

Service Director: Children's Social Care (South)

Reports to: Executive Director, Children, Education and Families

Grade: Leadership 3. £124,027 - £137,206

Location: New Shire Hall, Alconbury Weald

Job Purpose

Cambridgeshire County Council is committed to transforming children's social care to secure permanence and stability for children and young people, while delivering integrated support that strengthens families and prevents entry to care. This transformation is underpinned by collaboration with health, education, and voluntary sector partners to provide holistic, therapeutic, and timely interventions.

The Service Director for Children's Social Care South leads statutory children's social care services across the South locality, with end-to-end accountability for the continuum of support from early help and safeguarding through to children in care, permanence, and leaving care. This includes oversight of services such as Clinical Services, Adoption, Fostering, and Corporate Parenting. Reporting to the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families (DCS), the role ensures compliance with key legislation such as the Children Act 1989/2004, Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Care Planning Regulations.

The postholder will champion sufficiency planning, foster carer recruitment and retention, and adoption excellence, ensuring children achieve permanence through high-quality placements and support. A strong focus on safeguarding and corporate parenting ensures that services are safe, inclusive, and inspection ready. Services must reflect principles of personalisation, trauma-informed practice, and co-design with children, young people, and families.

The role will play a key part in shaping and delivering future phases of service alignment, ensuring services are configured to provide integrated, place-based support that improves outcomes and responds to local need.

Leadership and Collaboration

Provide clear, compelling and inspiring leadership to the Council, championing the vision for children and families and contributing to the delivery of the Council's Purpose and Strategic Priorities. Communicate a clear ambition for improving outcomes for children and young people, ensuring safeguarding and corporate parenting responsibilities are at the heart of everything we do, and positively engage others internally and externally.

Effectively contribute to the development and delivery of the Council's Corporate Strategy, Medium Term Financial Strategy and Workforce Plan, ensuring these reflect the needs of children and families. Actively understand the challenges faced by colleagues across the organisation and the wider children's system to support all

Extended Leadership Team colleagues in delivering objectives that improve life chances for children and young people.

Create a high-performance culture within children's services by providing strong and motivational leadership that drives continuous improvement, efficiency, and excellence in practice. Promote the Council's priorities and values, embedding a culture where safeguarding and corporate parenting are non-negotiable and where every child's voice shapes service delivery.

Role model and take responsibility for embedding an effective approach to corporate parenting and safeguarding of vulnerable children and young people across all areas of responsibility, ensuring compliance with statutory duties and readiness for inspection.

Develop and implement effective communication and engagement arrangements with children, young people, families, carers, and partner agencies to build trust and co-design services that deliver better outcomes.

Actively develop and maintain strong strategic relationships with key external stakeholders, including schools, health partners, police, voluntary sector, and regional adoption and fostering networks, to optimise opportunities for integrated delivery and improved outcomes for children.

Ensure the Council influences and collaborates effectively with the Cambridgeshire and Peterborough Combined Authority, NHS Partners, Greater Cambridge Partnership, and District and City Councils to secure investment and joint solutions that benefit children and families.

Act as Senior Responsible Officer (SRO) or Sponsor for major programmes and projects of change within children's services, ensuring robust programme management, timely delivery, and measurable improvements in outcomes for children and young people.

Deputise for the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families as required, providing authoritative advice and leadership on all matters relating to children's social care and safeguarding.

Governance

Provide professional and strategic advice to Members and the leadership team on all matters relating to children's social care operational delivery and service development, ensuring they are fully briefed on key issues, risks, and opportunities within the portfolio.

Ensure that all statutory duties, guidance, and processes within the remit of the role are followed appropriately across services. This includes, but is not limited to, compliance with the Children Act 1989 and 2004, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Working Together to Safeguard Children, and Care Planning Regulations.

Maintain robust governance and assurance arrangements to ensure safeguarding responsibilities are met and that services are inspection-ready at all times.

Ensure compliance with all relevant legislative and best practice frameworks, including but not limited to procurement regulations, information governance and data protection requirements, health and safety regulations, and the Council's financial control procedures.

Uphold the Council's Constitution, Scheme of Financial Delegation, and Contract Procedure Rules, ensuring transparent and accountable decision-making throughout the directorate.

Champion a culture of openness, accountability, and continuous improvement, ensuring lessons from audits, complaints, serious case reviews, and inspections are embedded into practice.

Innovation

Champion innovation by being open minded to new and radical ways to deliver services, actively seeking out good practice from others to learn from to develop our own service design and delivery.

Promote a culture of continuous improvement by encouraging colleagues to share ideas, take appropriate risks, and recognising innovation.

Champion and embed a performance and quality assurance culture that delivers results through rigorous open challenge, personal accountability and continuous improvement.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

Promote an organisational culture that is positive, safe, respectful and compassionate, as well as open to change and feedback enabling everyone to feel empowered and valued.

Act at all times in ways that create an inclusive environment where people can thrive and be empowered to do their best. Role model good behaviour and practice and proactively seek ways to ensure staff feel valued and develop a sense of belonging.

Demonstrate awareness of the diverse needs of our residents to inform the decisions made about the services we deliver and ensuring a robust approach to equality impact assessments and their application to employment, service delivery and policy development.

Role Specific Accountabilities

- Provide strategic oversight and leadership to Heads of Service across the South locality, ensuring alignment, consistency of practice, and effective integration of services.
- Provide strategic leadership for statutory children's social care across the South locality, ensuring cohesive and integrated delivery across early help, clinical services, safeguarding, corporate parenting, and permanence services.
- Own the end-to-end permanency pathway for the South, from early help and edge-of-care interventions through fostering, kinship care, adoption, and leaving care, ensuring timely decision-making and placement stability.
- Lead the locality sufficiency strategy, shaping the placement market, expanding in-house fostering capacity, and reducing reliance on independent fostering agencies and residential care.
- Drive recruitment, retention, and support strategies for foster carers and kinship carers, ensuring access to training, clinical support, and recognition frameworks.
- Provide leadership for adoption services, ensuring effective interface with the Regional Adoption Agency, timely approvals, early permanence planning, and robust post-adoption support.
- Champion corporate parenting responsibilities for the South, ensuring children in care and care leavers receive high-quality placements and support to achieve positive outcomes in education, health, and independence.
- Ensure the effective integration of clinical and therapeutic services to support children with complex needs, promoting stability, resilience, and improved outcomes across the system.
- Embed a culture of practice excellence through supervision, audit, and learning loops, ensuring readiness for inspection and compliance with statutory guidance.
- Work closely with health, education, and voluntary sector partners to secure therapeutic input, timely health assessments, and educational stability for children in care and those on the edge of care.
- Provide authoritative advice to the Executive Director (DCS), elected Members, and statutory boards on all matters relating to children's social care across the South locality.
- Maintain full compliance with statutory frameworks, including the Children Act 1989, Adoption and Children Act 2002, and Working Together to Safeguard Children, ensuring inspection readiness at all times.
- Lead workforce development for the locality, ensuring strong supervision, recruitment and retention strategies, and a culture of learning and accountability.
- Ensure services operate within budget, deliver agreed savings, and implement invest-to-save initiatives while maintaining quality and safeguarding standards.
- Lead and contribute to the design and implementation of future service models, including opportunities to align and integrate services in line with organisational priorities and the next phase of transformation.
- Actively contribute to and provide leadership across all Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme activity relating to Children's Services,

working collaboratively with system partners and senior leaders, and taking shared responsibility with the Executive Director for Children, Education and Families for the safe, legal and effective transition and disaggregation of services into new unitary arrangements, in line with the Council's LGR Disaggregation Programme and agreed implementation plans.

Person Specification (essential criteria)

Experience	Significant and successful experience of: • Working at a senior level within a large and complex organisation with comparable scope, responsibilities, budget, and resources. • Experience of managing a large and complex budget. • Providing balanced strategic advice and guidance in a political setting. • Leading the delivery of public services with competing priorities and demands often outside of the Council's direct control. • Leading large scale organisational change and reform and creating innovative service models, particularly in response to the demands of an organisation undergoing radical transformation and modernisation. • Delivering complex projects on time, within budget, and achieving intended outcomes. • Leading and contributing to strategic decision-making, resource allocation, and policy formulation and delivery, adopting a problem-solving culture. • Delivering creative and innovative solutions to improve the use of resources and achieve value for money across an organisation. • Establishing a strong performance culture including effective performance measures, evaluation of service quality, and improvement of service delivery to achieve the Council's objectives. • Leading, managing, and developing employees to sustain high levels of service delivery, recognising and developing talent. • Developing and nurturing positive and constructive working relationships with a wide range of customers, stakeholders, and
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	partners, maintaining a positive personal and organisational profile. Role Specific: • Extensive senior leadership experience in statutory children's social care, including safeguarding, corporate parenting, and permanency planning. • Proven track record of improving outcomes for children and young people through service transformation and practice improvement. • Experience of leading fostering, adoption, or targeted support services. • Successful delivery of sufficiency strategies, placement market shaping, and commissioning arrangements. • Experience of inspection readiness and quality assurance frameworks for children's services. • Demonstrated ability to work effectively with health, education, police, and voluntary sector partners to deliver integrated services for children and families.
Skills and knowledge	Ability to demonstrate: • Comprehensive understanding of current issues and challenges facing local government and the statutory framework governing children's services. • In-depth knowledge of legislation and guidance relevant to children's social care, including Children Act 1989/2004, Adoption and Children Act 2002, Care Planning Regulations, and Working Together to Safeguard Children. • Skills in understanding and responding to different perspectives and taking a cross-organisational approach, gained by working in a political or similarly challenging environment. • Business acumen and an entrepreneurial mindset to lead strategic delivery of services and maintain a focus on obtaining best value for money while balancing sensitive challenges. • Ability to lead, develop, and sustain effective team, partnership, and multi-agency working through strong advocacy, influencing, and negotiating skills. • Skills to provide creative solutions to complex problems together with high-level analytical, presentational, and communication skills.

	• Ability to establish and sustain positive relationships that generate confidence, ability, and trust. • Highly developed influencing and negotiation skills to operate at a strategic professional and political level, locally and nationally. • Understanding of barriers to organisational and cultural change and commitment to being a catalyst for change. Role Specific: • Expertise in safeguarding practice, risk management, and corporate parenting responsibilities. • Strong understanding of fostering and adoption practice. • Knowledge of sufficiency planning, market shaping, and commissioning for children's placements. • Familiarity with inspection frameworks (Ofsted) and continuous improvement methodologies.
Personal Effectiveness	Ability to demonstrate: • A clear and strong personal commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion and a track record of developing inclusive services and leading by example. • Evidence of leading people and services to recognise, respect, and value individual needs to achieve a culture of inclusivity. • Evidence of operating effectively and openly within the democratic process with the political acumen and skills to develop productive working relationships with Councillors that command respect, trust, and confidence. • Personal and professional credibility which commands the confidence of elected members, senior managers, staff, external partners, and external stakeholders. • Leadership by example with a style that empowers others and is open to question and challenge as well as a commitment to continuous self-improvement. • A commitment to and evidence of successful strategies in managing personal resilience and wellbeing at a leadership level and promoting positive leadership practice, role modelling these behaviours for others. • Evidence of planning for future delivery of services, including effective workforce planning for future challenges.

Qualifications	• Recognised Social Work qualification and current Social Work England registration. • Evidence of continued professional development • (Desirable) Specialist post-qualifying and/or postgraduate training in children's social care leadership.
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