

Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 2 June 2026.

PRESENT

Mr M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. J. Boam CC	Ms. A. Pendlebury CC
Mr. N. Chapman CC	Mr. B. Piper CC
Mr. S. J. Galton CC	Mr J. Poland CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC	Mr. K. Robinson CC
Dr. D. North CC	Mrs B. Seaton CC
	Mrs D. Taylor CC

1. Appointment of Chairman.

RESOLVED:

That it be noted that Mr Mark Bools CC has been appointed Chairman of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Rule 6(a) of the Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rules (Part 4E of the County Council's Constitution).

2. Appointment of Vice-Chairman.

It was moved by Mrs K. Knight CC and seconded by Mr Kim Robinson CC:

“That Mr Bill Piper CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

It was moved by Mr Poland CC and seconded by Mrs Seaton CC:

“That Mrs Deborah Taylor CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council.”

The Chief Executive advised that there had been an equality of votes (five votes for Mr Piper, five votes from Mrs Taylor and two abstentions). At the request of the Chairman a second ballot was held.

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

Six votes for Mrs Taylor CC, the Chairman having used his casting vote, five votes for Mr Piper CC, and two abstentions. The motion “That Mrs Deborah Taylor CC be elected Vice Chairman for the period until the next Annual Meeting of the Council” was carried.

3. Minutes of the previous meeting.

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2026 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. Question Time.

The Chief Executive reported that no questions had been received under Standing Order 32.

5. Questions asked by members under Standing Order 32(1).

The Chief Executive reported that the following question had been received under Standing Order 32(1) from Mr Innes CC:

“It has come to my attention that a number of homes across the County have had their use changed from a dwelling to other uses (for example a children’s home) through a certificate of lawfulness, issued by borough councils. Specifically, there is a home that has been given this certificate in Melton Mowbray, where the location is unsuitable for a number of reasons. Local residents have no say in the placing of these homes, and this is causing stress and anxiety for these residents.

Is it possible for the County Council (LCC) to put in place a policy that only residential care homes, that have gone through full planning consent, can be considered for placing children and adults that are ultimately under the care of LCC?”

Reply by the Chairman:

“Planning applications for children’s homes are dealt with by the relevant Local Planning Authority (LPA) The LPA for the area in question is Melton Borough Council. You refer to a certificate of lawfulness. These are in fact called a Lawful Development Certificate (LDC) These are administered by the relevant LPA and are a legal and binding confirmation that a change is already lawful and does not need planning permission. They are issued as confirmation that planning permission is not necessary, not as an alternative to planning permission. Leicestershire County Council has no control over this process. Providers of children’s homes services are regulated by law by Ofsted, again something the Council has no control over.

Provided LDC’s are obtained by providers then the use of the property by the provider as a children’s home is entirely lawful. Therefore, it is not possible for the council to adopt a blanket policy of only placing children in homes where the provider has obtained planning permission. It would have the effect of penalising and discriminating against providers who have used a lawful and correct process. It would very likely be considered by the courts as being an irrational and unreasonable decision by a public body.”

Supplementary question

Mr Inness asked on the response to the question if the Council took into consideration the views of local people living within the area where homes such as these were put in place because of the potential impact on the residential area. Mr Innes cited an example, of a home in Melton where additional traffic flow into a small cul-de-sac where a home had been located had created significant issues.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Interim Director of Children and Family Services responded and advised that the County Council was not approached and did not have any powers to comment on or contribute to decisions made by local planning authorities regarding planning applications of this nature. Such decisions were taken by district councils in accordance with planning legislation.

6. Urgent Items.

There were no urgent items for consideration.

7. 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.

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 33.

The Chief Executive reported that no petitions had been received under Standing Order 33.

10. Leicestershire School Term Dates Autumn 2027 to Summer 2032

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its views on proposed Leicestershire school term and holiday dates covering the period from autumn 2027 to summer 2032 for schools maintained by the local authority. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 10' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A member queried the way in which the consultation options had been presented, noting that one option was described as maintaining the existing pattern, but would nevertheless alter the timing of the October half term to align more closely with other areas. It was explained that the two options retained the valued July fortnight which it was recognised as being important to parents. Both options were therefore aligned in this regard with current holiday patterns. However, residents' views were also being sought on the opportunity to have a two-week October half term which is where dates differed. Officers emphasised that the consultation was intended to gather views on the relative importance of both options before any recommendation would be made.
- (ii) Members welcomed the fact that both options retained the Leicestershire fortnight, recognising the benefit this provided for families in relation to holiday costs and noting that it provided certainty for parents and carers.
- (iii) Members discussed the importance of alignment with Leicester City Council, particularly for families with children attending schools in both the city and county. It

was noted that the County Council had attempted to work with the City Council and remained keen to align term dates where possible, particularly in the context of local government reorganisation. However, each authority would ultimately make its own decision. It was noted that at the time the County Council's consultation had been prepared, the City Council's position had not been sufficiently clear to include this within the consultation material.

- (iv) A Member asked whether the consultation should have been delayed so that information about Leicester City Council's proposals could have been included, as this could influence how residents responded. The Director advised that there had been considerable dialogue with the City Council and he did not consider the omission to be a flaw in the consultation. It was reported that over 5,000 responses had already been received. The Member suggested that the consultation should specifically capture how important alignment with Leicester City Council was to residents, so that this could be taken into account alongside the other consultation responses.
- (v) The Committee was advised that Leicester City Council's proposals differed from the County Council's options only by a small number of days in some years. For 2027/28, the City Council was proposing to finish a week later than the County Council, but by 2028/29 the difference between the patterns was expected to reduce to approximately two days. It was also noted that the County Council did not set school inset days, which were determined by headteachers and academy trusts, and that this provided a degree of local flexibility around the start and end of term dates.
- (vi) Members questioned what issue the second model allowing for a two-week October half term were intended to address, given that the existing pattern was understood and valued by many residents. The Director reported that educational considerations associated with the length of the autumn term, including the potential impact of staff and pupil illness was a factor. There was also evidence that some children regressed during the long summer term. Members noted that it was thought that an additional week in October could also provide families with an opportunity to further access holidays at a less expensive time of year.
- (vii) While the Leicestershire fortnight had been heard consistently as the most important factor for parents, there was also evidence of an appetite for a different pattern, including the two-week October half term. Members noted that responses to the consultation so far were broadly equally split between the two options.
- (viii) In relation to safeguarding, a member asked whether there were implications arising from the length of school holidays. It was explained that referrals tended to increase before the summer holidays as schools raised concerns ahead of the break, and that the Council also saw an increase during the summer period. This was considered to be linked to the length of the summer holiday rather than to the specific term date option under consideration.
- (ix) The Committee discussed whether schools could be encouraged to group inset days together to provide families with additional flexibility. The Director advised that schools had autonomy to determine inset days and that clustering them into week-long blocks could have a detrimental impact on the quality of education and on staff development, as intensive blocks of training were not always the most effective approach. It could also result in pupils having longer blocks away from school,

which could have a greater impact than individual inset days spread across the year.

RESOLVED:

That the comments now made by the Committee on the proposed Leicestershire school term and holiday dates covering the period from autumn 2027 to summer 2032 for schools maintained by the local authority be taken into account as part of the consultation and presented to the Cabinet for consideration.

11. Elective Home Education in Leicestershire

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of elective home education in Leicestershire, the County Council's statutory duties in this area and how these were discharged by the Inclusion Service. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 11' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) Members expressed concern about the reasons why some families chose to elect to educate their children at home, particularly where this was not a positive or freely chosen decision but a last resort following difficulties within mainstream education or where a child's needs had not been met.
- (ii) Members raised concerns about the breakdown of relationships between families and schools, which was identified as a key reason why some parents withdrew their children from school. It was suggested that more could be done to intervene earlier, before relationships reached crisis point. The Director advised that work was undertaken to support and repair relationships where possible, but that the issues were often complex and required work from both schools and families.
- (iii) Members noted that there was no statutory requirement for the Council to provide education to children who were electively home educated. The Inclusion Service undertook valuable work with families before a decision to home educate was made, but thereafter parents were signposted to other sources of support. Members queried whether more could be done to provide ongoing support once a child was being educated at home. The Director emphasised, however, that any further support offer would need to be considered in the context of the Council's statutory responsibilities and the limited resources it had available to go beyond that.
- (iv) Members queried how the Council monitored the standard of education being provided at home and whether parents were equipped to provide suitable education. It was noted that there was no requirement for children who were electively home educated to take formal examinations. The legal test was whether the education was suitable to the child's age, ability, aptitude and any special educational needs, and this could cover a wide range of educational experiences.
- (v) It was emphasised that the Council's role was to signpost families to resources and support, and to only intervene where there were concerns about the suitability of education or safeguarding.

- (vi) The Committee recognised that many families provided good quality education at home, and members asked how the Council could better learn from those positive examples and share effective practice, while continuing to support families where appropriate.
- (vii) Given the number of children being electively home educated had increased, additional capacity had been allocated to the Inclusion Service. However, the number of vulnerable children had also increased, and resources therefore had to be targeted and prioritised according to need. The Director indicated that they were not currently concerned about capacity but acknowledged that this would need to be monitored as numbers continued to rise.
- (viii) The Committee raised concerns about the current lack of data on outcomes for children who were electively home educated. Members noted that positive outcomes were not always captured, as families were not required to inform the Council if a child achieved qualifications such as GCSEs. Members commented that proposed Government plans for a register of children not in school would be important in improving data collection and enabling local authorities to identify concerns and take appropriate action.
- (ix) Members asked about the number of young people not in education, employment or training (NEET) that had been home educated. It was noted that because families were not required to register all outcomes, robust data was not available. However, a recently recruited post-16 manager was looking at NEET young people and how they could be supported back into education or training, drawing on good practice from other areas.
- (x) A member raised a concern about fairness, noting that parents of children attending school could be fined for unauthorised absence, whereas children educated at home could have more flexibility and were not subject to the same monitoring, testing or attendance requirements.
- (xi) Members welcomed the proposal for the item to return to the Committee, noting the increasing interest in elective home education and the importance of improving the available data. It was suggested that the Council should seek to reduce any stigma which might prevent parents from sharing their reasons for choosing home education and should engage with families in order to learn from their experiences.
- (xii) Members suggested that possible ways of improving engagement with home educating families, could include use of the Council's website and the gathering email addresses so that officers could communicate directly with families and seek further information.
- (xiii) A member raised concerns that some home educated children might fall under the radar and referred to the role of commercial organisations and local charities that supported parents educating children at home. It was suggested that representatives from such organisations could be invited to speak to members, to provide a better understanding of why families used these services and what support was available.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the updated provided on elective home education in Leicestershire, the County Council's statutory duties in this area and how these were discharged by the Inclusion Service be noted;
- (b) That officers provide further information on the number of school attendance orders issued and, of those, how many resulted in children returning to school;
- (c) That the Director be requested to explore ways to engage with home educating families, local charities and relevant support organisations.

12. Corporate Parenting Strategy

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which sought its view on the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which set out how the County Council would meet its statutory duties and responsibilities for children in care and care leavers until 2029. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 12' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) A member asked for clarification on the changes to the strategy, noting that these appeared to be minor. Members were advised that the changes were primarily intended to ensure that the strategy remained up to date and reflected relevant new legislation and guidance.
- (ii) Nationally, care leavers were over-represented among young people who were not in education, employment or training. It was reported that the Council had a focused area of work through the Virtual School, the 16-plus service and apprenticeship routes to try and address.
- (iii) Members recognised that, because of the trauma experienced by some young people, those aged 16 to 18 might not always be ready to engage fully in education or training opportunities. The Committee therefore welcomed the fact that support for care leavers continued up to the age of 25, when some young people might be better placed to take up such opportunities. Members also noted the importance of ensuring that a range of pathways were available, including university, apprenticeships and vocational or trade-based routes, so that young people could pursue options best suited to their interests and abilities.
- (iv) In response to a question about digital poverty, members were advised that support was provided to ensure care leavers had access to appropriate equipment, including IT kit and phones, so that they were not disadvantaged. Personal advisers also supported young people with applications and practical tasks in a way that a parent or carer might otherwise do. Members noted that consideration was being given to establishing hubs in localities to provide accessible support for young people.
- (v) A Member queried what data was available regarding the number of care leavers that accessed university and apprenticeships and the number of those identified as having special educational needs and disabilities. The Director undertook to provide further data to Members after the meeting.

- (vi) Members welcomed the inclusion of the promise to children and young people and the evidence that the voice of young people had informed the strategy.
- (vii) A member asked about elected member representation on the Corporate Parenting Board and noted that members had not been asked to make nominations. It was explained that member champions had previously been established to support children in care and care leavers following a member review, but that the current position was being reviewed to determine whether that model remained appropriate. A Member commented that this work should be progressed urgently if the Council wished to strengthen its approach to corporate parenting.
- (viii) Members emphasised the importance of all political groups being able to feed into this work and being appropriately represented, given that corporate parenting was a responsibility for all members. It was suggested that an all member briefing should be provided to reemphasise to all members their corporate parenting responsibilities.
- (ix) A member suggested that, as the strategy had been contributed to by children and young people, consideration should be given to presenting it in a format that was accessible and engaging for them, including through an App or other alternative media. The Committee was advised that children in care had produced a video, which had been shown to children and young people, explaining corporate parenting.
- (x) Members queried the extent to which the Council could support looked after children and care leavers to access opportunities that families might otherwise provide, including activities linked to their interests, access to technology, holidays and work experience. It was recognised that there was a balance to be struck, as many families across the county also faced financial pressures. The Director advised that payments to children's homes included provision for activities, pocket money and holidays, and that this would be considered as part of the review to ensure that arrangements were working effectively.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That the Council's Corporate Parenting Strategy which set out how the County Council would meet its statutory duties and responsibilities for children in care and care leavers until 2029 be noted;
- (b) That the Director be requested to provide further information on care leaver data, including figures relating to those that accessed university and apprenticeships, and those identified as having SEND;
- (c) That the Director be requested to consider elected member involvement in the Corporate Parenting Board and the member champion model and that an all member briefing be provided to reemphasise members corporate parenting responsibilities.

13. Schools White Paper and SEND Reform

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Government's Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving and the associated SEND Reform proposals. The report summarised the national policy direction, outlined the implications for the County Council and its partners and highlighted key risks and opportunities. A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 13' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) It was noted that the proposals represented the most significant set of reforms since 2014 and that a key aim was to strengthen support for children and young people within mainstream education.
- (ii) Members emphasised the importance of translating national legislation and guidance into arrangements that would work effectively for Leicestershire children, young people and families.
- (iii) The Committee noted that there were currently over 9,000 Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Leicestershire and that numbers had grown significantly in the last year. It was further noted that under the Government's current proposals existing Plans would not change. It was understood that EHCPs were likely to be reserved for children attending special schools or those with the most complex needs, while children in mainstream schools who did not meet that threshold might instead have an individual support plan put in place. Members were advised that the principal distinction appeared to be that EHCPs would be local authority-led and funded, whereas individual support plans would be school-led and school-funded.
- (iv) Members considered it important to reassure parents that children who currently had an Education, Health and Care Plan would retain it under the proposals as presently understood. Members also asked how the reforms would affect the Council's responsibilities, school funding arrangements and routes of appeal. Officers explained that the funding position was not yet clear. Current funding arrangements included school funding, the notional contribution and local authority top-up funding, but it appeared likely that more funding would be passported to schools in future. The mechanism for doing so, and the extent of any additional funding, remained uncertain.
- (v) In relation to appeals, the Committee was advised that the proposals did not appear to remove the ability for parents to challenge decisions relating to ECHPs. However, it appeared that tribunals might in future only be able to make recommendations rather than binding decisions. The position in relation to appeals or complaints about individual support plans was less clear, with early indications suggesting that these might be considered through the school complaints processes and escalation to Ofsted.
- (vi) Members raised concerns about the lack of fairness and consistency of funding, noting that similar levels of need could be funded differently depending on the school or area a child lived. Leicestershire remained one of the lowest funded county councils nationally for high needs funding per pupil, meaning that a child attending a school in Leicester City could attract more funding than a child attending a Leicestershire County Council school. The Director assured members that the Council continued to work through the F40 Group to campaign for fairer funding

arrangements.

- (vii) The forecasted Dedicated Schools Grant deficit had reduced from £117 million to £99 million, which was considered a positive local position. It was also noted that the Government's proposed arrangements included reimbursement of a proportion of the net deficit, although the precise detail of how much this would be was yet to be confirmed.
- (viii) The direction of travel within the reforms was generally considered to be right, particularly the focus on building capacity in mainstream schools, but there remained risks around timing, funding and implementation. The Director reported that work had been undertaken with schools and partners to identify gaps in confidence and capacity within mainstream provision and to develop a plan to address those gaps over time.
- (ix) Members asked about the potential cost of individual support plans compared with EHCPs, and whether reducing reliance on EHCPs would, in practice, improve outcomes for children. The Director advised that the cost of individual support plans was not yet known and would be a matter for schools. It was estimated that, based on current patterns, around 60% of EHCPs related to children in mainstream provision and around 40% to children in specialist provision, although the final criteria for individual support plans had not yet been confirmed.
- (x) It was noted that children with EHCPs in mainstream schools tended to achieve stronger academic outcomes, while those in special schools often achieved stronger social outcomes. Overall, outcomes for children with an EHCP in Leicestershire were considered to be good.
- (xi) Members expressed support for mainstream inclusion in principle but raised concerns about variations between schools and multi-academy trusts, including differences in access to educational psychologists and other specialist support. It was suggested that this could create a postcode lottery for parents.
- (xii) A Member commented that there needed to be clarity about how the success of mainstream inclusion would be measured, when concerns would trigger review, and how the Council would intervene if arrangements were not working effectively. The Director confirmed that the Council in its response to the Department for Education's consultation had emphasised the same concerns, the need for checks and balances and a role for the local authority where provision was not found to be effective.
- (xiii) Members noted the Experts at Hand model used a locality-based approach to bring together specialists that could provide support on education, health and social care matters. Schools had responded positively to the model, and work was underway to develop measurable key performance indicators.
- (xiv) A Member questioned whether there would be enough qualified staff to deliver the proposed changes across a wider range of mainstream schools. Leicestershire was considered an attractive area in which to work and did not generally experience the same recruitment difficulties as other areas. However, it had been acknowledged that workforce capacity could be an issue and it was therefore a key area being considered locally through partnership working.

- (xv) Members also raised concerns that schools were already under considerable pressure and that a greater emphasis on mainstream provision could place additional burdens on schools unless the necessary funding, support and specialist expertise were in place.
- (xvi) A member asked that future reports include a list of abbreviations, given the technical nature of the subject matter.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Government's Schools White Paper, Every Child Achieving and Thriving, and the associated SEND Reform proposals be noted.

14. Quarter 4 2025-26 Performance Report

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the Department's performance for the period January to March 2026 (Quarter 4). A copy of the report marked 'Agenda Item 14' is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) During the Ofsted inspection in December, inspectors had been positive about referrals and assessments and the identification of need. However, repeat referrals remained an area that was scrutinised closely as part of performance monitoring.
- (ii) It was noted that audits of repeat referrals did not indicate that these involved children and families being rereferred soon after their case had been closed. Some did return to the service after closure, but this could be appropriate where needs were periodic or circumstances changed. This was being closely monitored to understand and address the increase over this quarter.
- (iii) In relation to repeat child protection plans, members were advised that the key factors were often domestic abuse, parental mental health and substance misuse. Officers reported that further training was being considered to support staff to take different approaches in these cases. Members also noted that events such as the World Cup could lead to increases in domestic abuse referrals, and that the front door needed to remain flexible in order to respond to changes in demand.
- (iv) It was noted that the Family First programme was designed to support continuity, with a worker remaining with a family throughout the process. Members suggested that, where a family returned to the service within a short period, consideration should be given to whether the referral could be directed to a social worker already familiar with the family's circumstances, rather than progressing through the service as an entirely new referral, where this was appropriate and safe to do so.
- (v) A member referred to permanent exclusions and noted that the figure was substantially higher than in 2018/19. The member asked why exclusions had increased and what impact the Covid-19 pandemic had had. The Director advised that the pattern reflected a system under pressure, with funding pressures and the impact of Covid-19 contributing to escalation. The Committee was advised that this was a national issue and that Leicestershire reflected wider national trends.

- (vi) Members were advised that one of the reasons for establishing the outreach service was to address the increase in exclusions. Early indications of impact were positive, but officers considered that the service should be allowed to operate for a full year before this was assessed and reported back to the Committee.

RESOLVED:

That the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2026 (Quarter 4) be noted.

15. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 1st September 2026 at 2.00pm.

2.00 - 4.40 pm
02 June 2026

CHAIRMAN