

Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 19 DECEMBER 2023 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool - Chair

Councillor Barnes
Councillor Dr Moore
Councillor Pickering

Councillor Haq
Councillor Pantling

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35. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Joshi.

36. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

During the item on New Children's Residential Homes, Cllrs Pantling and Moore declared that they were members of the Planning and Development Control Committee and left the room for part of the item.

37. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission held on 2 November 2023 be confirmed as a correct record.

38. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

39. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

40. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

41. THE LEICESTER SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP BOARD (LSCPb) 2022/23 YEARLY REPORT

The Director of Childrens Social Care and Community Safety submitted The Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCPb) 2022/23 yearly report.

The Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission was invited to Comment on how effective the LSCPb Yearly Report had been in setting out what safeguarding partners had done as a result of local arrangements, and to seek any further clarification needed on any areas.

The Director of Education SEND and Early Help, the Director of Childrens Social Care & Community Safety and the independent Chair of the LSCPb attended the meeting to assist with the discussion.

The Deputy City Mayor - Social Care, Health, and Community Safety introduced the report.

The independent Chair of the LSCPb presented the report and presented slides as included with the agenda pack. Other key points included:

- The annual report of the Partnership was a statutory requirement and needed to be produced on an annual basis to demonstrate the effectiveness of multi-agency arrangements and quality assurance practices across the partnership.
- Partners included the Police, health partners and Local Authority partners, who in turn worked with other partners as detailed in the report.
- The membership of the Partnership was far-reaching and focussed on households with children.
- The report set out work around the procedures, learning and development, the approach taken to assess impact, quality assurance (including Section 11 which was noted to be a good measure across the partnership), and the audits undertaken. This had been triangulated with the data presented.
- Further to this, the report mentioned the information sharing agreement, the Local Child Safeguarding Practice Review and importantly showed benchmarking against the learning form national reviews.

- The report also looked at work done against priority areas, safeguarding babies, child mental health and emotional wellbeing, the safety of adolescents, safeguarding children and young people from diverse backgrounds, and effective safeguarding in independent and out of school settings.
- This was a strong partnership with a clear focus on the outcomes for local children.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- It was suggested that it would be useful to have a section of statistics showing incidences of safeguarding cases year on year so that it could be seen if cases were going up or down. The independent Chair of the LSCPB agreed to try and include this in future reports. Further to this it was suggested that numbers coming down may not necessarily be a good thing as it was important to be aware of any safeguarding issues and if the Partnership were aware of more then they could help more and help earlier.
- It was raised that the number of early help assessments had gone down whilst the number of children in need had risen, and it was asked as to whether there was any correlation between early help assessments and escalation. With regard to this it was suggested that it was possible that a drop in early help assessments could potentially lead to children coming into the system further along as children in need. However, that the data would need to be analysed over a longer period of time and data continued to be monitored on an ongoing basis.
- It was further clarified that the increase in children in need was not unique to Leicester, it was a national phenomenon that had partly grown out of the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on children's wellbeing. The numbers in Leicester were not disproportionately high and Leicester was in the median range. Further to this it was suggested that it was preferable to have children in need than children in care. Further to this it was necessary to look at the issue in the medium term rather than the short term with the involvement of health and education staff in order to see where a reduction might sit. Other organisations were worked with to ensure that staff had access to training to complete early help assessments.
- The potential consequences of any potential cuts to childrens' centres and any associated knock-on effect would be considered.
- In response to a question about how children were medically assessed, it was explained that the Safeguarding Board focussed on children who were identified as having a need or vulnerability. When such cases were identified, access to services were looked at, for example with public health nurses, or whether they were registered with a dentist. When it was considered that the children did not have access to such services, the cases were followed up and it was ensured that systems

were put in place.

- With regard to a query about GP details being taken when children registered at schools, it was clarified that whilst schools asked for medical information, if this was not provided by parents, schools could not push for it. Gathering such information was up to individual schools rather than councils and such requests were not on the standard admissions form. There were certain things that schools were not allowed to ask.
- Hospitals had designated safeguarding leads and as such could, if needed, refer patients to Childrens Services without a GP. If a child was referred, GP details were asked for and through triage it could be ascertained as to whether a child was registered with a GP. Additionally, all schools had a school nurse and often also had family support workers who could work with families to obtain information.
- With regard to a query about the challenges brought by Leicester having a comparatively high population density within the East Midlands, it was clarified that high population densities meant different priorities needed to be focussed on and as such these priorities needed to be identified. Other challenges included workforce challenges and continuity challenges given the mobile nature of some of the population.
- With regard to a query about ways to redress disproportionality, work had been undertaken to understand the makeup of the population and the unique practices of the population, and looking at disproportionality and layering.
- It was noted that there was a disproportionate number of children in children's safeguarding from the white British population, as such it was necessary to understand whether there were enough safeguarding referrals from the diverse population in the city. It was further explained that it was not always about trying to reduce in one area, but about having the confidence of reporting right across the city.
- Information on the methodology of the audit of Electively Home Educated children would be obtained.
- Regarding a query about how the use of Department for Education (DfE) Practice Principles tackled exploitation and extra familial harm to support a collaborative partnership response to safeguard adolescents, it was clarified that a broad set of principles were looked at in the application of the work. An underlying philosophy was adopted when the work was undertaken.
- With regard to the ways in which young people's views were collated for the Task and Finish Group for Safeguarding Children from Diverse backgrounds, it was explained that a range of methodologies were used rather than one approach.
- In response to a query on how young people could become involved in the Safeguarding Matters Live online session, it was highlighted that the Partnership would welcome the opportunity to hear the views of young people, however it was clarified that the session in question was aimed at working with professionals regarding changes in practice and

procedures. However, there were other ways for young people to become involved in safeguarding reviews, and sessions had been conducted with young people looking at priorities for the safeguarding boards and how to take them forward.

AGREED:

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That comments and requests made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers and the independent Chair of the LSCPB.

The Chair agreed to an agenda variance, New Childrens' Residential Homes was taken before Home to School travel for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

42. NEW CHILDREN'S RESIDENTIAL HOMES

The Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission received a presentation setting out an overview of progress in the development of two children's homes, Holly House and Hillview.

Slides were presented (attached).

Other points from the presentation included:

- There had been challenges around cost, availability and suitability of externally commissioned homes, as such, it had been thought that the best thing to do was to expand the in-house residential estate. This was part of the Placement Sufficiency Strategy which includes fostering and residential accommodation for children and young people in the care of the Local Authority.
- A report two years ago had shown accelerating costs and as such a plan had been put together to grow the estate by two children's homes over a two-year period.
- Holly House:
 - This consisted of two semi-detached properties owned by the Council.
 - Work had started in March 2023 after planning permission had been granted (there had been no objections to the application).
 - Work had been undertaken to make two properties into one building, and final check of the construction work would be undertaken shortly.
 - The building was now a proper children's home with all paperwork registered and the relevant documentation sent to OFSTED. Inspectors to interview managers and inspect the premises were being awaited.

- A management team had been appointed as well as chef, housekeeper, administrator and a core care team were being recruited. It was hoped to draw in experienced staff from other parts of the service so that it was not an all-new team.
- It was hoped that the children's home would be fully functional in February 2024.
- Hillview:
 - This property had previously been a children's home in the 1970s but had since been converted to offices and later fell into dereliction. The site was now planned to be rebuilt as children's homes.
 - The home would include 'deprivation of liberty' provisions, it was clarified that 'deprivation of liberty' referred to certain things that some children could not do due to restrictions (i.e. restriction of access to mobile phones or the internet) if the court approved that such restrictions were in a child's best interest. When this happened, it was usually due to a potential risk to the child from either their own actions or the actions of others.
 - It was clarified that the 'Staying Close' principles were an extension of the 'Staying Put' principle for foster care, but in this case applied to residential homes and would be included as part of the remit of this children's home.
 - The possibility of making it a passive build had been explored, which would have made the home self-sufficient in terms of heat and energy. However, the traditional construction method, but with higher energy efficiency had been chosen, which included features such as having solar panels and heat pumps.
 - The children's home facility would not take up the entire site and another part was available for development or other purposes.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- In terms of the suitability of children to the accommodation and subsequent interaction with local residents, assessments were made by the social work teams, including needs assessments to match young people to placements. It was rare that local residents make complaints about the Local Authority's children's homes as they maintained a 'Good Neighbour Policy' within their communities. It was further clarified that when complaints were received, they were sometimes about physical features of the site, such as trees, rather than with the residents, and others has been found to be about children in the community rather those in care. Hillview was a stand-alone site and this mitigated noise issues.
- These residences were not specifically for disabled children. Specific homes with specialist designs features already existed within the service to meet these children's needs. Holly House and Hillview were generally

aimed at children with emotional and behavioural support needs.

- In terms of the impact these developments had on the overall residential provision for Looked After Children in Leicester, it was thought that this would be positive as it would bring young people back to be cared for by Council staff rather than being cared for privately. Lots of private homes were away from Leicester and there were benefits in the city as they would be close to their families, local community resources and the Council has strong working partnerships with other agencies to support these children.
- The homes would be mixed-gender.

AGREED:

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

43. HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS & DISABILITIES

The Director of SEND, Early Help and Education submitted a report on Home to School Travel for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities, to provide the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission with an update on the home to school and college travel provision, and costs for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

The Director of Education SEND and Early Help introduced the report. Key points included:

- There was a statutory duty to provide transport assistance to children with SEND that fit certain criteria. The criteria in the policy were clear and the policy was consulted on publicly.
- The report looked at ways in which the Council could help children get to school.
- The first offer was usually to offer parents and guardians a transport budget if they fit the right criteria, so the parents would be responsible for transport. If this was not possible then buses were considered as an option. Where busses were not an option, the cases would be assessed, and the children transported by taxi.
- Costs had accelerated, the £13.6million to transport Children and Young People in 2022/23 had come from the General Fund. It had been identified that this was a large spend area and something that needed to be reviewed.
- There was a workstream around school transport for SEND children and the solutions were multifaceted. Solutions considered included looking

at ways the personal transport budget could be used and increasing travel training and investing in working with schools, as travel was an important life skill to build with children.

- A project to increase Designated Specialist Provisions (DSP) is ongoing, which increased opportunities for SEND children to go to specialist places at a local school. 120 extra DSP places had been delivered in Phase 1. Phase 2 to deliver 150 additional placements is now mid-way through and a further 70-80 places had been managed so far.
- The way that the bus fleet was used was considered, with capacity building and training to help understanding of special needs. Additionally, pickup points and the way children were getting on buses was considered.
- Schools were being worked with on creative solutions to transport children with individualised solutions around schools.
- It was hoped that the above would reduce the reliance on taxis.
- Travel costs were a national challenge and not unique to Leicester.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- Travel training and DSP aimed at reducing the reliance on council buses and taxis, however, it was noted that the aim to increase the in-house bus fleet was because it was recognised that there was always a need, and busses were more cost-effective than taxis.
- Regarding evidence that the facilities in schools were working, Ofsted reports had been overwhelmingly positive and supportive. Nationally it was evident that children achieve better long term outcomes when educated in mainstream schools and there are examples of children who had previously been allocated a placement in special schools achieving well in DSPs.
- It was noted that travel budgets were aimed at covering more than fuel costs, such as maintenance and depreciation of cars through mileage.
- When parents and guardians were given a transport budget, it was up to them how the budget was used, but it was their responsibility to get children to school. Flexible and creative ways of using personal budgeting were being considered.
- The use of school staff to transport children was being considered.
- Government funding applications for electric school busses could be considered.
- In terms of risk-assessments, escorts were needed to help allow drivers to concentrate on driving. The best and most safe ways were being considered.
- Figures on how much bursary funding was available to post-16 students would be obtained.
- A bus service in the style of the city-centre 'Hop' bus could be

considered for use for school transport, however, it needed to be recognised that the spread of schools across the city would be a challenge.

- Work was being undertaken on why children were needing to go to settings outside Leicester.
- It was clarified that in the Autumn 2023 figures, there were 182 students aged 0-18 attending independent special schools and 103 students age 18+ attending independent special schools, however, these were not necessarily long-distance journeys as some were located within Leicester.
- With regard to a query on which parent or guardian was responsible for travel arrangements if the child lived at multiple addresses, clarification would be sought following the meeting.
- It was clarified that Passenger Assistants ensured that children were safe so that drivers could concentrate on driving. This was not necessarily with regard to public transport.
- It was asked as to whether it would be possible to increase the personal transport budgets as an incentive for people to take them up so as to reduce taxi use, which was seen as more costly to the Council.

AGREED:

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

The Youth Representatives left the meeting during the discussion of this item.

44. CHILDREN IN EDUCATION - NUMBERS ON ROLL, ATTENDANCE, AND THOSE MISSING EDUCATION

The Director of SEND, Early Help and Education submitted a report to update the Commission on the numbers of children on roll, attendance and those missing education. The report summarised a presentation of data on the known education provision for children in Leicester up to the end of the 2022/23 academic year.

The Director of Education SEND and Early Help attended, and the Service Manager of the Education Welfare Service attended remotely to assist with the discussion.

Slides were presented as in the agenda pack.

Other key points included:

- There had been a gradual increase in the number of children on school rolls. In addition to this, there were 2202 in independent schools. These

numbers were stable.

- In terms of comparator data, the Leicester school population was increasing by 15% in comparison with 8% nationally and 9% for the East Midlands.
- There had been a slight reduction in state-funded primary numbers, but the latest indicators showed that these numbers were going back up.
- There were now more academies and a reduction in Local Authority maintained schools.
- In terms of safeguarding for Electively Home Educated (EHE) students, most of those known about had a good or excellent education. There was a process for dealing with situations where information was not shared by parents and sometimes there was a legal process to ensure that EHE students improved or returned to school. Sometimes these culminated in a School Attendance Order.
- Regarding absence rates, Leicester generally followed the national trend, however, sometimes absence was in excess. In terms of primary school attendance, there were sometimes increased levels of absence, but these were generally close to the national average. There was usually less absence in secondary schools.
- Persistent absence was a key statistic. Persistent absence equated to children missing one day out of every two weeks. Ofsted were keen to consider this in their inspections. Another important statistic was severely absent, those missing 50% or more of school days.
- It was clarified that 'Absence due to Holiday' did not always involve an actual holiday. It was noted that schools should only grant a leave of absence in exceptional circumstances.
- The rate of Holiday Penalty Notices was high. Absence due to holiday was partly explained by the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and people being unable to travel during that time. Additionally, Covid staffing levels were part of the reason between the difference in requests for penalty notices and those issued in 2021/22.
- Sometimes when children were taken away from school they did not return to school, and as such they needed to be tracked to ensure that they were safe where they were. If children could not be tracked by schools, then the Council became involved and work was done with schools to ensure that children were accounted for.
- In terms of exclusions and suspensions, it was currently difficult to compare with the national data as it would probably not be published until July 2024.
- Leicester City Council (LCC) Schools did not suspend as regularly as others in the region or nationally as they looked at other ways to address issues. However, the rate had gone up this year and it was difficult to determine what was driving this. More permanent exclusions were predicted before the end of the academic year. Special schools did not often exclude pupils and Primary schools did not generally exclude pupils. Exclusions were lower than the national figures but still a concern. Head teachers had the power to exclude, and this would not

change.

- Of 455 children investigated in terms of whereabouts in 22/23, 266 had returned to education and the main three outcomes for the majority of the others were home educated, in independent schools, or abroad.

The Committee were invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- It was difficult to explain the year-on-year increase in primary school absences and primary schools had been worked with on the issue. It was suggested that it was possible that some of it may have been related to habits developed when children were at home during the Covid-19 pandemic. It was also noted that historically primary schools had authorised a lot of absence, and this had changed some years ago. Schools were working hard to keep children in school and using all legal tools to challenge families over absences.
- A lot of time was spent looking at data on children missing from school linked to a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) request, and this would be published in 2024. Children who had fallen off the schools' census between Jan 22 and Jan 23 were reviewed. Schools had tracked children and where they could not they were referred to the local authority where they were tracked. All schools must inform the local authority when a child comes off their roll, including independent schools. When children were abroad this presented problems as families were not always willing to share information or the information was limited. However, there had not been any concerns about these children. If there was a record of a child in a database, there were ways of identifying them and picking up their case. The system was robust.
- A comment was raised about possible causes of children missing school being among family attitudes such as parents thinking of school as negative, the delivery of the curriculum, the quality of leadership and management, and the management of bullying in schools. It was acknowledged that the causes behind absence were a complex picture and difficult to resolve, however, it was important that attendance was prioritised.
- Legally, the money from the holiday penalties could only go into the administration of the system, which was very costly.
- It was desirable to manage SEND children in mainstream schools and meet their needs. School staff were worked with to educate them and give them better support to prevent exclusions. Exclusions in SEND children were lower partly because schools were supported to be inclusive. There was a range of SEND children and some may exhibit challenging behaviour and as such could be excluded at times, however, most of the time their needs could be met. Sometimes it was difficult to include SEND children due to the adaptations needed, time, resources and staff knowledge needed, however, a great deal of effort was made

to keep them in school.

- With regard to a concern raised about SEND pupils being off-site during an Ofsted inspection at an academy, such concerns could be raised with the Regional Schools Commissioner, however, specific examples would be needed.
- In terms of deterrents for absence due to holiday, it was difficult to analyse their impact. However, when penalty notices were analysed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, in around 90% of cases the child was not taken out of school the following year. Penalty notices were a way of giving a sanction without going to court. If they did not work i.e. parents repeatedly took their children out of school, then the parents/guardians were taken to court. Parents and guardians were being encouraged to cut short trips where they had planned to go away for a long time so as to get the child back in school. They are now being given notice to change their plans and get the children back to school with the warning that prosecution may be considered if they didn't. For many, the prospect of going to court was a deterrent.
- In terms of the results of EHE children, there was no current formal record of results for EHE children. It was thought that whilst many did not take exams, many did, and where data could be obtained it appeared as though EHE children were obtaining a lower number of GCSEs and lower grades. It was suggested that this could be an area for the government to look at in the future as this could provide better analysis. It was difficult to compare EHE children to school-educated children as parents of EHE children did not have to follow the national curriculum.
- In regard to the higher proportions of suspensions and exclusions within certain ethnic groups, this was one of the areas of focus of the Racial Literacy training currently being delivered to all secondary schools in Leicester. Primary schools were also looking to develop this.
- A breakdown of absences by Ward could be provided once the census data was obtained although it was important to bear in mind that children often travelled to school outside their ward.
- It was rare that a school would not request a penalty notice for absence due to holiday.

AGREED:

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

Cllr Pantling left the meeting during the discussion of this item.

45. 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.

It was requested that ESFA (Education Skills and Finding Agency) be added to the glossary.

With regard to the proposed Task and Finish Group on the DSG High Needs Block, it was clarified that feedback was needed from the ESFA which would then need to be signed off and agreed with the Chair. Once this was done the task and Finish Group could proceed. It was possible for the work of the group to span across the change of municipal year.

The work programme was noted.

46. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further items of urgent business, the meeting finished at 20:00.

Progress update on our new Children's Homes

Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny
Commission

19th December 2023

Lead Officer: Mike Evans

Lead Director: Damian Elcock



Background

- **Consultations carried out as part of Placement Sufficiency Strategy 2020-23, sets out how Leicester City Council will meet duty to provide and secure sufficient accommodation for Looked After Children and Care Leavers.**
- **Considered a range of development activity, including the need to expand in-house residential and foster care provision.**
- **External placement market costly and limited opportunities for young people to remain close to their own family networks and communities**
- **February 2022 – agreement for £2.2m of capital finances to develop two new children’s homes, Holly House and Hillview**
- **Successful bid for match funding to DfE – awarded £500K grant towards capital costs of Holly House and £800K towards capital costs of Hillview.**

Holly House

- **Public, stakeholder and planning application consultations completed late 2022**
- **Conversion of two existing council owned previously unoccupied semi-detached houses**
- **Building works commenced March 2023 – main works now complete – interior fit underway**
- **Conversion to 4 ensuite bedrooms and one independence flat**
- **Expected handover date December 2023/January 2024**
- **Ofsted registration process underway**
- **Management team appointed, now recruiting practitioners and support workers**
- **Expecting operational launch February 2024**

Original Front Elevation



November 2023

Young Person's Independence Flat



Rear view with the new managers of the home



Hillview

- **Building on site owned by local authority, unoccupied for some time**
- **Unsuitable for conversion so planning consent for demolition sought and approved**
- **Demolished and site cleared ready for new build**
- **Planning consent for conversion of site to Children's Home lodged, expecting decision imminently**
- **Expected start date of construction February 2024, with completion of building work October 2024 and operational February 2025**
- **Will provide six additional residential placements for young people with more complex emotional and behavioural support needs. Will include a dedicated area for DoLS (Deprivation of Liberty) provision.**

Hillview

- **Home will act as a “hub”, providing training and meeting facilities for social care staff, foster carers, and professionals.**
- **Could also be used as a base for outreach and drop-in facilities for young people who enter care and for young people who have left care and live in the community, supporting our implementation of “Staying Close” principles.**
- **Home will be built according to traditional construction methods and incorporate energy efficient design features e.g. modern heating, solar panels, high specification insulation.**
- **OFSTED registration and recruitment of the staff will be initiated when building works close to completion**

APPENDIX 4:
Hillview External Elevations



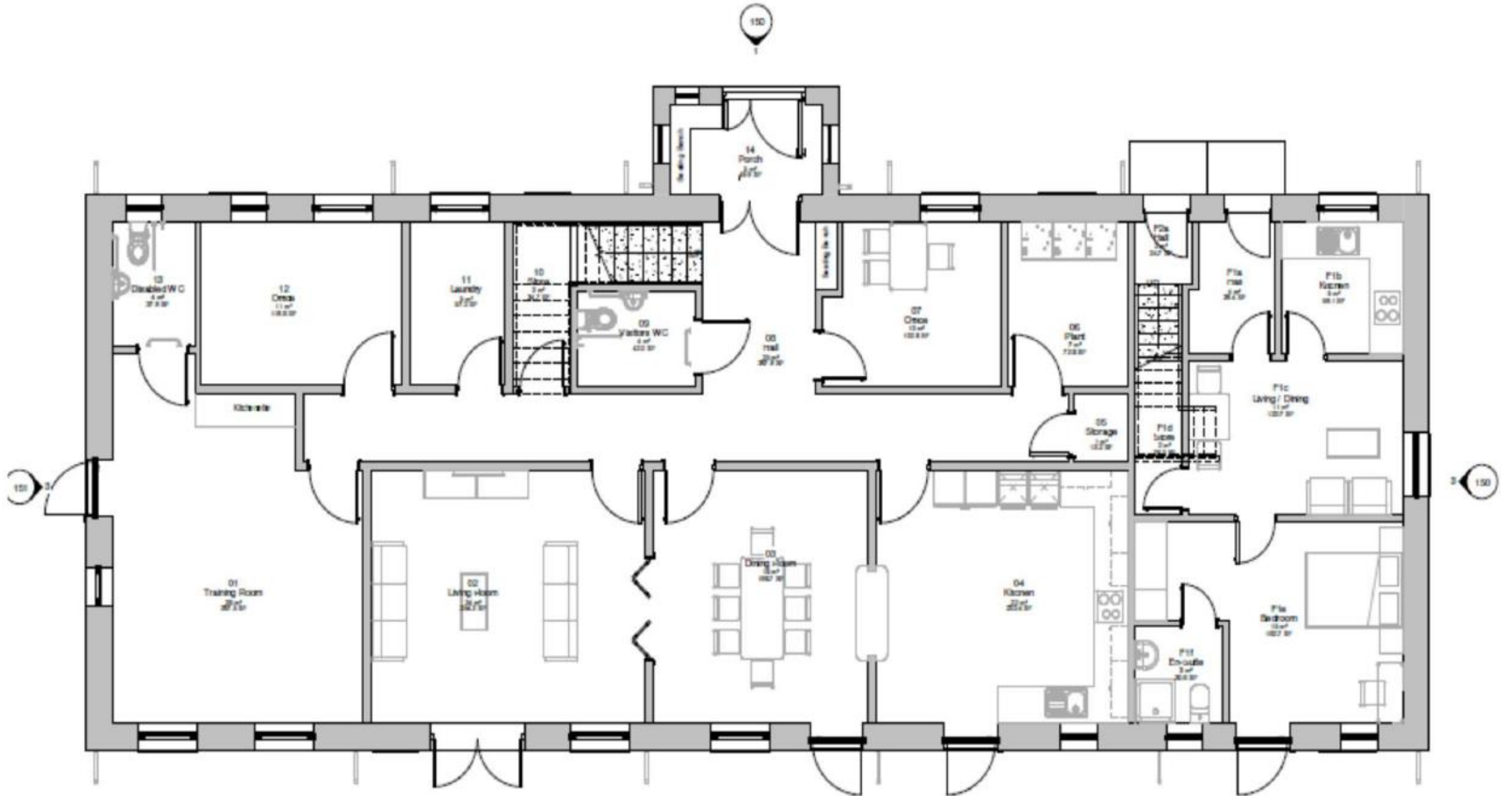
3D View - Front



3D View - Rear

Internal Layout: Ground Floor

Please note that this design may be subject to change.



Internal Layout: First Floor

Please note that this design may be subject to change.

