



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: TUESDAY, 28 OCTOBER 2025 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T :

Councillor Batool (Chair)
Councillor Bonham (Vice Chair)
Councillor Orton

Assistant City Mayor- Children and Young People, Councillor Pantling

Standing Invitees (Non-Voting)

Jennifer Day / Nic Plumtree – Teaching Union
Janet Mckenna – Trade Union

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176. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

It was noted that apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gregg, Moore, Singh Sangha and Westley.

177. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

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

There were no declarations of interest.

178. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The Chair highlighted that the minutes from the meeting held on 23rd September 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 23rd September 2025 were a correct record.

179. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair advised the Commission that the order of the Work Programme had been adjusted to allow for the High Needs Block Task Group completion. This item would now come to the January meeting. The Children's Centres and Performance Dashboard would also be heard at a later date.

180. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

181. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

182. VERBAL OFSTED UPDATE/ CHILDREN'S SOCIAL CARE, EARLY HELP AND PREVENTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education gave a verbal update on the current position of the Ofsted and Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention Improvement Plan. Key points to note were as follows:

- The report was awaiting publishing.
- Future delivery would be shaped by a combination of the recommendations.
- Implementation was on schedule, and timely delivery was key.
- Further development was required in terms of measuring impact.

The Director of Children's Social Work and Early Help summarised the structuring of the report and noted that the vast majority of actions were completed, or on an amber rag rating. One action was marked red, but this was on track for completion.

The Chair welcomed questions and comments from the Commission, and it was noted that:

- The logistics were being coordinated.
- The area of Performance Management was of particular focus, surrounding timeliness, quality and escalation methods.
- A focus would be maintained on reviewing the mechanisms in place when outcomes were not delivered.
- In terms of Pathway Plans, it had been noted that Unregulated Places had remained well below the 5% threshold. Leicester benchmarked well against other Local Authorities.
- In response to the Ofsted findings, seven providers were reviewed to identify examples of best practice, and Islington was selected due to facing similar challenges. A three-month engagement had focused on:
 - Care Leaver Pathways

- Safety Planning
 - Individual coaching from staff, balanced with high challenge
 - Working with leaders from a global majority background
- A joint protocol with the Housing Sector was in place, covering grants, rent support, and assistance for vulnerable individuals. Following Ofsted feedback, protocols had been reviewed and benchmarked. Further consideration was needed across the wider Council, beyond Children's Services.
- Directors sat on the Corporate Responsibility board.
- A Foundations Grant had been secured to develop impact and practice.
- Progress against the action plan was measured on quality feedback, youth engagement and partnerships.
- Governance was managed via the Impact Board.
- An interim Ofsted visit was expected within next 6 months and an annual conversation had taken place.
- There was an annual focussed visit.
- Reports would continue to come to scrutiny every six months.
- A letter would come to the January Scrutiny meeting.

AGREED:

That the report be noted.

183. CHILDREN SEEKING SAFETY

The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help submitted a report and gave a presentation to update the Commission on the Families First Partnership which aims to transform Children's Social Care by promoting early coordinated and family centred support.

Key points to note were as follows:

- Developments were driven by a national mandate.
- A merger with Social Work services, excluding Child Protection was in place.
- A range of staff would be in place under a lead worker, with Social Worker involvement as required.
- Meetings had taken place with Turning Point to support embedding staff.
- Community Groups and Volunteers added support value.
- There was an emphasis on developing family enablement and support networks.
- Police partnerships were in place and had been reviewed.
- The programme had been running for six months and a three-month pilot had concluded.
- The pilot had informed objectives, and it was noted that the service would evolve over time with a holistic approach to supporting the whole family.
- Staff were in place at children's centres and family hubs for the upcoming launch.

- The Family Help Model had been adopted with co-location.
- New pathways would be tested out with a focus on assessment thresholds.
- A staff skills audit had taken place and learning plans had been developed, together with administration and support structuring.
- The programme would span two years:
 - Year one would implement the Family Help Model.
 - Year two would focus on Multi-agency team integration, incorporating the Health and Police teams.
- Ongoing discussions were taking place with path leaders Luton Borough Council with a view to gathering delivery insights.
- The goal was to reduce the numbers of Child Protection Plans and numbers of young people coming into care.
- Disability services were currently standalone but could be integrated.
- It was noted that the changes were welcomed within the wards and that Leicester was ahead when compared to other Local Authorities.
- Five workshops would be hosted with community groups and partners, schools had expressed a notable interest.
- Phase two would consider longer term support.
- An update would come to the Scrutiny Commission in March 2026.

WIn response to questions and comments, the following was noted:

- Delivery would be contained to Family Hubs and would not detract from the Youth Centres. Children's Trust Arrangements would map youth provision and consideration would be given by the Children's Board.
- Local Police secondments had taken place and the Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust formed part of the transformation team.
- Resourcing and Housing remained challenging.
- Monthly meetings would ensue with directors for feedback and real-time learning.
- Reforms had been piloted in Lincolnshire, The Wirral and Wolverhampton.
- Help resources included The Department for Education Regional Team and the online knowledge hub.
- Support was in place with Impower.
- Central government set the timelines, with implementation targeted for March 2026. Scheduling was currently on track.
- The Commission welcomed the Multi-Agency approach but noted it could have been more central to the transformation.
- Long-term projects included changes to the case management system and interfacing with partners.
- Engagement with the Young People's Council would help to shape provision preferences for young people.
- Informal Kinship Arrangements formed a key component of the model.
- There would be a consortium approach for cluster areas and organisations providing support.
- For matters of persistent neglect, it was noted that families were more prepared to work with local community groups.
- A significant investment would be directed towards procurement.

- A member briefing pack would be issued to the Commission.

Agreed:

1. That the report be noted.
2. For a Pilot update to be brought to the Commission in March.

184. FAMILIES FIRST PROGRAMME

185. EARLY YEARS EXTENDED ENTITLEMENT

The Director of Send and Education gave a presentation on the development of early years provision over recent years, outlining the series of national changes and local expansion taking place within the sector. It was noted that:

- It was explained that childcare and wraparound provision were being implemented gradually, with learning continuing as the system became embedded.
- The early years sector was described as being largely run by the voluntary, community and private sectors, with the Council having a statutory duty to ensure sufficient childcare places. The market was noted to be highly changeable and affected by national trends, recruitment challenges and the cost-of-living crisis, which had significantly influenced how providers operated.
- Leicester had been fortunate to retain strong nursery provision within schools, and a new government programme on school-based nurseries was highlighted as an effective use of capital to expand places. However, it was recognised that term-time provision did not fully meet the needs of working families who required year-round childcare.
- The importance of early access to education in improving life chances was emphasised, alongside the need to maintain sufficient places for vulnerable children and those with special educational needs and disabilities. While the demand for places had grown, the city's capacity had also expanded.
- A Department for Education capital grant of just over half a million pounds had been secured to support this expansion, enabling around three hundred thousand pounds of new provision to be created across five or six settings. The target was to create four hundred additional places, with approximately eighty per cent of that already achieved.
- The main challenges identified were funding levels, which had not increased in line with inflation, and ongoing national workforce shortages. It was expected that the government's Best Start in Life policy would review funding arrangements in the coming years.
- Officers advised that support, training and sufficiency monitoring continued to be provided to help settings overcome challenges and maintain market stability.
- The quality of provision and the sustainability of providers were also key priorities, with officers working closely with Ofsted and offering training to ensure that provision remained of a high standard.
- Recruitment pressures across the sector were discussed, with particular

difficulty in securing skilled and experienced staff and ensuring sufficient special educational needs capacity. The city continued to run a SENCO training course for early years staff, and the ongoing work of the specialist early years team was recognised as vital to sustaining quality provision.

In discussions with members, the following was noted:

Members compared the development of the sector to academisation and asked how the balance was being managed between maintained and private providers, particularly given financial pressures. It was explained that this balance had always existed and continued to evolve. The Council had supported private providers to remodel in response to market pressures and had encouraged schools to admit younger children to fill the gap for disadvantaged families eligible for the fifteen-hour offer.

It was noted that demand for places for children under two had increased and required significant financial investment to expand capacity.

Members queried how working parents were being made aware of new funding opportunities for under-twos. Officers confirmed that the rebranding of the Best Start for Life and Family Hubs programmes included a new eligibility checker and information hub for parents. Work was ongoing with communications teams and partner organisations to ensure parents were informed early about what they were entitled to.

Members suggested that information could also be shared through councillor social media channels to help promote awareness locally. Officers welcomed the suggestion and agreed that regular promotion was essential.

Members supported the idea of a local campaign and proposed using libraries and the annual council tax mail-out to distribute information. Officers noted that eligibility criteria were set nationally and that both parents in a working household needed to be employed for at least sixteen hours per week, with an income threshold of up to one hundred thousand pounds per person annually.

The information on the offer was already available on both local and national websites, although further local communication would be explored.

Members asked how equality and quality of provision were measured across the city. Officers explained that all providers were required to be Ofsted-registered and subject to the same inspection framework as schools. Only providers meeting the required standards were eligible for funding, and any with inadequate inspection outcomes could have funding frozen until improvements were made. Officers added that support would be provided to affected families to identify alternative provision if needed.

AGREED:

1. That the commission note the report.
2. That a further update on early years provision be added to the Commission's work programme for six months' time.

186. 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.

187. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other business, the meeting closed at 7.47pm.