



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 18 JUNE 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Batool (Chair)
Councillor Bonham (Vice-Chair)

In Attendance:
Councillor Gregg
Councillor Moore
Councillor Singh Sangha

Joycelin Eze-Okubuiro – Parent Governor Representative (Primary)

Also Present:
Sarah Sampson-Vincent – Youth Representative
Councillor Pantling – Assistant City Mayor for Education
Jennifer Day – Teaching Union
* * * * *

149. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair led on introductions and welcomed those present to the meeting.

150. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

Councillor Moore declared that she is the Chair of the Advisory Board at Millgate School and a Member of the Alderman Richard Newtons Charity Trust.

151. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

1. That the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission held on 8th April 2025 and 22nd May 2025 be confirmed as a correct record.

152. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2025/26

The Membership of the Children's Young People and Education Scrutiny were noted.

153. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE COMMISSION 2025/26

The Chair clarified that the agenda had stated that the following meeting would be 19th August 2025. This meeting had been re-scheduled to 23rd September 2025.

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

18 June 2025
23 September 2025
28 October 2025
20 January 2026
3 March 2026
14 April 2026

154. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference

155. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded members that their role in scrutiny was to be transparent, to challenge, and to hold officers to account, while remaining respectful.

156. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Dr Nizamuddin Patel asked:

1. Ofsted's latest report for children's services states LCC 'requires improvement' in every area. Whereas our neighbouring council Leicestershire County Council has received 'outstanding' in all areas bar one. Is your department planning on working with the county to share good practices to improve LCC children's services?
2. Ofsted have stated that the overall effectiveness of the department has declined since its last inspection in 2021. It also notes that there is not enough challenge from managers or that they 'were not sufficiently sighted on issues'. Have senior leaders considered 'open door' policy for any level of their staff to speak with them openly?
3. Further to this, will senior leaders consider emailing/contacting parents and other professionals involved with children's social service on a regular basis with a simple feedback form/questionnaire to gauge an understanding of how well the service is currently operating and if there can be any

improvements to the service?

4. There is a national shortage of skilled social workers. I understand council has plans of international recruitment. However, what perks or additional benefits do LCC give domestic social workers which will entice them to continue working with LCC?

5. From exit interviews with social workers leaving LCC, what are the 3 most common reasons of them leaving? Can this be mitigated?

The Director of Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention gave the following responses:

1. Officers were involved in several regional groups across the LLR (Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland) area that shared good practice and support improvement.
2. Senior leaders held a number of staff engagement events throughout the year to share information with staff about key developments and which provided opportunities for staff to give feedback. Senior leaders also attended team meetings, undertook practice observations as part of our twice-yearly practice weeks and had an open door policy for staff to raise any issues.
3. Parents whose children had an allocated social worker have the opportunity to provide feedback at a range of points in the support that was provided to them, for example child protection conferences, core groups, Looked After Children reviews. Professionals were also able to provide feedback at a range of key meetings and there was a well-established professionals escalation process to raise any concerns about social work practice or decision making. As part of our quality assurance activity monthly case audits took place on a selection of cases, and this included contacting parents to seek their views on the support their family had received.
4. Leicester City Council is not alone in seeking to recruit qualified social workers from overseas to address continuing recruitment challenges for experienced social workers, numerous councils across the country are doing so.

All council staff were provided with an employee benefits offer as detailed in the attached document:



LCC - Benefits
Booklet - External (2).t

5. January 2024 to June 2025
 1. Retirement
 2. Career development – as with most hierarchical organisations, as levels of seniority increased the number of roles reduced, so at times some staff were ready to progress but there were not vacancies, as Leicester had been very successful at recruiting and retaining staff in management positions at all levels. There were currently no agency staff at Team Manager, Service Manager or Head of Service level and only had one Team Manager vacancy.
 3. Career change

157. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

158. INTRODUCTION TO CYPE SCRUTINY COMMISSION

The Assistant City Mayor for Education introduced the item welcoming old and new members. She noted it was good to relook at where the commission was and what officers bring to the commission.

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education welcomed members and stated that it was good to see the work within each department and a break down across the Children, Young People and Education portfolio. He advised that he was the Joint Strategic Director for Social Care and Education with the ability to think across line supports, to maximise support across the areas.

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, it was noted that there had been a lot of changes to early years entitlement for families, as well as around breakfast clubs. Work was being overseen in relation to wrap around childcare, including before and after school care, with both capital and revenue funding used to support its development. A wide range of work was undertaken across all areas relating to children accessing education from early years to school and college. Efforts were focused on ensuring there were enough places available, that they could be accessed by those who needed them, and that the best possible support was provided within those settings.

The Director of Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention outlined the seven service areas under Children's Social Care and Early help 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:

- It was queried how many of the 600 staff were funded through the High Needs Block, and what percentage of the block was used to fund the body, noting that not all were funded from it. Further information was to be circulated.
- Questions were raised about which team would be responsible for supporting schools that do not have SEND support in place, particularly if a school were to decline a large number of placements due to insufficient SEND provision. It was confirmed that Heads of Service would follow up in such cases.
- Clarification was sought on why adventure playgrounds had been discontinued and commissioned.
- Adventure playgrounds had never been formally commissioned or part of the delivered services but had instead received grant funding in previous years. The last year of funding from the Local Authority had now passed, and a working group had been established, with a decision taken back in February.
- A question was raised as to why there were fewer looked after children compared to children supported by children in need teams. It was noted that there were more children on child protection plans than in looked after care.
- Concerns were expressed that only having one multidisciplinary team within Children and Families Services could reduce efficiency, particularly when dealing with children's behaviours and placement moves.
- It was highlighted that feedback from foster carers informed the level of support needed, and that in-house foster carers were provided with support, while private providers were expected to fund that support themselves.
- A question was asked about whether a report existed evaluating the efficiency of the Family Service. Officers agreed to locate the relevant minutes and report from a previous meeting where the service had been discussed and circulate.
- The structure of the service was acknowledged as being very in-depth, with recognition given to the day-to-day work of dedicated practitioners who were committed to the children they supported.
- Clarification was sought on how the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) functioned outside of regular hours. The EDT handled emergency calls, often from police or hospitals, checking records and attending as necessary. Examples included cases where a young person was arrested and could not return home, or when emergency services found an injured child. The EDT would coordinate next steps to safeguard the

child and ensure smooth handover to daytime teams.

- It was noted that the EDT was run by separate staff, who did not always have the same access to training and development. However, their varied shift patterns enabled a better quality of response and stronger support mechanisms.

AGREED:

1. That the presentation be noted.
2. That the minutes from the previous meeting on Efficiency of the Family Service be circulated.

159. FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education submitted a report to the Commission to outline the vision for the development of services in Leicester in response to the governments reforms to children's social care known as the Families First programme.

The Assistant City Mayor for Children and Young People introduced the item as an exciting and ground-breaking piece of work that aimed to break down barriers through strong partnership working in communities. Emphasis was placed on the importance of helping families stay together, stay safe, and remain supported within the family unit.

The Strategic Director presented the report. It was noted that:

- The work had originated from a government initiative and aligned with Leicester's priorities.
- A previous review of children's social care had not resulted in significant change, but the current government had embraced the "Stable Homes Built on Love" report and introduced a new programme called Families First.
- The aim of the programme was to intervene as early as possible to reduce the number of children going into care.
- The approach aimed to keep children at home with their families, which would free up foster placements and allow more funding to be directed toward intensive family and community support.
- Six locally based Family Help Teams were being developed, building on existing early help services and the children's centre network.
- It was noted that social workers often lacked knowledge of local areas. The new model proposed merging child in need and care home functions into the six local teams to improve coordination.
- There were no reductions in multi-use centres, and a single front door remained in place for referrals from professionals or concerned individuals.
- Family Help Practitioners would lead more multi-agency work, involving partners such as local policing, youth services, education, housing, schools, public health nursing, GPs, and therapy services.

- Families would be encouraged to create their own social care plans, with support from the teams. The aim was to empower families to take greater responsibility for their futures, with practitioners there to help deliver those plans.
- It was acknowledged that some families had trust issues with council-branded services. The programme intended to increase the role of the VCSE sector, especially in cases of chronic neglect and long-term support.
- In cases where abuse or complex safeguarding issues were present, experienced social workers and health and safeguarding specialists would step in and lead on child protection and court proceedings.
- Health practitioners would work alongside the family help teams to provide support and allow continuity of care.
- The programme placed emphasis on avoiding temporary settings for looked-after children and aimed to deliver better value for money by placing more Leicester children within the city.
- Continued support would be provided to families even after children entered care, including working with parents and the wider family network.
- Leicester currently had seven children's homes, with plans underway for an eighth. The city had received government grants to support this and was recognised for effectively managing homes on a larger scale.
- These homes were not used for the most complex children, who were instead supported locally to ensure proper care.
- Longer-term plans included forming a partnership with a non-profit provider to expand city-based services and reduce reliance on high-cost independent placements.
- The new staffing model and commissioning approach had already been signed off.
- The programme was not a cost-reduction exercise, and it included £2.5 million of additional government investment this year.
- A recent spending review confirmed continued funding, including the expansion of therapy services.
- It was noted that previous austerity programmes had used change as a cover for cuts, but this was not the case with Families First.
- Community-focused commissioning would go out to tender for areas such as drug and alcohol support, domestic violence, and other areas of VCSE led work.
- The staffing model had been finalised, with the aim of having teams in place by April 2026, ahead of the April 2027 deadline.
- Child protection teams would take longer to establish, and work was ongoing with senior health managers, public health teams, and housing partners to develop integrated pathways.
- The six local networks would continue to evolve, having been co-produced with families and children in local areas to ensure they reflected local needs.

In discussions with Members, the following was noted:

- Questions were raised about how engagement would be widened

across agencies such as GPs and schools, and how the model would be publicised.

- Officers confirmed they had begun engagement, including conversations with headteachers and public health colleagues. A senior change manager and police representative had also been appointed.
- Members supported the approach, describing it as positive and a step towards building trust following the pandemic.
- Queries were raised about whether hubs based in libraries and community centres could help ensure local provision was maintained.
- Officers responded that there were no plans to close hubs, apart from one site that was not fit for purpose. The aim was to use buildings more effectively and explore co-location of services.
- It was suggested that more support should be available at front-desk level in council buildings to help people navigate services.
- Members reflected on the importance of supporting a wider range of family structures beyond the traditional nuclear family and involving local organisations in decision-making processes.
- Questions were asked about whether new staff would be recruited or if existing staff would be redeployed, and when the success of the programme would be assessed.
- Clarification was sought on why fostering was mentioned in the context of keeping children with families.
- Officers explained the village approach, emphasising the value of extended family, neighbours and community in supporting families. They also noted that while some children would still require care, efforts were focused on creating better outcomes and value for money.
- Members noted that the programme felt like a much-needed shift after years of reduced funding and uncertainty.
- Communications around previous changes had caused confusion, and members requested that the presentation be shared more widely.
- Concerns were raised about recent closures of youth centres and how this aligned with the new strategy.
- Officers acknowledged variation across the city and recognised the need for targeted engagement with communities to understand gaps in provision.
- A note of caution was raised regarding the scale of transformation required. It was emphasised that the quality of leadership, staff engagement, and multi-agency collaboration would be key to success.
- Officers acknowledged previous challenges with similar initiatives but stressed that this programme was informed by successful past practice, government backing, and lessons learned.
- It was noted that while some previous attempts failed due to lack of resources or poor structure, there was now greater clarity about roles and delivery.
- Officers recognised that there would be challenges, trial and error, and some mistakes along the way, but maintained that the drive to succeed remained strong and that measurable success might not be seen for 2–3 years.
- It was raised how equality, diversity and inclusion would be embedded in

the programme. The model had been co-produced with communities and designed to reflect the unique needs of each local area. Ongoing responsiveness and listening would be crucial.

- Concerns were raised about the high costs of external care placements and how the programme aimed to reduce these through better local provision.
- Officers reported a 9% reduction in looked-after children since 2023, saving approximately £3 million annually. Local provision had significantly reduced weekly placement costs while delivering improved outcomes for children.

AGREED:

1. That the report is noted.
2. That regular updates on the progress of the Family First Programme would come to the commission.

160. SOCIAL CARE AND EDUCATION PERFORMANCE DASHBOARD

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education submitted a report to update the Commission of the Social Care and Education Performance Dashboard that was being produced.

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education presented the report. It was noted that:

- From April 2025, the Social Care and Education department began producing a new quarterly performance dashboard, which included key data on performance, volumes, and finance across children's services, education, and adult social care.
- The dashboard was produced approximately two months after the end of each quarter and was presented to the Lead Member and the City Mayor's Education, Health and Care Board (EHCB).
- It was proposed that a version of the dashboard would be provided to members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission and the Adult Social Care Commission following its presentation at the EHCB. This allowed Scrutiny Commission members the opportunity to scrutinise performance and use the information to generate future work plan items for deeper exploration of areas of interest.
- The dashboard was initially produced in Excel, with plans to move it onto a webpage that would allow users to view trend information, comparisons, and data across different areas in graph form. It included specific content relating to Adult Social Care, as well as data that could help identify placement patterns for children, although a sanitised version was required for official publication due to sensitivities.
- The dashboard contained a much wider range of data and was expected to support the generation of future items for the forward plan, while also reporting on financial data. It was acknowledged that some members

might need support in navigating the information, so efforts would be made to ensure it was as accessible as possible. The aim was to focus on both successes and challenges, helping to strengthen the role of scrutiny.

In discussions with Members, the following was noted:

- It was noted that the dashboard had previously been in place for many years and was seen as a valuable tool, providing regular feedback that supported scrutiny in carrying out their role.
- A question was raised about what mechanisms were being put in place to ensure the dashboard's sustainability and prevent it from being discontinued.
- It was acknowledged that changes in the political cycle could impact such initiatives, but reassurances were given that the dashboard had now been embedded into how data was gathered and used.
- While the format would likely evolve over time, this was expected to be a positive development, with continued focus on transparency and creating a culture of data-informed decision making.
- The aim was to produce the dashboard quarterly, with publication approximately two months after the end of each quarter.
- It was hoped that the dashboard would soon be made available via a website, improving accessibility.
- The next meeting was expected to include a full year's worth of data from the previous year, including information on the most expensive placements, although it might instead cover either the final quarter of the previous year or the first quarter of the current year.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

161. CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE, EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Director for Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention submitted a report to provide the Commission with an update on the Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan. Members of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission were recommended to note the action plan and the progress made to date in delivering the required improvements.

The Assistant City Mayor for Education introduced the item, noting that it was something the Commission had been awaiting. The Children's Social Care and Early Help Improvement Plan had been set out and was now underway. It was hoped that officers would be able to provide assurance on the direction of travel and the progress being made in delivering the plan.

The Director for Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention presented the item, it was noted that:

A report was provided to update on the previously shared development plan. The plan was structured around every Ofsted grading outcome, with specific areas for improvement identified by officers.

Five key areas were highlighted for improvement:

- Accuracy
- Quality and impact of supervision
- Timeliness and robustness
- Quality of care
- Support for care leavers and those in unregistered children's homes

It was noted that some care leavers were reluctant to ask for help. A more detailed summary of improvement activity and its impact was included on page 49 of the agenda pack. The first three areas listed above had been rated amber, both for progress and impact.

The remaining two areas had been addressed more quickly due to the more defined nature of the tasks involved. These were rated green for progress, and amber or green for impact.

Additional detail was provided on page 51 of the report, which included specific feedback from inspectors explaining why each area had been identified for improvement. This informed the development of a more detailed action plan.

- Significant progress had been made across several areas.
- Some actions had not yet started due to the planned sequencing of tasks.
- A skills development plan was being created for both individual staff and the wider workforce.
- Specific training was being developed to cover both health and social care roles simultaneously.
- Some of this work was delayed until later in the month, partly due to the need to incorporate new guidance.
- The work extended beyond one service area and would form part of a wider organisational approach.

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

- A connection was noted between the performance dashboard and the improvement plan information, with comments made on the importance of communication between the two tools.
- Pride was expressed regarding the improvement indicators within the plan.
- It was observed that the format resembled earlier versions of the dashboard, and a request was made to receive that format again.
- Officers confirmed the intention to bring the item back on a regular basis for continued monitoring.
- Clarification was sought on point 18 of the report, specifically regarding the review of visiting frequency and whether new guidelines were in

place. It was confirmed that actions had been taken to improve oversight for unregistered children's home provision, including the introduction of weekly visits.

- A question was raised about the reference in section 2.11 to early identification of carers through networking, and who those carers were. It was explained that this referred to identifying individuals within a child's wider family or social network who could potentially care for the child, as an alternative to entering care.
- Concerns were noted that in some cases, these conversations with families were not happening early enough. In some situations, parents might acknowledge they could no longer care for the child, yet still not accept the concerns held by professionals.
- It was emphasised that during care proceedings, officers were expected to have explored all possible support avenues with the family first, including offering practical and financial help to avoid the child coming into care.
- A comment was made on the importance of incorporating the real-life experiences of care leavers, especially those in custody or at risk of homelessness, and ensuring their voices were reflected in improvement actions.
- Officers confirmed that all care leavers were assigned a care advisor and had a support or pathway plan in place. However, it was acknowledged that engagement could be difficult, particularly with those in custody.
- Additional challenges were highlighted due to prison rules, such as the need for care leavers aged 18+ to give explicit consent for communication, which could be refused. This created barriers in maintaining contact and providing consistent support.
- It was reiterated that, as legal adults, care leavers could not be forced to accept support, even where services were available and offered.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. The improvements be an agenda item at the next meeting in September.
3. Quarterly updates be added to the work programme.

162. 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.

163. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Concerns were raised regarding the accuracy of the previous meeting's minutes, particularly in relation to the discussion around the recent call-in, which had been constructive and amicable. Members discussed growing concerns over individual assessments for Post-16 SEND school transport

assistance. A number of emails had been received from distressed parents who felt recent decisions were unfair and potentially unsafe. Specific examples were shared involving students at Millgate School, where transport had been withdrawn despite alternative provisions being named in their EHCPs. In some cases, school staff had been required to transport pupils themselves.

It was noted that these issues seemed to stem from decisions being made without a full understanding of individual needs or full communication down the line. Members highlighted that many affected families lacked the capacity or knowledge to challenge decisions, and there was a strong desire to avoid situations escalating into legal challenges. There was a call to review the current assessment processes and clarify which transport provisions would be funded.

Officers responded with an apology and acknowledgement of errors, including administrative mistakes where incorrect letters had been sent to families. A review had been undertaken that day, with senior officers manually rechecking each case. It was confirmed that ten families would receive transport and a further eight were being followed up for additional information. All affected parents were to receive a new letter and apology by the following day, and a new team had been tasked with handling cases moving forward.

Questions were raised about how applications were being processed, how the system could be audited, and how to ensure families were properly supported. It was suggested that school subcontracting of alternative provision needed policy review, particularly around whether associated transport costs were being fairly included. Technical issues with the application platform were also flagged. Finally, members stressed the need for clear communication with parents, including signposting to support services such as SENDIASS and other council teams who could assist families through the process

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 8.20pm.