

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 4 March 2025.

PRESENT

Mrs. H. J. Fryer CC (in the Chair)

Mr. R. G. Allen CC

Mr. L. Hadji-Nikolaou CC

Mr. R. Hills CC

Mr. M. Hunt CC

Mrs. S. Jordan CC

Mrs. R. Page CC

In attendance

Mr. D. Taylor CC – Lead Member for Children and Families

Mr. C. Smith CC – Cabinet Support Member for Children and Families

54. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21 January 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

55. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 34.

56. 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).

57. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

58. Declarations of interest.

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.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

60. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 35.

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

61. Expansion of Childcare for Funded Entitlements and Wraparound Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which outlined the County Council's statutory duties with regards to childcare and provide an overview of the work being undertaken by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service to support the delivery of the expansion of early education and childcare provision. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 8', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Concern was raised regarding whether a sufficient number of childcare places would be available in order to meet the demand expected as a result of the expansion of childcare policy. The Director assured members that she was confident that the Council would meet its statutory duties in line with the policy change. Members noted that a sufficiency survey which had been undertaken by Department for Education did not represent the whole picture in Leicestershire. The Department would work with providers to increase the level of provision. Expanded childcare provision would be supported by breakfast cubs and wraparound care.
- (ii) In response to a question relating to the number of Leicestershire childminders of which had left the sector, the Director advised that the most common reason for this had been an increase in provision costs. Members noted that grants were available to new childminders joining the profession. The Service would continue to provide support to new childminders joining the sector. It was agreed that the Director would provide Mr. R. Allen CC with the contact details of the Department's Early Years Business Development Adviser in order to facilitate further discussions relating to opportunities in this area.
- (iii) A question was raised in relation to the number of childcare apprentices who had dropped out of the course. There remained a high dropout rate, and the Service was undertaking work with colleges and other educational settings to understand the reasons for this in order to reduce future attrition. It was agreed that the Director of Children and Family Services would provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons behind apprentices having dropped out of childcare apprenticeships.
- (iv) With regards to breakfast clubs, 18 Leicestershire primary schools had become early adopters of the government scheme, although some had withdrawn from the scheme. The Cabinet Leader Member for Children and Families emphasised that breakfast clubs were not means tested and the level of funding provided was often not sufficient to meet costs within schools. It was agreed that the Director of Children and Family Services would provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons why some schools had chosen to not continue to provide breakfast clubs, despite being early adopters of the scheme.
- (v) Members noted that in 2021/22 the Early Years Block of Dedicated, Schools Grant (DSG) recorded a deficit of £4.26 million, and as of March 2024, this deficit had reduced to £3.1m. The Department planned to clear this deficit over four years, by March 2027.

- (vi) In response to a question relating to contingency funding, the Director stated that historically, the Council had not held a contingency fund. However, the Department was holding a contingency fund which was funding that could be utilised in order to respond to the financial implications of changes in the number of children taking up the entitlements. The budget was dependent on census information. As a result, the level of funding received from Government could be less than the amount required to be paid to providers to support the actual number of children who had taken up their entitlement.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's statutory duties with regards to childcare and the overview of the work being undertaken by the Early Years Inclusion and Childcare Service to support the delivery of the expansion of early education and childcare provision, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons behind apprentices having dropped out of childcare apprenticeships.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members of the Committee with information relating to the reasons why some schools had chosen to not continue to provide breakfast clubs, despite being early adopters of the scheme.
- (d) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide Mr. R. Allen CC with the contact details of the Department's Early Years Business Development Adviser.

62. Department of Education Statutory Guidance for the use of Agency Children and Family Social Workers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the Local Authority's duties and responsibilities, under the new regulations for the use of agency children and family social workers, which were published in September 2024, and to outline the progress made to date against these requirements.

In introducing the report, the Director stated that there was an error in Paragraph 7 of the report. Reference to November 2025 should have read November 2024.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding resource implications arising from the policy change, the Director stated that no additional costs would be required in order to implement the changes. The Department would continue to undertake work in order to stabilise the workforce further by aiming to increase the number agency staff returning to permanent employment. This move would also reduce financial staffing pressures considerably.
- (ii) The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the Department was in a good position with regards to Recruitment and Retention and that it would

continue to work with regional partners to influence the market in order to further improve outcomes for children and families.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the Local Authority's duties and responsibilities, under the new regulations for the use of agency children and family social workers, which were published in September 2024, and the progress made to date against these requirements, be noted.

63. Children's Innovation Partnership.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), with a particular focus on the residential redesign. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question raised relating to meeting the changing needs of Leicestershire children in care, the Director assured members that demand and profile modelling exercises would continue to be undertaken in order to regularly assess need and to put the appropriate measures in place to meet this need. The Department also worked with the private sector and continued to develop its inhouse foster carer resource as part of its overall strategy to provide homes for children.
- (ii) The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the project would provide good homes for children with complex needs and enable them to live within their local communities and to make improvements to their lives. She thanked officers for the work undertaken to deliver this project.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children's Innovation Partnership (CIP), with a particular focus on the residential redesign, be noted.

64. Quarter 3 2024/25 Performance Report.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period October to December 2024 (Quarter 3). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding data relating to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), the Director advised that there were 2,566 children with an EHCP at the autumn term school census which was 108 lower than at the summer term census when the number was 2,674. However, the autumn term figure was higher than that recorded in any other autumn term.

- (ii) Concern was raised regarding the number of children who had been subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Concern in this area had been raised by the Committee at a number of meetings. The Director stated that the Department continued to undertake robust work in order to prevent children from becoming subject to a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time. Members were provided with some reassurance that there were usually gaps between plans of two years or more, indicating that there are periods of improvement and stability. However, factors such as domestic abuse meant that there could be setbacks in such periods of stability.
- (iii) A question was raised in relation to a decrease in the percentage of children in care at the end of Quarter 3 who had an annual health assessment within the preceding 12 months. The Director explained it was important to consider that children in care received more health checks than children not in care and that. The Department continued to work with children and young people to understand health matters which are important to them, including mental health and wellbeing, in order to understand how to address health needs and provide the best level of support. This work also included working with colleagues within the health sector who provided health checks for children in care.
- (iv) With regards to Electively Home Educated (EHE) children, the Director stated that the Department had a duty to ensure that the education being delivered outside of a school setting was to an acceptable standard. Checks were undertaken annually to measure this. The Council had a statutory duty in terms of safeguarding children. Partner agencies also had a role to play in raising concerns relating to safeguarding. Members noted that the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill, which was being passed through Parliament, included provisions relating to the safeguarding and welfare of children as well as attendance of children at school.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period October to December 2024 (Quarter 3), be noted.

65. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 3 June at 14:00.

2.00 - 3.25 pm  
04 March 2025

CHAIRMAN