



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 25 FEBRUARY 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice Chair)

Councillor Pantling
Councillor Rahman

Councillor Riyait
Councillor Whittle

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor - Education and Housing
Councillor Russell, Deputy City Mayor - Social Care and Anti-Poverty

Also Present:

Gerry Hurst - Roman Catholic Diocese
Mr Mohit Sharma - Parent Governor (Primary / Special Schools)

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111. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Carolyn Lewis, Janet McKenna and Joseph Wyglendacz.

112. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cole declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who worked within schools and a family member that worked within the Council.

Councillor Rahman declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that she was a governor at a school.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillors judgement of the public interests. Councillors Cole and Rahman were not

therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion of the agenda items.

113. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 13 January 2021 be confirmed as a correct record.

114. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, reminding everyone that this was a virtual meeting, as permitted under Section 78 of the Coronavirus Act 2020, to enable meetings to take place whilst observing social distancing measures.

At the invitation of the Chair, Members and officers present at the meeting then introduced themselves.

The Chair informed the Commission that agenda item 9 – 'Edge of Care interventions Summary Report Quarter 2: 2020-21' would be deferred to the CYPS Scrutiny Commission meeting in April.

It was noted that a Special Meeting of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission would take place on 11 March 2021 to discuss the 'Realignment of Special School Funding'.

115. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

116. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Ruth Sinhal (questioner) posed a question/ statement at the previous meeting and since then, a written response from Officers had been provided. Ruth Sinhal was present at this meeting and gave details of a subsequent statement (provided to the Commission prior to this meeting). Some of the points Ruth highlighted from her statement included the positiveness of promoting racial literacy training in schools and requested the Council to be willing to work with local anti-racist groups in order to signpost schools where they could get the right literacy training.

In response, the following was noted:

- That a positive meeting had been held with officers, Assistant City Mayor for Education and Housing and Ruth Sinhal.
- Partnerships had been established with schools over the past year to ensure the right practice was being shared.
- Racial literacy training was the starting point of an ongoing discussion, some discussions of which had already commenced with organisations

such as the African Heritage Alliance.

Members of the Commission welcomed the discussion and also contributed observations, and the following points were made:

- Support was expressed for racial literacy training and it was felt that the Council had a responsibility to ensure good educational outcomes of children in this City. It was further urged that these principles would need to be embedded into the system rather than merely providing literature.
- The idea of inviting Members to sessions once they were up and running was welcomed.
- It was reported that the Government had posted details regarding the 'Petitions Committee: Online engagement on Black history and Cultural diversity in the curriculum' and the Member requested that this be monitored.

Ruth Sinhal was thanked for all the hard work and efforts and it was noted that further work/ communication with Ruth Sinhal and key stakeholders in relation to the anti-racism pledge and addressing the cultural bias would continue.

AGREED:

1. That a report would come back to a future meeting.

117. TAXI TRANSPORT SERVICE FOR SEND CHILDREN

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education provided a verbal update in relation to the Taxi Transport Service for SEND children. The following was noted:

- Approximately 18 months ago the transport service for SEND children moved from being held in the housing division to the education division.
- £7.5m was spent on taxi services in Leicester City taking children to and from schools, an amount which was noted to be a large majority of funding the Council had to support education.
- The unit costs being paid for these journeys was significantly higher compared to other cities in the country, one reason for this was the amount of transport being provided.
- The contracts were looked into to see if there was a different way the services could be procured. It was aimed to move away from the framework of a taxi provider bidding for a route of transporting a new service user, to moving to an agreed fixed price for each route which would be in two parts; 1) a flat rate for doing any journey and 2) a per mile distance rate.
- Engagement with the operators took place over an extended period and the proposed arrangements were worked through with the taxi providers, a formal procurement process took place and a number of taxi companies made bids and contracts were awarded.
- It was planned that the new arrangements would commence from January 2021. However, when assigning routes to individual taxi providers, the operators were not content with the offered rates and doing the work under those newly procured terms, even though those

rates had been explicit throughout the procurement process.

- As a result, the existing contract was then extended until half term to allow for further engagement with the taxi operators to see whether within the procurement boundaries there was scope to adjust the arrangements, however it was not possible to reach an agreement. The procurement process was then abandoned, and the existing contract extended for a further year until a new procurement exercise could be completed.
- The service has had to go back to the drawing board to identify options that could be used to do this. These included: looking at travel training, providing support to families to be able to transport children themselves to schools and looking at the range of alternative travel options.

Members of the Commission discussed the taxi transport service for SEND children and the Strategic Director for Social Care and Education responded to the queries, as below:

- The reasons why the agreement didn't hold were further clarified, one being that taxi operators thought there was scope for further negotiation following the agreement of fixed prices, however the procurement contract didn't allow for this.
- LCC was looking to reduce costs by 10% (£1m) across the overall £10m taxi budget, to be in line with the costs of their statistical neighbours. The procurement process over the next year would look at how the loss of saving for this year could be mitigated and it was reiterated that if travel training and other aspects were implemented this could allow some costs to be recouped.
- It was confirmed that during the process there was no impact to children and no child was left without transport as the existing contractual arrangements continued.

AGREED:

1. That the verbal update be noted.
2. Request a report to be brought regarding the financial impact and the impact on the vulnerable communities being engaged with to the April meeting.

118. VIRTUAL SCHOOL HEAD ANNUAL REPORT 2019/ 20

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education submitted the Virtual Head report which highlighted the achievements of Leicester City's looked after children in the school year 2019/2020. The report coincided with the period of national lockdown arising from the Covid-19 resulting in most of our looked after children accessing learning remotely from home during the summer term.

The presenting Officer informed the meeting of the following:

- The aim was to ensure the educational outcomes of looked after children were near to that of their school peers.
- It was reported that a maintained year on year improvement in school attendance had been achieved, there were no permanent exclusions

and the rate of fixed term exclusions had decreased for the looked after children.

- GCSE grade achievements for looked after children were explained and it was noted that teacher assessments had been cancelled and GCSE's assessed in a different way, so there were no comparative data for that year.
- During the national lockdown most looked after children accessed their learning remotely, were provided with access to a digital device for this, and a Virtual School touch down website was also established with resources to support learners and carers.

Members discussed the report and officers responded:

- It was further reiterated that exclusion rates had gone down and although it was aimed to avoid exclusions, for the few that did happen most were one day exclusions generally relating to challenging behaviour including persistent disruption or not following instructions. To address an exclusion, resources were put in place and interventions to readdress the balance as to the underlying issues.
- A Member of the Commission highlighted a point about the higher costs of employing temporary staff as opposed to employing permanent staff. The service would be discussing this issue with management in March.
- In terms of careers support/ further education, it was noted that were visits for looked after children to universities, starting from primary school years and throughout school years. In addition, a sailing ship enrichment experience activity was offered which gave the opportunity to support the looked after children in developing their aspirations. It was noted that the tour ship activity had been confirmed for this year. The support provided through university life was also explained.
- Some of the reasons why looked after children were not in education, employment or training post 16 were reported. Some reasons were due to several looked after children becoming young parents for that report year but who would return; some hadn't engaged with education at any point for a wide range of reasons and some were serving time in institutions. A lot of time was spent working on how to engage and intervene and this was dealt with on a child by child basis taking into account many factors.
- In terms of disproportion to the figures, it was noted that the majority of children looked after were from a white British background.
- Progress had been made on all the key objectives and it was noted that this was a continual process and was not expected to be achieved within a year.

The team were thanked for their hard work

AGREED:

1. The Commission note, welcome and approve the Virtual School Head Annual Report 2019-20.
2. The Commission notes that the impact of Covid-19 would have affected young people and a report is requested to identify its

challenges and how these issues will be addressed.

119. EDGE OF CARE INTERVENTIONS SUMMARY REPORT QUARTER TWO: 2020-21

This item was deferred to the next meeting of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission.

120. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE AND EARLY HELP ASSURING QUALITY OF PRACTICE QUARTERLY REPORTS

The Director for Social Care and Early Help submitted a presentation to update Members of the Commission on the Children's Social Care and Early Help Assuring Quality of Practice Quarterly Reports for quarters one and two.

- The presentation detailed the impact of Covid-19 and the alterations put in place including all meetings being moved to virtual arrangements and any face to face visits saw social workers and EH practitioners always wearing PPE equipment.
- The 'Their door is shut. Ours is open' campaign helped to see the referral rates go back up after an initial decrease at the start of the pandemic.
- Since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in March 2020, a continued increase had been evident in children subject to repeat child protection plans. Following a look at 40 families, this showed good evidence of good quality effective relationships with social workers, Edge of Care practitioners and young people, parents/ carers. Measures had now been put in place where there were gaps in the assessments.
- Figures of children in care and care leavers were provided and one of the areas for focus noted was to move planning for transitions to adulthood earlier to 14 years rather than 16 years as this would give the children more opportunity to prepare.
- 'Quaranteens' – which was a social media campaign aimed at supporting living in lockdown created by young people, won Best Project 2020.

In response to Members comments, the following was noted:

- Following this piece of work, a large discrepancy was noted between the foster carers training and the kinship carers' training. Since then discussions had taken place and kinship carers would now have the opportunity to engage in carers training more effectively than previously. In addition, part of the support has been restructured, splitting the service so there was bespoke support for recruited foster carers and those kinship carers, some of the training and learning and development had also been split. The offer was now also more varied and included online training.
- Out of approximately 28 parents who took the participation surveys and parental feedback, the vast majority reported that they found the

conference easier to be part of, however, some felt that not being present in a room left them at a disadvantage. Looking forward at least the initial meeting, would be moving to a hybrid model and risk assessments would take place to determine which method would be more effective.

- The importance of Q&A work was expressed, and the presenting officer explained the process after each Q&A report was made/ carried out. This included, that the reports were discussed at the monthly improvement board meetings and then all actions were distributed to the relevant service. These reports allowed for the service to have the resource to be able to look in more detail if required to see what could be improved. The importance of celebrating success was also noted.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission note and welcome the many strengths which have been identified in the report.
2. The Commission welcomes and is pleased that the Leicester City Council 'Quaranteens' project created by young people, was nominated for and won the *'Best Project 2020 by National Leaving Care Bench Marking Forum'*. In addition, the Commission welcome that Leicester City Council have been recognised for good practice in the LGA for the LLR campaign 'Their door is shut, ours is open'.
3. The Commission would like to be updated on progress following the areas of focus on the transitions of adulthood, care plan safety planning at a future meeting.

121. IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON LEICESTER'S CHILDREN SERVICES AND SCHOOLS

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education provided a verbal update in relation to the impact of the coronavirus on Leicester's children services and schools.

The Government had recently announced all schools would be reopening on 8th March 2021, with secondary schools having a phased return from this date to allow for lateral flow testing to be offered to the children. To help this process, work would be carried out to promote and help the Covid-19 testing process in schools. In addition, areas of wearing face coverings were being considered for schools amongst other measures for parents.

The current rate of cases in Leicester was now reported to be five times higher than in September 2020 when children returned following the previous lockdown.

Following Members comments the below responses were provided:

- There were still concerns around the infection rate and whether children returning to school could worsen this, however, it was essential for children to be back in school. Schools were looking at reducing bubble

sizes to reduce the transmission bridges. It was however reconfirmed that there had not seen big number of transmission cases in schools and the measures put in place by schools were able to contain reported cases.

- An increased amount of teaching staffing now met the new shielding requirements and as a result were not required to come back into school, which could mean less staff available on site. Shielding was due to end on 31 March.
- Some of the things in place to support schools and children on the concern of mental health included the Wellbeing Education Recovery Programme training which was offered to all schools and colleges in the City and had been supported by the educational psychology team and mental health teams. School nurses were also being re-introduced, including an online digital offer where students could get self-help and in addition many schools were looking at what their counselling offer would need to be going forward.
- Following a Member's concern that children had been locked down a lot over the past year and needed outdoor sports, playschemes etc. It was responded that some outdoor sports clubs would be reopening nationally soon, and sports activities organised by schools could be restarted again, some of which could be funded via the 'catch up' fund.
- In the holiday a new programme called the Holiday Activity and Food programme which worked closely with a range of providers including sports clubs, adventure playgrounds and more to ensure there was an offer for children to be active and socialise.
- Schools and the Education Welfare Team would be and had been working closely with families who had concerns about sending their children back to school.
- Members were requested to update the Assistant City Mayor for Education on any queries being received from parents. These would be added to a crib sheet being put together, of which the information on schooling arrangements and guidance could then be circulated to Members and something for parents.
- It was reported that many staff were keen to be vaccinated however many were not necessarily in the age category being called for the vaccination. Following a discussion, Members were all in accordance to support the Department for Education (DfE) in their lobby that all teaching staff should have access to being vaccinated as a priority, regardless of age group.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission agree to support the DfE in that teaching staff should have access to being vaccinated as a priority, regardless of age group.

122. WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the work programme be noted.

123. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.58pm.