



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 20 AUGUST 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool – Chair
Councillor Bonham – Vice-Chair

Councillor Clarke
Councillor Dr Moore

Councillor Karavadra

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85. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mahesh and Councillor March.

86. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Members were asked to declare any interests they may have had in the business to be discussed.

Councillor Dr Moore declared that she was chair of the advisory board at Millgate School.

Councillor Karavadra declared that she worked in a nursery.

87. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

A typographical error was noticed with regards to Councillor Gregg's declaration. It should have read: "He would be careful to keep his comments non-political."

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and

Education Scrutiny Commission held on 19 June 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

88. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

89. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Mr Stephen Ashley asked:

“Can the City Council commit to immediate, constructive dialogue in order to give the City's nine adventure playgrounds the best possible chance of moving towards sustainability?”

The Director of Childrens Social Work and Early Help gave the following response:

“Dialogue between the City Council and the nine adventure playgrounds has been ongoing since January 2024, with a clear focus on the expectations communicated to all nine adventure playgrounds that they work towards business and sustainability plans to become financially self-sufficient.

The report before today's meeting clearly evidences the extensive support that the adventure playgrounds have been provided with since January 2024, and also clearly communicates the council's position regarding grant funding ceasing in April 2025 due to the extensive funding pressures it continues to face.”

In responding to the question, officers kept in mind the statement that Mr Ashley had submitted as shown on the agenda.

90. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

A petition was submitted at the meeting. This would be verified to ascertain whether it would go to Full Council.

91. ADVENTURE PLAYGROUNDS UPDATE

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted a report to update the commission on the position for each of the nine Play Associations that manage the adventure playgrounds across the city.

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety introduced the report and noted that:

- This report had been requested at the previous meeting to include the specific combinations of support that had been offered.
- In addition to this, an additional meeting was being arranged with Ward Councillors and the play associations to look at those playgrounds that had not yet submitted sustainability plans to see if there were any other opportunities that could be taken up.
- It was stressed that the playgrounds were run by individual, independent charities, and whilst the Council could offer information and links the Council could not tell the organisations what they should do. Therefore, the Council worked on facilitation rather than direct support.
- The Council wanted the playgrounds to succeed in the long term.
- The Council was in a financially dire situation. With the information available at the time of the decision, it had looked as though the Council would be facing a Section 114 notice within the following 12 months. In the event of a Section 114 notice, grants would cease immediately. This would have left the playgrounds exposed and vulnerable, and the Council wished for the playgrounds to be successful.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety to respond. Key points included:

- Regarding a query as to whether grant monies could be spent on redundancy payments by the organisations, it was noted that whilst the Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community had not been party to the legal advice to the organisations' management committees, each organisation was independent, and their management committees were seeking advice on liabilities. It was further noted that many volunteer sector organisations were set up in a way whereby there was no personal liability, although it was unknown if this was the case for these organisations. The Council could not pay for both redundancy and running costs due to its financial position. The route of open access play only had not been followed in the spirit of supporting staff.
- In response to a query on the use of Capital Funding by organisations, it was noted that four had applied for Capital Funding: Mowmacre, What Cabin, Goldhill and New Parks. The Council had been working with the

play associations to ensure that the correct processes were observed, particularly with regard to fencing that was needed. With regard to Mowmacre and What Cabin, these were on Parks land, and as such a local consultation needed to be conducted as this would partly block public land for part of a school day. In the case of Goldhill, alternative provision had been considered as it was noted that September was the quietest time of year and alternative provision picked up usage throughout the year. A certain amount of money had been agreed for Goldhill. With regard to New Parks, the nursery position was being looked at.

- In response to a query about extended leases and the transfer of assets, it was explained that in terms of leases, academy land remained as such. With regards to the adventure playgrounds, if playgrounds produced a sustainability plan and a business case, once the business case was evaluated the council could issue a five year licence to occupy, and these were free of charge in terms of use for the site, usually there was a charge for the use of Council buildings, but this was not the case for playgrounds. The licence was charged for, and this gave the organisations limited liability and helped the Council to support them. Options were explored internally for community asset transfer and long leases, however, there had been complicated legal issues involved. Any lease over seven years counted under the Council's disposal policy under national legislation, and therefore different rules needed to be applied. In asset transfer, it was necessary to say that the site was being offered for the local community and increased activity and would be open evenings and weekends, this would leave it open to other organisations coming in and taking over. The Council had a legal duty to follow the best value route. For example, if Highfields was put up for asset transfer, then theoretically another organisation who offered increased services and offered to pay a rent could offer to take over, and the Council would have a legal responsibility to take the best option, and this would not necessarily protect the adventure playground. The licence process protected the play associations as best as possible; they had been secured in the short term whilst keeping a longer-term option open. Additionally, with Highfields on Parks land and Goldhill being on education land, the government would need to be applied to for the disposal of the land.
- There had been discussions over what people from the organisations would like in terms of meetings, and logs had been kept of these conversations.
- Having security of tenure was seen as useful when applying for philanthropic funding, and the Council had provided letters of assurance to assist with this. Evidence gathered from around the country showed that it was necessary to look at change in the operating model to make it sustainable. Where play associations that offered open access play had changed their operating model to increase their range of services, they had been able to get long-term sustainability and thrive. An example of

this was Manchester Young Lives.

- The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety, the Assistant City Mayor for Culture, Libraries and Community Centres and the officers involved were thanked for the effort they had put in to trying to get the best outcome.

AGREED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.

92. FAMILY HUBS AND CHILDREN'S CENTRES

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education and the Strategic Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help submitted a report on the ongoing work within Family Hubs and Children's Centres.

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety introduced the report and noted that:

- As a flagship programme of the previous government the Council had been happy to get the funding to take the work forward, however, it had become clear that the funding had come with caveats.
- The biggest challenge had been the need to develop an offer and expand it over two years, this needed to be sustainable as after two years the funding would be stopped. The Council had managed to achieve this.
- The Secretary of State had been written to in order to ask for the opportunity for Leicester to pilot early intervention if Children's Centres did not need to be closed. This would be going ahead, but it was not known how much the government were going to change it.

The Head of Early Help and the Disabled Children's Service then presented the report. Key points highlighted included:

- The programme was now in the implementation stage.
- Providers for 0-2 year-olds had been commissioned.
- The workforce and partners were being trained. This included health workers to ensure that interventions were successful.
- With regard to co-dependencies, there were staff available to provide the core offer as well as other offers.
- Looking at the numbers of staff trained, these matched the needs of the community and could also provide core services.
- The consultation on the Summer Extravaganza would need to be considered in terms of delivery. This was still at the consideration stage.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety to respond. Key points included:

- In terms of outcomes, there had been over 100 requirements from the Department for Education (DfE). In terms of sustainability, the Council were looking at their own monitoring processes as they were familiar with the city. The DfE had given boundaries and measures in terms of broad outcomes, but the Council would look more specifically in terms of quality assurance in terms of feedback from families etc.
- It was noted that expectations changed, and other authorities had been told they could have different things.
- The consultation had been completed in terms of Children's Centres. In terms of delivering services that were both early help and early years, it was aimed to move that forward to local communities as much as possible, building connections between workers, families, teachers and health workers etc. Efficiencies and savings could be made through this approach.
- In response to a query on whether a portage service was available, it was noted that there were early years teachers who did Special Educational Needs (SEN) work. It was uncertain as to whether a portage model was used, but in terms of indicators of early years need, there was a model that was embedded.
- Mapping for Change was a part of the project to support the needs assessment. Once the final report was reviewed it could come to the Commission.
- In response to queries on the tailoring of services and the provision of resources, it was clarified that the Mapping for Change report helped the Council understand what the needs were so that services could be tailored, and resources provided accordingly.
- Interventions through the DfE would target specific issues.
- Family hubs were not just about a physical presence but were multi-modal with added focus on online and remote delivery, particularly for hard-to-access families. This gave flexibility.

AGREED:

- 1) That the update be noted.
- 2) That the commission be kept informed of updates.
- 3) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.

93. USE OF CAPITAL PROGRAMME IN SCHOOLS

The Director of Estates and Buildings submitted a report to update the commission on Childrens and Education projects and programmes of work

completed relatively recently by the Capital Projects and Minor Works teams within Estates & Building Services.

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety introduced the report and highlighted that the work often goes unseen, but there is lots of amazing work ongoing and it had been particularly beneficial having Estates & Building Services work hand in hand with Children's services to streamline the process which has made the difference to the children involved.

The Head of Capital, Estates and Building Services presented the report. It was noted that:

- Some projects listed were from decisions made four years ago.
- Projects included SEND extensions and refurbishment, Children's Home refurbishments, Children's Contact Centre refurbishments, Designated Special Provision works, roof repairs at schools, window replacements at schools, playground improvements, safeguarding projects, Individual Access Needs works and toilet upgrades.
- Overdale Infant and Junior School, Lutterworth Rd Children's Home, Oaklands School, Elmbrook Primary School were some of the projects completed.
- Wigston Lane would be complete next month.
- Things that had looked like small change had made a big difference and been transformational to children, staff and teaching environments. For example, use of different lighting, moving a fence to include the tree line has created more space for playing, replacing drafty windows, outdoor canopies to create covered play area and refurbishment of old buildings.
- Safeguarding works included fencing and gates but also the relocation of reception works. This has provided remote control access for staff and has had a huge impact for safeguarding of both staff and pupils.
- Toilet projects were completed by the Minor Works Team. More user-friendly units had been installed which were also more efficient.
- An example of individual access needs was a child who was given an unsuitable medical placement, it was fast tracked to ensure there was an appropriate environment for them to go into.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments and the officers and the Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety to respond. Key points included:

- 55 schools had benefited from decarbonisation schemes. This had seen installation of things such as new windows, solar panels and LED

lighting which saved a lot of money and energy as well as improving the looks and feel for pupils and staff.

- The Chair and Vice-Chair expressed their thanks for the work on this project and how impressed they were at the work shown.

94. LEICESTER CITY YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2024-25

The Director of Childrens Social Care and Education submitted a report providing a summary of the annual Youth Justice Plan refresh, highlighting progress to date and new emerging priorities. The Head of Prevention and Safer Communities and the Service Manager for Children and Young Peoples Justice Service and Youth Service presented the plan, and it was noted that:

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety introduced the item and noted that the team involved was fantastic and that they were passionate to get it right. Page 143 of the report summed up the plan and the work of partners behind the scenes and demonstrated how it was also relevant and meaningful to the young people who were vulnerable in the city and helped to support them to make changes.

Head of Service Prevention Services and the Service Manager for Children and Young Peoples Justice Service and Youth Service presented the report.

It was noted that:

- The team was proud of what had been achieved and were now working on next year's plan. The Service Manager for Children and Young Peoples Justice Service and Youth Service had been instrumental in the development of the plan.
- The last inspection had been in 2019. The inspectorate had put together a new package and as such an inspection was anticipated soon and priorities have changed due to Covid and the challenges that brought.
- The Youth Justice Board created a new monitoring framework – Leicester were rated in quadrant 2 and aimed to be in quadrant 1.
- The aim of this plan was to be collaborative all the way through from children to leadership team.
- One of the key priorities is first time entrants into the system. There were 200 young people in the service at one time and 40% were first time entrants. The service would like intervention in place before they become first time entrants.
- The reoffending rate was excellent with those who were being engaged with and the service wanted to continue to mainstream intervention with the budget available.
- A key challenge was that youth offending has increased. A requirement was knowing the population, and it was known who and where reoffending was and it was being addressed.
- Another key challenge was the smaller number of young people who offended with high frequency. This has required trauma informed

approaches to help them as it had been notable that there were increased complexities.

- Education was raised as a big issue for ages 16-19 as fewer had gone into employment or placements post-covid.
- Serious youth violence was a very small concentration of young people, contrary to what had been suggested in the media. There was a multi-agency collective to address this working with the police and community safety.
- A collective partnership offer to victims through court and pre-court processes which allows the victims voices to be heard whilst supporting them.
- The focus is very much on a child first approach - focused on them being children first and an offender second using a children's plan which is child led and was impactful.
- Young people would like safe spaces, training in life skills, emotional support etc. All of which were core basics of youth work.
- There would be a meeting on 5 September to face challenges and respond to what the children want.
- An example of a key success has been the REACH service. They were given funding to provide intervention in eight schools for children who were vulnerable or at risk of exclusion to help prevent them entering the criminal justice system. The project engaged with 240 children. However, the concern is the sustainability of these programmes, as they are provided using short term funding offered by government.
- The Children and Young Peoples Justice Service (CYPJS) had been awarded the SEND Youth Offending Service) YOS Charter Mark and were now working towards the SEND leaders award.
- A consistent approach to working with children and young people on Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) had been developed to ensure staff were skilled and able to adapt plans to meet identified needs.
- Nine different training sessions from the Crown Prosecution Service had been offered on preventing unnecessary criminalization of children in the city.
- In terms of risk, there had been a large impact from Covid and the ensuing isolation of young people, as they became disassociated and disenfranchised with the wider community.
- A balance of prevention and early intervention was required and there was more work the team wanted to see happen in the communities.
- The Director of Social Care and Education was the chair of the partnership board and commented on the strength of the partnership and commitment from the police and other partners. Noting that these relationships had helped how the challenges could be addressed.

The Detective Chief Inspector from Leicestershire Police commented that this report documented the progress made as a partnership and how the partnership could move forward.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments and the

officers to respond. Key points included:

- The length of the report was commented on as particularly large; this was noted as being the statutory length but is an issue that was raised annually.
- The statistics in the report demonstrated that the work being done had been working and the team was commended on the work done.
- It was suggested that the plan could be sent to schools to help address the fact there was an increase in first time entrants to the system.
- Quarterly meetings with the magistrates were held and there was significant training, especially around how to talk to children. Similarly, language work with the children occurred along with what to expect in the system. The intention had been to help make the process as kind as possible for the child and to help them be relatable to the magistrate.
- Engagement had occurred through a range of methods including music or cartoons. There had been focus groups to help understand how to engage the children best. However, engagement was voluntary, and it was around 90%.
- Work had recently been commissioned on cost of living and deprivation in relation to youth offending rates increasing.
- Each member of the Leicester Youth Justice Management Board had adopted a measure to scrutinise to ensure they were addressed.
- The Youth Justice plan was best in country in 2022/2023.
- The key frustrations for officers in the service were how the media reported children and criminal offences. It was highlighted that this has been one of the benefits of the child first approach as it allowed them a voice and to push back against the labels and still be seen as children. Another frustration was funding as the work needed long term investments to make sustainable changes.

The commission thanked the team for the report and their work.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

95. WORK PROGRAMME

It was requested that the situation with Adventure Playgrounds be revisited after September. It was further clarified that this could only be based on what the Council knew of the situation as they could not talk on behalf of independent organisations.

The possibility of involving the play associations in the scrutiny would be discussed outside the meeting.

The work programme was noted.

96. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 19:29.