



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 23 SEPTEMBER 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool - Chair
Councillor Bonham – Vice Chair
Councillor Singh Sangha
Councillor Gregg

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164. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Sophie Maltby.

165. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chair asked members to declare any interests in proceedings for which there were none.

166. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes from the meeting held on 18th June 2025 were included in the agenda pack and asked Members to confirm whether they were an accurate record.

AGREED:

- It was agreed that the minutes for the meeting on 18th June 2025 were a correct record.

167. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- The Chair announced that the agenda items would be rearranged to support a young person attending the meeting.

168. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

It was noted that none had been received.

169. PETITIONS

It was noted that none had been received.

170. CHILDREN'S SERVICES FINANCES

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education introduced the report which updated the Commission on the financial position for Education and Children's Services as at the end of the first quarter up to 30th June 2025.

The Head of Finance presented the report. It was noted that:

- A high-level summary of the Education and Children's Social Care budget was provided within the report. The total budget was £119.3m, with a forecast of £116.3m and an underspend of £3m as at the end of June. Of this, £0.8m related to reduced growth and demand for SEND transport, and £2.1m related to vacancies across the directorate. This represented 2.6% of the budget, which is a small percentage. It was explained that while the forecast would be monitored as accurately as possible, the 2.6% underspend may not necessarily continue for the full year.
- Capital forecast information was outlined in the report. Capital schemes were progressing and there were no plans to overspend or underspend on these schemes. It was noted that June was early in the year to judge projects, and one project was currently rated purple while awaiting further developments. The timing of work was dependent on school availability and operational windows.
- Monitoring of savings was discussed, with two savings reported on track.
 - Adventure playgrounds had delivered a saving of £400,000 in the current year, with a further £1m saving scheduled for the following year, which had already been built into the Council's budget strategy.
 - SEND transport was on track to deliver a saving of £900,000, rising to £2.1m in two years.
- Examples of cost mitigation measures were shared. These included investment in in-house residential homes, with two opened in the last two years. This avoided placing children in external placements, generating an annual saving of around £400,000. Work to reunify children in care with their families had also produced an annual saving of £1.3m. The authority was among the first nationally to pilot this approach and expected to expand it further.
- Dedicated School Grants (DSG) balances were reported with a deficit of £22.2m in 2024/25, projected to rise to £43.1m the following year. A special 'override' is in place until March 2028. The authority is awaiting a government decision on how DSG deficits would be addressed. This was a challenge shared by most local authorities. Efforts were being made to manage the impact through a recovery and transformation plan. The council had discussed our position and proposed actions with the Department for Education.
- A transformation plan was in development to reduce the DSG deficit. It was acknowledged that while it would be unrealistic to expect the deficit to shrink significantly, the aim was to stem the growth of the deficit going forward.

In response to members comments, the following was noted:

- Questions were raised on early years provision, noting there had been no spend yet on two-year-olds and asking what spending plans were in place.
- Officers explained that work was required across nurseries to increase capacity to support two-year-olds, though access remained constrained by the academic year and school holidays. The plan was to utilise the full allocation to enable provision across the city.
- Further queries were made regarding the removal of the adventure playground budget, with members asking whether this would shift following the Overview Task Group and whether the money could be reallocated back into adventure playgrounds.
- It was confirmed that the adventure playground funding had been fully removed from the budget. Any recommendation to reinstate funding would need to be agreed by the Executive, with £1m of savings required from elsewhere.
- Members commented on the scale of the DSG deficit, noting that while Leicester's position was challenging, it was not as high as some authorities. It was confirmed that the Government was expected to publish papers next month on the SEND system and the rising national deficit. Local work continued through the SEND Change Programme, including piloting more inclusive mainstream school approaches.
- It was suggested that the DSG recovery and transformation plan may need to return to scrutiny at a future meeting for further consideration.
- Members highlighted the importance of inclusive practice in schools to support children staying in mainstream settings where possible, with appropriate structures and support in place.
- Questions were raised about how many young people were being educated this year compared to last, and how many were subject to child protection plans
- Officers reported that there were around 120 children subject to protection plans, a figure similar to the previous year. There were approximately 609 looked after children, representing an increase of about 100, and around 450 children in need. Demand for early help had increased, driven by pressures such as housing and the cost of living.
- Members welcomed the budget monitoring work and observed that there was no significant overspending.
- Officers explained that education costs were forecast with complexity, and it was suggested that school place planning be invited to scrutiny in early 2026 to inform members. Questions were raised about additional bulge classes in the south of the city, with reassurance given that numbers should even out over time.
- Members asked what risks might skew the financial position. Officers explained that most spending related to staffing and children's social care. While looked after numbers had remained relatively static, circumstances could quickly change, for example through new arrivals under the national transfer scheme, potentially creating costs of up to £1m.
- Members asked whether the Home Office reimbursed the Council for supporting children seeking safety. It was explained that funding was received, but often did not cover full costs. Specialist skills were required to conduct age assessments, and delays in the process sometimes created additional pressures. Once young people turned 18, the Council became their corporate parent, with only reduced central government funding available. Members expressed concern about whether all eligible funding was being claimed.
- A complaint had been received from families regarding SEND transport.

Officers reported that post-16 applications were processed within three working days, and that this year there was an £800k underspend reinvested into school-age SEND transport. Savings were attributed to the competitive procurement of taxi journeys. Members noted that school-age transport was statutory, whereas post-16 provision was not.

- Concerns were raised about the upcoming white paper and how DSG deficits would be dealt with, noting that authorities might be allowed to overspend without it being carried as council debt, possibly to be repaid over multiple years.
- Members asked about the risks if savings were not delivered. Officers explained that growth in spending continued to rise, and while actions were being taken to mitigate this, further funding would still be required in future years. Savings initiatives included reducing the number of children in care through prevention work, building capacity in mainstream schools, and reinvesting underspends on staffing to strengthen family support.
- Updates were provided on the edge-of-care pilot, which had supported 7 young people, 6 of whom had been successfully reunified with families, achieving annual savings of £1.3m. Investment in a new prevention grant was also expected to reduce demand and produce further cost savings.
- Members asked what key financial risks should be kept under review in future quarters. Officers noted that while the current position showed a small underspend of 2.6%, risks included changes in the needs of children, recruitment challenges and higher agency costs, and rising placement costs.
- Questions were raised about the condition of Pindar Nursery. It was confirmed that the nursery was still functioning but required refurbishment, with estates colleagues to be asked for a clearer timeline. Members praised the quality of provision and the dedication of staff and welcomed the decision to move renovations forward.

AGREED:

1. The report was noted.
2. The DSG / High Needs Recovery Programme would be added to the work programme.
3. School planning would be added to the work programme.
4. Looked after children seeking safety would be added to the work programme

171. YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN

The Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help introduced the report which gave a summary of the five-year Youth Justice Plan for 2025-30.

It was noted that a statutory Youth Justice Plan must be maintained, reviewed annually, and its summary shared with political leadership. Following this, the review was then submitted to the Youth Justice Board.

The Head of Service for Early Help gave an overview of the report. Key points to note were as follows:

- A new approach was being taken after reflecting on previous plans.
- There was now a five-year plan with an annual refresh.
- The board had met to identify priorities over the next 5 years, and the operational priorities for the next year.
- The Youth Justice board continued to have oversight.
- The plan set out the functions, governance and operational aspects of the Youth Justice Service.
- The recent HMIP inspection and the subsequent eight recommendations were also covered by the plan.
- Improvements were in line with the best needs of the young people and victims.
- The plan detailed risks expected over the next twelve months and the ensuing five-year period.
- Ten Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) were outlined in the plan. The three top KPIs measured:
 - First time entrants
 - Reoffending rates
 - Custody and remand numbers
- The plan incorporated innovation and best practice.
- HMIP had commended the work with SEND children and young people. SEND panel referrals supported a holistic approach.
- There was an overrepresentation of children with Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) within the Youth Justice system.
- There was continued investment in the Reach programme, working with those at risk of exclusion, which was a marker for exploitation and future criminal activity. Ten Youth Workers within ten secondary schools provided support to reduce these risks.
- Community cohesion policing work had taken place to support the communities.
- Following a key HMIP report recommendation, a victim working group had been established with a focus on victims and their voice.
- Members were asked to consider and note the achievements over the past year and consider and agree both the strategic and tactical operational priorities over the next five years. Any new priorities would be addressed as they arose.

In response to questions and comments, it was noted that:

- The HMIP inspection outcome was less favourable than anticipated, prompting the following measures:
 - The development of an improvement plan which was presented to the inspectorate.
 - The establishment of working groups.
- The board scrutinised as a partnership and progress updates would come.
- The inspection scheme was new and involved different criteria which had brought fresh insights.
- Scrutiny would come via the management board, HMIP, and also through the Youth Justice Board.
- The board had been strengthened with a new director, having key experience in victim work.
- A quality and performance subgroup to the board was in the pipeline.

- A disproportionality working group scrutinised the data and monitored every child open to the service, and those going through custody. The HMIP report had commended work on disproportionality and diversity.
- The Lundy model of participation, had been adopted and young people were encouraged to shape the service, including with holiday planning and staff recruitment. Children created their own plans with staff, shaped reparation programmes and helped to write and deliver programmes.
- Members noted the strength of the team, but felt statistics were still concerning, in particular the numbers of first-time entrants, reoffenders and custody all being above the national average. Further scrutiny was welcomed.
- The Head of Service for Early Help noted that since the HMIP inspection, numbers of first-time entrants had been significantly reduced and were now in line with the regional average.
- Members were encouraged to take part in the working groups.
- It was noted that Leicester is a deprived area, so mitigating support was necessary to prevent crime.
- It was suggested that a piece of work mapping the city youth provision would be best managed by The Children's Trust.
- Members suggested future partnership with universities to further understanding of youth crime.
- The workforce in place remained stable with experienced staff, coaching and support was in place. An Operational leadership change was noted.

AGREED:

1. That the report is noted.
2. That the executive liaises with The Children's Trust regarding mapping out city youth provision.

172. EDGE OF CARE STRATEGY 2025 - 2027

The Director of Children's Social Care and Education submitted a report on the Edge of Care Strategy which set out the understanding of Leicester's current needs.

The Head of Service for Early Help, Targeted Service and The Service Manager for Family Therapies gave a presentation on the Edge of Care strategy, which referred to children at risk of needing to be looked after. It was explained that this involved factors such as parental relationships, behaviour, income and pressures on the family unit that could affect safety and stability. The strategy also considered children already in care who might be supported to return home safely. It was noted that:

- Most local authorities had an Edge of Care strategy, as this was both one of the most expensive and one of the most challenging areas of provision. Previously, there had been numerous carers available to meet children's needs, but demand on the system now meant there were often only one or two places available. Focus was therefore on making local family connections, including extended family, and strengthening

in-house residential care to support families to keep children within their wider networks. This approach had been relatively successful and demonstrated excellent practice.

- Leicester's service was regarded as exceptional and unparalleled in many parts of the UK. It had developed over twelve years from humble beginnings to a comprehensive local offer, supporting children to stay with their families where possible. This was seen as a distinctive and valuable feature compared with other parts of the country.
- There was no single definition of "edge of care," but it was described as those children whose needs could be met through family-based services and therapeutic support, particularly for those of secondary school age. Issues leading to referrals often related to parental behaviours, over-representation of alcohol use, and undiagnosed conditions such as PTSD or personality disorders.
- The "Safe Steps Home" programme was presented as a key element of the approach. The model had been designed with children and families and included support for young babies and pre-births, recognising that early intervention could prevent children from entering long-term care.
- During the last financial year, the programme worked with around 734 children across approximately 300 families. Of these, 199 children were supported to remain safely at home without ongoing service involvement. It was estimated that without intervention, those children would have entered care. The programme delivered savings three times higher than originally projected by finance, with an estimated £7m saved for the authority. Outcomes were monitored at 6, 12, 18 months and 5 years, with data showing the plans were sustainable and effective over the long term.
- The programme ensured that when children did need to come into care, services could be focused on those most in need. Leicester's decade of experience in this area was highlighted as a source of pride.
- Looking ahead, the next steps included strengthening communication packages and ensuring that support was maintained beyond the initial intensive period, so families continued to develop and apply skills once children returned home.
- It was acknowledged that this was challenging work, but strong evidence from the pilot demonstrated very positive results. Decision-making was now focused on expanding the offer, balancing financial responsibility with the moral imperative to support children and families effectively.

In response to comments raised by Members, the following was noted:

- Members welcomed the strategy and highlighted that keeping children safely at home was the ideal outcome. Questions were raised about how many families were rejected or unable to proceed through assessment.
- Officers explained that only a very small number of families were not eligible, usually where there were high risks such as active abuse, psychosis or sexual harm, which made the intervention unsafe or unsustainable. Some families also chose not to engage. In these cases, safeguarding action would still be taken, and alternative support or placements considered.

- It was acknowledged that despite the success of edge of care services, some children would inevitably still need to come into care when risks were too high. Capacity within the service was also a limiting factor.
- Questions were asked about national averages for carer strike rates, with officers reporting that Leicester remained above the national figure.
- Clarification was sought on how outcomes were measured against Ofsted frameworks. It was explained that inspection findings broadly mirrored the service's own assessments, though there could be inconsistency in how practitioners recorded information.
- Members asked how the service could reduce reliance on very high-cost placements. Officers confirmed that placements were regularly reviewed, with a focus on whether expensive out of area placements were appropriate, or whether children could be safely supported to return home. This work was also linked to therapeutic services and other preventative programmes.
- It was raised about how outcomes were tracked beyond the 12 to 18 months guidelines. Officers explained that cases were reviewed on a weekly basis and that data mining was used to check long-term outcomes, including whether families had been re-referred into the system. While families were not supported indefinitely, evidence showed that many interventions sustained over time, with tracking extended up to five years to demonstrate long-term impact.
- Members heard that a funding bid had been submitted to test what additional evidence-based programmes could work in Leicester, taking into account the city's diversity and demographics. Scrutiny would be updated on the outcomes of this work
- Concerns were raised about how long children remained in contact with services after interventions ended, and whether there was a statutory duty to continue to check their wellbeing. Officers clarified that if a child remained at home, responsibility lay with the family unless a professional raised new concerns.
- Questions were asked about the speed of assessments, with members noting the recommended 10-day timeframe. Officers confirmed that most cases met this target, though engagement with families could create delays. A new policy had been introduced to ensure that where families did not sign consent within two weeks, the case would be escalated to legal and social work teams.
- Members asked how the service ensured equity for children from diverse backgrounds. Officers explained that teams were representative of Leicester's population, with many bilingual staff and access to translators, and services were adapted to reflect different cultural needs.
- It was acknowledged that some families were suspicious of social services. Officers explained that systemic practice involved engaging the family's wider support network, building trust, and ensuring families understood the role of practitioners. This approach had proven successful in securing lasting support beyond the service's

direct involvement.

Agreed:

The strategy was noted, with members expressing the hope that future updates would continue to demonstrate positive outcomes.

173. SEND TRANSPORT UPDATE

The Assistant City Mayor for Children and Young People introduced the item, expressing thanks to the team for their efforts, and their focus on engaging with individual families.

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education gave a verbal update on the current position for SEND school transport. Key points to note were as follows:

- There had been some initial challenges which had been addressed.
- Forecasting had indicated that up to 455 post-16 SEND young people would require assistance during the current academic year. Around 100 of which were transitioning from year 12 to 13, where a policy exemption resulted in a continued offer of school transport assistance.
- Of the applications received to date, 65 had been agreed, 36 were accepted for Personal Transport Budget (PTB) and 11 had been rejected.
- More than half had not applied, follow up work would ensue to understand reasoning.
- There had been a very small number of appeals, most dealt with a stage 1 and 3 pending stage 2 appeal.
- There had not been any legal challenges, either individually or to policy.
- Delays had been experienced in gaining essential information from families and there had been a person-centred approach around this.
- Applications were dealt with swiftly.
- Next year, the deadline for application submission was likely to come earlier to alleviate pressures and allow for efficient processing.

In response to questions and comments it was noted that:

- Members felt that the low numbers of appeals reflected success in taking an individual approach.
- Members expressed concern about the numbers who had not applied for assistance. An exercise was to take place with Connexions to identify support requirements.
- Work was ongoing with internal auditors to understand journey costs in relation to PTBs.
- Families had the option to choose how best to utilise a PTB.
- Parental suggestions had been taken onboard regarding payment scheduling.
- Significant work had taken place to ensure that schools and SENDIASS were able to support families in their applications.
- Work has commenced with schools including Millgate School, support and collaboration plans will form part of the January update.

AGREED:

That the report is noted.

174. WORK PROGRAMME

The Chair reminded Members that should there be any items they wish to be considered for the work programme then to share these with their and the senior governance officer.

175. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no further business, the meeting closed at 7.55pm.