



Leicester
City Council

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

Held: WEDNESDAY, 13 JANUARY 2021 at 4:00 pm

P R E S E N T:

Councillor Dawood (Chair)
Councillor Cole (Vice Chair)

Councillor Pantling
Councillor Rahman

Councillor Riyait
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
Janet McKenna - Unison
Joseph Wyglendacz - Teaching Unions Representative

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98. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Carolyn Lewis.

99. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Cole declared an Other Disclosable Interest in the general business of the meeting that he had family members who worked within schools and a family member that worked within the Council.

In accordance with the Council's Code of Conduct, these interests were not considered so significant that they were likely to prejudice the Councillor's judgement of the public interests. Councillor Cole was not therefore required to withdraw from the meeting during consideration and discussion of the agenda items.

100. MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

AGREED:

that the minutes of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission meeting held on 30 November 2020 be confirmed as a correct record.

101. PETITIONS

The Monitoring Officer reported that no petitions had been received.

102. QUESTIONS, REPRESENTATIONS AND STATEMENTS OF CASE

Ruth Sinhal was present in the virtual meeting and asked the following to the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission:

- 1) With reference to Leicester City Council's strong position on equality and the recent Black Lives Matter movement, would the committee agree that there is a need to strengthen their approach and consider a role for the authority in encouraging schools to adopt the Anti-Racism Pledge (attached to the agenda at appendix B), which is supported by significant groups and individuals involved in racial justice work in our city?

Due to the absence of the Officer providing the response to the question, the following was decided to the questioner Ruth Sinhal:

- That the Assistant City Mayor for Education would further communicate with Ruth Sinhal outside of the meeting,
- To be invited back to the next meeting for a further discussion,
- That a written response be provided to the questioner and a verbal response be presented at the next CYPS Scrutiny Commission meeting.

103. DRAFT GENERAL FUND BUDGET 2021/22

The Director of Finance submitted a report setting out the City Mayor's proposed budget for 2021/22.

The Strategic Director of Social Care & Education and the Head of Finance noted the following in relation to the budget in general and the Children, Young People and Schools aspect of the budget:

- This year the budget was a one year stop gap budget, as it was unclear as to the ongoing impact of the pandemic in terms of future levels of expenditure and, on the economy generally.
- There had been minimal changes to the budget for 21/22 and no further information had been received from government regarding funding beyond this period.

- The proposed budget was in many respects a roll forward of this year's-based budget, taking into account some areas of pressure that had arisen as a consequence of the current year.

The presenting Officers further explained and responded to comments from Members of the Commission:

Placement Service

- It was noted that significant work was being done to address the substantial proportion of the budget which was allocated to placements for children who are looked after. For example, children in specialist placements noted to be quite expensive.
- In terms of placement costs, it was reported that there was sufficient head room in the budget to carry the service through to next year without additional growth. However, work was required to keep the costs under control.

Special Education Needs (SEN) service

- The majority of funding for Special Educational Needs (SEN) was drawn from the dedicated schools grant, however the bulk of the funding for the provision of transport to get Children and Young People to and from school came from the Council's General Fund Budget.
- Following a recent review, the results showed that Leicester had a larger proportion of SEN service users who receive Council funded transport compared to other authorities.
- Of those who were supported, a larger proportion were transported by taxi rather than an inhouse bus network. In addition, the average route cost for those services was generally higher than in other authorities.
- This was an area where there was significant pressure on the budget and therefore substantial work was being carried out to:
 - better understand where the service was in terms of the transport budget,
 - ensure that the service was getting value for money for its existing contracts,
 - ensure that the demand for those services was balanced. i.e. travel training and supporting families to transport the children themselves.
- It was further noted that this budget was offset by some savings which the Council had put in around the new framework taxi contracts and savings through expanding personal budgets, however there was still a £2.2m increase in the SEN transport home to school budget.
- The service noted the importance of securing the best outcomes for young people and of supporting young people to have the greatest ability to travel independently, which was a vital life skill for when they became adults.
- In order to address the growing number of education health and care plans, there was an increase in the Special Education service team of £400k. This was especially required since, the team had not received an increase in capacity for a number of years, despite ongoing growth in

demand, driven by legislation.

Connexions Service

- There was a planned Connexions Service review which was to take place this year however this had been paused due to the impact of the pandemic on the economy.
- Instead the fund was retained, and the service was being restructured to be more efficient.
- It was noted that, as a result of the pandemic, there had not yet been an increased demand in the Connexions service however, they now had better detail on what was happening with those existing service users who were not in education or employment.
- It was noted that there was likely to be some significant impact on youth and employment services in the next 12 months as a result of the pandemic.

Children Social Care and Early Help

- The Children's Social Care and Early Help budget had been controlled very tightly this year and was reported to be in a steady state.
- There was also additional funding that had been put in which allowed the Children's Services budget to be at the level it needed to be especially compared to other authorities.
- It was further confirmed that there had not been an overall increase in safeguarding demand for Social Care services during the course of the pandemic and details were provided on the support given to families during this time for instance the recent increase of domestic abuse incidents within households.
- Therefore, no significant increase or additional pressure was anticipated. The challenge would be to what extent the budget could be reduced going forward.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. That the Commission welcomes the position taken to retain the connexions service.
3. That a report on the SEN transport budget be brought back to a future meeting of the Children, Young People and Schools Scrutiny Commission.

104. JOINT SEND COMMISSIONING STRATEGY FOR ENGAGEMENT

The Director for Adult Social Care and Commissioning submitted the Joint SEND Commissioning Strategy which had been developed by the Joint Planning and Transformation group for LLR, consisting of officers from the CCG's and the 3 LA's for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

- The strategy was identified as an action for both Leicester city and Leicestershire areas following written statements of action (WSOA) that stated a need to further develop joint commissioning for SEND.

- There would be an online document that Members could access to look at the different areas and this would be updated as the information developed.
- The vision was to work across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The strategy picked out areas which would benefit from working together, for instance jointly funding a service.
- Following feedback from Members of this Commission, it would be looked at whether changes to any aspects within the strategy would be required and the team would start to work through what those suggestions would look like. It would then be taken through governance in March, published in April 2021 with an aim for the strategy to launch thereafter, providing no significant changes in direction were required.
- It would need to be ensured that the service support being provided was the best it could be and gave the best opportunities.

Members of the Commission discussed the SEND Commissioning Strategy and Officers responded to the queries, as below:

- This was currently a draft document however a variety of engagement and participation had taken place to ensure the right information had been included. In this regard, the strategy had been around to several forums, meetings, support groups and there had been a number of responses to the online consultation. There was a commitment to engage and co-produce every step of the way.
- In response to a query regarding the educational needs that children had before and after school. It was responded that the Transition Strategy, which was approved 18 months ago, looked at how to continue working with young people so that they could access services into adulthood.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission notes the report.
2. Get a report back on the results from the consultation
3. Ask the department to report a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPI) against which the department and members of the Commission can assess the priorities and performance of the SEND strategy.

105. LEICESTER SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN PARTNERSHIP BOARD (LSCPB) ANNUAL REPORT 2019/ 20

The Director of Social Care & Education submitted a report which set out the responsibilities of the Leicester Safeguarding Children Partnership Board (LSCPB) in relation to its functions and requirement to produce and publish an Annual Report. This report covered the period from September 2019 to June 2020.

The report was presented highlighting the following points:

- It was a requirement to publish a report at least once in every 12-month period and this was the first one as the Safeguarding Children's Partnership Board.
- The partnership was now a shared and equal duty for the three safeguarding partners; the Police, Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and the Local Authority, to safeguard and promote the welfare of children in Leicester.
- During the period of the report and in the first six months of the partnership being in place, two local children safeguarding practice reviews were commissioned and the national panel commissioned and published one national review.
- The national published report focussed on criminal exploitation and the learnings were picked up from the local criminal exploitation group.
- As a result of Covid-19, a media and communications campaign was implemented by the three partners, to inform the children and communities that the safeguarding services were still available and open. In addition to this, leaflet drops, and posters were also distributed.
- Furthermore, engagement took place with local young people and their input influenced the business planning and priorities for 2021, some of which included mental health & safeguarding, domestic abuse and the impact of children within the family.

Following Members comments the below responses were provided:

- The video/ short film which was welcomed by a Member of the Commission, was noted to be directed/ designed by a young person and had now achieved international acclaim. It was aspired to build on aspects like this.
- The national review which took place highlighted national concerns however Leicester City Council (LCC) already had a lot of things in place for local issues.
- The first LLR annual report would be produced for the end of year and this would give an indication of where things would be moving next.
- In order to avoid children 'slipping through the gap', the service delivered safeguarding to all schools and also did a year diagnostic to ensure it was implemented well. In addition, staff had multiagency training.
- From a safeguarding perspective the service was well resourced especially as the budget was shared with the Police and Partnership funding, therefore there were no current resource concerns.
- When the first lockdown took place due to the covid-19 pandemic, the referrals into the system declined significantly. The service then produced a marketing campaign to emphasise that the safeguarding system still existed and as a result, the referral numbers did go back up.
- The safeguarding service had been maintained throughout the pandemic, although the face to face activity had to decrease. The team were committed to engaging with young people and not reverting to electronic communication entirely.
- As a result of mental health concerns, there was a task and finish group working on this aspect. In addition, schools were being supported to

address mental health concerns.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission notes the report.
2. The Commission requests a report from the task and finish group focusing on mental health to be brought back to a future meeting.
3. The Commission recognises the good work of the partnership.

106. LEICESTER CITY COUNCIL PERMANENCE STRATEGY 2020-2023

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted a report to outline Leicester City Council's strategy to achieve permanence for our children and young people to ensure they have a safe place to live and thrive and that they achieve the best outcomes possible.

All to note:

- The permanence strategy was based on fundamental principles to do what was right for the children in Leicester City who came into social cares attention.
- The first principle was to work with families and children in need to support them staying together.
- The ways in which the Council provided long-term permanence options for children to live within family households was noted.

AGREED:

1. That the Commission welcome the report.

107. CHILDCARE SUFFICIENCY ASSESSMENT 2019 AND SUFFICIENCY UPDATE REPORT

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education submitted the Childcare Sufficiency Assessment 2019 and Sufficiency Update report. The following was noted:

- The report detailed a lot of analysis, data, risks and gaps of the available places for childcare in the city.
- The wards with a level of concern and deficit of childcare places were detailed.
- It was clear that the position was changing weekly and through the pandemic/ lockdowns various providers had to open and close, some of which closed permanently.
- There was a current challenge for the nursery setting position as these were usually small settings where staff were required to communicate with other staff and parents, all of which had implications of virus transmission. The report to follow, would show the challenges currently being faced.

Following comments from Members of the Commission, Officers provided the below responses:

- In relation to the support currently being offered to providers, it was noted that the amount of funding had been maximised, however one of the challenges was that providers boosted their income from the private sector, but due to changes in family circumstances during the pandemic i.e. parents being furloughed, working from home, loss of employment etc this had resulted in less nursery places being taken up. Some nurseries which were eligible were able to access the business support fund.
- In this regard the Commission Members were all in accordance to write to the Department for Education (DfE) and raise the concerns of this sector.
- It was further noted that the Council's role was to support sufficiency and details were provided on what help the Local Authority could provide. One aspect was that the Council had a small team that developed support and looked at gaps in the market i.e. outreach and working with communities and children's centres. In addition, the Council worked closely with all providers and monitored attendance as well as noting reported cases of Covid-19.
- Due to the current risk of Covid-19, provisions were generally losing money as some parents were no longer sending their children to these childcare services. Another challenge was staff could not be furloughed as they were permitted by government to be open.

AGREED:

1. That the report be noted.
2. The Commission would like to be updated in relation to any further challenges/ threats to the service.
3. That a letter be written, in consultation with the Assistant City Mayor for Education, to the Department of Education (DFE) to raise the concerns of the Commission.

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

The Strategic Director of Social Care and Education provided a verbal update in relation to the impact of the coronavirus on Leicester's children services and schools. The following was noted:

- During the pandemic children's social care and early help services continued with some adjustments including the implementation of virtual contact, feedback received reported that virtual contact worked better to some extent. In addition, contact between parents and children was ensured and facilitated.
- There were numerous lessons with how to deliver services for children of Leicester City and the division looked at different ways of how to meet the needs of children in this time.
- It was reported that Ofsted and the courts were satisfied with the level of contact that LCC provided and it was clear that Leicester were not on

the list of Local Authorities that Ofsted were concerned about. A letter confirming this detail would be provided by Ofsted in due course.

- As a result of the increase in infection nationally, the government decided to close the schools during the most recent lockdown, of which the division had very little warning about.
- In addition, there was a lot of confusion and tension with the guidance issued by the Department of Education.
- The following had to be sorted out very quickly; the provision of free school meals – whereby information was being revised on a daily basis, digital inclusion and availability of digital devices, cancellation of exams and further work for schools in relation to psychological issues and assessments.
- The sector was keeping updated with guidance on testing for staff/pupils, and where in priority school staff should be, for vaccinations.
- Leicester City Council would be interviewed as part of the Local Government Association (LGA) process regarding the impact of the virus.

Members of the Commission discussed the information presented, expressed their concerns and received responses, as follows:

- The eligibility of free school meal provisions was explained in more detail, these included: Food parcels – which the government advised was the first option and each parcel contained a week's worth of food, but however costed more than producing a meal onsite. The other option for free school meals which over 70% of eligible children had opted for, was the provision of vouchers which could be exchanged for food at local shops or supermarkets and would cover two weeks' worth of lunches for a child. To recognise the additional costs for providing these provisions, schools would be able to claim additional funding.

Some Members of the Commission had the following concerns:

- The government had reduced the threshold for free school meals, it was reported that some food parcels received had a few items such as bread with near or expired best before dates. The Assistant City Mayor for Education would feed this back to the relevant area.
- There were still over 4,700 children of key workers attending schools, during the lockdown and there were concerns that this would increase the transmission rate.
- The contrasts in home school learning and the disparities between school education provisions could have an impact on those children already struggling. It was responded that some of the challenges of this were access to devices, content, broadband, relevant space, home facilities amongst other factors.
- Many professionals such as school leaders and teachers were reported to have reached a breaking point and some of them felt they could not do their job as well as they would want to. There were concerns of long-term impact.

- Many vulnerable children may have become more vulnerable as a result of the current situation.
- Some Members of the Commission were of the view that the City could produce documentation to show the impact things were having, this would also support teachers and help prepare for future pandemics.
- Thanks, were expressed to the division, union and teachers who had worked continuously to deal with the situation as it emerged.

AGREED:

1. Officers to consider support or a piece of work to support headteachers and staff.
2. To capture all challenges being faced by schools.
3. In partnership with the Assistant/ Deputy Mayors and Officers, a letter be sent to the Department for Education with regards to proposed tests.
4. The Assistant City Mayor for Education to explore the process for supporting schools with digital devices via Ward Communities funds.

109. FUTURE WORK PROGRAMME

AGREED:

That the work programme be noted.

110. CLOSE OF MEETING

The meeting closed at 7:37pm.