



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: THURSDAY, 25 JUNE 2020 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice Chair)

Councillor Pantling
Councillor Riyait

Councillor Rahman
Councillor Whittle

In Attendance:

Councillor Cutkelvin, Assistant City Mayor - Education and Housing
Councillor Russell, Deputy City Mayor - Social Care and Anti-Poverty

Also Present:

Gerry Hurst - Roman Catholic Diocese
Carolyn Lewis - Church of England Diocese
Janet McKenna - Unison
Mr Mohit Sharma - Parent Governor
Joseph Wyglendacz - Teaching Unions Representative

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70. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Hunter.

71. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no Declarations of Interest.

72. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED: That the Minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 27 February 2020 be confirmed as a correct record, subject to clarifying the wording concerning support to the anti-poverty strategy.

73. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Petitions had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

74. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

The Monitoring Officer reported that no Representations or Statements of case had been received, in accordance with Council procedures.

It was reported that a Question had been received out of time for formal submission to the meeting. The Chair used his discretion to allow the content of the question to be considered during the update on school safeguarding. Other issues arising from the Question had been referred to the appropriate authorities for any action.

75. IMPACT OF CORONAVIRUS ON LEICESTER'S CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SCHOOLS

The Strategic Director, Social Care and Education submitted a report, which provided a summary of the Council's response to the Coronavirus pandemic locally within the city in terms of children and young people, the way in which services have responded, and most importantly how the Council had supported children, young people and their families to date during the crisis.

It was noted that work was currently underway in relation to the actions needed as existing restrictions were eased and some of the emerging themes were highlighted. It was proposed that this would be the subject of a report once further work had been completed.

In considering the report Commission members joined the Chair in thanking the staff in the Directorate on their efforts in dealing with the Covid-19 pandemic to date.

The report provided detailed information on social care and education, including free school meals provision. It was noted that the report did not consider the specific financial impacts on the Directorate or the Council.

At this point, the Strategic Director, Social Care and Education gave a presentation to update the Commission with the most up to date position.

The presentation was divided in two separate sections, firstly dealing with the social care impacts, then moving to the educational impacts.

In considering the social care response the following key points were noted:

- Most services were broadly operating as normal
 - Safeguarding functions fully available
 - Supporting shielding & vulnerable groups
- PPE had been addressed
 - Guidance, specifications & supplier list
- Plans were in place for restoring services
 - Reopening of buildings being taken forward
 - Contact parental services
 - Increased direct contact by services with children & families
- Changes to services
 - Virtual contact had opened new opportunities
- Impact on improvement progress
 - Ofsted inspection not expected in the current calendar year.
 - Regional and national work continued, including the 'no wrong door' project in seen as an example of national best practice for partnership working.

The Commission was asked to comment, and issues were raised in relation to risks assessments, safeguarding, racist incidents and domestic violence. The stable numbers of cases that had been referred to social workers was noted, and it was confirmed that the severity and number of cases had not been significantly affected.

In response to questions, the support to foster carers and the participation with looked after children and care leavers was explained and welcomed. The effect of Covid on young people in residential settings and the work of the residential care staff and those involved in the virtual school was recognised.

In terms of racist incidents, it was noted that the numbers reported were low, and that the initial response as primarily dealt with by the Police and the ongoing partnership work and the role of the Council was clarified. The accelerated development work across the Council in relation to 'Black Lives Matter' was also noted.

The Deputy City Mayor, Social Care and Anti-Poverty, confirmed that these areas were regularly assessed as part of audit practices.

The additional pressure on staff arising from homeworking arrangements were also acknowledged and appreciated.

The Assistant City Mayor, Education and Housing commented on the importance of the safeguarding role during the period and reminded the Commission of the robust practices undertaken in schools.

In considering the education and schools part of the presentation, the following key points were noted:

- It was initially noted that the vast majority of schools had not closed and had remained open for vulnerable and other children. The planned process for the full return to schools as recently announced was described and it was noted that the final decision was with individual schools
- Risk assessment: site, movement, individuals
 - Dynamic process, based on latest guidance & local situation
 - Risk assessments shared with staff, unions and parents
 - Vulnerable staff, including BAME staff – individual risk assessment and can choose to work (all documented)
- Balancing different risks
 - Infection / health, social isolation, challenging home environments, lost learning opportunities
- Significant support given to Headteachers, Governing Bodies, Unions, staff

In terms of school practicalities, the following issues were outlined:

- Detailed plans developed
 - Staffing, use of space, cleaning, etc
- Class sizes halved ('bubbles'), with little social distancing within
 - Minimal mixing between bubbles
 - Staggered start & break times, separate toilet facilities, one-way systems
 - Avoid use of public transport
 - Imposes tight limits on numbers attending (space & staff)
 - Key workers & vulnerable children remain priority
- No need for PPE other than in very specific circumstances
- Whole 'bubble' isolates for 14 days if any member tests positive

In terms of the latest position it was confirmed that all schools were open and the data concerning attendance, including the impacts of extended opening initiatives was noted. It was reported that the guidance was awaited from DfE in terms of the further opening proposals in the Autumn. It was a concern that there would be little notice given before the end of the current term and it was expected that managing the situation would be challenging.

The data concerning reported cases in schools, impacts on early years settings, school closure statistics, and wider impacts on schools were also reported and noted. In concluding the presentation, the issues concerning the SEND impacts were reported.

The Assistant City Mayor, Education and Housing commented on the wider work undertaken with schools and welcomed the enhanced engagement and joint working arrangements due to the crisis. The increased work with Public Health partners and Union colleagues in a collaborative way was recognised and noted.

Joseph Wyglendacz (Teaching Unions Representative) referred to the work of staff in the Directorate and reiterated thanks for their efforts shown and collaboration with the Unions.

The Chair asked that thanks also be expressed to the staff involved in delivering the school meal service.

At this point, the effect of the pandemic and likely impact on the content of the 'underachievement' report being prepared separately was recognised. It was confirmed that the dialogue on Covid would be considered in conjunction with that Task Group report.

The Chair asked for clarification on the supply of laptops and the level of data provided. It was noted that the current need for 'live-learning' affected the data offer. In terms of the extent of contact with vulnerable young people, it was reported that some had child protection plans in place and continued to receive support at home. It was noted that additional vulnerable families and young people had been identified from the separate work undertaken in offering food parcels and deliveries during the period. It was also noted that schools had identified vulnerable children and information was shared allowing regular contact and support. The enhanced work undertaken in arranging risk assessments for vulnerable children was also reported and noted.

In conclusion, the Chair asked that an analysis of the gap in learning that was considered inevitable from the pandemic be measured and reported in due course.

The Deputy City Mayor, Social Care and Anti-Poverty and the Assistant City Mayor, Education and Housing, made comment on the wider work being undertaken across the Council on noting the positive changes to practices as a result of Covid.

76. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 6.30pm.