

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 4 June 2024.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Frisby CC	Mr. R. Hills CC
Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC	Mr. M. Hunt CC
Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC	Mrs. S. Jordan CC

In attendance:

Mrs. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Family Services

1. Appointment of Chairman.

It was moved by Mr. R. Hills CC and seconded by Mr. M. Frisby CC that Mrs. H. Fryer CC be elected Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2025.

RESOLVED:

That Mrs. H. Fryer CC be appointed Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2025.

Mrs. H. Fryer CC – in the Chair

2. Appointment of Deputy Chairman.

Nominations for the position of Deputy Chairman were sought. Mr. R. Hills CC was nominated by Mrs. B. Seaton CC and seconded by Mr. M. Frisby CC.

RESOLVED:

That Mr. R. Hills CC be elected Deputy Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2025.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024.

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

The following question was received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5) and was put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Question asked by Mrs. S. Jordan CC:

“I understand that the County Council has a duty to secure sufficient high-quality childcare provision which supports parents back into work or study, which is one of the vital responsibilities of the Childrens and Family Services Department.

However, I understand that the law will be changing from September 2024, to extend the “free” childcare offered by the Government, to enable nine months to three-year-old children 15 hours of childcare, from September.

That is why, I am concerned as to whether the Department is going to be able to absorb this, as a recent House of Commons Library research commissioned by the Liberal Democrats has shown that since 2019 there has been a 407 fall in the number of childcare places in Leicestershire. What is the Council going to do to provide the extra spaces needed and will it be able to do this to meet the demand in September?”

Reply by the Chairman:

COVID-19 had an impact on the sustainability of Early Years provisions compounded by increasing costs for rent, pension contributions and the increase of national minimum wage alongside the rising cost of living for fuel and food over the last few months.

However, the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service has worked with the Private Voluntary and Independent Sector to secure sufficient childcare for the first phase of the expansion of childcare. The sector is agile in responding to the parental needs and are flexible in their delivery of their childcare offer. Following the model of three- and four-year-olds, from April 2024, working parents of two-year-olds can access 15 hours of free childcare. Children can receive their funded childcare place the term after their second birthday. Parents are required to check their eligibility through HMRC website every three months to receive a valid code. In the first term, 4167 codes were issued to Leicestershire parents. 90% have taken up a place in their nursery in the summer period.

The Service has been working with the sector to see what capacity there is to offer the expansion of childcare places. A focus group has been developed with the National Day Nursery Association (NDNA) and links made with Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (PACEY). Questionnaires have been sent to find out about childcare spaces and waiting lists, building space and opportunities for expansion, recruitment, and opening times.

Leicestershire has received a Childcare Expansion Capital Grant totalling £1,177,525 to support the expansion of childcare places. 80% for early childcare funded places and 20% for wraparound places.

To ascertain where this funding is most needed a further survey has been sent to localities where the Service has identified there is less sufficient childcare places. The funding available will then be prioritised for expansion in these areas.

Mrs. S. Jordan asked the following supplementary question:

“With regards to the surveys referenced by the Chairman, when are the responses to the surveys expected and what is going to happen following this?”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded that the surveys had since been received from providers and that these would support the Service in the mapping process, in order to identify those areas where there is likely to be insufficient childcare for children under two years old. Those areas which were identified as red and amber risk would be targeted for capital funding, providing they met the criteria. The application process was progressing through internal legal processes so that providers could apply in the late Autumn term.

6. To advise of any other items which the Chairman has decided to take as urgent elsewhere on the agenda.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. Declarations of interest in respect of items on the agenda.

The Chairman invited members who wished to do so to declare any interest in respect of items on the agenda for the meeting.

No declarations were made.

8. Declarations of the Party Whip in accordance with Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

There were no declarations of the party whip.

9. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 36.

10. Children in Care and Care Leavers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care and care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- i. In response to a question regarding whether there were opportunities for elected members to support the offer for children in care and care leavers, the Director stated that three Member Champions were in place who supported the work of lead officers and partners by championing particular areas of interest for Children in Care and Care Leavers. In addition, the Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services continued to act as a co-Chair on the Corporate Parenting Board. Members noted that the Service welcomed the views of all elected members on the support delivered to children in care and care leavers.
- ii. Since the conclusion of a national consultation of Children's Social Care, Stable Homes Built on Love, the Department had undertaken a review of the consultation outcome. The Service was pleased with the recommendations which had been set out in response to the consultation and had considered how these could be used to develop support for children in care and care leavers.

- iii. In response to concern regarding performance data relating to care leavers in employment, education or training, it was acknowledged that the percentage was lower than in other areas of performance. However, the Director assured members that performance in this area was higher than that reported by comparative authorities. The Service would continue to engage with care leavers and undertake work in order to improve the number of care leavers in employment, education or training. Members noted that it would not be possible for the Service to track each individual case as care leavers progressed adulthood. However, the Service would analyse data in order to understand trends and develop the best level of support possible to support care leavers in accessing employment, education or training.
- iv. The Lead Member for Children and Family Services was pleased with the work which had been undertaken to support children in care and care leavers.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care and care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward, be noted.

11. Family Hubs in Leicestershire: One Year On.

The Committee considered a report and presentation of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the delivery of Family Hubs in Leicestershire. A copy of the report and presentation marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

- i. In response to a question raised regarding the purpose of Family Hubs, the Director stated that the Hubs provided an integrated resource for families to receive advice and guidance for supporting children and their families. The services offered by the Hubs would depend on the demand in a particular locality, but would often include stay and play sessions, wellbeing cafes, drop-in sessions delivered by partner agencies, SEND support groups, as well as both individual and group-led family help sessions. The Hubs model aimed to strengthen the overall support package which the Department delivered for families and children. Members noted that there was a strong focus on delivering early intervention support in order to prevent families from reaching crisis stage.
- ii. Members noted that Government funding had been utilised to develop the Hubs, and that this had included adapting infrastructure and creating materials, launching a website, and developing branding. Further funding was not available, but the Hubs would be delivered within existing budgets, as part of the Department's family help model, to meet the needs of children and families. The Director stated that whilst the eligibility for grants was relatively limited for local authorities, the Department would consider how it could apply for funding to deliver additional projects.
- iii. In response to concern raised regarding the availability of a Family Hub in certain localities, the Director stated that the Hubs had been established according to demand, and that it had not been appropriate to open a Hub in all localities. Some Hubs operated within libraries in order to expand their availability. Library staff

would continue to receive training in order to support families. In addition to physical spaces, the Family Hubs website contained a range of resources available for children and families to access. The website included video guides for the buildings, operating hours, and a list of events and services which were available at each Hub. Work was being undertaken to include videos from specialities such as health visitors, and advice on self-help.

- iv. The Director reported that the Department for Education had been pleased with the progress achieved by the Family Hubs model in Leicestershire and had cited the Service as a service of good practice. An evaluation of the Family Hubs model would be undertaken in October 2024 and the results of which would be shared with the Committee.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the update on the delivery of Family Hubs in Leicestershire, be noted.
- b) That the results of an evaluation of the Family Hubs model would be shared with the Committee once it had concluded.

12. Quarter 4 2023/24 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance of the period January to March 2024 (quarter 4). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2024 (quarter 4), be noted.

13. Dates of Future Meetings.

The next meeting of the Committee would take place on 3 September 2024. Meetings of the Committee in 2025 would be held at 14:00 on the following dates:

21 January 2025
4 March 2025
3 June 2025
2 September 2025
4 November 2025

RESOLVED:

That the next meeting of the Committee would take place on 3 September 2024. Meetings of the Committee in 2025 would be held at 14:00 on the following dates:

21 January 2025
4 March 2025
3 June 2025
2 September 2025
4 November 2025

2.00 - 3.45 pm
04 June 2024

CHAIRMAN