



Minutes of a meeting of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at County Hall, Glenfield on Tuesday, 3 June 2025.

PRESENT

Mr. M. Bools CC (in the Chair)

Mr. M. H. Charlesworth CC
Mr. K. Crook CC
Mrs. L. Danks CC
Mrs. K. Knight CC
Mr. J. McDonald CC
Mr. B. Piper CC

Mr J. Poland CC
Mr. K. Robinson CC
Mrs B. Seaton CC
Canon. C. Shoyer
Mr. C. A. Smith CC

In Attendance

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

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 Mr Bill Piper CC and seconded by Mr Kim Robinson CC:

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

It was moved by Mr Craig Smith CC and seconded by Mr James Poland CC:

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

The Chairman informed members that both candidates had 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:

Six votes for Mrs Linda Danks CC, four votes for Mrs Deborah Taylor CC, and one abstention. The motion “That Mrs Linda Danks 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 4 March 2025 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

4. 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 the number of Education Health Care Need Assessments (EHCNA) refused since 1st September 2024 which have then subsequently been appealed/been through mediation/gone to tribunal, with the result of an EHCNA and subsequent Education Health Care Plan (EHCP)?”

Response by the Chairman:

Since 1st September 2024, 306 Education Health Care Need Assessments have been refused. 112 of these appealed to mediation and 24 appealed to tribunal. 49% of mediations resulted in an EHCP being issued or an Education Health Care Need Assessment undertaken. All of the appeals to tribunals were conceded and have been issued as plans or have an Education Health Care Need Assessments.

Sue Whiting asked the following supplementary question:

“I’m a little puzzled by 49% of mediations resulted in an EHCP being issued or an Education Health Care Need Assessment undertaken. Is it possible to have the actual number of children this refers to please, for clarification?”

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Director of Children and Family Services responded to say that of the 112 cases which had been appealed, 57 of those cases were upheld and 55 were conceded. These 55 children were either allocated with an EHCP or were progressing through the assessment process.

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. 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.

Mr. D. Page CC cleared a Non-Registerable Interest in agenda item 10: School Place Planning and Admissions, as he had served as a parent governor at a school.

Mr. M. Bools CC declared a Non-Registerable Interest in agenda item 10: School Place Planning and Admissions, as he was a parent governor at a school.

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 35.

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

10. School Place Planning and Admissions.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an update on the processes and work around school admissions and school organisation, the issues arising and anticipated trends. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 10', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was pleased with the performance of the admissions service, given that over 95% of children had secured their first preference school and over 99% had secured one of their preferences. He emphasised that this demonstrated the strength of policies relating to school-based planning and the robust execution of those policies by the Department. The Department had a clear strategy with nearly 5,000 new school places being delivered through the capital program, including for a significant number for children with SEND. He stated that the Department was operating effectively as it responded to growing demand at secondary level and to falling birth rates in some areas.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A question was raised relating to phase transfer allocations. The total number of applications had reduced from 7410 in 2022 to 7141 in 2025. This was in line with a reduction in the number of infant to junior school transfers, which had also decreased over the same period. However, the number of secondary transfers had increased from 7918 in 2022 to 8261 in 2025. The Director stated that this was a result of a significant increase in the transfer into secondary provision nationally, a reduction in the number of late applications received, changes to the independent schools' sector, and a year-on-year migration of pupils from neighbouring authorities.
- (ii) Members noted that the causes of parents requesting a school place outside the normal admissions round or part-way through an academic year were recorded and monitored. The Department ensured that it had spare capacity within the school system in line with recommendations set by the National Audit Office so that parents have the opportunity to request a mid-term transfer. A Fair Access Panel supported parents in accessing an alternative school place for their child. In addition to this, the Inclusion Team supported pupils to access an alternative school place in cases where they had been removed the school roll without a permanent exclusion, referred to as off-rolling.

- (iii) It was reported that some primary schools had struggled to maintain balanced budgets, as a result of smaller cohorts in the lower primary school year groups, which was linked to a reduction in birth rate. The issue had presented unsustainable pupil numbers for some primary schools and academies. The Director stated that Leicestershire's Planning Obligation Policy (LPOP) was under review and was likely to be adopted later in the year. A new school place planning strategy would be introduced as a result of this review. As part of this review, the Council would consult with schools regarding pupil capacity and review Pupil Admission Numbers (PAN) where necessary.
- (iv) With regards to the utilisation of Section 106 contributions in order to ensure sufficient school places, a pupil ratio yield was used to assess and seek development contributions for education facilities. The contributions received were allocated to projects which either delivered new school places or allowed for enhancements to be made to existing schools. As Section 106 contribution funding was agreed at the point of the planning application having been submitted and approved, rising costs, often within the construction sector, presented significant challenges in the delivery of school schemes within the original Section 106 contribution amendment. In addition, a number of developers had requested a new primary school to be built alongside a development in order to increase appeal. However, the pupil ratio yield often indicated that a new school would not be necessary.
- (v) A question was raised relating to whether a new secondary school was expected to be built within the Harborough district. The Director stated that the Council would be consulted on the sufficiency of school places within the area as part of the local plan process and would make a consideration for any new school against the pupil yield ratio. Members noted that the Council had an obligation to ensure the viability of the whole school system. As there were smaller cohorts of primary aged children across the county at the time, this was expected to affect the cohort of secondary aged school children in some years.
- (vi) In response to concern regarding a reduction in Basic Need funding, capital funding from the Department of Education (DfE) for the provision of additional mainstream school places, the Director stated that the Department would approach DfE if there was an impact in the Council delivering its statutory obligation for ensuring a sufficient supply of school places.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the processes and work around school admissions and school organisation, the issues arising and anticipated trends, be noted.

11. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Children in Care.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to children in care, including children seeking asylum. The report also outlined progress achieved and the development plan going forward. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 11', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that he was pleased to see such strong indicators consistency within the care system with all children having had up-

to-date plans and 90% of health and dental checks having been completed on time. He emphasised that the Department was meeting its core responsibilities as well as ensuring good outcomes for children in care.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) A member raised concern regarding the accessibility of the Disabled Childrens Service for families who were supporting children with complex needs. The Director stated that the Service was not responsible for providing support to all disabled children, but to children whereby an assessment had identified that they and their families would benefit from social work involvement. The Director agreed to respond to concerns relating to accessibility of the Service outside of the meeting with the member.
- (ii) In response to a question regarding the number of staff employed within the Children in Care Service, the Director stated that the Service comprised of four teams. Each team had a manager, five social workers and a senior practitioner. No vacancies were held within the Service, but it did reserve positions for the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme and apprenticeships. The Director assured members that although the number of children in care was increasing, this growth had been built into the Council's Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in order to ensure that there were a sufficient number of social workers to support children.
- (iii) With regards to support available for staff, the Director stated that it was recognised that staff worked within a challenging environment and were supported in various ways. Members noted that staff had monthly supervisions which presented an opportunity to discuss cases, personal supervision which focussed on wellbeing, pods whereby teams could collaborate to discuss complex cases and challenges, and appraisals whereby wellbeing and training would be discussed. In addition to this, the practice excellence team was responsible for supporting staff through observing practice. The Council also had a wealth of wellbeing resources available to staff which included a counselling service. Members noted that the Department was mindful of experience, and therefore staff being trained the ASYE programme were allocated with a protected number of cases.
- (iv) Members noted that of the 717 children in care at the time, 206 of those were being supported by the family safeguarding service which would determine what the long-term plan for those children would be. In addition to this, 82 became looked after due to seeking asylum, 388 were children with a care plan of long-term care in the Children in Care service, and 41 were supported by the Disabled Children's Service.
- (v) In response to a question relating to how the Service overcame language barriers when supporting Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), the Director stated that interpreters were present in meetings in order to facilitate communication between the child and social workers. In addition to this, UASC were enrolled on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses to assist with to reading, writing and speaking English.
- (vi) With regards to the assessment process relating to UASC, the Director stated that the Department would undertake a Merton compliant age assessment, follow government guidance, and refer to a court assessment. In order to make a

judgement on claimed age, the Service would consider their life journey and experiences in their country of birth, as well as a genogram. In the event that the individual was considered to be of adult age, the Home Office would then be responsible for their support.

RESOLVED:

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

12. Leicestershire County Council's Responsibility to Care Leavers.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of Leicestershire County Council's duties and responsibilities to care leavers, the progress achieved and the development plan going forward. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 12', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question asked regarding the responsibility for care leavers who had moved into another authority area, the Director stated that the Council would still be responsible for providing care leaver support to those individuals.
- (ii) Members noted that Personal Assistants (PA) were directly employed by the Council. All children in care were allocated with a PA from the age of 16 in order to support the establishment of a meaningful and trusting relationship prior to turning 18.
- (iii) With regards to support for the 37% of care leavers not in employment, education or training, the Director stated that senior practitioners were focussed on supporting these individuals. The Service was developing opportunities for work experience and apprenticeships, in addition to developing relationships with other organisations which provide support for those not in employment, education or training. Members noted that some of this cohort would be work ready, but that some would require additional support.
- (iv) In response to a question regarding the number of care leavers which had received a bursary for university of £4,000, as part of the local care leaver offer, the Director stated that she would provide this figure to members after the meeting.
- (v) At the request of the Chairman, the Director agreed to provide members with additional information relating to the journey of care leavers, in order to increase awareness of their experiences following leaving care.

RESOLVED:

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

- (b) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with the number of care leavers which had received a bursary for university of £4,000, as part of the local care leaver offer.
- (c) That the Director of Children and Family Services be requested to provide the Committee with additional information relating to the journey of care leavers.

13. Families First Reforms - Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided the Committee with an overview of the national reforms for children's services, Keeping Children Safe, Helping Families Thrive; and details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 13', is filed with these minutes.

The Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Families stated that although the reforms were being introduced nationally, it was important that the Council was taking steps to respond in order to ensure that correct the approach was being taken. He emphasised that early work being delivered on workforce data and partnership working would ensure that the Department was in a position to respond effectively and would provide the opportunity to build on good practice which was being delivered. He stated that he was confident that the Department would continue to focus on delivering early, meaningful support to families and achieving lasting positive outcomes for children.

A question was raised regarding the Children's Social Care Prevention Grant. The Director stated that the £270 million grant was new funding which had been made available through the final local government finance settlement to support local authorities to deliver preventative support to children. Of the total grant amount, the Council would receive £1.4m which would be utilised in order to develop an implementation plan for both designing and implementing services in line within the national reforms. It was unclear whether the grant amount would be sufficient to cover the costs of service delivery. However, the Department would utilise existing prevention funding in order to fully deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of national reforms for children's services, Keeping children Safe, Helping Families thrive; and details of the proposed programme of work to design and deliver the reforms across Children and Family Services in Leicestershire, be noted.

14. Local Delivery of the Homes for Ukraine Scheme.

The Committee considered a report of the Director of Children and Family Services which provided an overview of the Homes for Ukraine scheme, and the support provided locally by the County Council. A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 14', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were made:

- (i) In response to a question relating to funding for the Homes for Ukraine sponsorship scheme, the Director stated that Council's work relating to the scheme continued to

be fully funded through tariff funding provided by Central government, and that the reimbursement of 'thank you' payments were paid at the national rate.

- (ii) Members were pleased with support which had been provided to Ukrainian families and wished to place on record their thanks to both hosts and officers for their ongoing work and support.

RESOLVED:

That the overview of the Homes for Ukraine scheme and the support provided locally by the County Council over the past three years, be noted.

15. Quarter 4 2024/25 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 for the period January to March 2025 (Quarter 4). A copy of the report, marked 'Agenda Item 15', is filed with these minutes.

Arising from discussion, the following points were raised:

- (i) In response to a question regarding whether the standard of education of children who were electively home educated (EHE) was monitored, the Director stated that the Council had no formal powers or duty to monitor the provision of education at home. Once parents had made the decision to EHE, they would then be responsible for ensuring that the child received a good quality education. The Department continued to offer support where it was requested by parents and promoted useful networks, but oversight was limited. If sufficient information about the home education had not been provided and it appeared that a child was not receiving a suitable education at home, the Council could serve a s.437(1) notice, requiring that the parents satisfy the Council that the child was receiving a full-time and efficient education at home which was suitable to the child's needs. If the parents failed to satisfy the Council that the child was receiving a suitable education, then it could serve a school attendance order.
- (ii) Concern was raised regarding the safeguarding of children who were not on roll within a school. The Director acknowledged the importance of a child being in school and stated that the Council had a duty to safeguard all children and had undertaken work to ensure that the public, parents and families were aware of safeguarding and child protection. Concerns regarding safeguarding were expected to be raised by the community. The Department continued to have contact with families with a child not in school and used the opportunity to look at the family's life.
- (iii) Members noted that the Council continued to follow national policy guidance on EHE and had reviewed internal policy to ensure that parents and children received the correct level of support with the decision to EHE. The reasons behind the decision to EHE were collected and monitored in order to inform the strategy for EHE. The Department continued to work constructively with families in order to ensure that children received the best education to meet their needs whether that was in a school environment or at home.

RESOLVED:

That the update on the Children and Family Services Department's performance for the period January to March 2025 (Quarter 4), be noted.

16. Date of next meeting.

RESOLVED:

It was noted that the next meeting of the Committee would be held on 2 September at 14:00.

2.00 - 4.04 pm
03 June 2025

CHAIRMAN

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