

Minutes of a meeting of the Adults and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Monday, 2 June 2025.

PRESENT

Mrs. K. Knight CC (in the Chair)

Mrs. L. Broadley CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC
Mr. G. Cooke CC
Dr. S. Hill CC
Mr. N. Holt CC
Mr. A. Innes CC

Mr. B. Lovegrove CC
Mr. P. Morris CC
Mr. P. Rudkin CC
Mr. A. Thorp CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In attendance

Mr. J. Boam CC – Lead Member for Adults and Communities
Mr. Kash Bhayani (for Fiona Barber) – Healthwatch Leicester and Healthwatch Leicestershire

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that Mrs. K. Knight CC be appointed Chairman for the period ending with the date of the Annual Meeting of the County Council in 2026, in accordance with Rule 6(a) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4E of the County Council's Constitution).

2. Appointment of Deputy Chairman.

It was moved by Ms. K. Knight and seconded by Mr. A. Innes:

"That Mr. P. Morris be appointed Deputy Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council."

It was moved by Mr. C. Smith and seconded by Mrs. B. Seaton:

"That Mr. N. Chapman be appointed Deputy Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council."

The Chairman informed members that both candidates have been duly proposed and seconded. In accordance with item 4 of Standing Order 27 a secret ballot would therefore take place.

The Chief Executive announced the results of the ballot, as follows:

5 votes for Mr. P. Morris, 4 votes for Mr. N. Chapman and 3 abstentions.

The motion that “Mr. P. Morris be appointed Deputy Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council” was therefore carried.

3. Minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2025.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that one questions had been received under Standing Order 35.

1. Question asked by Mr. Adam Stares

“At this Committee’s meeting on 20 January 2025, point 48 (iv) noted that the Adults & Communities department had a target of reducing costs by £4million in 2025/26, but that this would not come at the “expense of services provided”

Has the department identified these savings and is it on track to reach this target within the constraint of not cutting the services that are provided to service users?”

Reply by the Chairman

The demand management target of £4m applied to the 2025/26 budget is a consequence of activities undertaken in 2024/25 to effectively manage resources, which resulted in an underspend against the established budget in that year.

Therefore, the overall growth requirement for the following year (2025/26) can be reduced as the expected growth can be met within existing budget. In effect this saving has already been met.

Supplementary Question

“This is good news that actions taken in 2024/25 means that additional cuts are not mandatory this year, but given that demand and costs continue to rise, can I please clarify if, whilst not essential, the Council has considered if it would still be prudent and sensible to continue to seek to make any potential efficiency cuts so that it is in a better position in the future as those costs rise next year again?”

Response by the Chairman

At the request of the Chairman the Director of Adults and Communities responded that it was absolutely prudent and sensible to consider where further efficiencies could be made. There was a process undertaken each year to look at where efficiencies and savings could be made, where areas could be more productive, and those areas were brought forward each year into the next year’s Medium Term Financial Strategy.

Mr Stares left the meeting at this point.

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

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 7(3) and 7(5).

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.

Mrs. Brenda Seaton declared that a close relation (daughter) was employed by the NHS.

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. Performance Report 2024/25 - Position at March 2025

The Committee considered a joint report of the Chief Executive and Director of Adults and Communities which provided an update of the Adults and Communities Department's performance for the year 2024/25. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- i. It was noted that the Department had a policy in place which staff and managers followed, whereby people waiting for an assessment of need for adult social care support were contacted, usually fortnightly, and kept up to date with progress regarding their assessment. Managers rated the risk to the individual on a Red, Amber, Green (RAG) rating list. Data was reviewed on a monthly basis to consider both the numbers of people waiting, and what activity and contact had been made with individuals. The Director undertook to provide a detailed report on available metrics relating to residents awaiting assessments to a future meeting of the Committee.
- ii. A Member queried the 4% increase in the number of people waiting over six months for an assessment and asked if this was due to the systems currently in place or staffing issues. Members were reassured that no one waiting over six months had a significant level of need or risk, and that delays could be for various reasons, for example, awaiting information from other organisations, or legal processes pending conclusion. These were not due to staffing or systems issues.

- iii. A Member referenced two statutory surveys undertaken of people in receipt of social care services (the annual and biennial survey), and the identified drop in social contact being experienced by both service users and carers. It was noted that officers had, in the past, analysed findings around social contact in detail, but surveys had been paused during the Covid pandemic. Starting from 2024 the Department, alongside the Business Intelligence Service, had developed an analysis tool that could delve into attained survey information at a demographic level. For example, on the basis of age, gender, primary support reason, learning disabilities or mental health. A small task and finish group had been set up to commence in June 2025 which would look at these survey results, including looking at social contact.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the Performance Report 2024/25 - Position as at March 2025, be noted.
- b) That the Director be requested to bring a detailed report to a future meeting of the Committee regarding the Departments current communications approach with people awaiting an assessment of need for adult social care support.

11. Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029 Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities, the purpose of which was to present to the Committee the findings of the consultation on the draft Adults and Communities Strategy 2025-2029 "Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire 2025-2029". A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion the following points were made:

- i. A Member questioned the low number of responses received from the public consultation. It was noted that the consultation had been made available on the Council's website and therefore accessible to all. It had been promoted by the Communications team which had ensured responses were encouraged and promoted to carers. The Director advised that a prior consultation had taken place from late 2019 to July 2020 during the Covid pandemic which similarly yielded 61 formal responses. It was suggested that other forms of direct consultation with the public should be explored for future consultations to try and encourage a greater response.
- ii. Members were reassured that prior to the public consultation direct engagement with service users had been undertaken and their feedback had helped to shape the draft Strategy now put forward for consideration.
- iii. A Member pointed out a response to the survey, emphasizing the necessity for clarity regarding whom to contact within Adult Social Care, and underscored the importance of effective communication across social care services. The Director indicated that the initial point of contact for individuals was the Customer Service Centre (CSC). Significant efforts had been made to improve process within the CSC which had resulted in an increased response rate and reduced call durations. Furthermore, it was noted that a new tool had been implemented, enabling

individuals to locate their assigned social worker on the Council's website if they had been given a named worker and reference number.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on the findings of consultation on the draft Adults and Communities Strategy 2025 to 2029 Delivering Wellbeing and Opportunity in Leicestershire be noted;
- b) That the comments now made by the Committee be forwarded to the Cabinet for consideration at its meeting on 17 June 2025.

12. Report on Prevention Review Programme - Respite and Short Break Provision.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities, which provided information on the review of the Council's in-house respite and short break provision and the case for change to deliver best value for the Council. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- i. It was noted that there were three respite facilities in the County: Wigston, Melton, and a twelve-bedded unit at Hinckley. Alongside residential settings, there were also shared lives services offering overnight short breaks which were geographically spread over the County. It was noted that each of the three units were different in terms of their capability of meeting people's needs, from people requiring limited support, through to complex needs requiring, for example, hoisting, or additional one to one support.
- ii. In response to a Member's question on whether the respite service was offered on a need's basis rather than a cost basis, it was explained that any offer of respite would be made following an assessment of a person's needs before cost was considered. The Director explained that the Authority would be responsible for meeting a persons identified unmet needs following an assessment and would look at all options for the best way to meet those needs. Cost was a factor considered as part of this process. The Department had a Fair Outcomes Policy, which detailed how the process would be undertaken and the choices that were available to people. Furthermore, if a person wanted a more expensive provision than could be procured by the Authority, they would have the option to support part of that cost themselves, either through individual support, or through a third party.
- iii. As the Authority only had the three respite units, a Member questioned if it would look at partnership working in order to offer more services, particularly in rural locations which were often difficult to reach. The Director explained that a key issue for private sector providers in terms of both respite and short breaks care was financial viability due to the number of voids and vacant beds during periods of low demand, such as during school holidays and weekends. As a result it was a difficult area for providers to manage and make a profit on a commercial basis. It was for this reason the provision of such services tended to be expensive, as overall costs factored in expected vacancy costs.

- iv. The Director reported that due to the number of vacancies within the internal service, expansion was not currently being considered. However, if following the review a need for expansion was identified, partnership working would be an option looked at. It was noted that the building of the care units was bespoke, had very high levels of equipment and were very expensive to build, so it was not something that the Council could currently deliver on its own.
- v. A Member asked if there was any respite care for people with physical difficulties of working age, as it appeared many had to be placed in elderly residential care which was not appropriate. It was suggested that this seemed to be a gap in the market. It was reported that people with physical disabilities could be supported, but ordinarily the Authority would be looking to the external market to provide such respite care. With the Shared Lives scheme, respite short breaks could be offered to people with physical needs in a shared lives environment, if that was appropriate for that person's needs.
- vi. It was acknowledged that a lot of people of working age with a physical disability simply wanted an ordinary break such as a holiday. In such cases it would be more appropriate for them to access a service available outside of the County Council ensuring that any venue could cater to their specific needs. Direct payments were offered to people, for example, to employ a personal assistant to accompany them on a break to support them. There was a range of options for people if they did not need a specialist environment, but if a specialist environment was required, then it was largely in the private residential sector.
- vii. In response to a question, it was noted that there was cross referral between the City and County for such services, with strong links and contracts in place. For example, approximately 20% of residential care provision for County residents was in the City, and similarly the City would use facilities in the County. The border was quite fluid in the way people lived and chose to be near family.

RESOLVED:

That the report on the Prevention Review Programme – Respite and Short Break Provision be noted.

13. Home Care for Leicestershire Procurement.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Adults and Communities the purpose of which was to seek the view of the Committee on the approach to procurement of home care for Leicestershire residents with eligible social care needs. The current Home Care for Leicestershire (HCL) Framework was due to end October 2026, and it was not possible to extend the current Framework beyond that date. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were made:

- i. A Member questioned the tendering process and the approach taken to provide prices to suppliers in advance. It was suggested that this did not provide the Council the opportunity to reduce its costs and ensure it was getting best value. It was reported that some Councils would go out to the markets with a range of prices. However, having undertaken work with an independent organisation the advice had been to find the optimum rate to ensure a quality service could be

secured which ensured staff would be paid a reasonable wage, travel time and mileage was covered, and allowed a provider to adequately train and support their staff. By pitching at a sustainable price, the Council was more likely to secure a reasonably priced, long term sustainable service. It was noted that cheaper offers could often result in lower quality services being procured with less security over the long term which risk impacting service users. In addition, providers would have to score a minimum of the marking system during the tender process, for example, CQC rating.

- ii. The Authority had a quality assurance process. If a provider was non-compliant, the authority could 'breach' the contract, namely suspend new activity, apply sanctions to limit activity, develop and action plan to improve the service, or terminate the contract. It was explained that with the quality assurance process and framework followed, a lot of focussed work and resources went into ensuring providers could improve without necessarily terminating a contract. This ensured greater stability for service users. The approach taken depended on the circumstances of each case.
- iii. Members were reassured that during the tendering process there was a requirement for continuity of care for vulnerable people, with regards to staffing models, rotas and how people were employed.
- iv. Members queried the cost of support by the Quality Team to businesses providing inadequate care. It was reported that the Team was part of the service offered to businesses, so whilst guidance and support was provided, it was the provider's responsibility to implement actions in the plan. Members' general feeling was that quality was key and commercially the Authority should look at a process that penalised underperforming providers, which as a business should be written into any tender, and as the Authority was facing financial restriction it should not pay for another organisations' inadequacies.

RESOLVED:

- a) That the report on proposals for the Home Care for Leicestershire Procurement be noted.
- b) That the comments now made be forwarded to a future meeting of Cabinet for consideration.

14. Dates of Future Meetings.

The dates of future meetings of the Committee scheduled to take place on the following dates, all on a Monday at 2.00pm, were noted:

Monday, 1 September 2025
Monday, 3 November 2025

2.00pm to 3.34pm
02 June 2025

CHAIRMAN