Speech, Language and Communication Strategy (SLC)

Supporting children and young people's voice, agency and wellbeing

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Leicester
City Council

Contents

This strategy is informed by the following related strategies and guidance:
Early Years
Early Help
Transitions
Anti-Poverty
Participation
Health and Wellbeing
Public Sector Equality Duty
SEND Code of Practice
NHS Long Term Plan
Healthy Beginnings
Social Mobility Action Plan

Introduction

Communication starts in early life before speech, and develops through loving interactions between parents/carers and babies. For example, playing a game of peekaboo involves turn-taking, give-and-take, and seeing things from the others point of view. These communication skills are key for success in learning, work, living together in diverse communities, encouraging creativity and fostering wellbeing. Although we all develop at different rates, if children don't communicate as might be expected, it may mean that they or their parents/carers could benefit from support.

There is a strong relationship between living in poverty and early language delay – up to 50% of children in some areas of Leicester may experience language delay. Supporting the home learning environment and parents/carers confidence can boost early language development. This strategy describes how we will work together in supporting Speech, Language and Communication (SLC) from **birth to 25 years** across our city, through engaging families, creating communication friendly spaces, and developing the skills of staff and parents to meet SLC needs (SLCN) – particularly through effective early help in the early years.

Giving every child the best start in life

A loving, secure and reliable relationship with a parent or carer supports a child's:
emotional wellbeing
brain development
language development and ability to learn
capacity to form and maintain positive relationships with others

Alongside this strategy we will co-design an online **SLC Pathway** to help families and the workforce to access the right support to meet SLCN at the right time, in the right place and in the right way.

We know that strong communication skills support children and young people's **voice** (expression of views), **agency** (shaping their future) and **wellbeing** (health and happiness). Our approach is led by children's right *to express their views* and *have those views taken seriously for the best start in life* (Article 12, UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.) We will continue to collaborate with children, young people and their families to shape this support.

Healthy Beginnings

In Summary…

Support for SLCN

We will empower parents/carers as children's first communication partners to support their voice and agency from early life to adulthood.

In the right place

We will create communication friendly spaces where children learn and play: at home, early years, schools, FE, libraries, clubs and in the wider community

In the right way

Timely, joined up help and advice on SLCN from pregnancy onwards will be available for all families.

Why does early language matter?

The link between language and other social, emotional and learning outcomes makes early language a primary indicator of child wellbeing

Difficulties in one area of development lead to problems with the others

Speech Language Communication | Social | Emotional | Learning
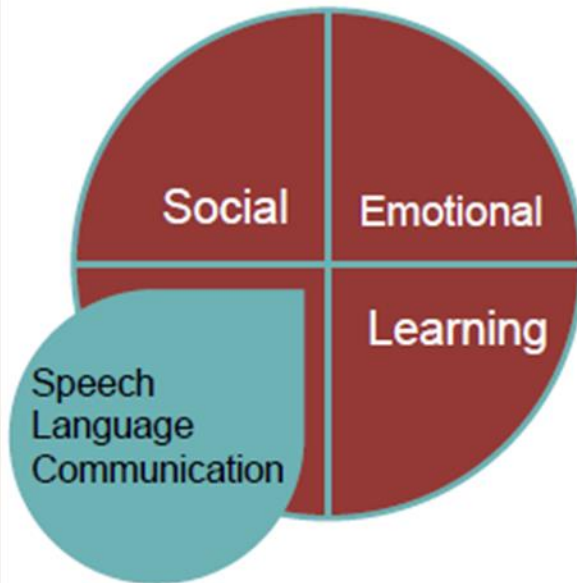
Educational disadvantage:
Communication is the key to access learning
Reduced school readiness/ Poor academic achievement

Emotional and behavioural difficulties
Increased risk of ADHD and anxiety disorders in adolescence

Risky behaviours
More than 70% of young people in the youth offenders system have a communication disability

Criminal Justice
50% of the UK prison population have language difficulties (compared to 17% of general population)

Economic disadvantage
12% lower earnings due to inadequate literacy skills
Twice as likely to be unemployed at age 34

Mental Health problems
3x Increased risk of mental health problems in adulthood

Source: PHE (2018)

Speech, Language and Communication Policy context

DfE Update: Early Years Social Mobility Programme

July 2019

Department for Education

Early years - a sector to be proud of

Around 10% of children have long-term SLCN difficulties, and in some areas of deprivation more than 50% of children start school with language delay (Communication Trust). Action at the family, community, city and national levels is urgently required to address these needs.

Our Leicester SLC strategy is informed by the Department for Education's Social Mobility Programme (2017) which aims to address economic disadvantage through educational opportunity.

A target of the Social Mobility programme is: '*By 2028, the percentage of children who do not achieve at least expected levels across all goals in the 'communication & language' and 'literacy' areas of learning at the end of reception year is reduced by half.*'

The Social Mobility Index looks at the chances that a child from a disadvantaged background will do well at school and get a good job across each of the 324 local areas of England. Leicester is classed as a social mobility 'cold spot' and is ranked low on the Social Mobility Index at 289 out of 324 local areas. This SLC Strategy therefore aligns closely with our Leicester Anti Poverty Strategy (forthcoming).

Children need language to: think, read, express themselves and connect with others. The link between language and other social, emotional and learning outcomes makes early language a primary indicator of child wellbeing, and early language development is recognised as a public health issue.

Investment during the early years period to improve attachment security, the quality of parent–child interaction, including the quality of conversations parents have with their children improves child outcomes across the life-course and has considerable cost benefits. Source: Healthy Beginnings PHE (2015)

Early Childhood is an important period of rapid brain growth. The crucial role of midwives in supporting early communication and attachment and supporting new parents has also been recognised. Source: 1000 Critical Days (2019)

The role of health visitors at a family, community and population level in supporting SLC development and recognising SLCN has been recognised and supported through strategies and workforce development. Source: Early Years High Impact Area 6 LGA & NHS England (2018)

The child's communication environment (the early ownership of books, trips to the library, attendance at pre-school, parents teaching a range of activities and the number of toys and books available) was a more important predictor of language development at two, and school entry 'baseline' scores at 4 than socio-economic background. Source: DfE (2011)
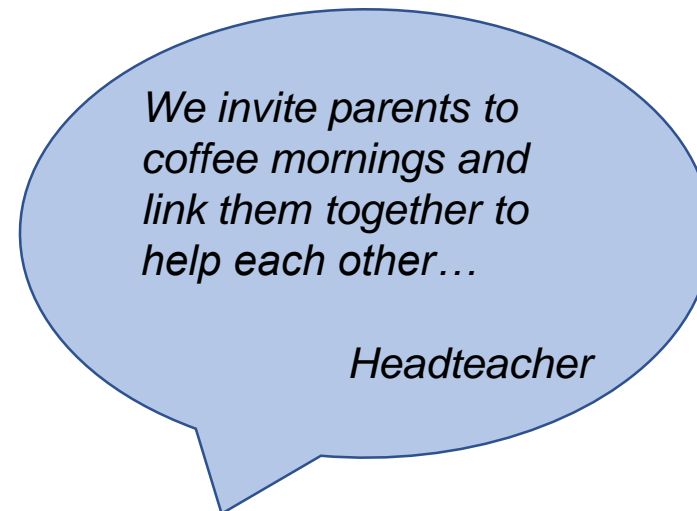
Our SLC strategy forms a key strand in our commitment to support children's best start in life aligning with our local health and wellbeing strategy, and school readiness priorities.

'*Making sure a child is able to start school ready to learn, able to make friends and play, ready to ask for what they need and say what they think.*' Source: Children's Minister (2012)

Understanding Speech, Language and Communication (SLC)

Developing a common understanding is key to supporting SLC:

Speech	Language	Communication
Saying sounds accurately and in the right places in words	Understanding and making sense of what people say	Being able to communicate to people and take turns as well as change language/communication to suit the situation; in effect, how we interact with others
Speaking fluently, without hesitation, prolonging or repeating words or sounds	Using words to build up sentences which are used in longer stretches or spoken language and to build conversations	Non-verbal communication, for example eye contact, gestures and facial expressions
Speaking with expression in a clear voice, using pitch, volume and intonation to add meaning	Putting information in the right order to make sense	Being able to consider another person's perspective, intentions and the wider context

Source: RCSLT

We invite parents to coffee mornings and link them together to help each other…

Headteacher

The term speech language and communication needs (SLCN) encompasses a wide range of difficulties related to aspects of communication in children and young people. It is wider than the SEND definition of SLCN. Identification of needs is important, because needs and strengths of a child, rather than a diagnostic category, should determine the resources applied to supporting a child.

Factors affecting Speech, Language and Communication

Almost all children learn to communicate through language but there are persistent differences in their abilities to do so.
Factors known to affect SLC development include gender, social deprivation, month of birth, and English as an Additional Language (EAL).

Figures for Leicester show different patterns of need for SLC support:

More girls than boys have consistently achieved at least the minimum required level in communication and language in their early years, over the last 5 years (DataNet, 2019).
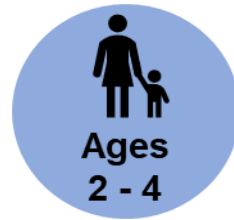
The percentage 2 - 4 year olds benefitting from Free Early Education places has been below the national average over the last three years (DFE, 2019).
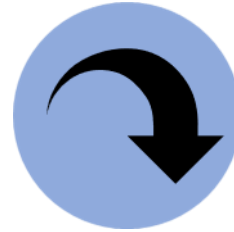
The percentage of children in their early years known to be eligible for free school meals that achieve the expected level of development for communication and language is below the national average (2018, DfE).

The number of children with EAL achieving expected/exceeding scores in communication and learning in reception has increased from 63.5% to 74.5% in the last 5 years (2019, Datanet). However, schools in Leicester are also characterised by high numbers of children who are new to English, and whose language is delayed when they first start at school.

Needs assessment

Leicester City has a young, ethnically diverse population, many of whom live in areas of high deprivation. Many children in Leicester start school with low levels of language (16 months behind in Nursery and 18 months behind in Reception, 2019).

76% of children in Leicester were at or above expected levels for communication at 2½ years, compared to the national average of 89% (Datanet and PHE)

The number of children in Leicester aged 0 – 4 is almost 2.5 times the national average

The number of young people in Leicester aged 19 – 24 is almost 4 times the national average.

Leicester is ranked amongst the most deprived 20% of areas in England.

There are at least 19 ethnic groups in Leicester, and over 65% of the ethnic population is comprised of White and Indian ethnicities

The percentage of children achieving the expected level of Communication and Language at EYFS (age 5) is 78% in Leicester (82% nationally)

Children in Leicester are assessed for communication on average 16 months behind expected levels in Nursery, and nearly 18 months behind in Reception (Datanet)

Population:
Five wards with the highest percentage of 0-4 year olds are:
Wycliffe (9.2%, 1400),
Fosse (9.1%, 1300),
Western (8.9%, 1800),
North Evington (8.7%, 1800), and
Humberstone & Hamilton (8.4%, 1700).

60% of 12-15 year olds say their ideas and opinions are asked for at home, school or in the community (Leicester City Council)

In Leicester the percentage of children working at the expected level for reading and writing at Key Stage 1 has been below the national average for the past 5 years, for all children.

Social disadvantage and predicted SLCN

Leicester City is in the 20% of Local Authorities in England with the highest levels of disadvantage and there is a strong correlation between language delay and deprivation.

This map created through the Balanced System™ shows the percentage of children 0-4 predicted to have some level of SLCN by ward. The tool to generate this data interfaces with the evidence base for prevalence and the population and demographic factors, and highlights the 'hot spots' for SLCN in the early years.

8 of the city's 21 wards, have a predicted SLCN level of over 50% - i.e. 1 in 2 children in these wards are predicted to have a level of SLCN.

The definition of SLCN for this purpose is any aspect of speech, language and communication that is not in line with expected levels but does not imply that these numbers of children should require speech and language therapy support.

… things like story time at a local library so children from lower income backgrounds get the chance to learn more language…

Member of Young People's Council

0-4 years %

35.00   58.56
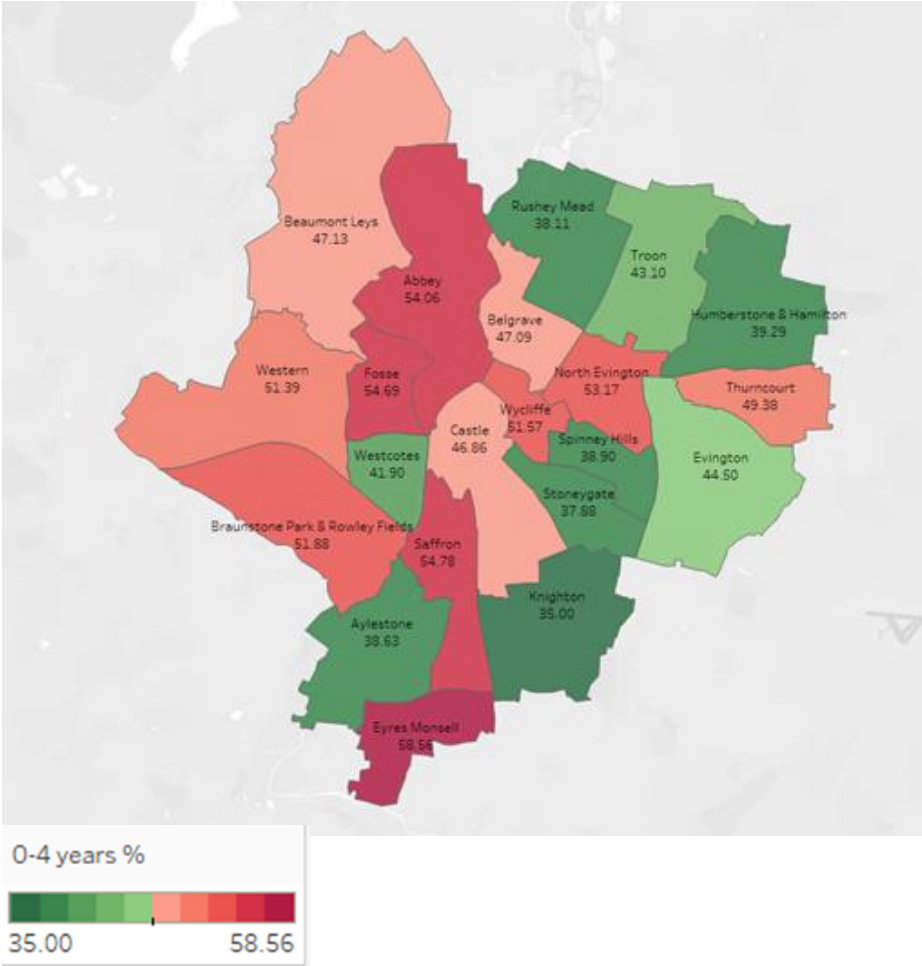
Map showing children with Predicted SLCN (0-4 yrs) by ward.
Source: Better Communication, CIC 2019

A workforce to support SLC Needs

Speech and Language Therapy (SLT) Workforce

SLT Workforce per 10,000 children 0-18

2.36 Leicester City

SLT Workforce per 1,000 children with predicted SLCN 0-18

0.64 Leicester City

The specialist workforce for SLCN consists of the speech and language therapy (SLT) service for Leicester City along with an educational psychologist with special responsibility for SLCN and learning support teachers with a specialism in SLCN. There are also a number of independent providers of SLT in City working both with individual children and families and in supporting settings and schools.

Better Communication CIC, our project partners have compared the SLT workforce with the population served and the population of predicted need. The figure left is a visual representation of these ratios. There is no complete benchmarking set for these data however from the range of services analysed to date through the Balanced System® methodology the ratio of 0.64 / 1000 children with predicted need is low. This supports the findings of the Children's Commissioner in the recently published national survey of spend for SLT where the East Midlands showed a significantly lower spend than all other regions of England.

There are no national benchmarks for caseload data and this is being explored further with the Speech and Language Therapy Service Leads.

	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-18 years	Total 0-18	19-24 years
Total Caseload	1186	1372	259	63	2880	5
Population	25600	24700	21600	16900	88700	46700
Caseload as % of predicted SLCN	9.8%	11.8%	4.4%	2.2%	8.9%	0.3%
Caseload as % of population	4.6%	5.6%	1.2%	0.4%	3.2%	0%

Source: Better Communication CIC, 2019

Our vision

All children and young people will develop speech, language and communication to support their voice, agency and wellbeing.

Everyone who works with children, young people and their families will understand how children and young people grow and develop, and offer timely help to identify and address speech, language and communication needs.

Our SLC Strategy aims to:

Lead system change to offer timely, accessible and effective support for SLC co-produced with families, commissioned through integrated frameworks and pooled budgets, and evidenced through improved outcomes.
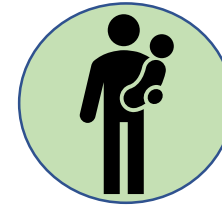
Engage all parents and carers through high quality and accessible information and resources in their role as communication partners for their children, and nurture children and young people's voice, agency and wellbeing.

Create communication-friendly, inclusive spaces for children and young people's learning and leisure at home, in early years settings schools and colleges, adventure playgrounds, parks, museums, neighbourhoods and across the city.

Empower staff/volunteers/families through training and ongoing learning to be confident and competent to work together, share information, identify and address children and young people's SLCN.

Values and principles

These values and principles will underpin our approach:

- intervene early, quickly and as effectively as possible
- understand the impact and value of what we do
- personalise our approach to fit the needs of the individual
- forge links with the community and encourage safe support networks
- ensure we give those we work with the best life opportunities
- establish & maintain the trust and confidence of those who we work with through strong partnerships

We are committed to co-producing services through commissioning wherever possible. This approach aims to involve children, young people and families through all stages of the commissioning cycle in order to develop services that best meet needs and improve outcomes.

Our SLC Strategy draws on an audit of existing provision and gaps, and draws on dialogue and workshops involving 400+ staff and 200+ children young people and families (see Appendix 1)

We recognise that addressing high levels of language delay within areas of social deprivation at the right time and in the right way will need a public health approach at an individual, family, community and population level.

The next section of the strategy looks at how we will use the Balanced System® framework and outlines our priorities for action across Leicester.

Towards a balanced system for SLCN

We are using the [Balanced System®](#) to transform our system of SLCN support with a focus on improved outcomes. The Balanced System® developed by Better Communication CIC is an evidence-based framework developed over 15 years, that has been used widely across the UK to support to improve the commissioning and delivery of services.

FAMILY SUPPORT · ENVIRONMENT · WORKFORCE · IDENTIFICATION · INTERVENTION

WORKING ACROSS THE FIVE STRANDS OF THE BALANCED SYSTEM®

In line with our principles and commissioning strategy, our aim is to shift the balance away from high cost specialist service towards investing in co-production, prevention and early intervention to best meet the needs of the child or young person in the right way, at the right time.
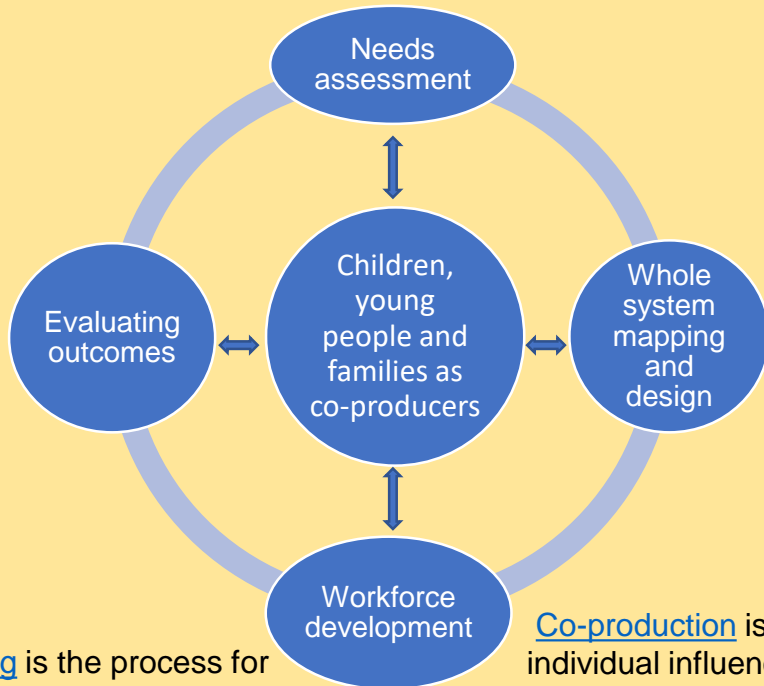
Every £1 invested in speech and language therapy for children with communication needs generates £6.43 through increased lifetime earnings

Every £1 invested in SLT for children with autism generates £1.46 through lifetime cost savings

Source: [RCSLT](#)

Aim 1:Lead system change

Aim: Lead system change in partnership to offer timely, accessible and effective support for SLCN co-produced with families, commissioned through integrated frameworks and pooled budgets, and evidenced through improved outcomes.

We share a vision and commitment to system-wide change through integrated commissioning. This will include:

Co-production with children, young people and families, a robust **needs assessment, whole system mapping and design**, **workforce development** and a focus on **evaluating outcomes**.

The most effective SLCN support is **co-produced** with children, young people and their families – starting from strengths and addressing needs rather than medical conditions. Our strategy has seen the involvement of families who are 'seldom heard', including BAME families, those living in areas of high deprivation, and those families experiencing SEND/SLCN.

We have developed this strategy in **partnership** with more than 400 midwifery, health visiting, school nurses, speech and language therapy, educational psychologists, early help family support and child development workers, parent peer development workers, early education settings, schools, FE, charities and businesses.

A population health approach underpins our strategy as we recognise the wider determinants of health (Marmot) including levels of deprivation, and the focus on **impact on outcomes** (i.e. what difference does it make to the lives of children, young people and families) rather than solely on inputs.

Diagram:
- Needs assessment
- Whole system mapping and design
- Children, young people and families as co-producers
- Evaluating outcomes
- Workforce development

Commissioning is the process for deciding how to use the total resource available for families in an effective, equitable and sustainable way.

Co-production is when an individual influences the support and services received, or when groups of people influence the way that services are designed, commissioned and delivered.

Aim 2: Engage families

Aim: Engage all parents and carers through high quality and accessible information and resources in their role as communication partners for their children, and facilitate families as co-producers of SLCN support, to nurture children and young people's voice, agency and wellbeing

Listening to families on SLCN

Our conversations with more than 220 children, young people and families revealed the following themes**:**

What helps: a good home environment, good work/life balance, warm family relationships including with siblings and grandparents, approachability of Speech and Language Therapists, EY SEND Teaching Team, Stay and Play at Children's Centres, Bookstart, Leicester Mammas, Family Learning Workshops (LASALS).

What hinders: Stigma associated with language delay, a lack of awareness of development milestones, low levels of parental confidence through own low language and literacy, low levels of accessible parental support available outside office hours, lack of support targeting dads, long waiting lists for SLCN services, children centre closures leaving gaps in provision, health visitor centralisation has disrupted continuity of care, isolation of parents/carers.

What would make a difference: a prompt easy referral system, more opportunities for supporting reading and singing with children, every child at school having a story read to them, looking at people not phones when talking, valuing home languages, warm support from health professionals.

We will support children, young people and parents as co-producers of SLCN support to:
- Develop an **SLC Pathway** which will help offer top tips for nurturing good communication, and signpost sources of further help and advice.
- Share information about the BBC's Tiny Happy People a new resource for families based on the best research evidence and co-created with families and child development experts to support SLC. The resource features high quality film clips and social media feeds which families value (LPT, 2018).
- Engage other parents through 'chat, play and read' with your child, the three key ways to support learning and development in the Hungry Little Minds campaign.
- Explore the use of Augmented Reality (AR) Parent Champions to share messages on support for SLCN. We will continue to engage with seldom heard families**,** including young parents with experience of homelessness, young asylum seekers, children and young people with learning needs and SEND, and care experienced young people.
- Work with the Early Help Locality Partnership Boards to take a targeted approach in response to SLCN prevalence data and encourage an integrated response to SLCN through asset-based community development, for example through accessing ward-funding or local business sponsorship with a focus on readiness for school and overcoming parental isolation.

Aim 3: Create communication-friendly spaces

Create communication friendly spaces for children's leisure and learning at home, in early years settings schools and FE, adventure playgrounds, parks, museums, and neighbourhoods across the city

'Children learn and develop well in enabling spaces in which their experiences respond to their individual needs and there is a strong partnership between staff/volunteers and parents/carers.' Development Matters

Communication friendly environments offer stimulating resources, relevant to all children's cultures and communities, rich learning opportunities through play and playful teaching, and support for children to take risks and explore. Outdoor Learning in the early years has a history stretching back more than 100 years to the pioneers of nursery education including Friedrich Froebel and Maria Montessori. Around the world many cities are creating playful learning landscapes. Many of the 420+ staff we spoke to in creating this strategy were keen to share messages on active play with parents, to encourage the development of children's large movements, core strength, social and emotional well-being and rich language development.

Home Language needs constant positive reinforcement in particular when English is an Additional Language (EAL). All languages should be valued as children confident in their home language acquire new languages faster. Signs and symbols are used by children and young people with SEND – and may need additional support in families where English is an Additional language.

Technology should complement and enhance face-to-face conversations. Increasing intergenerational contact, e.g. through grandparents' groups can encourage learning exchange and encourage social inclusion.

Families who informed this strategy were keen to hear about opportunities to support their children's SLC development, particularly those that were free, friendly and accessible - ideally based in their neighbourhood that can offer connections and friendship (see Coram Family loneliness research). The SLC Pathway (2020) will help signpost these sources of support recognising that most new parents pick up parenting ideas from friends (DfE, 2019)

Bookstart – was highly valued by families who felt the staff encouraged confidence and engagement. Parents were glad to receive the free books.

The Spark – operates in partnership with schools and children's centres facilitates creativity. Percussion sessions with local musicians were particularly valued by families.

Talent25 – an innovative long-term Arts Council England funded action research project co-produces opportunities to develop language through creativity.

We've been to the library but I didn't remember about the museum…
Parent

People looking at you instead of being on their phone!

Member of Big Mouth Forum (Young people with SEND)

Aim 4: Empower staff/volunteers/families

Empower staff/volunteers/families through training and ongoing learning to be confident and competent to work together, share information, identify and address children and young people's SLCN.

SLCN are most effectively identified through ongoing formative assessment .i.e. observations by staff and family members with good knowledge of the child/young person and their needs/interests.

Health Visitors use the ASQ-3 screening tool to identify SLCN at 2½ years. Following SLCN identification Let's Get Talking sessions are offered to families (between 2-4 weekly sessions). With parent/carer consent, information on SLCN is now shared locally with Children's Centres to enable targeted support to these families. Outcomes data from this integrated working should be analysed to inform continuous improvement.

Interventions for SLCN include: the language learning environment e.g. physical resources, language context e.g. role play, opportunities e.g. groupwork and interactions e.g. questioning and affirmations.

Whilst Speech and Language Therapists (SLTs) are experts on SLCN, members of the wider children's workforce also contribute considerable expertise in supporting SLC development. Everyone working with children and young people should access professional development opportunities to boost their knowledge and skills to support SLCN. Staff have identified the need for learning that is flexible, delivered online or as part of wider multidisciplinary learning opportunities, to counter decreases in integrated working associated with reduced staffing and increased caseload.

School staff told us they value professional networking opportunities e.g. for Head teachers, SENCOs and for particular initiatives e.g. a Voice 21 project on oracy. Some staff urged greater coordination for these opportunities to counter low take-up rates and to boost opportunities for inter-professional exchange. Opportunities for community development approaches to engage 'seldom heard' families will also be facilitated through the SLC Pathway e.g. Bookstart, Home-start, Safe Families for Children, and Leicester Mammas.

As part of the process of SLC Pathway creation the SLC project partners will also identify gaps in provision and stimulate innovative approaches e.g. sharing new ideas on supporting children and young people to develop vocabulary to respond to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) or online bullying.

We need to identify 10 non-negotiables for communication friendly settings based on Talk Matters…

Early Year Specialist

More lesson in different languages, more sign language, more language support…

Member of Big Mouth Forum (young people with SEND)

What we will do to achieve our aims

Engage families	Communication-friendly spaces	Empower workforce/staff/families
All parents and carers access information, resources and support through a co-designed digital online SLCN Pathway and integrated services	All places where young people visit to learn and for leisure become communication friendly environments.	Staff and volunteers access initial training and ongoing professional development so that they are confident and competent to advise families to prevent SLC difficulties, and to identify SLCN and offer support in a timely manner.
Parents/carers recognise the importance of SLC and developing the home learning environment from pregnancy onwards	Children, young people and their families are asked what helps make a space communication-friendly, and work alongside businesses, volunteers and local services to create communication friendly spaces.	All staff/volunteers understand the importance of sharing information with the agreement of the parent/carer or young person in an integrated workforce.
Parents know the signs of SLCN and can access early help services.		Families are supported to develop their knowledge and ability to support SLCN.

Integrated Leadership, Management and Commissioning

Strategic leaders see SLCN as a priority and lead system change

Maternity and children and young people's services are commissioned through an integrated framework which is outcomes-focussed.

Providers are asked to demonstrate impact of services on SLCN.

A basket of measures – including academic and wellbeing indicators - is collected and reviewed regularly to ensure that services to support SLCN are meeting the needs of the local population.

What difference will this make?

This area will be completed with children, young people and families following a period of consultation.
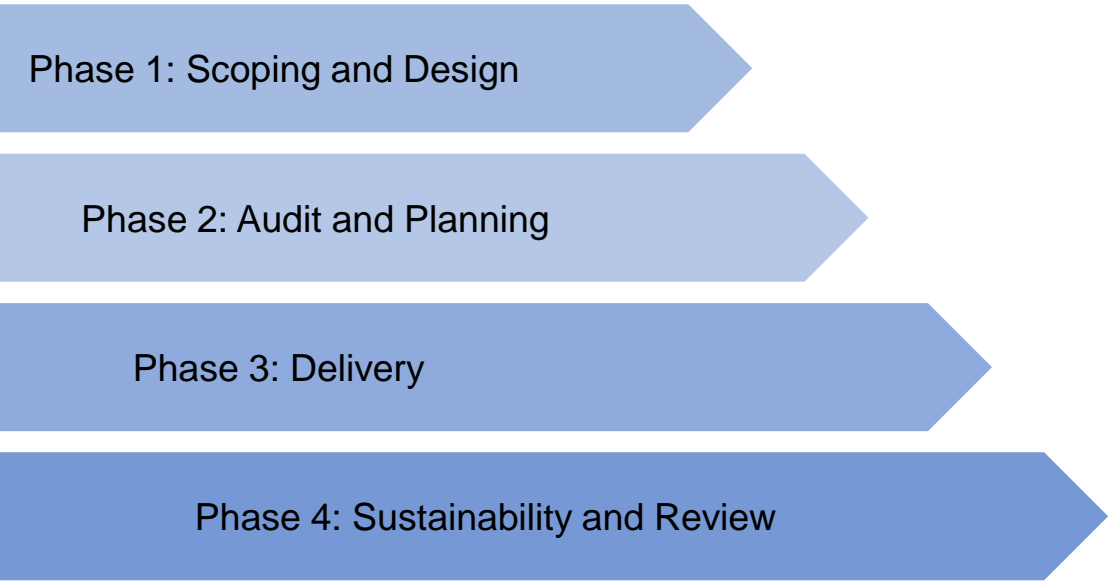
Co-production is important to us, as hearing the voice and taking into account the views of our children and young people (and those that represent and support them) helps us to continually improve quality of services.

We are committed to reviewing our work with our children, young people, families, staff and providers to ensure we continue to deliver quality services that meet the current and emerging needs, and provide real value for money and ultimately prevent crisis and improve overall wellbeing.

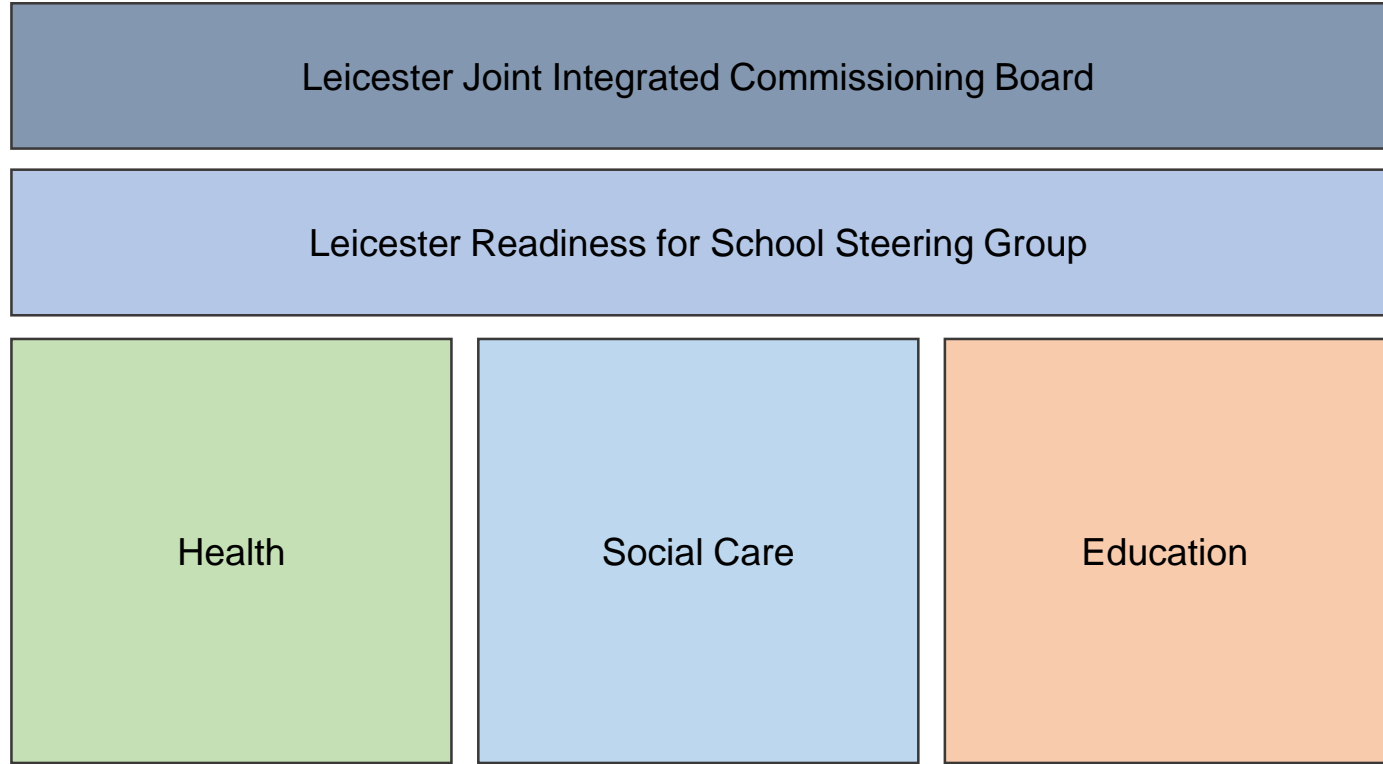To be completed post-consultation with children, young people and families

Governance and next steps

Project Phasing:

Phase 1: Scoping and Design

Phase 2: Audit and Planning

Phase 3: Delivery

Phase 4: Sustainability and Review

A detailed action plan will accompany this strategy, created alongside a SLC Pathway, and monitored by the existing governance structure.

Governance:

Leicester Joint Integrated Commissioning Board

Leicester Readiness for School Steering Group

Health	Social Care	Education

Relevant services report to the Readiness for School Group chaired by the Principal Education Officer which monitors and tracks progress and is overseen by the Social Care and Education Programme Board chaired by the Director for Social Care and Education.

Appendix 1: Key Findings from SLC Audit

We used the Balanced System® tool to gather qualitative and quantitative data on SLCN.
- Finance – spend on SLCN specific staff £713682.14 (not including CCG spend)
- Workforce 2.36 (Whole Time Equivalent) per 10,000 children (Aged 0-18)
- Caseload Speech and Language Therapy

	0-4 years	5-9 years	10-14 years	15-18 years	Total 0-18	19-24 years
Total Caseload	1186	1372	259	63	2880	5
Population	25600	24700	21600	16900	88700	46700
Caseload as % of predicted SLCN	9.8%	11.8%	4.4%	2.2%	8.9%	0.3%
Caseload as % of population	4.6%	5.6%	1.2%	0.4%	3.2%	0%

In creating this strategy we spoke to

224 children, young people families

407 staff

in 12 CYPF centres and the wider community

A summary of findings:

What's working well? SLT service is approachable, Let's Get Talking (Health Visitors), Stay and Play (Children's Centres), Early Years Support Team (SEND), Bookstart, The Spark

What's not working? More funding for services and staff levels needed as waiting lists for SLT are long and need more flexibility in appointments, training for EY settings, loss of Children's Centres and staff, different Health Visitor at each visit.

What might be possible? An easy prompt referral system, more programmes to support singing, active play, shared understanding of value of home language, better support for children with SEND, confidence building for new parents, information films and social media feeds on how to support early language.