

## **Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group (LECG)**

### **Statement from the LECG Early Help Task & Finish Group**

Following a presentation by officers at the March 2018 meeting of the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group about the consultation on the Early Help proposals, the Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group indicated its wish to have an opportunity to review these proposals from an equalities perspective.

Leicestershire County Council welcomed the opportunity to involve LECG in the development of the Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment work in relation to the proposals and LECG set up a Task & Finish Group to that purpose.

Members of the LECG Care Online Task & Finish Group met with County Council officers involved in the development of the Care Online proposals on June 14 2018. At this meeting the Group explored the equalities implications of the proposals, considered the consultation results and the feedback with regards to equality implications and discussed the proposed mitigation measures.

Following this meeting, the following statement was agreed by members of the Group:

We appreciate the pressures on the Council and the context in which these proposals have been developed and need to be considered. There are many positives in the principles for developing an integrated 0-19 service on the basis of a Whole Family approach. Nevertheless, it is clear that these proposals will lead to a reduction in the number of families that will benefit from the Early Help services and to a reduction in the number of Children's Centres which provide a valuable preventative and early intervention service. It is regrettable that this service needs to shrink at a time when it is needed more than ever.

We welcome the efforts of the council to consult with service users and stakeholders to gauge the potential impact of these proposals. The consultation responses received from service users make it clear that the early help services are highly valued. Behind every service user's experience of using the service there is a story that has real people dealing with life's issues at the heart of it.

The main focus of the consultation responses has been on the impact of the proposals on the number of Children's Centres. Re-designation of these Centres may lead not only to a reduction in access to the targeted LCC-provided early help services, but also to valuable 'universal' volunteer-led / volunteer-supported activities, and services by health providers and other partners. It is appreciated that the full impact of this is not yet known at this moment in time, but the feedback from service users and the public gives a clear indication of the potential impact should this provision disappear altogether in locations earmarked for re-designation.

Overall, the Group feel that the equalities implications are being considered thoroughly and we particularly note that officers have considered implications well beyond the usual protected characteristics. Having said that, there is perhaps room for improvement in considering the impact on people depending on the nature of their disability. For example, access to service issues may be different for people with sensory disabilities (i.e. deaf or blind) compared to wheelchair users.

The Group notes the various mitigation measures that have been put forward by officers correspond to the suggestions for mitigation from consultees. The group broadly support these measures.

- The Group welcomes in particular the intention to reduce the number of Children Centres to be re-designated.
- The Group also welcomes the intention to develop better access to information about support and advice online and to ensure people who don't qualify for Early Help services are signposted to alternative support services. We would however want to urge the council to give due consideration to cultural and language issues that can act as barriers to access this information.
- The Group considers the proposed travel support (alongside the use of community venues for delivery of drop-in or group activity) essential to minimising the negative impact of the proposals.
- The Group welcomes the intention to explore how volunteer led universal services could be supported to continue in future, including in locations where a Children's Centre is earmarked for re-designation. The Group considers this an important mitigation measure and would want to urge the Council to ensure this is a key element of the next phase of work.

The Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group want to thank County Council officers for their time.

**LECG Members**

Peter Lewis	LECG Chair
Samantha Smith	Transactive Group
Colin Norman	Social Housing
Vickee Kainth	The Bridge
Kazi Mashud	Equality Action, Charnwood