



Leicester
City Council

Minutes of the Meeting of the
CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE AND EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMISSION

Held: THURSDAY, 2 SEPTEMBER 2021 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Gee (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Batool
Councillor Pickering

Councillor Riyait
Councillor Willmott

In Attendance:

Councillor Russell, Deputy City Mayor - Social Care and Anti-Poverty

Co-opted Members (Voting):

Gerry Hirst - Roman Catholic Diocesan

Standing Invitees (Non-Voting):

Janet McKenna - Unison
Joseph Wyglendacz – Teaching Unions

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19. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Crewe and Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor - Education and Housing.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest other than those already stated in Members registers.

21. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Children, Young People and Schools

Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 22 June 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

22. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and requested Members, Officers and invitees present at the meeting to introduce themselves.

23. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

24. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no questions, representations, or statements of case had been received.

25. OFSTED UPDATES

(i) (IRO) INDEPENDENT REVIEWING OFFICER

The Director of Social Care and Early Help submitted a report, which considered the Annual Independent Reviewing Officers Report for 2019-20.

Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) perform a crucial role to ensure that:

- Children entering care were the right children to be looked after,
- Permanent plans were achieved as quickly as possible for those children
- Have an oversight of the child's care plan and input in the plan as the child progresses.
- Young people understand and can ask questions as to where they are in their social care journey and,
- Provide an opportunity that the services are operating in a way that is in the best possible interest of the young people.

Following Members comments the below responses were provided:

- The Virtual School Head works with schools to oversee the progression of education until the child is discharged from care, goes home or moves onto a permanent arrangement e.g. adoption. If a child remains in care until 18 years, the Virtual Head ensures the child's transition into employment/ training.
- The Local Authority (LA) is legally 'Corporate Parent' for all children who are looked after. It is therefore responsible for that child to have access to the best education and employment/ training that can be offered in and outside of the City.
- In terms of safeguarding, the LA also held the responsibility to ensure the child was safe in their environment and peer relations, that they were not being exploited and that contact with other

professionals was safe.

- The IRO's position was to ensure that the allocated social worker and care plan addresses the above issues.
- The improvement work taking place was so that children participated in the development of their own plans where possible. The service was now moving to the co-production part of the journey whereby the plan was co-produced with the child, so the child had full understanding of what's taking place.
- Special services and two of the children's homes were noted to be specialist for children with disabilities.
- The service recently adopted a model of a highly regarded rights-based approach to participation by children and young people, which had been developed by Professor Laura Lundy. This had been rolled out for the past six months, and guided measures to enhance the implementation of children's rights.
- Following from a Members comments, the Officer agreed that a segment in the 'Exit from Care' chart which was referred to as 'others' required further articulation and clarity.
- A number of different elements were noted for things that affected the transition for children in care into employment and training, including that the group of young people that count in those categories was ever changing. The Council had succeeded in increasing opportunities, however the challenge was to ensure that the opportunity was the right match for each young person. Employment was not always the right route for every child that turned 16 and the crucial task was to guarantee a positive experience. The service was now looking every six weeks at those young people not in education/ employment and communicating with their personal advisors to find the right hub for the child. In addition, bursaries were in place and long-term availability of opportunities being secured.
- It was noted that a mid-way point had now been built into the system so the IRO could check the network of work being done with each child to find a placement. Placement sufficiency was also monitored periodically. Details were provided as to the measures taken with red, amber or green flags. The Member who raised the query requesting that the calibration and points that showed how far the service has developed was included in the report.
- The Connexions service worked on a full range of options and opportunities for young people.
- Officers went through the process in detail and explained the number of weeks for securing a care order. Some of the impacts nationally which also seen an increase in timescales of independent assessments and especially, consideration of cases by the Courts, were noted to be as a result of the pandemic. Leicester compared to other LA's was showing positive signs in that it was able to secure placement of children with the permanent family prior to the Court granting the care order, so although it may take longer reaching the end goal, there were better outcomes for the children.

AGREED:

1. That the content of the report be noted.
2. That the Participation report which covers the Lundy model of engagement be brought to a future commission meeting.

(ii) YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

The Director of Social Care and Early Help submitted a report, which considered the annual youth justice plan setting out how youth justice services are to be provided and funded, how the Children and Young Peoples Justice Service will be composed and funded, how it will operate, and what functions it will carry out.

The Youth Justice Service was noted to support young people who had been part of the criminal justice system in some way. The City provided an amazing service however there were still challenges in engaging young people particularly around education, employment and training.

The presenting Officers further clarified details and responded to comments from Members of the Commission:

- Connexions provided dedicated support for Pre-16 years training and employment which was significant in attaining outstanding achievement. Since the Covid-19 pandemic, there had been a decline in NEET services mainly due to availability of apprenticeships.
- Specialist advisors were aware of the full range of different schemes available and would work with relevant providers to support the young people into the right opportunities.
- The Youth Justice Service in the City which was overseen by the Youth Justice Management Board generated a lot of youth justice performance data and information which was regularly shared regionally and nationally. This information allowed the service to understand its achievements comparatively. Some disproportionality was noted to still exist in the system nationally and Leicester had been working hard to address this.
- It was noted that general stability served young people in the Justice system well. The service had a good relationship and were carrying out prevention work with the Police to help prevent offending and re-offending.
- The service area worked with initiatives such as the Vulnerabilities Executive in Leicester and the Safer Leicester Partnership to do targeted work for young people entering the Youth Justice System due to exploitation.
- The Health Dashboard was explained.
- This work was being channelled into the overall work being carried out across the Council looking at tackling inequalities.

The Chair thanked Officers for their work and both reports.

Councillor Willmott departed the meeting following deliberation of this item.

AGREED:

3. Hyperlink to be circulated to Members of the Commission which included the 'Youth Justice Plan'.
4. That the content of the report be noted.

26. NATIONAL REVIEW OF CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE

The Director of Social Care and Early Help submitted the Independent Review of Children's Social Care terms of reference and a letter to the Chair of the review from the President of The Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS).

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education noted that Josh McAlister had the task of looking at issues in Children's Social Care and coming up with recommendations. Since the letter to the Chair of the review had been sent, interim findings of the review had been published. The national work was ongoing and a draft report which recognised the challenges would be produced in due course.

Officers responded to Members queries:

- Following two meetings with Josh McAlister, some of the challenging issues highlighted that would need tackling were noted as: placement costs, the independent market not working in the interests of children, and 'who holds risk'.
- It was confirmed that the service area worked very hard to prevent permanent school exclusions of looked after children. In addition, exclusion figures had decreased following training.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the response report be bought back to the commission.

27. UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT PROGRESS

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted a letter from Ofsted, following the formal 'annual engagement meeting'.

It was noted that at some point soon, Ofsted would most likely be visiting the department to do a full inspection, the general process was explained and a further briefing for Members of the Commission would be arranged.

It was confirmed that the department was well prepared for the inspection.

The Chair wished good luck to the department for the potential upcoming Ofsted inspection.

AGREED:

1. That the update be noted.

28. JOINT SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS AND DISABILITIES COMMISSIONING STRATEGY

The Director of Adult Social Care and Commissioning submitted a report on the Joint Special Education Needs and Disabilities Commissioning Strategy.

The Joint commissioning strategy brings together services across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

- It was noted that the team undertook an extensive engagement exercise with parents, carers, support services and several forums. Further details regarding postcodes/ areas, backgrounds/ ethnicity and other data could be provided.
- Several Members felt that the information about those included in the engagement exercises needed to be included in the report.
- It was noted that the Director for Adult Social Care and Commissioning held responsibility for both adult and children disability services and therefore this helped to create coherence. Furthermore, the transition strategy was in place to ensure successful transition for disabled children and the parent and adult hub.
- Another important aspect noted within the strategy was how parents were supported as well as young people.
- Working with other authorities to improve the provision for SEND was noted to be a work in progress however work was now taking place with partners to improve services and provide consistency.
- It was confirmed that the LLR part of the steering group had now been established.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That future updates be provided to the Commission.
3. The following be added into the strategy: that schools, communities and societies be as inclusive as possible to those with SEND.

29. UPDATE ON SEND LOCAL AREA REVISIT

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted a report, which set out the findings of the May 2021 Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) inspection revisit.

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education noted the following:

- The Local area visit was anticipated to take place in Spring 2020, however due to the pandemic this happened remotely in May 2021 with an active programme of interviews and focus groups.
- It was noted that Leicester was meeting the required standards in four

out of five areas.

- The one area not being met was area 4 – post 19 joint commissioning of health services, it was therefore recommended to develop an accelerated progress plan with the DfE and NHS to ensure that the necessary work could be done for this area to be met. Area 4 referred to health needs and therefore leadership would sit with NHS colleagues working together with the rest of the system in Leicester.

The Designated Clinical Officer for Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) who provided advice to the CCG on statutory duties for children and young people with SEND 0 – 25 years, presented the following information:

- The Designated Clinical Officer had the job to ensure that the system as whole, led by health services worked together to support children in this area to meet the area 4 criteria.
- Key areas for improvement were: the joint commissioning strategy, that the action plan had commenced, stream lining of health processes and pathways, implementing the transition strategy, engaging all stakeholders and ensuring relevant information for those transitioning into health services and working with colleges to ensure they had the support required.

The accelerated progress plan explained:

- This was the same structure as the previous written statement of action, however new leads had been agreed and reallocated.
- The impact elements had now been split into output and input which would capture young people's voices and their parents and carers voices through a number of surveys and focus groups. This would also be co-produced with parent carer forums and in conjunction with the clinical governance manager within Leicestershire Partnership Trust.
- Areas of focus would be parents and carers, young people, health professionals, colleges and gaining GP's views.
- Work was currently taking place with NHS England for improvement using the national benchmarking tool around transition to adult services.

Timelines:

- Currently developing questions for focus groups with parent carer forums and partners
- Meeting with DfE and NHS England to discuss progress
- Engagement Activities – October to November
- Baseline pulled together for SEND improvement Board – December
- Continue improving services and look at how performing – January to March 2022
- A template had been developed to provide feedback regarding progress, impact, next steps and any issues.

In response to a Member's query, it was noted that some of the aspects why Leicester were unable to reach meet the area could be due to not demonstrating the progress. It was also reiterated that Leicester was not the only area who had not been able to demonstrate the joint commissioning

element. However, plans were now in place as noted.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That an update be provided to the Commission in six months.

30. COVID 19 LEICESTER'S SCHOOLS AND COVID & FLU VACCINATION PROGRAMMES UPDATES

The Principal Education Officer and the Strategic Director of Social Care and Education provided a verbal update on the current situation concerning the impact of Covid-19 and the Covid and Flu vaccination programmes.

The following update was provided:

- The national guidance issued just before the end of the academic term July 2021 noted that schools should return to schools managing on site education and should not be considering any actions that prevented delivering a normal education. This advice was challenging for schools considering the rates of covid-19 cases still occurring, however, new risk assessments were set up and ready for implementation.
- A further update was provided by the DfE prior to children returning to schools, which stated that support was available if there were more than 2 or more positive Covid-19 cases in a special school and more than 5 positive cases in a mainstream school at one time. In addition, children would remain in school unless testing positive for the virus.
- All secondary schools would now carry out two lateral flow tests upon the return of children and the expectation was that staff would test twice weekly at home and report the results.
- If a child had come into close contact with a someone who had tested positive, schools would send out letters to parents encouraging their child to take a PCR test.
- Flu vaccinations would be rolled out for all school aged children over the first school term however at the time of this meeting there had been no national agreement whether children aged 12-15 would be Covid-19 vaccinated.
- Ventilation, guided by the use of CO2 monitors/ filters, open windows, reduced assembly numbers etc as well as regular handwashing were all encouraged measures to prevent and keep cases to a minimum in schools.

Following Members' comments, responses were provided by Officers:

- Masks were not compulsory for children unless schools discussed concerns with the local health protection teams and DfE who would make a decision. However, teachers could choose to wear masks and schools could request visitors to wear them in crowded areas.
- In terms of supporting proper ventilation in schools, the Council were working closely with unions and buildings colleagues for work to be done e.g. replacement windows which could open, understanding CO2 monitors and the use of filters. In addition, the service regularly shared the good practice guidance and held briefings to update headteachers

and networks for partners/ headteachers also shared information amongst themselves.

- The Council would follow up on some Members concerns regarding availability of booking local Covid-19 vaccinations for 16-17-year olds.

The unions representative noted that unions were opposed to the lifting of measures. However, the main task now at hand was how best to support schools now that they were responsible for their own risk assessments.

31. WORK PROGRAMME

Members of the Commission were invited to consider content of the work programme and were invited to make suggestions for additions as appropriate to be brought to future meetings.

AGREED:

1. That LADO Annual report be added onto the work programme.

32. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 8:07pm.