education

Children and young people have a right to have a say in decisions affecting them, have their views taken seriously, and to receive support that recognises their identities and cultures. Voice – expressing your ideas and opinions in whatever way you choose - is at the heart of our approach to participation. Care-experienced young people have told us that they're more likely to communicate with someone who shares the same experiences because it's easier to start a conversation and make a connection. We will work together to ensure our workforce reflects the strengths of our local communities and engage local communities in shaping and co-producing support for SLC needs.

Ivan Browne – Director of Public Health

Families, friends, neighbours, faith groups, employers, schools, health, planners, transport and housing providers are collaborating in a process of recovery from COVID-19. Digital *Toddlers Learning Together* courses, and virtual wellbeing assessments are just some of the new ways in which we are connecting with those communities who were often isolated and excluded even before Lockdown. Working together we will empower communities to address the wider factors that affect health and wellbeing, boost communication, address the digital divide and build resilience across the city.

Sue Welford – Principal Education Officer

Children and young people's communication skills crucially develop alongside their social, emotional and physical growth through play, conversations and learning opportunities. These follow their interests and broaden their experiences. We will work together to enable all those involved in the lives of children and young people to identify and address children and young people's communication needs early in life or when needs arise. Children and young people's voice, agency and wellbeing are at the heart of our partnership approach to improve outcomes for everyone in Leicester.

Cover illustration by Liyana (aged 8 years) following a conversation with her parent about 'multisensory' walks to encourage 'voice'.

Contents

Responsive Interactions

"It's important to help parents to extend children's sentences and explain to children what's happening next – not just bundle them into the pushchair or the car, but explain what you're doing and where you're going…"

Parent/Volunteer Stay and Play Coordinator

Introduction

This strategy sets out the vision, priorities and success measures for effective speech, language and communication (SLC) support from pre-birth into adulthood (0-25 years). It is a long-term approach to *Build Back Fairer*[1] in recovery from COVID-19, to tackle poverty, discrimination, and social isolation: the deep-rooted causes of early language delay and many SLC needs (SLCN). This builds on the strengths of the child who is a born communicator, the resilience of their family and wider communities,[2] and their rights to equality of opportunity[3] and social justice.

Although children develop at their own pace, a child's early language can reflect their current wellbeing[4], and may be a predictor of their potential life chances. Language delay at five years can have implications for children's longer term social, emotional, learning and economic outcomes[5]. SLCN are recognised in the **SEND Code of Practice** as a special education need to be addressed.

The link between language delay, deprivation[6] and the wider social determinants of health and wellbeing is documented[7]. Public Health England[8] (PHE) and other stakeholders have called for not only a focus on responsive interactions, but *large scale and transformative change* in homes, neighbourhoods, workplaces and public services to tackle the underlying determinants of health inequities.[9]

Strategic Context

Addressing early language delay is a priority in the government's 'levelling up' social mobility plan[10], locally in the vision[11] for the city, and must be at the heart of plans for COVID-19 recovery[12].

This strategy relates to Leicester's anti-poverty strategy (2021), Better Births, Early Help, 0-5, SEND Health and Wellbeing Local First 1001 Critical Days Plan (CCG, forthcoming, 2021)

Relevant national policy and guidance includes Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication (PHE, 2020) The Children Act (2014), Equality Act, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, SEND Code of Practice, Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, National Curriculum in England, Public Health Outcomes Framework .

This strategy is informed by No Child Left Behind a public health approach to prevent vulnerability through helping early when problems arise, and creating an environment throughout the life course where negative effects are lessened.

Internationally, this strategy addresses the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, and UN Sustainable Development Goals including no poverty; health and wellbeing; quality education; gender equality; and supporting the marginalised and disadvantaged.

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[1] Build Back Fairer: the COVID-19 Marmot Review, IHE 2020
[2] Parents Helping Parents nesta 2020
[3] Public Sector Equality Duty 2011
[4] Recent developments in language and inequality PHE, 2018
[5] Language as a child wellbeing indicator EIF
[6] RCSLT social disadvantage factsheet

[7] Marmot Review 10 Years On
[8] COVID stakeholder engagement synthesis PHE
[9] Children's Commissioner 2020
[10] Early Years Social Mobility Programme Summary
[11] Leicester City Mayor – My vision
[12] Children and young people mental health recovery briefing NCB

Vision and Principles

All children and young people will develop their speech, language and communication skills to support their:

voice - expressing their views and feelings - however they choose to

agency[13] - ability to act and make decisions that influence events and affect their world

wellbeing – health, happiness and building relationships

Everyone in the lives of children and young people including their families, friends, communities, and wider services will engage with them as **communication partners** to support their learning and development through **responsive interactions**. Spaces where children and young people live, play, learn, spend leisure time and work will support **inclusive communication**. Staff and families will feel confident to **identify and address communication needs** early in life or when needs arise and know how to access further help and support through self-directed or coaching approaches.

Children are active community-makers. They participate in and contribute to multiple communities as they move between home, extended family, settings and play areas. They often act as cultural brokers, helping families and settings understand one another.[14]

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[13] Birth To Five Matters, 2021 p.118
[14] Birth To Five Matters, 2021

These six principles from Leicester's all age commissioning strategy[15] inform our approach. We will:

support the **best start in life for all** and the **best life opportunities** through coordinated, multiagency strategies to upskill the children's workforce and empower parents/carers, family members and friends as children's first communication partners[16].

co-produce with children, young people and their families in accordance with their rights through the 2014 Children Act[17] and SEND Code of Practice[18] to express their views and have these views taken seriously.

work in **partnership** across the city and in neighbourhoods through aligned perinatal (including mental health) services, early years, social care, schools, colleges and universities, youth services, health, council and community provision.

help early in life or when needs arise through a graduated approach and high-quality, culturally relevant support. Boost peer and community-led approaches as parents' preferred sources of support[19]; and enable families and staff to access the SLC Pathway and other sources of practical support.

personalise responses to meet individual needs in their wider community and recognise intersectionality (how race, class, gender, disability, and other protected characteristics in the Equality Act combine) through for example, developing learning approaches that suit boys who are new to English or girls with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) through universal, targeted and specialist support and a graduated approach

continually monitor and review evidence of **positive impact** in children and young people's lives by asking them 'what's changed' and 'what's possible' (including those from BME backgrounds, care-experienced, and those with disabilities, who are more likely to live in poverty and experience lower wellbeing[20]).

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[15] Leicester City All Age Commissioning Strategy 2020-2025
[16] Children's Society
[17] legislation.gov.uk
[18] councilfordisabledchildren.org.uk
[19] Department for Education
[20] State of the Nation 2020: children and young people's wellbeing, DfE

Priorities for change

Our four priorities for change are to:

lead   support for SLC through joined-up, responsive services and through **genuine partnerships** (co-production) with families, sharing information in the interests of the family and working together

engage   parents/carers, family and community members as **communication partners** who listen, take turns and help children and young people to develop strong communication skills and emotional wellbeing through responsive interactions

create   **communication inclusive spaces** at home, nursery, school, library, clubs and places of worship, whilst walking or on the bus, in the park, or at work. These are spaces to communicate and connect on new experiences and ideas, where information is available in a range of formats e.g. pictures, community languages, audio-description, Makaton and sign language

**empower**   families and staff through self-directed or coaching models, to identify and address **communication strengths and needs** early in life, or when needs arise, and know (or learn) how to address these through a graduated approach

"We talk about things we would like to improve in our school …we should stop throwing so much food away…I see so much food on the floor in the dinner hall…" Member of School Council, Leicester Primary School

Local Context

Data on children and young people's learning and wellbeing, levels of poverty and deprivation, actual and predicted SLCN were analysed by our project partners **Better Communication CIC** pre COVID-19. Key findings include:

- 16 per cent of children attending development checks at 2-2½ years had language below expected levels (compared to 11 per cent nationally)[21] using the ASQ3 questionnaire
- Many children start school with around 17 months language delay on age-expected levels[22].
- A quarter of children from deprived backgrounds and two-thirds of children with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities were not at the age-expected levels for communication and language at five years old.
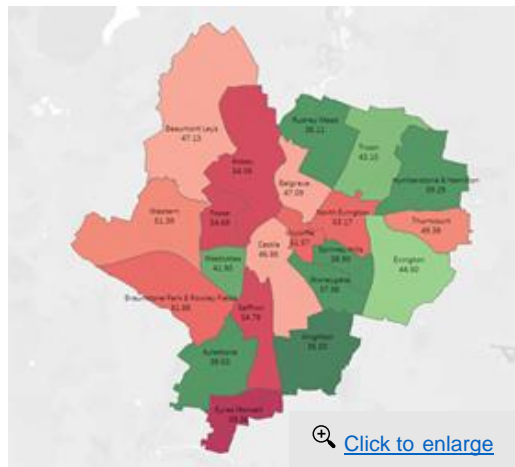
In eight wards in the city more than 50% of children under four years old were predicted to have a SLCN. These children will need high quality teaching and learning opportunities to develop their SLC skills.

The local place-based response to COVID-19 recovery must respond to these SLCN.

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[21] DfE

Future Need

Headline messages from an audit involving staff (400+) and families (250+) on support for SLCN include:

What's working:

Approachable Speech and Language Therapy services; Let's Get Talking (Health Visitors); Stay and Play (Children's Centres); Early Years Support Team (SEND); Bookstart (Libraries), The Spark Arts for Children and Talent 25 offering creative engagement opportunities.

What's not working:

Increased poverty/stress so families don't know what support is available, don't access it, or it's not accessible in tone or language; digital divide i.e. no ICT hardware, wifi access or data to access online support; parents spending too long on phones; psychological, economic and social impact of extended COVID-19 Lockdown, lack of bilingual support.

What might be possible:

A local place-based approach for those most vulnerable e.g. looked after children, those with SEND, BME and those living in poverty; culturally appropriate support from peers who have been through similar experiences; increased and ongoing support for parent/carer engagement with well-resourced community services and take-up of benefits e.g. funded early education entitlement at 2 years.

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[22] Leicester City Council Datanet 2019

What we are doing

"Every mother dances her baby…" Kenyan Proverb – on the responsive, nurturing relationship between parent and child[23].

Partnerships with parents in the first 1001 critical days and beyond

Communication begins in the earliest days of life through responsive interactions. For example, playing peekaboo involves looking, listening, vocalising, turn taking and seeing things from the other's point of view. In many cultures the relationship between parent/carer and child is described as a dance (see quote above) – a responsive partnership, which grows in the right environment. A focus on support for families in the First 1001 Critical Days from conception until two will support babies' and parent/carers' communication, emotional wellbeing and development over the longer term. If SLCN are identified parents must be involved as partners, support identified and reviews planned – see the SLC Pathway.

"At the heart of communication is the time in each day for every child or young person to interact with an adult and with other children or young people. Building positive relationships is key to emotional wellbeing." Cath Jackson, SEND Early Years Support Team, Leicester city council

Build Back Fairer: strengthening families and communities through COVID-19 Recovery

Studies have shown that parents from disadvantaged backgrounds have reported spending less time on activities with babies and

toddlers during Lockdown than those from more advantaged backgrounds.[24] Alongside this, reports from Health Visitors[25] and other services point to an increase in violence in the home and worsening mental and physical ill-health in families during Lockdown. Services have for many years responded to increased SLCN (and wider health and learning needs) with fewer staff and diminished budgets[26]. The immediate and longer-term consequences of Lockdown in Leicester's diverse and deprived communities demand coordination and strategic alignment of strategies and resources to *Build Back Fairer* and tackle the root causes of many SLCN and vulnerabilities: discrimination and poverty.

Coordinated, multiagency strategies to upskill the children's workforce (including volunteers) and empower parents/carers, family members and friends as children's first communication partners can ensure children are given the best start in life[27].

The Balanced System® outcomes-based framework for SLC *system change* underpins this strategy. Using this framework, the strengths, weaknesses, gaps and possibilities for innovation in local SLC provision will continue to be audited and analysed alongside rich evidence of community-led approaches to address SLCN.[28] Data from the Balanced System® audit, Early Intervention Foundation SLC Maturity Matrix and secondary research was used to create the SLC Pathway and inform the SLC strategic priorities and action plan.

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[23] Okwany 2016
[24] University of Oxford 2020
[25] Institute of Health Visiting 2020
[26] Nuffield Foundation 2020
[27] Children's Society
[28] Department of Health and Social Care 2015

Governance and accountability

Partners will work together to monitor progress on improving support for SLC and unblock barriers wherever possible through the arrangements detailed below.

- Leicester Readiness for School Group (LRSG) a multi-agency steering group established in February 2016, will continue to meet each half-term to coordinate and align local integrated SLCN support in response to evidence of need[29]. Members will work alongside existing partnerships, including Leicester Children's Trust Board, and the Joint Strategic Planning and Transformation Group, to take forward priorities in the SLC Action Plan.
- The Joint Integrated Commissioning Board will oversee the development of integrated outcomes-based commissioning frameworks and aligned resources and strategies.
- Population outcome measures[30] including those relating to fewer children and young people living in poverty will be taken forward through Leicester's Anti-Poverty Strategy (forthcoming, 2021) and vision for the city.

Partners will regularly gather and review evidence of improvements in children and young people's learning, health and wellbeing to inform this strategy and action plan. Longer term signs of progress will include:

- Fewer children in Leicester live in **poverty**
- Fewer children are identified with **language delay** at 2 and 4 years and the language gap between deprived children and their peers is closed
- More families access **Funded Early Education** at 2 years
- More early years settings and schools are graded **outstanding** by Ofsted
- **High quality SLCN support** delivered through **partnerships** is **accessible** to all
- More children and young people can confidently communicate their **views**, **feelings** and **ideas** and they feel **happier**, **healthier** and **connected**

Click to enlarge

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[29] Best Start in Speech, Language and Communication PHE 2020

[30] PHE Fingertips

Action Plan 2021-2025 developed by partners

PRIORITY	ACTION	BY 2025
Lead system change to develop a co-produced place-based approach to SLC. Address the root causes of many SLC needs (SLCN): poverty and discrimination. Focus on First 1001 Critical Days.	- Integrated commissioning framework across public health, CCG, SCE is developed by Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland commissioners and service leads (Integrated Care Service) - Needs/outcomes data drives SLC support - Co-production of SLC support with families	- Community and peer-led SLC support is widely available - Early language gap between deprived children and peers is reduced. - Fewer families are living in poverty.
Engage parents/carers, families and friends as responsive communication partners	- Disseminate SLC Pathway widely, monitor use and quality - Locality partners including Parent Peer Champions support access to SLC Pathway and offer mentoring and guidance to families and friends in their role as communication partners	More parents feel confident in their role as responsive communication partners. More children and young people feel happy, healthy and heard.
Create communication inclusive spaces where children and young people live, play, learn and spend time	- Communication inclusive homes, schools and settings developed - Neighbourhoods, libraries and parks engaged as spaces to nurture communication skills	Places where children live, play, learn and spend time foster their communication skills, confidence and wellbeing.
Empower all those in the lives of children and young people to identify and address SLCN early in life or when needs first arise	- SLC Framework used to audit skills and CPD - Integrated approaches established to support early identification of SLCN (e.g. 27-month development review) and interventions to address SLCN in first 1001 critical days of life.	Children and young people are empowered to develop their SLC skills. Their learning, health and wellbeing outcomes support their wider life opportunities and aspirations

Glossary

BME – Black and Minority Ethnic is the terminology often used in the UK to describe people of non-white descent. It is recognised that this is an administrative term spanning many ethnic groups. In this strategy it includes African, African Caribbean, Indian, Pakistani, Bangladeshi, South East Asian, East Asian, Middle Eastern, South American, Gypsy, Roma, Irish Traveller and other recently settled communities in the city.

CAMHS – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services

CCG – Clinical Commissioning Group – commissioners of services including midwifery and Speech and Language Therapy

EYFS – Early Years Foundation Stage

EYFSP – Early Years Foundation Stage Profile

HCP – Healthy Child Programme

LRFSG – Leicester Readiness for School Group

LPT – Leicestershire Partnership Trust NHS Provider of health services including Speech and Language Therapy Service, Public Health Nurses and Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

PHE – Public Health England

PHN – Public Health Nurses: health visitors birth-5 years, school nurses 5-19 years

RCSLT – Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists

SLC – speech, language and communication

SLCN – speech, language and communication needs

SLT – Speech and Language Therapy service

SEND – special educational needs and/or disabilities

White – an ethnic classification used in the 2011 UK Census which incorporates English, Welsh, Scottish, and Northern Irish

UHL – University Hospitals of Leicester providing services including midwifery

The terms speech, language and communication[31] are defined as follows:

- **Speech** - saying sounds accurately and in the right places in words; speaking fluently, without hesitation, prolonging or repeating words or sounds; speaking with expression in a clear voice, using pitch, volume and intonation to add meaning.
- **Language** - understanding and making sense of what people say; using words to build sentences and conversations; putting information in the right order to make sense.
- **Communication** - how we interact with others; being able to talk to people and take turns as well as change language to suit the situation. It includes non-verbal communication, for example eye contact, gestures and facial expressions. Being able to consider another person's perspective, intentions and the wider context.

Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) is used to describe a range of communication difficulties. SLCN can include:

- Developmental Language Disorder (DLD)[32] affecting around 7-10% of the population with primary speech, language and communication needs, and
- language delay[33] when language skills are significantly below expectations, which can affect more than 50% of children in areas of high economic deprivation.

The principles of the SEND Code of Practice (2014) are also integral to this Strategy. SLCN is recognised within the SEND Code of Practice as an area of special educational need and it acknowledges that the profile for every child with SLCN is different and their needs may change over time. They may have difficulty with one, some or all of the various aspects of speech, language or social communication at various times of their lives.

In the identification of SLCN all settings should adopt a **graduated approach** with a four stage assess, plan do and review. Where a pupil is identified as having SEN, action is to be taken to remove barriers to learning and put effective special educational provision in place. Earlier decisions and actions are revisited, refined and revised with a growing understanding of the child's needs and of what supports the child in making good progress and securing good outcomes. The graduated approach draws on more detailed approaches, more frequent review and more specialist expertise in successive cycles to match interventions to the SEN of children and young people.

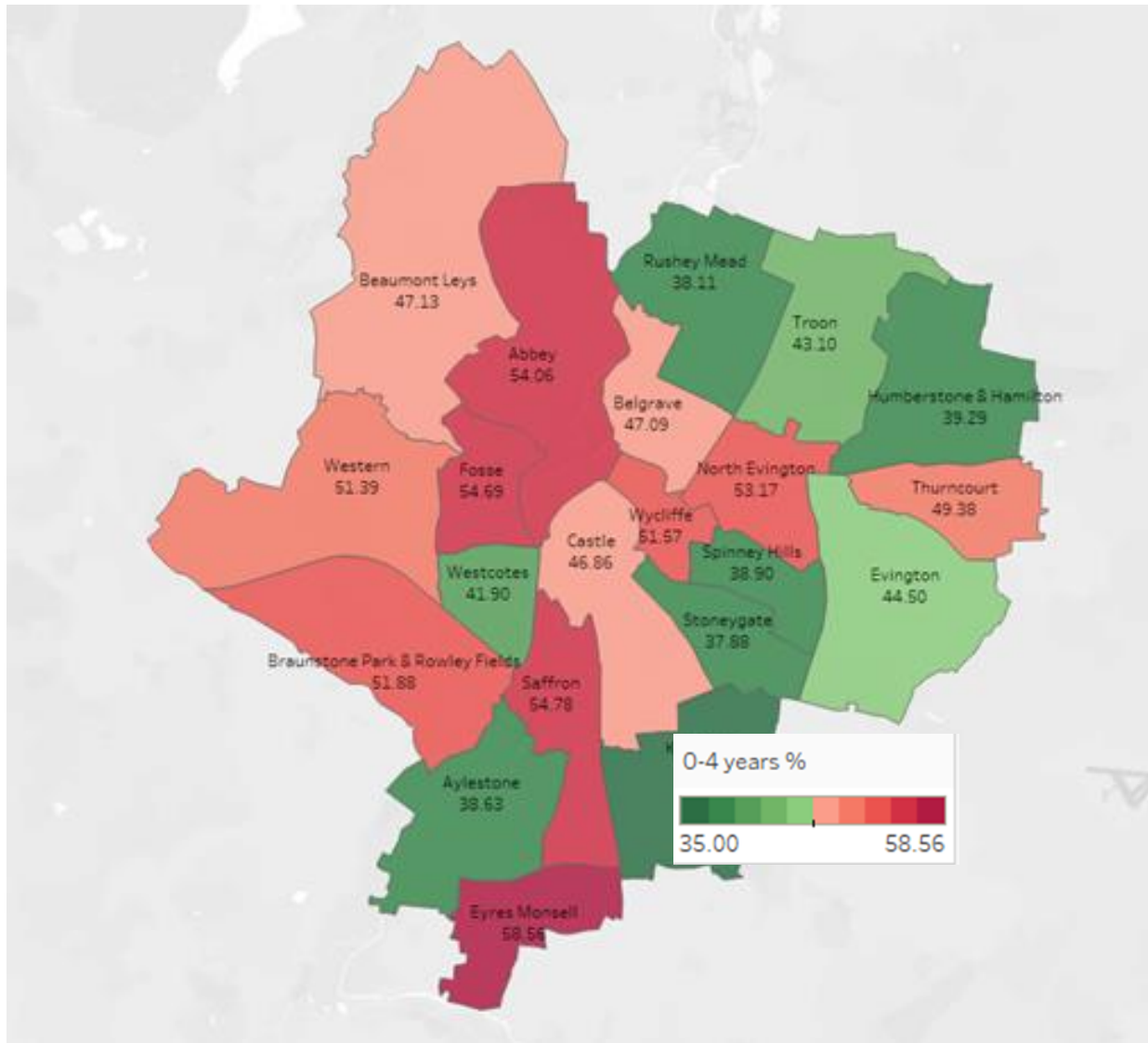[31] Justice Evidence Base RCSLT
[32] Developmental Language Disorder RCSLT
[33] SLCN Social Disadvantage RCSLT

Map showing children 0-4 years with predicted SLCN by Leicester ward

These children will need high quality teaching and learning opportunities to promote the development of SLC skills.

Source: Better Communication CIC, 2019

SLC Data in Leicester

All data was gathered pre-COVID19 Lockdown (in March 2020).

Leicester's population[34]

- Over a quarter (96,390) of Leicester city residents are aged 0-19. Leicester has a younger population compared to the average across England.[35]
- Life expectancy for men in the city is 77 years compared to 82 years for women (both rates are lower than the national average of 79.5 years for men and 83.1 years for women)
- Leicester has the largest, long term, non-UK born population (18 per cent resident for more than 10 years) in the East Midlands.
- Nearly 50 per cent of Leicester births in 2013 were by non-UK born mothers, which is the highest proportion in the East Midlands.[36]
- 54 per cent of pupils in Leicester schools speak English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- 16.5 per cent of Leicester children claim free school meals and more may be eligible
- 23 per cent of Leicester under 16s are in low income families

Early language

- 54% of eligible families take up Funded Early Education at 2 years (68% national rate)
- At the 2-2½ years health and developmental screening 16 per cent of children (1 in 6) have language below expected levels (compared to 11 per cent nationally)[37] using the Ages and Stages (ASQ3) data
- Children start Nursery Class with 17 months language delay and 17 months delay in Reception Class[38]

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[34] leicester.gov.uk
[35] leicester.gov.uk
[36] leicester.gov.uk
[37] DfE
[38] Leicester City Council Datanet 2019

Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (age 5)

Legend: Emerging ▪ Expected or exceeding

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Expected or exceeding	70.4	75.6	75.9	77.4	77.7
Emerging	29.6	24.4	24.1	22.6	22.3
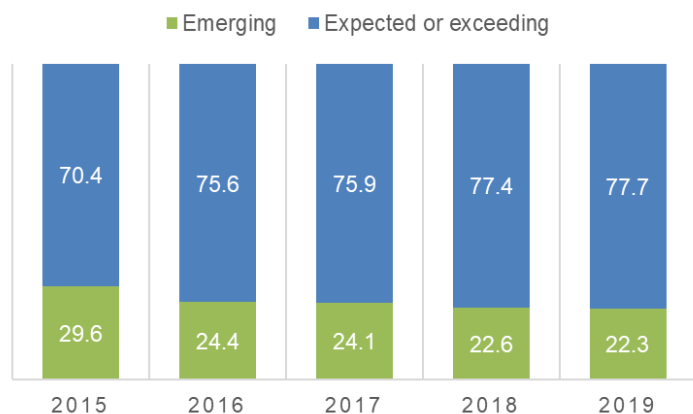
Figure 1: Percentage of all children in Leicester achieving the Early Learning Goal (ELG) in communication and language at Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS).[39]

At Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (age 5) the percentage of children at or above the expected level in **Communication and Language** was 78 per cent for all children (82 per cent nationally), 74 per cent for disadvantaged children and 33 percent for children with SEND.

	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Leicester	50.7	60.7	64.4	66.4	67.7
East Midlands	64	67.6	68.9	69.8	70.3
England	66.3	69.3	70.7	71.5	71.8

Figure 2: Percentage of children achieving a good level of development at age 5 in Leicester – regional and national comparisons

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[39] Leicester City Council Datanet 2019

Assessment data across all 7 areas of the Early Years Foundation Stage Profile, shows 66 per cent of all children in Leicester (72 per cent nationally) were at or above expected levels. There is a variation for girls and boys, and those with mother tongue English (MTE) and English as an additional language (EAL). In 2019, the percentage of children at or above expected levels in all aspects of learning at the end of EYFS were as follows:

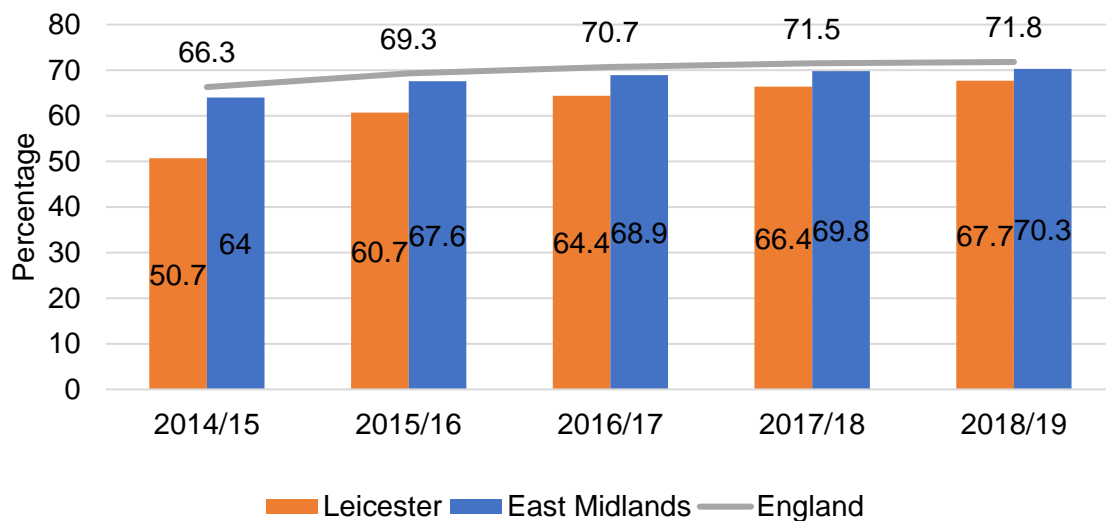- 75 per cent of girls with Mother Tongue English (MTE)
- 72 per cent of girls with English as an Additional Language (EAL)
- 63 per cent of boys with MTE
- 58 per cent of boys with EAL

Percentage of 4 to 5 year olds who met the expected standard in development		
	England	Leicester
All	71	66
Girls		72
Boys		60
Asian	69	71
Girls		79
Boys		64
Black	68	61
Girls		66
Boys		57
Chinese	76	64
Girls		62
Boys		67
Mixed	72	68
Girls		74
Boys		61
White	72	63
Girls		69
Boys		57

Figure 3: Percentage of children who meet the expected standard in development at Early Years Foundation Stage Profile by gender and ethnicity in Leicester.

Figure 3 shows fewer Black or white boys at, or above, expected levels of development at EYFS Profile. National figures show that 34% of children from Gypsy Roma and Traveller children are at expected levels of development aged 5 years.

A comparison with 10 statistical neighbours (local areas with similar characteristics) in 2018 (Figure 4) shows that Leicester had the second largest percentage point gap (-5.3) against the national average for all children achieving the expected level of development at EYFS Profile for communication and language and literacy (combined).
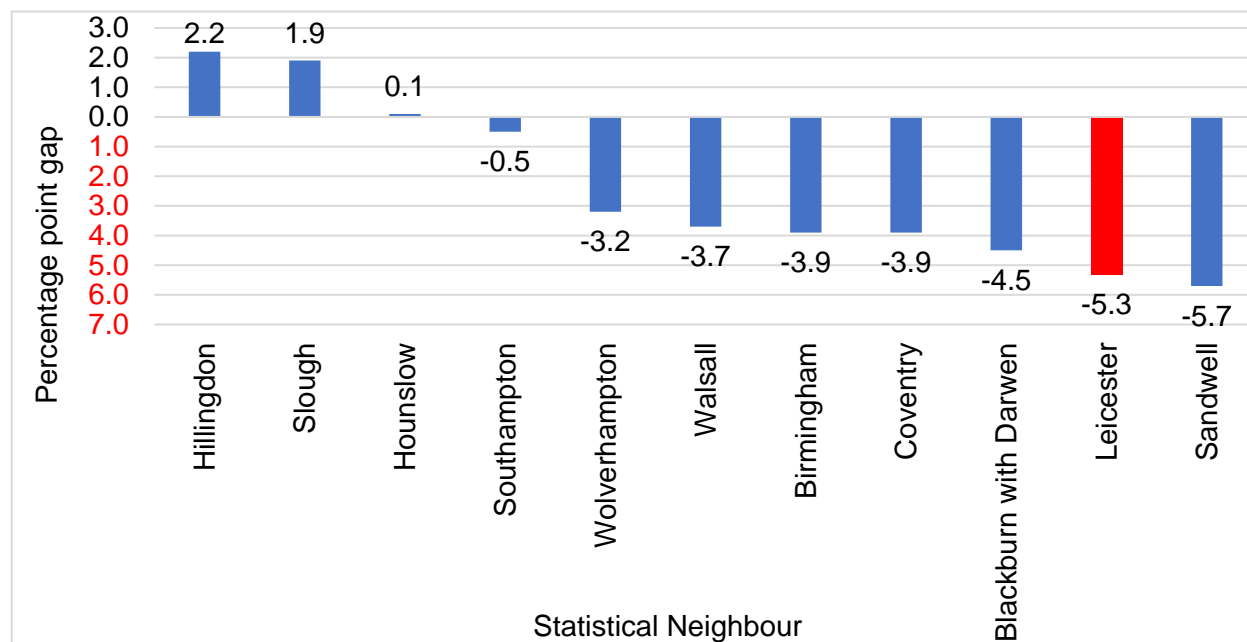
Figure 4: Children in Leicester at expected levels for Communication, Language and Literacy at EYFS Profile in comparison to ten statistical neighbours

This early years learning outcomes data emphasises the need to personalise SLC support and create communication inclusive spaces for all children: tailoring approaches for boys from all ethnic groups, children with SEND, those from deprived backgrounds – including Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children, and those with English as an Additional Language (particularly those new to English).

Key Stage 1
The percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading and writing has increased by 3 percentage points (pp) and 6pp since 2016, respectively. In 2019, Leicester was behind the national average by 5pp and 4pp in reading and writing, respectively. Leicester's achievement levels at KS1 reading and writing have consistently been behind its statistical neighbours, the East Midlands region and the national average since 2016.

Key Stage 2

Since 2016, the percentage of pupils achieving the expected standard in reading has declined by 1pp and there has been no improvement in writing. In 2019, Leicester was behind the national average by 3pp and 2pp in reading and writing, respectively. Leicester's achievement levels at KS2 reading and writing (teacher assessments) have consistently been behind its statistical neighbours, the East Midlands region and the national average since 2017.

Key Stage 4

The percentage of pupils achieving a 9 – 4 pass at Progress 8 in English and Maths has fallen by 0.7 pp since 2017. Leicester has been performing behind its statistical neighbours, the average for the East Midlands region and the national average since 2017. However, Leicester's statistical neighbours and the East Midlands region have been performing better than the national average since 2017.

Attainment at age 19

The percentage of 19-year-olds achieving a level 2 qualification in English and Maths has been falling in the East Midlands region and amongst Leicester's statistical neighbours since 2016. A national decline was seen between 2017 and 2018. In Leicester 63.5% of 19-year-olds achieve a Level 2 qualification in English and Maths.

Adults' Skills

	Leicester	National
Those formally qualified to level 2+	62.3%	73.6%
% 16-64-year olds with HE qualification	28.8%	37.1%

Figure 5: Adult Skills levels in Leicester, 2018, DfE

Fewer adults in Leicester have a level 2 (GCSE 4-9 equivalent) or above than the national average (1 in 3 adults are not qualified to level 2 or above in Leicester in comparison to 1 in 4 adults nationally) and fewer adults have a higher education qualification than the national average. The need for national strategic workforce reform and improved pay and conditions as a result of increased awareness of the invaluable role of key workers in health, social care and education (childcare) operating without a Level 2 qualification has been extensively documented.[40][41]

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[40] Office of the Children's Commissioner 2020
[41] Sutton Trust and CREC

Wellbeing

Wellbeing data for children and young people in Leicester[42] reflects their wider environment and experiences. More deprived children tend to have less access to necessary technology and IT, less suitable home working environments and are more likely to experience crowded living conditions, stress and poverty at home which harm learning and wellbeing.

- Among 5 to 10-year-olds, 10 per cent of boys and 5 per cent of girls have a mental illness, and in the 11 to 16-year age group the prevalence is 13 per cent for boys and 10 per cent for girls
- 60 per cent of 12 to15-year olds say their ideas and opinions are asked for at home, school or in the community
- 24 per cent of under 16s are worried about money
- 19 per cent are worried about having enough to eat

National data show that:

- Babies and toddlers from disadvantaged backgrounds have been missing out in COVID-19 Lockdown on activities to support their development, compared to children of highly-educated, well-paid parents[43]
- Two thirds of seven- to 14-year-olds with serious behaviour problems have language needs.[44]
- Those with a history of early language need are at higher risk of mental health problems e.g. 2.7 times more likely of having a social phobia by age 19.[45]
- Around 7-10% of children have SLCN associated with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability with higher numbers of children from BME and deprived backgrounds experiencing barriers to education and life opportunities associated with disability.[46]
- There has been a continued decrease in average happiness with life among 10- to 15-year-olds in the UK. Happiness with friends is in decline. 15-year-olds in the UK were among the saddest and least satisfied with their lives in Europe. Those with SEND and from BME backgrounds have lower wellbeing.[47] The Coronavirus pandemic affected children's happiness due to the lack of choice they had in life.[48]

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[42] leicester.gov.uk
[43] BabiesinLockdown
[44] The Communication Trust
[45] RCSLT
[46] gov.uk
[47] DfE
[48] The Children's Society

Audit Findings - SLC support system in 2019

SLC audit responses from families, staff and volunteers to the key questions: what's working well, what's not working and what might be possible to support SLC in Leicester for children, young people and their families?

Leading the System

What's working well?
- Strategic and political leadership and commitment to collaboration on early language is a high priority nationally and locally
- There is strong commitment to early intervention and partnership working

What's not working?
- Increased poverty, austerity and funding reductions have reduced capacity in integrated delivery and created gaps in services
- Co-production needs time and resources to develop genuine partnerships
- Wider political and economic uncertainty (including Brexit and COVID-19 Lockdown) has led to an increase in poverty, discrimination and associated SLC needs.

What might be possible?
- A shared vision and partnership long-term approach to addressing SLCN is agreed based on shared principles and values to inform 'common elements' of SLC support.
- Integrated commissioning frameworks and pooled budgets are developed.
- Shared data on children and young people's predicted and actual SLCN and educational and wellbeing outcomes is used to inform ongoing commissioning of SLC support, including through qualitative research on children and young people's lived experiences.

Engaging Parents/Carers/Peers

What's working well?
- Leicester Mammas community-based peer-support for early communication and breastfeeding is engaging new parents in deprived areas
- Leicester Midwifery Services have achieved UNICEF Baby Friendly standards which include supporting the development of loving relationships
- Leicester Maternity Voices Partnership enables co-production in perinatal services
- Coffee mornings to connect parents as peer supporters (in some schools)
- In Children Young People and Family Centres Family Support Workers and other staff from the local community engage with parents/carers through lively interactive sessions including bumps to babies, stay and play, babies learning together, toddlers learning together PEEP sessions. Relationships based parent training for targeted groups.
- Get Up and Go free, fun family-friendly activities – many in local parks (and online ideas)

- Let's Get Talking small group work developed in partnership by Speech and Language Therapists and Health Visitors and delivered by Health Visitors (virtual) targets children with early language needs
- The SEND early years support team empower children and their families to address SLCN.
- The Spark Arts for Children works in partnership with schools and children's centres facilitating creativity. Rhythm Play Express music sessions with local musicians are particularly valued by families.
- Talent 25, an innovative long-term Arts Council England and De Montfort University funded action research project co-produces creative opportunities and cultural opportunities
- Libraries provide a range of language and literacy support including stories from home, toddler time, and Bookstart

What's not working?
- Families have higher needs for personalised support ('hand-holding') including vulnerable families – some families are suspicious of group where workers 'observe and take notes about them', some families perceive stigma around SEND
- Children are arriving at school "Straight from the pushchair with fewer than 10 words" with little experience of parental interaction (Head teacher)
- Loss of children's centre teacher roles and local voluntary sector support
- Low levels of parental literacy and confidence
- Misunderstandings on the value of bilingualism and early support for home language in the context of the 'hostile environment' and loss of English-language learning provision for families new to English.
- Important that families understand importance of 'serve-and-return' conversations back and forth, listening to the child and following their interests.
- "Need to address what happens at home time between collection at the school gates and arriving home. Challenges include parents shouting – not necessarily aggressive – but not patient and calm communication." (Head teacher)
- The 'digital divide' - some families living in deprivation don't have access to ICT (devices or broadband)
- Universal relationship based parenting programmes e.g. Understanding Your Child is not widely available despite investment in staff training.

What might be possible?
- Hyperlocal campaigns will help e.g. through Parent and Young Champions to understand important of active play – particularly outdoors.
- Build on lessons learned from Dads' groups and the Talk Matters public health campaign on the importance of communication from pregnancy onwards
- Challenge the jargon e.g. if we talk about families being 'disengaged' they won't engage!
- Address responsible use of ICT as a tool for learning not a substitute for experiences in the real world, and not TV as 'white noise' in the background.
- Encourage local opportunities for family learning through creative activities e.g. multilingual storytelling and active play.
- Increased opportunities for 'relationship based parent training' e.g. Understanding Your Child, Solihull approach.

Creating communication inclusive spaces

What's working well?

- School Councils are inclusive and encourage pupil voice and wellbeing e.g. ending food waste, campaigns for climate justice.
- Voice 21 programme has encouraged a whole school approach to oracy
- Route to Resilience whole school strategy on mental health and wellbeing
- Bookstart Corner support for literacy in libraries
- Small number of settings/ schools have been awarded communication inclusive education e.g. Talk Matters in Leicester and Primary Talk.
- New and established designated specialist provisions (DSPs) for children with severe and persistent SLCN
- City Psychology Service Emotional Well-being in Education Project (EWE) for Looked after Children supports communication and well-being and promotes resilience and relationships. Transitions are supported through a well-being conference.
- Adventure playgrounds offer space for autonomous and child-led learning which encourages voice and agency.

What's not working?

- Over dependence on ICT mobile phones/tablets at expense of conversations
- Fewer opportunities for under 3s play and learning opportunities
- Explicit messages on SLC needs for parents should not be 'preachy' and should be part of a relationship-based parenting approach.

What might be possible?

- Each school adopts the Communication Inclusive Spaces framework developed by SENDS team, Speech and Language Therapists and partners
- All staff encourage communication – multilingual staff reach out to parents with EAL and encourage all languages
- Multilingual storytelling raises the confidence and self-esteem of all children, including those new to English, and their families
- Children's preferred communication is recognised and valued (including their embodied voices, gaze, hand gestures and movements).
- Play Streets playful learning spaces parks and open spaces across the city are designed as communication inclusive spaces

Empowering the workforce/families

What's working well?

- Early Years Coordinator: "We use WELLCOMM – but it takes resource – we change the timetable to make sure we have someone to work on this…"
- Midwifery Services co-production through Maternity Voices Partnership, UNICEF Baby Friendly Accreditation excellence in support for parent-child positive interactions, increase in parental choice e.g. more Home Births
- Emotions in Motion intervention and training for children and families delivered by Children's Centre staff with specialist consultation to support communication and interaction, emotional understanding and emotional literacy in the home.
- Meeting Individual Needs Good Practice Guide (SLCN) is available in all schools to support best practice in SLCN. This includes a whole school audit document. language screen and guidance for assessment and intervention.

- SLCN training for the workforce in Children's Homes, in the Youth Justice Service including for Leicester City Magistrates. A collaborative SLCN pathway in place to support identification and intervention of young people in the youth justice system with SLCN. A 'quality first communication approach' has been developed for the service.
- On-line SLCN links to support parents / families at home during isolation and lockdown to promote learning and emotional well-being.
- Inclusive Provision in Mainstream Schools for SLCN / Best endeavours and Reasonable Adjustments (BERA) document supports staff in ensuring classroom arrangements meet the needs of children with SLCN.
- Multi-disciplinary early intervention pathway, training and guidance in available to support reluctant speakers in their early years, in schools and with their families.
- Parent, carer and pupil participation in Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes.
- Communication style and preference is identified within EHCPs
- Use of Augmentative and Alternative Communication devices in specialist provision.

What's not working?
- Good training on offer for SENCOs but less resource to access it.
- Many different approaches but no consistent offer of support for SLC needs
- Burden of Ofsted paperwork for small early years providers

What might be possible?
- Improve information sharing e.g. Hearing Support Team and Speech and Language Therapy service had developed shared pathway
- Improve consistent use of ONE system to share data at child/family level (data stewardship).
- Link with DMU SLT students and DMULocal volunteers to support in schools
- Leicestershire Cares links with businesses in schools supporting literacy
- Leicester and Leicestershire Enterprise Partnership (LLEP) links to employers networks

Partnerships and networks involved in SLC strategy creation 2019-2020

Parents/carers
- Leicester Parent Carer Forum presentation at 25/2/20 SLC event
- Ongoing attendance at monthly LPCF drop-in meetings and information shared via LCPCF Facebook page
- Interviews with families at 12 Children, Young People and Family Centres
- Online parent/carer questionnaire through audit on SLCN
- Ongoing project feedback through Leicester News, Face public consultation and Social Media
- Outreach with parents at Get Up and Go Events August 2019

Young People's Active Involvement Groups (see summary of their views below)
- Big Mouth Forum (BMF) presentation 25/2/20 SLC event
- Attendance at BMF, Young People's Council and Care Experienced Consultants meetings October 2019 to introduce the project and May/June 2020 to explain 'what's changed' as a result of their input
- Creation by BMF of an 'easy read' guide to what helps communication

Midwives, Public Health Nurses – Health Visitors/School Nurses, GPs, Paediatrician
- Readiness for School Steering Group
- Community Midwives team meeting
- Meeting with LPT Better Births Midwife
- Ongoing contact with Midwifery Services
- Public Health Nurses Clinical Leads Readiness for School Steering Group
- Workshop with LPT Nursery Nurses
- Community Paediatrician contact via Leicester CCG Chair
- UHL Infant Feeding Lead contributed to SLCN and bilingualism project

Speech and Language Therapy
- Readiness for School Steering Group
- Workshop with SLTs to inform SLC audit
- Presentation to Leicester SLC Event 25/02/2020
- Ongoing work on SLC Pathway
- Work on supporting bilingualism in Leicester

SEND Support
- Readiness for School Steering Group half-termly multiagency meetings
- SEND Support early years team led creation of Communication Inclusive Spaces framework
- Ongoing work on development of SLC Strategy and Pathway and consultation following Local Offer Live 31/1/2020
- Primary SENCOs network and newsletter
- Comments on draft SEND strategy on SLCN
- Meeting with Designated Clinical Officer CCG

City Psychology Service
- Consultation to support SLC strategy, pathway and the development of communication inclusive spaces.
- Exchange of information to support vulnerable children with SLCN including bi and multi-lingual children, new arrivals, looked after children and those at risk of social, emotional mental health needs and those in the youth justice system.

Early Years
- Early Education Development team involvement in Readiness for School Group
- Involvement in national LGA early years SLC Peer Challenge Network
- Early Years Network SLC presentations to network and articles in newsletters (schools and PVI setting, October 2019 and February 2020)
- Visits to early years settings including Shama Women's Centre Creche, Kiddycare Nursery

Social Care, Prevention and Early Help, Children Young People and Family Centres
- Visit to all 12 centres – interviews with staff and families
- Interviews with parents and children at 'Get Up and Go' events
- Presentations/workshops to 4 Early Help Locality Partnership Boards
- Virtual School Early Years Lead

Schools, FE and Universities
- Visits to primary and secondary schools
- Presentation with lead Infant School Head teacher to Leicester Primary Partnership
- Online survey of schools (Better Communication, 2019) and update on Schools' Extranet
- Meeting with SEND lead at FE College
- Ongoing meetings with staff at DMU (Talent 25) and University of Leicester

Family/Community Learning

- LASALS Family Learning Readiness for School Group
- Libraries Readiness for School Group
- Community Centres, Early Help Locality Partnership Boards

Voluntary and Community Sector

- Leicester Mammas presentation to SLC event 22 Jan 2020
- Home-Start Horizons
- VAL Health and Social Care Network
- Leicester Children's Trust Board presentations
- Visits to projects including Soft Touch Arts, Leicestershire Cares, The Race Equality Centre, The Y
- Talent 25 presentation to online SLC event 2nd June 2020
- The Spark Arts attendance at Early Years Music network and attendance at online consultation event 26th May 2020

Commissioners

- Readiness for School Steering Group meetings 2019 onwards (CCG and Public Health)
- Public Health involvement in SLC Strategy and Pathway development
- CCG Commissioners involvement in SLC Strategy development
- Joint Integrated Commissioning Board

Summary from Young People's Active Involve Groups (available as Easy Read Guide)

- o Children and young people should feel safe, well and happy and feel able to tell someone if we are worried, sad or unwell.

- o We all have a right to express our ideas and to have our views listened to and stay quiet when we want to.

- o Communicating with each other helps us to play, learn and get on together.

- o Children and young people want to listen to others, understand what is happening, and tell others how we feel and what matters.

- o Look at us when you talk to us, use simple words and pictures.

- o Sometimes we communicate with our bodies not words.

- o Parents, carers, family members, people who live with us, mentors and friends help us to communicate by being with us, playing with us, and helping us learn.

- o We are more likely to communicate with someone we know and who is kind to us.

- o When we go out to play in the park, travel on the bus, or help others we see different things and learn new words.

- o Help us to learn other languages and learn through apps. Learning new things helps us feel confident.

LEICESTER CITY SLCN UNDERSTAND BASELINE EVALUATION

Not at all	Partially	Mostly	Complete	Don't know

AREA	LEVEL 1: INPUT	LEVEL 2: REACH	LEVEL 3: QUALITY	LEVEL 4: IMPACT
Commissioning / funding	To what extent are all commissioners with a remit for children and young people including the needs of this population in needs assessment and commissioning of their element of children and young peoples' services?	To what extent are commissioners ensuring that their collective activity reaches the full population of children and young people with SLCN?	To what extent are providers delivering services to meet the specifications developed by commissioners as intended?	To what extent has the collective commissioning activity for children and young people yielded demonstrable change in their speech, language and communication skills?
Integrated workforce	To what extent is the workforce working in an integrated way?	To what extent does an integrated workforce support all pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is the integrated workforce demonstrating high quality collaborative working?	To what extent is the integrated workforce impacting on the wider community?
Engaging parents and carers	To what extent are services for children and young people with SLCN engaging with parents in support of their children's SLCN?	To what extent are parental engagement strategies and activities reaching all parents of pupils with SLCN?	To what extent is parental engagement consistently of high quality?	To what extent are improved parental participation and confidence in supporting pupils' SLCN demonstrated?
Leadership and management	Is there leadership and management of provision across agencies and disciplines?	Are the leadership and management arrangements facilitating services to reach all children with SLCN as appropriate?	Is the leadership and management of high and consistent quality?	Does the leadership and management contribute to achieving improved speech, language and communication skills for children and young people with SLCN?
Training and development	Is there a range of training and development on offer to parents and the workforce?	Is the training and development accessible in terms of funding, time, location?	Is the training and development of high and consistent quality?	Does the training and development result in improved skills to support children and young people with SLCN?

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June 2019 Baseline at the start of the SLC Project using the Balanced System® tool

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March 2020 Using the Balanced System® tool to show change in the system of SLC support

Early Intervention Foundation SLC Maturity Matrix (2019)

Plan	1. Strategy	2	0-5 strategy 2016 to 2019 focussed on improving health wellbeing, closing the gap and early help. Not sufficiently focussed on specific issues of SLCN	Refresh strategy and ensure focus on those elements which will close the gap in outcomes through effective partnership working. Insufficient ownership by operational leads of strategy delivery. Recent analysis shows that the SLC is the most significant issue impacting on EY outcomes and future progress	Work with stakeholders to revise strategy and disseminate action plan	
	2. Commissioning	1/2	LA and CCG establishing collaborative commissioning opportunities. Currently individual services commission SLCN and are insufficiently coordinated	Although some joint commissioning, aligning budgets and partnership agreements is work in progress.	Commissioning arrangements and establishment of Children's Joint Commissioning Group to improve connectivity and identify where budgets can be pooled.	
	3. Workforce Planning	1	The breadth of those who can impact on SLCN is acknowledged and known at an operational management level.	To link directly with specialist Speech and Language Therapists and professionals with early years qualified status in the delivery of early education. Mapping of current workforce	Workforce analysis Workforce development	
Lead	4. Partnership	2	Children's Trust Board has senior representation from all key public (Health, Social Care, Education, Police) and voluntary sectors Chaired by Lead Member for Children, Families and Schools. Readiness for school working group has operational leadership representation to support delivery. Group has developed good relationships across schools, LA, Health, libraries, family learning	Currently there is a disconnect between representation on the CTB and the readiness for school group. Insufficient focus in CTB on EY outcomes. Partnership is strong	Establish the readiness for school group as a subgroup of the Children's trust board to lead the delivery of focus on Early Years outcomes to deliver plans	
	5. Leadership	1/2	Readiness for school is a priority for the council and the city mayor. The establishment of the readiness for school working group has developed a shared determination to improve outcomes	Overt active buy-in of the importance and impact of speech and language across strategic and operational leadership		
	6. Community Ownership	1	CYP through young advisers and other children forums, families through Parent/carer forum are consulted on priorities. A co-production protocol has been established this approach is shared by partners Families consulted re the readiness for school priorities	Co-production of SLCN priorities and actions and in development of strategy Understanding of current community offer including that delivered and supported through libraries Understand the DMU local programme and its impact on SLCN	Collate the current community offer for SLCN and update the FID/My Choice	
Deliver	7. Services & Interventions	1/2	Children's centres host and co-deliver a range of evidence based early language programmes. Majority of children have ASQ Direct service delivery for EY considers SLCN Evidence shows that interventions are delivering results Project with National Literacy Trust to improve home learning is being extended	Low take up of 2year old and 30 hour offer compared to level of need Insufficient reach and understanding of need Coordination of services	Quality Evidence based programmes and interventions Coordinated working	
	8. Information & Data	2	Baseline data on entry to school is well used and analysed targeting children who are performing well below Children's centres target siblings of those who perform less well at EYFSP	Knowing and sharing the understanding of the ASQ where there are issues Understanding the SLCN earlier than 3. Education, health and social care, including Early Help, work primarily with two IT based systems. Promotion of information for families	Data collection/use for targeting Information sharing Information for families	
Evaluate	9. Outcomes	1	Improved outcomes in EYFSP over past four years reducing the gap. Focus has been across the prime areas of learning, literacy and mathematics.	Specific focus on SLCN Ensuring that all children have a universal entitlement for their SLCN and develop a differentiated pathway of support where interventions would be helpful.	Outcomes framework Family access & Experience	
	10. Using & Generating Evidence	1/2	Readiness for school working group set up to ensure a coordinated focus on early years as a result of evidence review.	Process of evaluation is not embedded or coordinated across the partner to lead to more joined up and effective provision for children and families in the early years.	Using evidence well and sharing/ pooling of information across the established partnership.	

In our Communication Inclusive Space we:

Leicester City Council

Listen to children and value their views

Identify/ address SLC* needs early

Include children with SLC needs and meet needs

Work in partnership with parents

Value home languages

Believe that promoting SLC is everyone's role

Develop skills in a range of SLC strategies

Plan a language rich curriculum

Recognise that **Literacy** builds on language skills

Speech
Provide a good speech sound model

Communicating and talking
Teach new vocabulary and create opportunities for children to talk about their interests and learning

Understanding
Match our language to the child's level of understanding and experience, and use visual cues to support children's understanding

Attention and Listening
Create a good listening environment
Teach and practise good looking and listening skills and use visual cues to support these skills

Interacting
Ensure that every child has opportunities to interact with an adult and with other children
Build positive relationships and support emotional wellbeing

*SLC Speech, Language and Communication