

Combined Assurance

Status Report Children Services



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Introduction

This is the third combined assurance report for the Council.

Working with management we have been able to show what assurances the Council currently has on the areas of the business that matter most – highlighting where there may be potential assurance ‘unknowns or gaps’.

We gathered and analysed assurance information in a control environment that:

- takes what we have been told on trust, and
- encourages accountability with those responsible for managing the service.

Our aim is to give Senior Management and the Audit Committee an insight on assurances across all critical activities and key risks, making recommendations where we believe assurance needs to be stronger.

Scope

We gathered information on our:

- critical systems – those areas identified by senior management as having a significant impact on the successful delivery of our priorities or whose failure could result in significant damage to our reputation, financial loss or impact on people.
- due diligence activities – those that support the running of the Council and ensure compliance with policies.
- key risks – found on our strategic risk register or associated with major new business strategy / change.
- key projects – supporting corporate priorities / activities.

Methodology

We have developed a combined assurance model which shows assurances across the entire Council, not just those from Internal Audit. We leverage assurance information from your ‘business as usual’ operations. Using the ‘3 lines of assurance’ concept:



Our approach includes a critical review or assessment on the level of confidence the Board can have on its service delivery arrangements, management of risks, operation of controls and performance.

We did this by:

Speaking to senior and operational managers who have the day to day responsibility for managing and controlling their service activities.

Working with corporate functions and using other third party inspections to provide information on performance, successful delivery and organisational learning.

Using the outcome of Internal Audit work to provide independent insight and assurance opinions.

We used a Red (low), Amber (medium) and Green (high) rating to help us assess the level of assurance confidence in place.

The overall assurance opinion is based on the assessment and judgement of senior management. Internal audit has helped co-ordinate these and provided some challenge but as accountability rests with the Senior Manager we used their overall assurance opinion.



Key Messages

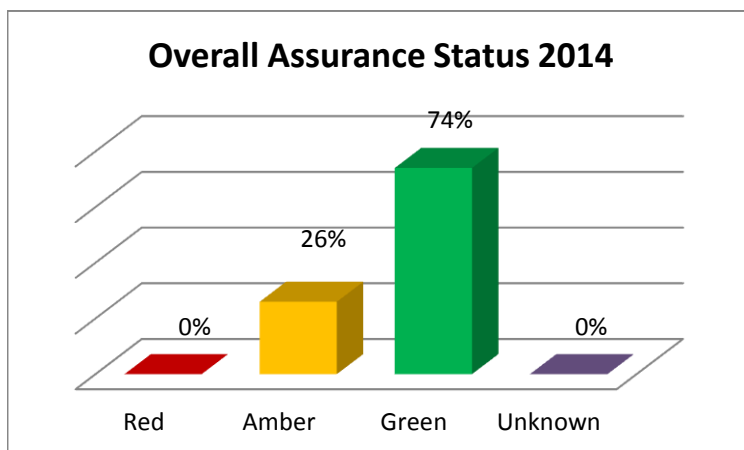
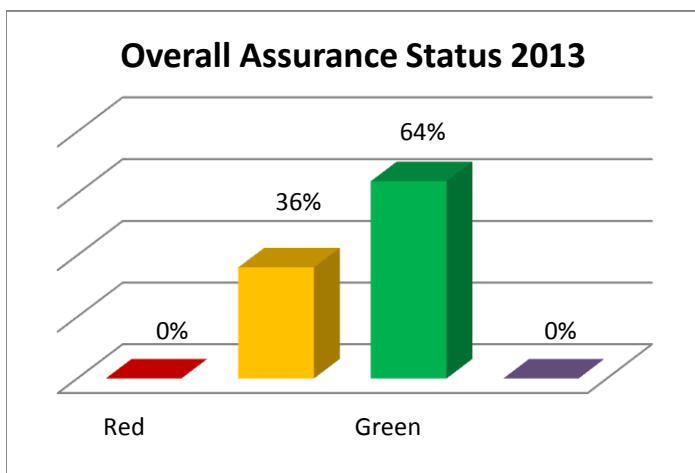
We have high aspirations and a clear, shared vision for all of our children and young people. We want all children in every part of the county to achieve their potential and we will deliver services with our partners guided by our strategic principles to achieve this vision. There is strong political and managerial leadership of Children's Services with a stable, highly competent, and visible Directorate Management Team. The Director of Children's Services has excellent relationships with partners and LCC staff as well as with schools, including academies. Integration best summarises our approach to the commissioning and delivery of outstanding services. We demonstrate true integration and focus on needs not silo working so families access joined up services.

Overall educational attainment of pupils in early years, Phonics and post 16 students in Lincolnshire is above the national average and similar local authorities. In all key stages from Key Stage 1 to those at age 16 we are broadly in line with national and similar local authorities. Performance of schools as measured by Ofsted has improved as 88% of primary and 73% of Secondary schools are now good or outstanding schools. This is an improving picture for Lincolnshire, however Secondary schools remains a priority area for us.

Our very recent Ofsted inspection is very positive and confirms the quality of outcomes for children, young people and families in Lincolnshire as Good overall and with an Outstanding Adoption service. The large majority of services, settings and institutions inspected by Ofsted are good and outstanding. Residential and respite provision is good and some homes have been judged Outstanding.

Front line social care performance exceeds national and statistical neighbours on the majority of indicators (e.g. timeliness of social care assessments was 92%, compared to a national average of 74%).The numbers of looked after children remain low at 43 per 10,000 compared with the England average of 60.

Adoption performance exceeds the new timeframes – the average time (days) between a child entering care and moving in with its adoptive family is 511 compared with the England average of 628, which is remarkable and leading the way nationally.



Critical Systems



Our Vision is for:

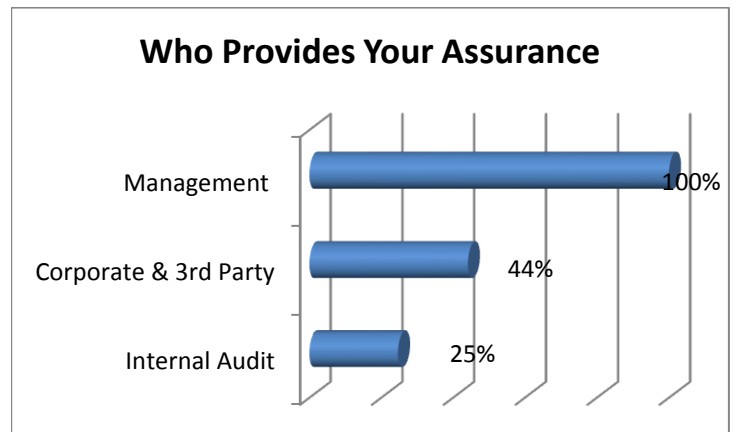
‘Every Child, in every part of the County to achieve their potential’.

Our principles, which underpin how we will commission and deliver services to achieve our vision are:

- **Early Help:** Strong protective universal services accessible to all with a range of early help available so children have the best start in life and families have extra help when they need it;
- **Safeguarding:** A shared responsibility to ensure children are safe at home, school and in their community;
- **Aspiration:** Children able to thrive and cope with life challenges;
- **Learning and Achievement:** All children being the best they can be with targeted interventions

Our local priorities are:

- Safeguarding Children
- Ensuring children and families have access to early help services
- Implementing the reforms for supporting children with a disability and special education needs to achieve their potential
- Helping families living in challenging circumstances to turn their lives around through Families working together
- Responding to the challenges of the sustainable services review
- Ensuring all children can access a good or outstanding school so they achieve expected progress and achieve their potential



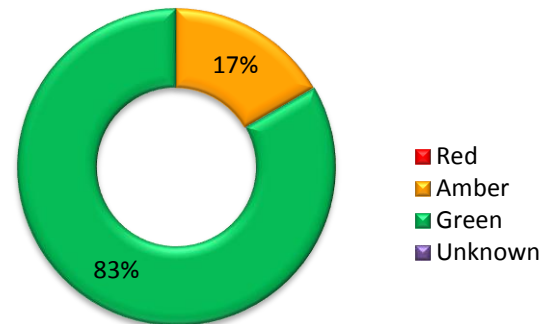
Overall, a high level of positive assurance exists around Children’s Services critical activities and systems. Assurance arrangements are working effectively. Most assurance comes from managers – supported by a good level of corporate and third party assurance.

Assurance is also provided through reviews conducted by Corporate Audit and Risk Management. This provides independent oversight and added value through recommendations made for improvement and complements any external reviews or inspections carried out. Any recommendations made are monitored to ensure implementation with progress reported to the Audit Committee.

Commissioning

This overview is based on the assurance concerning:

- Procurement/Contract Provision - **Green**
- Management of Grants - **Green**
- Contract Management - **Green**
- Commissioning of services - **Green**
- Home to School/College transport - **Amber**
- Children's Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) - **Green**



Both Contract Management and Transport have recently received assurance from Internal Audit.

Whilst the Home to School/College service is effectively managed, ensuring that the Council meets its statutory duties, there is a significant budget pressure as a result of the Council's Fundamental Budget Review process. The impact of this is intensified as a result of additional budget pressures on public transport subsidies.

A number of actions to manage the budget pressure have been in place over the past 12 months and have been managed through the Education Transport Efficiencies Board. Whilst in excess of £0.9m savings have been identified in-year, the net cost has not reduced and Passenger Transport Services have been unable to identify why or where costs are increasing.

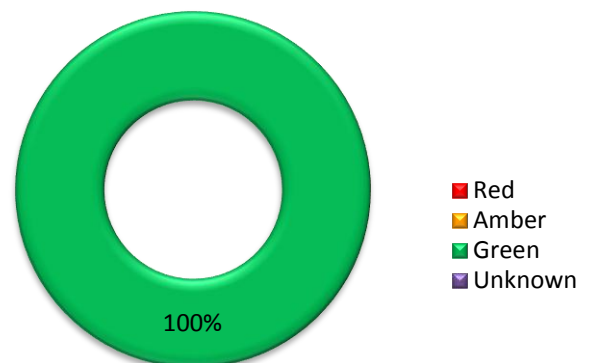
A corporate Transport Board is to be established in January 2015, led by Transport Services, and will look to tackle the funding pressures that affects transport provision in Lincolnshire.

The Commissioning team continues to undertake a number of reviews across the service to ensure that services continue to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families, and deliver value for money. The team is currently working with Lincolnshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust to implement reforms to CAMHS to further enhance the effective service we have in place.

Performance Assurance

All areas have good assurance:

- Independent Chairs/Independent Reviewing Officers
- Performance
- Learning & Development
- Information Advice & Support Service
- Quality Assurance
- Family Information Service

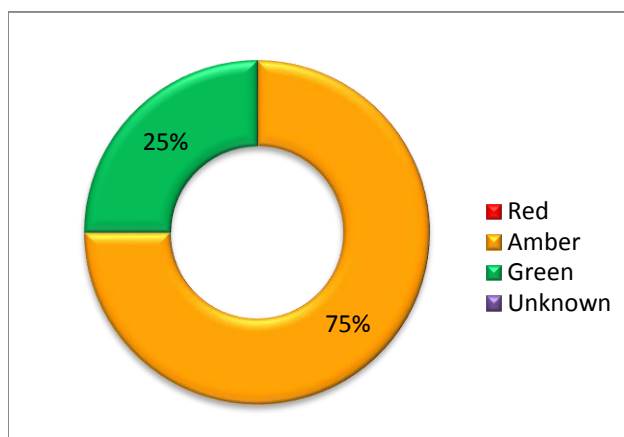


Performance Assurance also has a wide range of thematic leads across all of Children's Services; Health & Safety & Risk, Equality and Diversity, Workforce Development, The Children and Young People's Strategic Partnership, Quality Assurance, Sector Led Improvement etc. The implementation of the new Client Database (Mosaic) will create significant challenges for the Performance Team over the coming 12 months.

Education Support

There are four critical activities in this service area:

- School admissions;
- Children of statutory school age are educated;
- Continuity of education for children excluded from school; and
- Sufficiency of provision for children and young people aged 2 -18 (2-25 for those with a special education need or disability)



All school admission policies and procedures are compliant with the admissions code and have been ratified by the Council. There have been no external adjudicator referrals for non-compliance. Over 92% of parents still continue to receive their first preference school. The Council continues to administer a non-statutory mid-year admissions scheme for approximately 85% of families.

Significant changes have been made to those policies that relate to children's education; particularly for those groups of children that may be missing from education, educated at home or be persistently absent from school. The local authority's code of conduct for the issuing of fixed penalty notices has been revised in light of recent government changes to statutory guidance on school attendance and is now operational. Children and young/people that are on role at a school, but not in receipt of full time education*, are monitored regularly - the majority are those with a medical need and are managed through an assessment process such as an early help assessment.

Children excluded from school are reintegrated back into mainstream provision without delay or are temporarily enrolled onto the Lincolnshire Teaching & Learning Centre's role for re-integration preparation. If appropriate some key stage 4 young people will be enrolled onto an alternative provision curriculum if appropriate.

The provision of school places is well defined and ratified by the DfE which informs basic need capital funding. The sophistication of this approach is being extended to the pre and post statutory age provision.

*defined by Ofsted as 25 hours per week

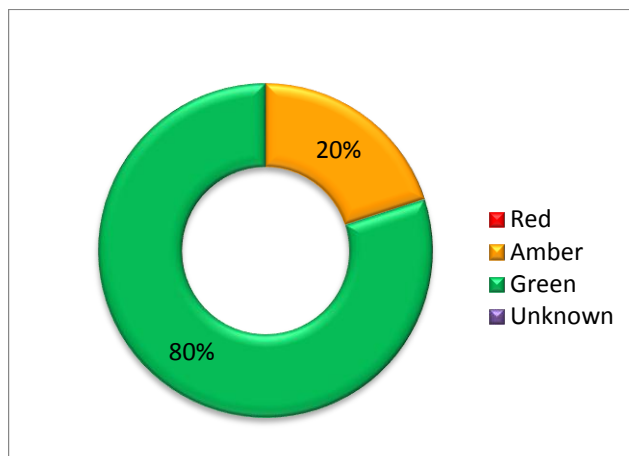
14-19 Commissioner

The following 4 areas have been given good assurance:

- Planning and allocations
- Post 16 learning
- Tracking status of 16 – 18 year olds
- Ensuring there is an independent careers advice service that schools can access

1 area has amber assurance:

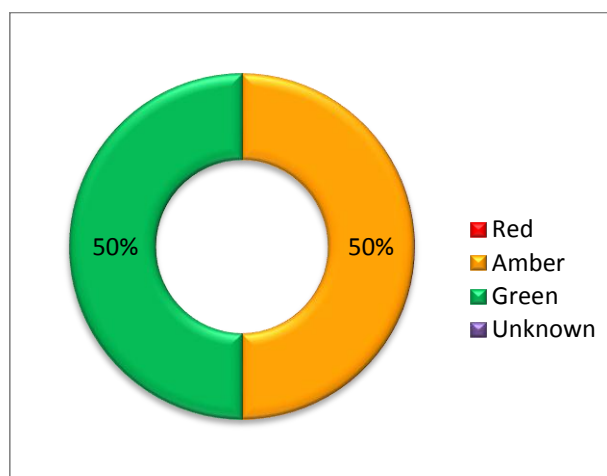
- Sixth forms



The post 16 network of providers, particularly school sixth forms, continue to experience difficulties due to the decline in the size of the 16 – 18 year old age group. This places sixth forms (particularly the smaller sixth forms of which Lincolnshire has a high proportion) under significant threat, especially as national funding decreases. The ability to mitigate the risks through increased collaboration lies with the schools and other post 16 providers themselves. Work will continue to encourage and support collaborative activity

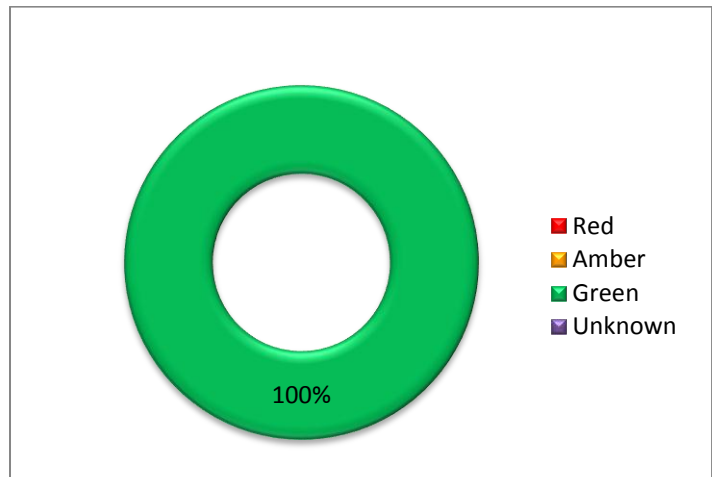
School Improvement Service

"The Ofsted Annual Report published in autumn 2014 states that the percentage of pupils attending good or outstanding primary schools was 86% in Lincolnshire, an improvement of 5 percentage points on the previous year placing Lincolnshire in the top 34% of councils in England for school performance. There are signs that the gap in performance between children entitled to Free School Meals and their peers is narrowing although final validated data for 2014 for all phases has yet to be published at the time of writing. The development of a sector-led approach to monitor, challenge and intervene with underperforming schools is progressing well but has yet to reach the stage of formal terms of reference. It is hoped that the formal infrastructure will be established in shadow form by the end of 2015".



Locality Teams

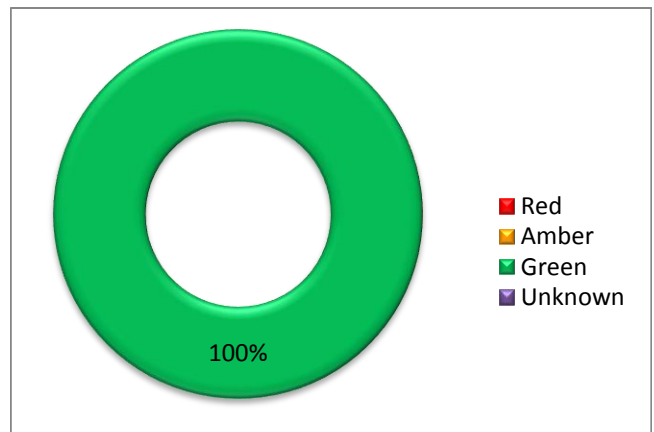
Significant improvement have taken place since last year. Substantial work on preparing for Ofsted inspection has been undertaken, led by a dedicated Project Manager. This has been further supported by a revised and enhanced QA audit process based on peer review of cases. Over the last 12 months, independent scrutiny of fieldwork services and numerous Children's Centres, both by Ofsted and Elected Members, has evidenced good quality service delivery.



The stability of the management team has been greatly reinforced with all but one management post at Grade 13 or above now filled with permanent staff. The Signs of Safety model is now fully embedded across the service.

Regulated Services

This year again Regulated Services has continued to meet targets in respect of key performance indicators, demonstrating that the services remain strong and ensures good outcomes for children and Young People. The Corporate Parenting Panel, Safeguarding assurance days and the Independent Reviewing Officers provide internal scrutiny of the activity and performance of the services provided to Looked after children. Regulated Services continually monitors and evaluates its service at every stage of the child's journey through care to ensure quality and effectiveness.

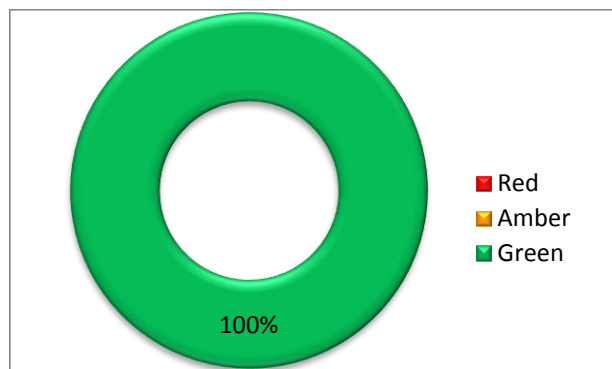


Performance of the service is also monitored externally, through Ofsted, with all services being judged as Good or Outstanding.

Early Years

The following areas have been given good assurance:

- Support and Advice to Early Years Providers (including Schools)
- Educational Entitlement Funding (2 Year olds)
- Educational Entitlement Funding (3/4 year olds)
- Profiles Scores, Data Collection and Monitoring
- Early Intervention - Area SENCOs
- Supported Childcare Allocations and Inclusion funding



National and Local Authority targets continue to be met and externally evaluated performance indicators confirm that the Birth to Five Early Years Services continues to achieve a high degree of compliance. Customer feedback and feedback from statutory bodies is very positive.

There were significant national changes to the Early Years Foundation Stage assessment process in 2013 the service has responded fully to these changes. Lincolnshire outcomes have continued to place the Local Authority in the top 10% across the country. The DfE, through the Achieving 2 Year Olds (A2YO) monitoring, have rated the 2 Year Old Free Entitlement process as good (Green). All areas of responsibility will continue to be reviewed periodically against agreed action plans and actions updated throughout 2015 as necessary.

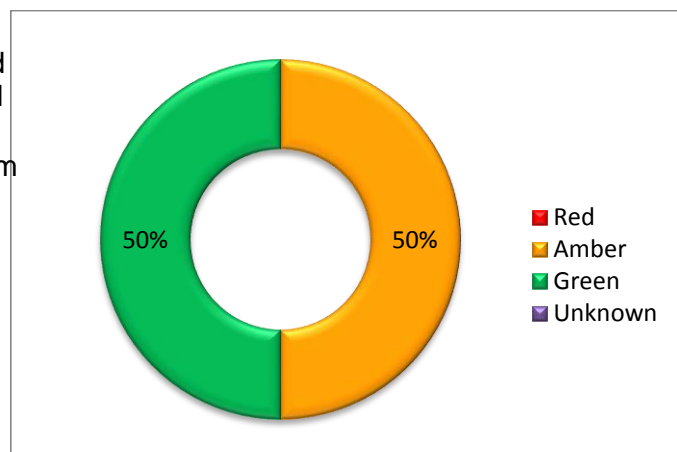
SEND

The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Service provides services to state funded schools, children and families. 3 areas have good assurance:

- Children with Disabilities Social Care Team
- Short Breaks Homes
- Early Support and Co-ordination Team

4 areas have 'amber' assurance:

- Special Educational Needs (0-16)
- Special Educational Needs (Post 16)
- Educational Psychology
- Sensory Education Support Team

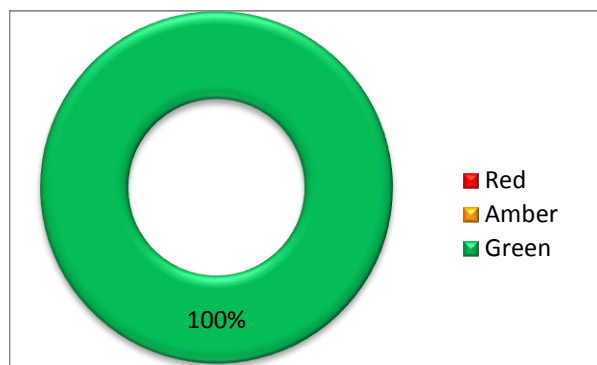


The SEND Reforms have introduced a new agenda around the way in which we support children with SEND. This is being closely monitored to assess the impact of the changes and the success of the new way of working. The future delivery of service will be shaped by the findings and new performance measures are being introduced to ensure service wide quality assurance.

Financial Support

Calculation of school budgets

This work was simplified in 2013/14 when the government introduced its radical school funding reforms. The new processes are now embedded, a larger number of the team are familiar with the calculations and the process and methodologies are understood. The EFA has accepted the local authority's submissions of the Authority Proforma Tool over the last two years as being accurate. The team's plans have been refined to enable school budgets for 2015/16 to be calculated accurately and within the EFA timescales.



Monitoring of school budgets

The monitoring of maintained school budgets continues to develop and improve. Since the summer of 2014, the local authority has been receiving schools' medium term finance plans. These are reviewed and any comments are fed back to schools. This new activity will help strengthen school financial management in future years and should help reduce the number of schools with overspends. The long established school budget monitoring process continues to operate. Schools that are most likely to overspend are identified and then offered support. The new finance system, Agresso, will be purchased by 96% of maintained schools from April 2015 and whilst introducing a new finance system always introduces risks and challenges, the system should help further strengthen schools' management of their finances.

People Management

The People Strategy 2012-2015 identifies the Council's people management commitments to support delivery of the Council Business Plan. Whilst the People Strategy Implementation Programme has remained on plan, the impact on its strategic benefits, including improved staff retention of key groups, reduced levels of sickness, increased staff motivation, will continue to be closely monitored. An interim review is to be completed by April 2015, of the impact of the ongoing organisational re-shaping and associated workforce change activity, which started in 2014 with the Senior Management Review with further workforce changes planned within service areas.

The People Strategy is currently managed through five work streams:

The following two areas were given full assurance

- Leadership and Management Development
- Employee Engagement and Wellbeing (including IIP).

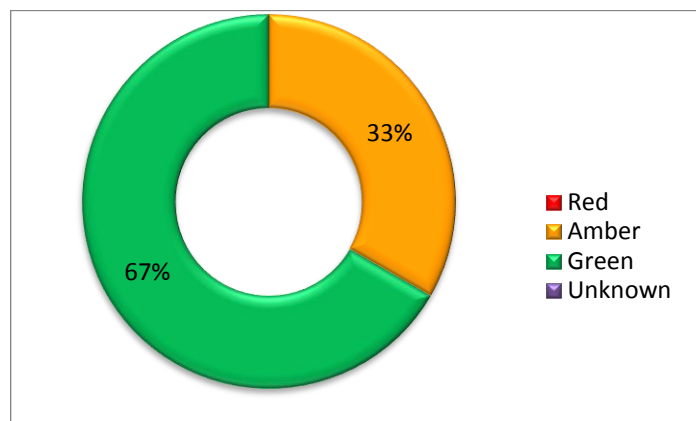
The following area has good assurance

- Managing Employee Performance (including sickness absence) and Induction

The following areas have amber assurance

- Resourcing and Talent Management, (with further work planned for 2015-16)
- Pay and Reward (which remains subject to ongoing negotiations with the trade unions)

A key priority is to ensure the momentum of the People Strategy is maintained through the work streams towards realising the benefits of the strategy, and ultimately to ensure it supports the required organisation capacity and resilience to deliver the Council's strategic objectives. In light of ongoing organisational and workforce change, the Council will need



to ensure that the corporate priorities for the People Management Service will be to focus on the:

- Co-ordination of workforce change activities to ensure all associated organisational risks are managed.
- Supporting the development of effective leadership skills in managing change, in particular middle managers, to support organisational resilience and well-being
- implementation of the Council's talent management processes and improved processes to support the retention of key skills

The planned employee surveys in early 2015-16, as well as the planned Internal Audit of the sickness absence system across the Council in 2015, will also assist the Council in fully evaluating whether the expected benefits of the People Strategy are being sustained, and will further inform the Council's People Strategy priorities, 2015 and beyond.

Suggested next steps.....

- To continue to monitor and provide good quality services that improves outcomes for children and young people.
- Delivery of Planned Internal Audit work in the following areas:
 - Home to school transport
 - Exclusions and closing the gap
 - SEND reform
 - 14-19 Strategy
- Work with our Internal Auditors to develop the 2015/16 Internal Audit Plan. Identifying where more independent assurance is required based on significance and risk of the activity, and where we can leverage assurance from other sources.

Strategic Risks



A key strategic risk for Children’s Services continues to be any potential failure to safeguard children. Work is ongoing to ensure that these risks are mitigated and children in Lincolnshire continue to have an outstanding safeguarding and early help service.

Council’s highest rated Strategic Risks for this area of the business

Safeguarding

Recruitment / Staffing

Examples of mitigating actions include:

- Audit of Section 11 (being conducted by People Management - Induction, Recruitment, Contract)
- Audit & Performance information to DMT for scrutiny
- Safeguarding Assurance days
- Independent Chairs - and Independent Reviewing Officers who quality assure the care plans of looked after children and children subject to child protection plans
- Team Manager Audits
- Lincolnshire Safeguarding Children Board Serious Case Reviews and Significant Incident Reviews
- Practitioner Supervision & Appraisal

Strategic Risks - Assurance Map as at 30 June 2014	OWNER	RISK APPETITE	Likelihood		DIRECTION OF TRAVEL	Management Assurance Status (Full, Substantial, Limited, No)	Corporate Functions & Third Party	Internal Audit	OVERALL ASSURANCE STATUS	COMMENTS
			Impact	Impact						
			CURRENT RISK SCORE	TARGET RISK SCORE						
RAG Rating for level of assurance Red (R)/Amber (A)/Green (G)										

Commissioning strategy - Children and safe & healthy

Safeguarding Safeguarding Children	Debbie Barnes	Cautious (Regulatory standing & legal compliance - recognised may need to change the ways things are done but will be tightly controlled)			Static	G	Unknown	A	G	Owner confident of a 'Substantial' status due to proactive & reactive actions in place. <i>Sources of information - Internal audit of Child protection plans</i>
			→							

Commissioning strategy - Enablers and support to the Council's outcomes

Recruitment / staffing Requirement to have the right people in the right place with the right skills at the right time a) Reshaping our workforce b) Capacity to deliver our core strategic objectives e.g. transformational change, recruitment & retention of specialist skills	Debbie Barnes	Averse (People - Recognise that our staff are a valuable resource that requires investment by us to help sustain their health & wellbeing - low risk options taken to minimise exposure)			→	Unknown	Unknown	G	G	This risk has derived from the previous working of 'Requirement to have an agile, skilled and motivated workforce'. We confirm that the 'b' part of this risk is currently showing the highest risk for the Council, however there is a lot of work in progress to mitigate this risk and we are confident that over time, the target score will be reached to a more acceptable level.



Key Projects in Children Services

Early Help – Green

Early Help is well embedded in Lincolnshire, and there is multi agency commitment to this. A new team of Team around the Child consultants was implemented in April 2014 to provide supervision to lead professionals based in school settings. The consultants also offer advice and support to all lead professionals and undertake audits with lead professionals to develop the quality of Early Help assessments and TAC plans. The consultants are highly regarded by lead professionals and their work is resulting in the quality of TAC's improving resulting in improved outcomes for children.

Signs of Safety – Green

'Signs of Safety' has been active in Lincolnshire since July 2013 and the results are now being evidenced through the full range of work within Children's Services. This has been further strengthened by the successful Innovation Bid by MTM (Munro, Turnell and Murphy) to develop Signs of safety as a whole system approach in line with Eileen Munro's recommendations from her Review of Child protection in 2011.

LCC is one of the 10 implementing authorities and is leading on the research arm of the project, focusing on whole system change. LCC has trained staff in the framework and its application, and completed multi-agency briefing sessions for partners in collaboration with the LSCB. LCC is seeking to embed the framework fully during 2015 aligning the organisation using this transformational approach with Signs of Safety at the centre.

SEND – Amber

This project includes:

- The restructure of the SEND Service to promote locality based working and development of local partnerships to support children with SEN
- Development of a new suite of Performance Indicators particularly around Transitions
- Promoting Independence Project to support Learners with Learning Difficulties and Disabilities to live independently and access meaningful employment

Integrated Health and Social Care – Amber

Lincolnshire Health and Care is an initiative which is looking to design better ways of providing essential health and social care services in the county.

Currently health and care services are not working together as effectively as they could and with a growing and ageing population, the current approach will not be sustainable in the long run.

Lincolnshire Health and Care will provide residents with access to safe and good quality services, closer to home and avoid, where possible, a lengthy hospital stay. The services under consideration for children and young people are pediatrics, maternity and neo-natal and a range of community services which are part of pathways into and out of these services.

Detailed design work is taking place in order to inform a range of options for future service design which will be subject to public consultation during the summer of 2015

Key risks to the delivery of the programme are:

- Securing sufficient clinical leadership and engagement
- Capacity to deliver such an ambitious programme
- Complexity of developing robust modelling and assumptions
- Response to public consultation

Youth Employment & Participation in Education and Training – Amber

Youth unemployment is a significant issue for Lincolnshire. Whilst participation of 16 – 18 year olds in education is high, 16 – 25 year olds represent a significantly higher proportion (5% more) of the total unemployed than nationally. Work is being undertaken to improve the links between education and skills, specifically to encourage the development of, and student demand for, programmes that will better prepare young people to take up employment within the Lincolnshire economy. Post 16 schools, colleges and other providers are free to design their own curriculum, and the LA has no powers or levers to change the offer. This will therefore require working with the providers and with the Employment and Skills Board and the Greater Lincolnshire Local Enterprise Partnership to influence change. As such the risk is amber.

Looking Ahead



People

People are key to the work we do. Children's Services are committed to developing staff and ensuring that staff are delivering in an efficient way.

Money

Children's Services budget continues to be robustly managed in a time of challenge.

Resilience

Children's Services have sound processes to ensure and maintain resilience, including a clearly communicated Business Continuity Plan.

Localism

Children's Services continues to work in a local way through area offices and Children's Centres and ensuring the child and family are at the centre of our work.