



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 19 JUNE 2024 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool – Chair
Councillor Bonham – Vice-Chair

Councillor Gregg
Councillor Mahesh
Councillor Dr Moore
Councillor Russell

Councillor Karavadra
Councillor March
Councillor Pantling

Also Present

Councillor Russell – Deputy City Mayor
Councillor Pantling – Assistant City Mayor
Jennifer Day – Teaching Unions
Mario Duda – Youth Representative
Thaneesha Hathalia – Youth Representative

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70. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Clarke.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Russell declared that she was an agent for an election candidate for Leicester West. She would be careful to keep her comments non-political.

Councillor Gregg declared a pecuniary interest that he was an agent for an election candidate for Leicester South, Leicester West and Leicester East. He would be careful to keep his comments non-political. He further declared, with regard to the item on Children Seeking Safety, that he provided services through his company to the Council on the issue. As this was not a decision-

making meeting, he would contribute to the item, but would be careful to remain objective and did not impact the issue from a financial perspective. He had also previously worked for the Council as an agency Social Worker.

Councillor March declared that she had two children at city schools and that she was the governor of two schools.

Councillor Karavadra declared that she worked in a private nursery and that she had worked in a school for 13 years, including with SEND children.

72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission held on 26 March 2024 be confirmed as a correct record.

73. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair announced that the Council was now within the pre-election period for the UK General Election which is taking place on 4 July.

Although this did not impact on the majority of Council business and that scrutiny and other meetings as well as Executive decisions could generally be exercised, the guidance reminded that the Commission could not provide any publicity to individuals involved directly in the election as either candidates or agents and that the Commission should exercise care to be objective and to avoid the appearance of political bias.

It was important that the Commission took these points on board when conducting their business and would be reminding any member of the necessity to adhere to the guidance should they contravene the practice that is expected at the meeting.

74. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS, AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Stephen Ashley asked:

“Can the Council restart the final 12 months funding for the Adventure Playgrounds, to coincide with issuing of further extended leases?”

As, given the absence of a support plan for the Adventure Playgrounds, we have been severely hindered in our attempts to make progress towards financial sustainability.”

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education gave the following response:

“We have been proud to support the independent, charitable play associations

across the years even when such facilities disappeared many years ago in most cities. Unfortunately, grant allocations to the voluntary and community sector undertaking important work that falls outside of the statutory services that the local authority must deliver, or commission have become impossible to sustain given the reduction in funding from central government. We are very aware that should Council finances become such that Commissioners are called in, areas of spend where we have discretion could be cut instantly and as such helping organisations so that they are not reliant on that funding is a priority. There is no funding available after the end of this financial year.

The local authority has agreed to provide a grant to nine organisations running the adventure playgrounds for the current financial year with increased flexibility and support so that they can move towards self-sustainability where possible over the current financial year if at all possible. Some Play Associations have already done this through charitable funding and grants, providing alternative education, delivering the Holiday Activities and Food Scheme, and providing respite breaks for children with disabilities for example. Our assessment is that this gives the best opportunity for the Play Associations to be viable charities in the long term. The Playgrounds have all been offered initial five-year leases for the land they operate on with a bore to longer term leases to help them secure their future.

We remain committed to supporting the Play Associations to make links with local voluntary sector partners, businesses, and funders so that they can continue to deliver services, which we know local communities value immensely, in the longer term but have no further funding to offer.”

In response to a supplementary question regarding specific help given to playgrounds, the Strategic Director for Social Care and Education responded that play associations had been linked with organisations that might be able to help, additionally, in terms of early years provision, schools had been linked to wrap-around services. A further report on the issue, including the offers made, could be brought to the next meeting of the Commission.

Legal services would need to be consulted regarding community asset transfer due to the allocation of land. A session could be set up outside of the formal Commissions to help members understand the issues surrounding community asset transfer.

75. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

76. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2024/25

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Councillor Batool
Councillor Bonham
Councillor Clarke
Councillor March
Councillor Moore
Councillor Karavadra
Councillor Mahesh
Councillor Gregg

77. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE COMMISSION 2024/25

The dates of the meetings for the Commission were confirmed as follows:

19 June 2024
20 August 2024
29 October 2024
14 January 2025
25 February 2025
8 April 2025

78. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

79. INTRODUCTION TO CYPE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Director of Education and SEND gave an overview of what her services cover and the role of scrutiny in these areas using the slides as attached with the agenda. In addition to the information on the slides it was further explained that responsibility for Early Help had moved back to Children's Social Care. It was also explained that there were a range of functions within her remit, some functions sat across all children's services, some across all eight service areas within Education and SEND and some functions were more specific, such as specialist teaching services.

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education, on behalf of the Director of Children's Social Care, Early Help & Community Safety, outlined the six service areas under Children's Social Care, Early Help, Prevention and Safer Communities as set out in the slides attached to the agenda. He further added that some issues were government-led and that we worked also with charities and organisations. He added that with regard to safeguarding, there were regulatory expectations with independent oversight from reviewing officers. Children's services areas were also judged by Ofsted and other regulatory inspectors.

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

- In terms of resource and funding, some came from grants and some came from the Local Authority. An offer of a separate briefing could inform members on finance and resources could be given.
- The numbers of agency staff were relatively low, and of the ones in place many were long standing. Changes to agency regulations were coming in the summer which would mean that an agency social worker could not be in place unless they were more than three years post-qualification. Some agency workers had gone on to become permanent staff.
- The Council were good at attracting social workers who had recently graduated from university, however, the average length of their career was around 6-7 years which was seen as short. In order to improve retention and conditions within social work, as well as practical considerations, the council were looking at the mental health of social workers given the traumatic situations they worked with.
- A social work academy was being developed and there was hope it would be in place by late autumn 2024. This would give career pathways and development opportunities to social worker to improve retention.
- Early Help had more longevity with their staff as a differently qualified workforce. They also offered apprenticeships in social work in the Early Help division. This offered a different route for the workforce.
- The figures on staff turnover for social workers would be ascertained.
- There was a challenge in staffing for educational psychology due to a shortage of qualified staff.

AGREED:

- 1) That the presentation be noted.
- 2) That an updated briefing come to the Commission to include information on finance and resource and the workforce.

80. EDUCATION PERFORMANCE REPORT

The Director of SEND and Education submitted a report to update the Commission on the overall education performance of children in the city and gave a presentation using the slides attached with the agenda.

The Assistant City Mayor for Education introduced the report and observed that the education outcomes were not because teachers were not putting in the effort but were rather indicative of the effect the COVID-19 pandemic has had on the progress of children's education.

The Director of SEND and Education also urged the Commission to be mindful of the fact that the report was largely a place performance, for which the local authority had minimal control.

The Programme Manager (Business Change) for SEND and Education proceeded to present the report. Key points highlighted included:

- The report compared how education outcomes have changed between 2019 and the post-pandemic period.
- The report showed the performance of about 56,100 children in Leicester's publicly funded primary, secondary, and Special schools, across different groupings, including heritage, gender, eligibility for school meals, English as a first or additional language.
- There had been a significant reduction in the roles and responsibilities of local authorities in the direct management of schools. However, they continued to have responsibilities for school improvement.
- Asian Children, English as Additional Language (EAL) children and children with free school meals in Leicester did better than their national peers in the early years' foundation stage. Comparatively, children of mixed heritage, white heritage, and those receiving SEN support performed significantly worse.
- School readiness was influenced by factors that included parents not reading to children at home and a lack of parental and community support.
- Children in Leicester who were eligible for Free School Meals performed better than their peers nationally at all key stages. This underscored the effect of deprivation on education outcomes.
- Children who started at a lower point, such as those with an EHCP, tended not to catch up in outcomes compared to their national peers.
- Areas where Leicester closed the gap and recorded performance improvements compared to previous years were spotlighted.
- Attention was drawn to the performance of children at the key stages 1, 2, and 4 and it was shown that Leicester had not made the recovery from the pandemic as quickly as nationally.
- Next steps were also discussed as stated in the report.

The Commission was invited to ask questions and make comments. Key points included:

- In response to a proposal for cross-referencing between groups locally, it was stated that the report focused on areas that had been previously agreed upon. However, further work could be done on the report to draw out specific data as required.
- On why children of white heritage are underperforming as stated in the report, it was explained that lots of factors are responsible and ultimately, there will be children from different demographics doing well, and some not doing well.

- On what could be done to improve the ready-for-school index, it was proposed that the same be viewed in a wider context i.e., the children's ability to exercise a level of independence as opposed to focusing on the ability to read and write only. It was suggested that some sort of campaign may help disseminate this information to parents, nurseries, and preschools.
- On whether there was a projected timeline for bringing education performance to the pre-pandemic level, it was explained that the variability of factors and subjectivity of experiences make it difficult to predict a firm timeline. It was however noted that schools had improvement plans in place. It was suggested that a previous report which highlighted high-performing schools and what they were doing right can be revisited.
- On what could be done to support children in the classes preceding GSCE (i.e., Years 9 and 10), it was stated that schools were making efforts to mitigate the impact of COVID-19 on GSCE performance. However, there was a likelihood that the impact could be throughout the educational career of a child.
- On whether there was a national plan for tackling the challenges identified in the report, it was noted that whilst there was not currently one in place, there was a likelihood that a plan could emerge in a few years.

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.
- 3) To further review of the data presented for other areas of focus, locally, particularly on the impact of deprivation on the performance of children of white heritage.
- 4) To invite the Regional Director from DfEA to give a presentation on what the Trusts are doing.
- 5) To monitor the emergence of a national plan.

81. CHILDREN SEEKING SAFETY

The Head of Corporate Parenting submitted a report to provide an overview of children seeking safety (CSS) who come to Leicester as Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and gave a presentation using the slides attached with the agenda.

The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety introduced the report noting that the report needed to be considered as part of the broader issue of new arrivals into the city. She further stressed that it was important to consider children and young people seeking safety who were seeking support from organisations other than the local authority.

Key points included:

- The report focussed on CSS that the Local Authority were responsible for. This did not include those arriving with their families. There were 38 Children Looked After (CLA) who were CSS from abroad in the context of approximately 600 CLA. Additionally, there were 64 care leavers from abroad who had previously been CLA but were now being supported by the Local Authority as care leavers. This was in the context of approximately 300 care leavers in total.
- These children were vulnerable by definition and had come to the authority through a range of routes. The three main routes through which CSS came to the Council were:
 - 1) The National Transfer Scheme (NTS)– this was based on a formula of 0.1% of the overall child population of the city. This was the most-used route and the Council did not have control over the rate of transfer. The rate of CSS coming into the city varied each month.
 - 2) CSS who came unaccompanied and had been placed in hotels designated by the Home Office. Within this group there may have been people who came as adults and subsequently presented as children. This raised the wider issue of age verification which was a complex and costly process.
 - 3) Spontaneous arrivals. These were a small number and may have arrived from other parts of the UK or neighbouring local authorities.
- There was seasonal fluctuation in the number of arrivals. This was in part to do with certain migrant routes being preferable during the summer.
- In terms of age profile, CSS were predominantly older adolescents aged 16-17. Care leavers were eligible for support up to the age of 25. Most were male with only one female CLA from abroad seeking safety.
- The Local Authority had responsibility for CSS as corporate parents. A comprehensive package of support was offered in accordance with a pledge to all CLA and care leavers.
- In terms of nationality, most CSS were from countries in conflict zones such as Afghanistan, Iran, Syria, Iraq and Sudan. In terms of heritage, many were of Kurdish origin.
- Numbers coming through the National Transfer Scheme could be larger as the city was not yet near to its designated upper limit. This was important to note in terms of resource implications and future planning.
- Other authorities placed CSS into Leicester. This diminished the ability of the Council to place their CLA and CSS as close as possible to the city.
- Leicester had a reputation as a City of Sanctuary which attracted these young people seeking safety.
- The Council were responsible for accommodation for these young people. A small number were in foster care, a very small number were living in children's homes and many were in supported living. There were pressures over access to suitable and timely accommodation.

- The Council were part of regional arrangements for CSS from Abroad.
- In terms of age assessments, when arrivals presented as adults and then as children, there was a comprehensive process of age verification. The responsibility for this lay with the Council. This process involved two social workers with independent social workers and translators and as such was resource intensive. There were currently eight people going through the process.
- There were a number of young people awaiting decisions from the Home Office on their legal status and right to remain at any given time. In this period, they could be very vulnerable as they did not have recourse to public funds and decisions could take several years.

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

- In terms of funding from the Home Office, the Council received £143 per night per child up until the age of 18.
- There was no duty for other Local Authorities to notify the Council when CSS were placed or move to Leicester. As such the Council relied on collaborative working. Many of the number came from the nearest Local Authorities, but the full numbers were not known. There were many more CSS and care leavers in the city than those the council was responsible for.
- A care leaver had made a film for people arriving in the city which highlighted the communities in Leicester.
- Financial implications were a live discussion. In terms of forecasts on current numbers, the full NTS quota had not been reached and as such numbers could potentially double. Additionally, CSS were supported by the voluntary sector as well as by the Council. Therefore, there was not an accurate figure, but there was discussion about how to prepare for forward projection.
- In terms of a joined-up approach, work was being undertaken with Housing regarding pressures in housing in terms of demand. This was processed through Children's services joint working with Housing. Within this work there was additional support for children and young people from abroad. In addition to this, there was a very strong virtual school team who worked with children from abroad as well as the Council's advice and guidance services.
- The progression and attainment of children from abroad was tracked through education.
- Arts and sports in the city were worked with, including Leicester City FC as softer elements of support to help young people feel settled and integrated.
- It was noted that Leicester were early voluntary adopters of the National Transfer Scheme within the East Midlands, and this was to the council's credit.

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.
- 3) That the Commission be kept updated of any developments.

82. POST 16 SEND HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education gave a verbal update of the current situation regarding post 16 SEND home to school transport.

Key points included:

- The new policy was due to be implemented from the start of the next academic year.
- Following legal advice, the Council had agreed to re-consult on policy, however, it was necessary to get formal permission from the executive for this.
- It was aimed to re-consult in September. This had been postponed due to the General Election. The new consultation would go out widely to parents of post-16 SEND children and the wider SEND cohort. The outcome could be subject to scrutiny.
- There had been no change to the budget situation and there was no money to fund post-16 SEND home-to-school transport.
- The Deputy City Mayor for Social Care, Health and Community Safety had agreed to talk to parents about the consultation process and some early plans on how to do this.
- Changes to the policy could be made based on the findings.

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

- Consultations needed permission from the executive and could not start until after the General Election.
- It was recognised that families were more likely to engage in term time.
- It was up to the participants if they responded or not. The Council could only drive awareness of the consultation.
- The consultation was about understanding the impact of the policy.
- Legal advice was still being taken as to the date of the new policy, but there was a legal duty to publish it by the end of May.
- Whilst the policy was not necessarily a desirable one, there was a need to balance budgets. Difficult decisions needed to be made.
- Campaigners had been communicated with and they were glad the Council was re-consulting.

- There was a need for caution. When a decision was made the Council had a duty to enact it. However, as a Council it was important to listen to legal advice and look again. To different sets of legal advice had been received.
- The consultation could be shared with members of the commission prior to going out.
- There was sympathy for those affected by the policy, but there was a responsibility to explain the position of the Council.
- A fuller report could come to a future meeting of the Commission.

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.
- 3) A fuller report could come to a future meeting of the Commission.

83. 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 the following be considered by the Commission:

- Further information about roles in CYPE.
- Early Years Entitlement and Wrap-around system.
- Improvement Plan for SEND System.
- Annual Quality Assurance Report.
- Children's Social Care Assessment.
- Regional DfE Officer to report.

The work programme was noted.

84. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 20:01.

