

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

PRESENT

Mr. M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Boam CC
Mr. S. Bradshaw CC
Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC
Adina Murataj

Mr. D. Page CC
Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In attendance

Mr. C. Pugsley CC – Lead Member for Children and Families

32. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 2 September 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

33. Question Time.

The following questions had been received under Standing Order 34 and were put to the Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

Question asked by Mrs Sue Whiting:

“Could the Chair please state how many Children with an EHCP, who are in Year 7, academic year September 2025 to August 2026, have yet to be found a suitable school placement and have all the previous academic year's Year 7 children with an EHCP now been placed?

I asked a question in January 2025 and there were still four children then who had not been placed. I understand that the earliest time I could have submitted a follow up question was in September 2025”.

(The question and response referred to within the above question can be found here: <https://democracy.leics.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7889&Ver=4>)

Response by the Chairman:

As at 31 October 2025, 13 pupils with EHCPs in Year 7 are awaiting a permanent placement. Of the four pupils with EHCPs (now in Year 8) who were previously identified as awaiting placement in response to a question asked in January 2025, one is currently waiting for an alternative placement to be identified.

The Special Educational Needs Assessment Service are actively working to find suitable placements for all children identified.

Sue Whiting asked the following supplementary question:

“Thank you for the details of the 13 children with EHCPs currently in Year 7 and the outstanding one with an EHCP in Year 8, who has not had a placement since July 2024. But can the Chair give details of how all these children are being provided with education whilst awaiting a suitable placement, please?”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director stated that for the Year 8 pupil, the placement had originally broken down. An alternative placement had been identified, and the Service was awaiting a start date. Of the 13 pupils referred to, eight children had interim tutoring arrangements which had been offered or were in place. The remaining five had either recently moved into the area or had not started at their allocated school. Again, interim arrangements were being put in place for those children where it had not already started.”

34. Questions asked by members.

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

35. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

36. 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.

Ms Ann Pendlebury CC declared a Not Registerable Interest in Agenda Items 8 and 13 as she was a member of Hinckley Homeless Group. The organisation supported young adults who had left care.

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

There were no declarations of the party whip.

38. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

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

39. Children and Family Services Department.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work of the Children and Family Services Department. A copy of the report, marked ‘Agenda Item 8’, is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the breadth and complexity of the services which the Department offered was profound. He placed on record his thanks to

all staff within the Department for their work, despite financial challenges and demand pressures which services were experiencing.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) The Director stated that both corporate and elected member support continued to contribute to the Department's success in delivering good quality services to children and families. The application of corporate parenting principles to looked-after children and care leavers at both a corporate and elected member level also helped to ensure that the Department was able to provide the best level of support to those children and young people. The Director agreed to provide members with resources relating to corporate parenting responsibilities, following the meeting, and to present a report outlining the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council, including elected members, at a future meeting.
- (ii) It was noted that the number of young people enrolled onto Prevent training was relatively low. The Prevent Duty sat alongside long-established safeguarding. The aim of the Duty was to tackle the ideological causes of terrorism, intervene early to support people susceptible to radicalisation and enable people who had already engaged in terrorism to disengage and rehabilitate. It was noted that the Youth Justice Service delivered work with young people at risk of radicalisation. The Department was due to advertise a position for a role specially related to Prevent. Staff training on the Prevent Duty would also be offered, and it was expected that training would be available for elected members in 2026.
- (iii) A question was asked relating to the Teen Health service. In 2022, Public Health had commissioned the Department to deliver Teen Health services. The Director stated that the Service sat within Family Help and had established links with all schools within Leicestershire to provide support to young people aged 11 plus relating to emotional wellbeing and health. Whilst there was risk of overlap between the work delivered by the Service and that delivered in schools, a gap in support presented a greater risk.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overview of the work of the Children and Family Services Department, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to present the Committee with a report which would include the corporate parenting responsibility of the Council, including elected members, at a future meeting.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide members with resources relating to corporate parenting responsibilities, following the meeting.

40. Inclusion in Leicestershire Schools.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the functions of the Inclusion Service. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 9', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated that the Inclusion Service was invaluable in ensuring that every child in Leicestershire received an education that

could meet their needs and allowing them to reach their full potential. He highlighted the emphasis on the Council, schools, and parents working together with children to ensure that they were receiving the best level of support, at the right time, in order to achieve the best outcomes.

Arising from the discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Concern was raised regarding the growing demand for support for children and young people who were facing barriers to attendance. The Director acknowledged that the number of children not in education was concerning. The number of those children and young people classed as having medical needs, the electively home-educated cohort of children, the number of children missing education, and the number of exclusions continued to increase. This demand pressure also continued to increase costs for the Department. The Director outlined that the issues could be attributed to a clearer understand of barriers to education, an increase in levels of complexity within cohorts of children, and challenges in schools meeting need. It was noted that a White Paper relating to education was anticipated and was expected to include a strategy for supporting children within schools.
- (ii) Concern was also raised regarding the number of primary school children missing education whereby the reason was either unknown or hadn't been recorded. The Director assured members that the Service engaged with families in order to understand the reason why a child was missing education. However, there would always be a point in time whereby the Department was not yet clear around the reason for missing education.
- (iii) With regards to secondary permanent exclusions having increased since 2022-23, the Director outlined that this could be as a result of either more complex children being supported in mainstream schools, school performance and the measures which schools were judged by, and disruptive behaviour. The Director stated that, historically, a low number of permanent exclusions were had been recorded in Leicestershire. The Department worked with schools to prevent exclusions. However, it would sometimes be necessary for schools to exclude children. It was noted that some schools used exclusions more often than others.
- (iv) In response to concern regarding the number of children being electively home educated (EHE), the Director acknowledged the concern and stated that the Department collected data relating to the reason behind the decision to EHE. Although, there were a number of reasons why the decision was made, there was no evidence that EHE decisions had been made due to any reported bias within the curriculum. It was noted that there could be some children who struggled to engage with learning styles and expectations within schools. However, some schools were more creative in adapting learning for children who required it. The Department was developing an Education Belonging Strategy which would focus on how different children could access the curriculum and engage with their classmates. This work would contribute towards improving attendance and supporting children to achieve positive educational outcomes for progression into adulthood.
- (v) It was noted that a webinar was delivered for new home educating parents which encouraged networking and also signposted to events. A webinar was also delivered specifically for Year 11 EHE children, relating to exam arrangements and post-16 education. In addition to this, a termly EHE newsletter would be sent directly to all home educating parents which included signposting to events,

opportunities, and essential services. It was noted that Department worked with other services both within the Authority and within partner organisations, in order to ensure that home educating families received support.

- (vi) At the request of the Chairman, the Director agreed to present a report on the Oakfield Short Stay School, at the meeting on 3 March 2026.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the overview of the functions of the Inclusion Service, be noted.
- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to present the Committee with a report on the Oakfield Short Stay School, at the meeting on 3 March 2026.

41. Leicestershire's Response to Tackling Child Criminal Exploitation.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work and progress of the Children Exploitation, Missing, and Modern Slavery Hub. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

In introducing the report, the Director outlined that the report contained information relating to all forms of child exploitation, not just child criminal exploitation.

The Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was pleased with the positive feedback received from Ofsted relating to the Child Exploitation Service. He emphasised that prevention, early intervention and the continuation of the strong partnership working were key in tackling and combating child exploitation.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question asked, the Director emphasised that all risk of exploitation could not be eliminated. However, robust processes were in place in order to mitigate exploitation risks effectively. Multi-agency work undertaken by the Vulnerability Hub in partnership with the Police, Health and other partner agencies had enabled positive outcomes for children and young people at risk of exploitation.
- (ii) Concern was raised regarding the vulnerability of children in residential care. The Director stated that children in care in Leicestershire had either been placed with providers by the Council or by other local authorities, and the Council had a safeguarding responsibility for all children in care within Leicestershire. The Council had a good relationship with residential care providers commissioned by the Council and offered regular training and support to them. It was noted that work had been undertaken with community members and stakeholders in order to promote a collective responsibility for safeguarding children, and to raise awareness of the signs of exploitation.
- (iii) With regards to the development of internal processes, the Director stated that the Service had a strong focus on continuous Improvement and reviewed regularly conducted reviews of practice at an operational level. The Service measured itself against findings from national case reports in order to ensure alignment and to drive improvement. It carried out regular testing and updates based on current research,

including collaboration with universities on topics such as Harm Outside the Home. Multi-agency meetings within the Hub and multi-agency reviews were conducted in order to benchmark performance and develop operational practice.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the work and progress of the Child Exploitation, Missing and Modern Slavery Hub, be noted.

42. Leicestershire Adoption Agency Statutory Report 2024-2025.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which gave an overview of the Annual Report into Leicestershire's Adoption Agency for the period March 2024 – March 2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member thanked staff within the Service for their work. He emphasised that the commitment to both permanency and strong post-adoption support were key to ensuring the long-term success of adoption placements.

A question was raised regarding an increasing preference within court judgements for contact to be maintained with birth families and whether this had presented challenges for adoption success. The Director stated that whilst contact could create emotional conflict for prospective adopters, both assessment process and training for prospective adopters introduced the concept early. The approach aimed to be realistic and flexible and often promoted the use of creative methods of contact in order to help children build a safe and accurate understanding of their birth parents.

RESOLVED:

That the annual report of Leicestershire's Adoption Agency for the period March 2024 to March 2025, be noted.

43. Fostering Annual Report 2024-25.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which outlined the activity of the Fostering Services for the period 2024-2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

The Lead Member for Children and Families emphasised that the recruitment of foster carers remained a significant challenge but was pleased with the proactive steps taken to address this.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A question was asked relating to how the Service had focussed on promoting fostering through the Council as more attractive than fostering through Independent Fostering Agencies (IFAs). The Service continued to face challenges with the recruitment of foster carers which had been driven by competition from IFAs and other local authorities who in many cases paid higher rates than the Council. The Director stated that the Service had undertaken extensive campaigns which promoted the Council's package of support for foster carers. It was noted that a service review was underway to develop this area further.

- (ii) With regards to the approach to recruitment, the Service engaged with members of the public, had a dedicated chat facility on the Council's website, and held online and in-person information evenings with regards to the fostering process. The Council's fostering webpage contained comprehensive information. Social media was utilised in order to promote fostering and to share the voices of foster carers. Links with school governors and head teachers had been developed for community outreach.
- (iii) The Director stated that the Service offered respite support to foster carers who needed to take time away. The Service also had a provision of independent visitors which could offer support by spending time with children when foster carers required personal time. In addition to this, during foster carer assessments, consideration was given to a prospective foster carer's wider support network. This included relatives who could be DBS checked so that they could provide care whilst foster families were away.

RESOLVED:

That the annual report outlining the activity of the Fostering Service for the period 2024 - 2025, be noted.

44. Annual Report of the Virtual School 2024-2025.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the work and data of the Virtual School (VS) for the academic year 2024-2025. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) Concern was raised that the Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC) cohort had significantly increased from the previous year. The Director acknowledged this concern and stated that whilst government funding was available, it did not fully cover the costs of provision, particularly for education and Virtual School services. It was suggested by a member of the Committee that the Lead Member for Children and Families could raise the issue of UASC funding with the Government.
- (ii) A question was asked regarding the Council's responsibility for UASC. The Director stated that the local authority had a statutory duty to provide care and support to UASC under the same legislation as other looked-after children. Where UASC remained in care for more than 13 weeks, before their 16th birthday, they would become eligible for care leaver status at 18, with the same entitlements as other care leavers. Additional financial pressures would arise because many UASC could not work or claim benefits until their asylum claims had been resolved. This required the Council to continue funding accommodation and support during this time. Delays in the asylum decision process further exacerbate these challenges.
- (iii) In response to a question asked, it was noted that there were three routes through which UASC could arrive in the County. Spontaneous Arrivals were UASC who arrived at a port of safety (such as a service station) and declared themselves as UASC. The local authority and police would respond immediately to assess and provide support. This route had been in place for many years. They could arrive

through the National Transfer Scheme (NTS), a mandatory Home Office scheme which was designed to distribute UASC across the country. The East Midlands operated regionally, with Leicestershire sharing the responsibility alongside other local authorities. It was noted that most current UASC arrived through this route. Numbers were often not equally distributed across the country, with some counties supporting a greater number due to geographical reasons. Finally, they could be placed in adult asylum hotels. This had been done in Leicestershire and had resulted in individuals identifying as children upon arrival. These cases were treated as spontaneous arrivals and required age assessments. Approximately 80 children had been identified through this route. This route has now largely reduced following the closure of adult hotels in the County.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the work of, and data relating to, the Virtual School (VS) for the academic year 2024-2025, be noted.

45. Date of future meetings.

RESOLVED:

That meetings of the Committee in 2026 would take place at 14:00 on the following days:

20 January 2026
 3 March 2026
 2 June 2026
 1 September 2026
 3 November 2026

2.00 - 4.09 pm
 04 November 2025

CHAIRMAN