



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 17 JUNE 2026 at 5:30 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Batool – Chair
Councillor Bonham – Vice-Chair

Councillor Gregg

Councillor Waddington

Also Present

Councillor Pantling – Assistant City Mayor
Joycelin Eze-Okubuiro – Parent Governor Representative (Primary)
Sylvia McNeill – National Education Union
Swetha Subaskaran – Young People's Council Representative

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225. WELCOME AND APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

Apologies were received from Cllr Cole and Cllr Dr Moore.

226. 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.

227. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

That the minutes of the meeting of the Children, Young People and Education Scrutiny Commission held on 14th April 2026 be confirmed as a correct record.

228. MEMBERSHIP OF THE COMMISSION 2026/27

It was noted that Cllr Gopal would be taking the place of Cllr Joshi for the municipal year.

The Membership of the Commission was confirmed as follows:

Councillor Misbah Batool - Chair
Councillor Stephen Bonham – Vice-Chair
Councillor George Cole
Councillor Lynn Moore
Councillor Sue Waddington
Councillor Charleigh Barnes
Councillor Jaientilal Gopal
Councillor Mick Gregg

Co-opted member - Joycelin Eze-Okubuiro Parent Governor Representative Primary Schools.

229. DATES OF MEETINGS FOR THE COMMISSION 2026/27

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

17 June 2026
8 September 2026
27 October 2026
27 January 2027
9 March 2027

230. TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Commission noted the Scrutiny Terms of Reference.

231. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chair reminded those present that scrutiny was a place of challenge, but with respect.

The Chair also noted that since papers had been sent to members ahead of the meeting, more focus could be given to discussion and questions.

232. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

233. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that none had been received.

234. INTRODUCTION TO CYPE

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 breakdown 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 Strategic Director also covered the area for the Director of Children's Social Care, Early Help and Prevention. There were seven service areas under Children's Social Care and Early help as set out in the slides attached to the agenda. He outlined the Vision for Children and Families:

- Building strong future ready systems
- Delivering creative forward thinking solutions
- Empowering people through connection and care
- Driving high standards and meaningful outcomes

He gave a snapshot of the Children across the city, with data up to 15th May 2026:

- Children in the City – 91,000
- Children receiving early help - 892
- Children "In Need" (all) – 2305
- Children on a Child Protection Plan – 446
- Children "Looked After" – 630
- Care leavers aged under 21 - 444
- Care leavers aged 21-25 – 234

Changes had been made to expand the Senior Management Team and provide proper oversight of capacity. The number of service managers supporting care leavers had increased, providing greater management oversight and helping to raise standards

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.

The service covered a broad range of statutory responsibilities relating to education and special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), including

access to education from birth to 25 years of age for children and young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). It was noted that the service was operating within a period of significant national reform, with changes across education, social care and the NHS all having a direct impact on local provision. It was noted that these changes represented the most significant transformation within the sector for a generation

The Director advised that education settings were responsible for much more than educating children and young people. Key responsibilities included school admissions, ensuring sufficient nursery, school and post 16 places, school organisation and expansion, governance arrangements, attendance and education welfare, support for children requiring additional assistance, and a range of licensing and regulatory functions.

A key focus of the service was ensuring children and young people could access the right support at the right time, whilst also preparing them for adulthood and supporting successful transitions into adult services. Close working arrangements were in place with Adult Social Care, particularly for young people with EHCPs where statutory responsibilities could continue until the age of 25.

The service was responsible for home to school transport and related transport services, ensuring children and young people were able to access education settings safely and appropriately.

The division covered a wide range of complex statutory functions and was supported by a senior management structure consisting of 6 direct reports and a further 2 members of the senior management team.

In discussion with Members and Young People Representatives, the following was noted:

- In response to a question, members were advised that the figures relating to children in the city covered those aged 0 to 18 years, reflecting the legal definition of a child.
- Members requested clarification on some of the acronyms used within the presentation. It was explained that IRUs referred to Independent Reviewing Units and that the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) had responsibility for managing concerns relating to volunteers or professionals working with children. Officers advised that they would seek to avoid the use of abbreviations where possible.
- In response to a question regarding how the figures compared with other local authorities, members heard that comparative data was generally published annually around September. It was noted that the figures were not considered unusual and that comparisons with authorities of a similar size and level of deprivation would provide a more meaningful

comparison than neighbouring authorities.

AGREED:

- 1) That the Commission note the report.
- 2) Definitions of the age groups used and acronyms within the presentation to be circulated to members.

235. EXECUTIVE RESPONSE TO CYPE SCRUTINY COMMISSION TASK GROUP RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE SEND HIGH NEEDS BLOCK

The Assistant City Mayor for Children and Young People presented the Executive Response to the CYPE Scrutiny Commission Task Group Recommendations on the SEND High Needs Block.

The Assistant City Mayor thanked the group for the work done and thanked the Chair for presenting the recommendations to the executive. The following points were made:

- The Executive were already working towards the recommendations made.
- The SEND Reform plan was now complete and a draft had gone to the Department for Education (DfE).
- The DfE had given advice around finance, and noted that it was important to get things right in order to mitigate risk.
- The Executive would take a last look before bringing the full plan to the DfE. It was hoped that the 90% reduction in deficit would be acknowledged.
- The consultation was extensive and had been presented to the Secondary Head Teachers Conference.

The Director for SEND and Education added that she was pleased with the feedback from the DfE and she was hopeful that the plan would be well-received. However, it would not be known if it had been accepted until the end of August.

In response to a query on Tribunal costs, it was noted that these costs could be considered privately. It was further noted that the Tribunal rate was one of the lowest in the region, which showed that change was being implemented and children and families were being worked with.

AGREED

- 1) That the response be noted.
- 2) That comments made by members of this commission to be taken into account by the lead officers.

236. PRESENTATION: POST-INSPECTION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

The Director of Children's Social Care and Early Help submitted a report to the Commission to deliver a presentation on the post-inspection improvement plan, progress made and priorities for the next 12 months for Children's Social Care following a full Ofsted inspection in September 2024 and an Ofsted Focused Visit reviewing services and support for Care Leavers in March 2026.

The Strategic Director for Social Care and Education introduced and presented the report on the Post Inspection Improvement Plan following the Ofsted inspection of Children's Services in October 2024. The following was noted:

- Children's Services had been assessed as "Requires Improvement". The previous inspection in 2021 had resulted in a judgement of "Good", however services had changed significantly since the pandemic and a detailed analysis of the inspection findings had been undertaken.
- Officers acknowledged the areas identified for improvement and advised that an extensive improvement plan was in place to strengthen service delivery, increase capacity, improve oversight and provide greater quality assurance across services.
- Governance arrangements had been established to oversee delivery of the improvement plan, including a dedicated board which met every 6 weeks to monitor progress.
- External support had been provided through the Department for Education, including support from the London Borough of Islington. Whilst this support had been beneficial, officers advised that progress was not moving at the pace they would ideally wish to achieve.
- It was reported that the authority was now in a significantly stronger position to deliver the required improvements, with the necessary resources, leadership and organisational culture in place.
- Workforce recruitment and retention remained a key area of focus, particularly within social work where recruitment of experienced staff continued to be challenging nationally.
- To address workforce pressures, the authority had recruited experienced social workers from overseas, including South Africa, Zimbabwe and Botswana. The first cohort had joined at the end of 2023 and all remained in post, with some progressing to senior social worker roles.
- A further cohort of approximately 20 social workers had joined during the current year, resulting in the service becoming fully staffed for social worker posts for the first time.
- Some overseas recruits had previously managed caseloads of up to 120 children before joining the authority, compared to significantly lower caseloads within the UK system.

In discussion with Members and Young People Representatives, the following was noted:

- In response to questions regarding the findings of the inspection, the key focus of the improvement programme was moving away from a culture of compliance and ensuring social workers had the time and capacity to undertake meaningful work with children and families.
- High caseloads had previously limited opportunities for relationship based practice and that the service was seeking to create greater capacity for social workers to focus on direct work and achieving positive outcomes for children. Officers advised that culture change would be driven through stronger relational practice, accountability and a focus on doing the right thing for children rather than simply completing paperwork
- Changes were being made to support more community based working, including increased use of Family Hubs and local networks. This would enable social workers to spend more time working directly with children and families and strengthen local relationships and support networks.
- It was noted that developments in artificial intelligence could help reduce the administrative burden on social workers by supporting recording processes and enabling more time to be spent working directly with children and families.
- In response to a request for additional performance information, officers advised that detailed data was monitored at a strategic and operational level and that quarterly performance reports could be shared with scrutiny members.
- Members discussed support for care leavers and heard that a focused Ofsted visit had taken place earlier in the year. Following feedback from the visit, work was underway to develop a standalone Care Leavers Strategy, which would provide greater clarity regarding priorities and future ambitions for the service. It was anticipated that the strategy would be available by the autumn.
- The number of care leavers aged over 21 was increasing and that work was ongoing to ensure appropriate staffing capacity, expertise and proactive support arrangements were in place. Consideration was also being given to the development of accessible community provision where care leavers could access support, advice and practical assistance.
- Members welcomed the proposals to strengthen community-based practice and develop a dedicated strategy for care leavers.
- In response to questions regarding external challenge and assurance, officers advised that focused Ofsted visits and peer challenge arrangements with other local authorities provided opportunities for

independent review and learning. Members heard that future peer challenge activity would include work relating to children affected by domestic violence and how services support non-abusive parents and carers. Independent external input would be sought where appropriate to support service improvement and continuous learning.

- Members suggested that links with universities and community organisations may provide further opportunities to support work relating to domestic abuse, substance misuse and mental health.

AGREED:

- 1) A future report on the development of the Care Leavers Strategy and related improvement work be brought back to the Commission.
- 2) That the Commission note the report.

237. PRIORITIES AND PERFORMANCE AMBITIONS Q4 25/26

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted a report and presentation providing an update on performance in social care and education and information on monitoring and improving quality.

Key points other than those included on the slides (which were taken as read) included:

- At the end of the previous municipal year it had been agreed that there would be a new framework to report on priorities for the department to ensure that things got done.
- This was a strategic framework for performance ambitions, and it was aimed to be more transparent.
- Updates would be brought six-weeks following the end of each Quarter.
- Obstacles were acknowledged with regard to the ILACS improvement plan.
- With regard to performance ambitions, it was aimed to look at the direction of travel and how the Council compared nationally, regionally and to other Local Authorities in terms of family benchmarks.
- It was aimed to look at actions that could change trajectory.

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

- With regard to points raised about the increasing figures for children in care in the city, it was explained that a large part of this was due to the pace of the courts as there had been issues surrounding the availability of Judge time and the availability of information that Judges wanted.

Over time, care proceedings would have more children in the care system. It was further noted that there were a large number of under-1s in the adoption system, by the system had been elongated. There had also been volatility in Leicester as there had often been many children from the same family going into care at the same time. Work had been done through Family Help reforms which should see numbers coming down and a slight reduction should be seen this quarter. The whole system was under pressure and there were wider societal factors around poverty and deprivation.

- In terms of support for those in financial difficulty, it was suggested that there was lots that could potentially be done, however, significant change was needed. There were particular factors around work and financial management in the long term for the crisis resilience fund. It was acknowledged that there were high levels of deprivation in the city, and that intelligence around what was happening could help officers understand what needed to be done differently. There was a pathway to cultural change in terms of crisis and resilience.
- In response to queries about the functions of LiquidLogic, it was explained that it was a recording system and database to record families worked with. It was being reviewed in terms of making it more user friendly so Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools could make it easier to record data. This had the potential to free-up social workers in terms of workload. Confidentiality aspects would need to be overcome, and it was necessary to think about how technology could help in terms of accurate recording and accountability. Other authorities were already using LiquidLogic. Microsoft Copilot had also been introduced, and the process of data protection was being worked through. This would offer potential to allow social workers to do more work with people as they would not need to spend so much time working on administration. It was necessary to ensure that AI understood standards, and work would be checked in real time.
- In terms of audit, this would always be checked by humans. People were involved in quality assurance, and some pressures meant that there had not been enough manager time for case management. The number of team managers and service managers had been expanded, and it was hoped to grow capacity. AI could do a 'second-look' and moderation.
- Some agency staff were used, but mostly for the purpose of covering staff on maternity leave and long-term sickness.
- Numbers of Social Work managers, team leaders and heads of service had been increased.
- Overseas social workers could be brought to Scrutiny to gain their insights.
- Responding to a query on how the methodology had changed, it was explained that previously there had not been a consistent way of recording quality assurance, and because it had been so variable, it had been difficult to find patterns. A system was desired that could

aggregate findings. Pro-formas had been used that people could fill in which allowed for aggregation.

- Further information on the 'Four Pillars of Prevention' on the LBL roadmap could be provided.

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.

238. WORK PROGRAMME

Issues surrounding were raised surrounding illegal schools, young people not in employment, education or training (NEET) and on the effects of the recent social media ban for under-16s and the possibilities for alternative activities for young people. NEET young people could be discussed as part of a report on the Connexions service. These could be discussed at the next agenda-setting meeting.

The work programme was noted.

239. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

There being no other items of urgent business, the meeting closed at 19:04.