



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 29 SEPTEMBER 2020 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)

Councillor Pantling
Councillor Rahman

Councillor Riyait
Councillor Whittle

Co-opted Members (Voting)

Mr Gerry Hirst
Mr Mohammed Al-Azad

Ms Carolyn Lewis

Roman Catholic Diocese
Parent Governor (Primary/
Special Needs
Church of England Diocese

Standing Invitees (Non-Voting)

Ms Rabiha Hannan
Ms Anu Kapur
Mr Peter Flack
Mr Gary Garner

Youth Representative
Youth Representative

Muslim Faith Representative
Leicester Secular Society
Teaching Unions
Union Representative

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77. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Cole.

78. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

79. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 25 June 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

80. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Petitions had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

81. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Representations or Statements of case had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

82. ADOPTION SERVICE & FOSTERING SERVICE - ANNUAL REPORTS AND STATEMENTS OF PURPOSE

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education submitted a report, which provided an overview of the activity and performance of the Adoption and Fostering Service, together with the Annual Statements of Purpose. The individual Annual Reports and Statements of Purpose were considered separately as follows:

(i) ADOPTION SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20 AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2020-21

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education submitted a report, which provided an overview of the activity and performance of the Adoption Service from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, together with the Annual Statement of Purpose.

The Chair invited the Deputy City Mayor (Social Care and Anti-Poverty) to open comments on presenting the report.

It was reported that the Adoption Service was essential in supporting delivery of high-quality care and support for looked after children, allowing them to live and thrive in a family home. It was noted that the primary aim of the Adoption Service was to ensure that children, who were referred for an adoptive placement, were placed within a caring and supportive family that could meet their needs during childhood and beyond.

Adopters would become the permanent family for a child who could not, for whatever reason, return home. They would take on all the rights and responsibilities of a birth parent and would give the child stability, love and security throughout their childhood and beyond.

The service allowed children and young people to live in safe, stable and appropriately matched families. The aim for children who were cared for

was that they would have a clear understanding of why they were looked after by the local authority, be given an opportunity to make sense of their experiences; knowing who is there to support them to achieve their goals and lead successful lives.

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education then presented the details of the report.

It was noted that the service had been rated 'good' and in line with other agencies the initiative to join a regional adoption strategy was emphasised.

There had been no significant negative effects or impacts of the ongoing Covid-19 situation and the service had been able to engage with children and young people and potential adopters virtually.

In response to questions reassurance was provided that despite some initial concerns regarding potential impacts of the regional strategy, the service remained in a strong position with the arrangements working well.

The positive report was welcomed prior to the formal launch of the initiative.

Mr Mohit Sharma commented on the positive report and care for young people by the Council up to the age of 18 and asked for clarification of the situation for young people as care leavers. It was confirmed that post-adoption care packages were successfully provided, with support offered to the age of 21.

In terms of the potential for more adopters (and foster carers) to join the service, the ongoing promotion of the need was highlighted. It was particularly noted that the 'fostering to adopt' scheme to appropriately match children and young people to families remained a priority.

In conclusion Commission members joined the Chair in offering thanks and congratulations to the service on the content of the positive report.

(ii) FOSTERING SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2019-20 AND STATEMENT OF PURPOSE 2020-21

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education submitted a report, which provided an overview of the activity and performance of the Fostering Service from 1st April 2019 to 31st March 2020, together with the Annual Statement of Purpose.

The Chair invited the Deputy City Mayor (Social Care and Anti-Poverty) to open comments on presenting the report.

It was reported that the Fostering Service was essential in supporting the

delivery of high-quality care and support for our looked after children, allowing them to live and thrive in a family home.

The service allowed children and young people to live in safe, stable and appropriately matched foster families.

The aim for children who were cared for was that that they would have a clear understanding of why they were looked after by the local authority, be given an opportunity to make sense of their experiences, knowing who was there to support them to achieve their goals and lead successful lives.

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education then presented the details of the report.

It was noted that similar to the adoption service previously reported the service had been rated as 'good'.

It was reported that the majority of Looked After Children in foster care were located in Leicester or Leicestershire and the need to recruit foster carers to continue this high percentage remained a challenge, with outreach and targeted work within communities being enhanced. The difficulties experienced with the competition from private agencies as previously reported to the Commission were reiterated and continued work with the Carers and Adopters Panel was ongoing where these issues were regularly debated.

In terms of the impacts of Covid-19 it was reported that similar to the adoption service, virtual webinars and use of technology, including the virtual schools service to ensure continued home education had been undertaken. Regular information bulletins had been distributed and the need to manage the situation and reduce anxieties was recognised.

In response to questions, the strong links to the DWP in terms of job support in relation to Covid-19 was also provided to give reassurance.

In respect of the report's comments on diversity, the numbers and ethnicity of foster carers was reported, and it was noted that the ratio was considered to be good, although more BAME carers had been encouraged in recruitment publicity. The ageing profile of carers had also been recognised.

In conclusion Commission members joined the Chair in offering thanks and congratulations to the service on the content of the positive report. It was particularly noted and welcomed that imaginative ways to ensure engagement during Covid-19 had been effectively put in place.

In conclusion it was noted that regular reports on progress and any suggested actions on issues arising would be submitted to the Commission in due course.

83. PARTICIPATION STRATEGY

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education provided a verbal update on the strategy with a launch of revised arrangements expected shortly.

It was noted that the strategy had received a high level of positive response following a recent consultation exercise.

The Deputy City Mayor (Social Care and Anti-Poverty) commented on the exciting development with the strategy being the first in the Country to undertake the revisions suggested. It was accepted that the implementation would be a long process as changes to processes were complex involving many agencies and partner organisations.

In response to questions as to how Commission members could become more involved in the process and become more engaged directly with young people, links to training materials and videos were offered.

The update was noted.

84. HIGH NEEDS BLOCK BANDING CONSULTATION

This item was deferred.

85. COVID-19 UPDATE

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education and the Assistant City Mayor (Education and Housing) provided a verbal update on the impacts of Covid-19 on services.

It was reported that services were operating effectively with some innovative changes to processes. Schools were open and learning continued despite the clear pressures, it being noted that Public Health colleagues had confirmed that there were no risks in terms of infection rates in schools with only a very minor number of reported positive cases.

The Chair and Commission members joined the Assistant City Mayor (Education and Housing) in thanking those involved for their considerable efforts to maintain educational standards in the ongoing challenging circumstances.

The update was noted.

86. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7.00pm.