



**CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
8 SEPTEMBER 2023**

PRESENT: COUNCILLOR R J KENDRICK (CHAIRMAN)

Councillors W H Gray (Vice-Chairman), A J Baxter, C Matthews, Mrs S A J Nutman, N Sear, T J N Smith, M A Whittington and R A Wright

Added Members

Parent Governor Representatives: Dr E van der Zee

Councillor S Roe was also in attendance.

Officers in attendance:-

Melissa Bennett–Shaul (remote) (Senior Commissioning Officer – Children’s), Matthew Clayton (Interim Head of Capital Reform & Education Sufficiency), Linda Dennett (Assistant Director - Children's Health and Commissioning), Rachel Freeman (Head of Service - Children in Care and Residential Estates), Charlotte Gray (Head of Service – Children's Strategic Commissioning), Sara Gregory (Commissioning Manager, Children's Strategic Commissioning), Tracy Johnson (Senior Scrutiny Officer), Jo Kavanagh (Assistant Director of Early Help), Sarah Nardone (Assistant Director - Sector Led Improvement) Dave Pennington (Head of Property Development), Heather Sandy (Executive Director of Children's Services), Martin Smith (Assistant Director for Children's Education), Matthew Stapleton (Senior Project Manager-Corporate Property), Alison Toyne (Project Manager – Corporate Property), and Jess Wosser-Yates (Democratic Services Officer).

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE / REPLACEMENT MEMBERS

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors A W Briggs and Mrs. P A Bradwell MBE – Executive Councilor for Children’s Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration.

18 DECLARATION OF MEMBERS' INTERESTS

There were no declarations made at this point in proceedings.

19 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING HELD ON 21 JULY 2023

RESOLVED

That the minutes of the previous meeting be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

20 ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE CHAIRMAN, EXECUTIVE COUNCILLOR FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES, COMMUNITY SAFETY, PROCUREMENT AND MIGRATION AND CHIEF OFFICERS

Councillor S Roe, Executive Support Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement, and Migration had attended several visits to District Council's in Lincolnshire to discuss Corporate Parenting responsibilities. The sessions, which were run by the Corporate Parenting Manager, were well received by District colleagues.

Heather Sandy, Executive Director – Children's Services, informed the Committee following recent press coverage that there had been no reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) identified in Lincolnshire academies or maintained schools. The Committee was assured that the Property Team had also conducted checks on children's centres, children's homes and secure children's homes and had not identified RAAC.

21 LINCOLNSHIRE SECURE CHILDREN'S HOME – LAND PURCHASE AND SECTION 203

Consideration was given to a report from Dave Pennington, Head of Property Development, Matt Clayton, Interim Head of Capital Reform and Education Sufficiency, Dave Clarke, Service Lead – Secure Estate and Rachel Freeman, Head of Service - Children in Care and Residential Estates. The Committee was invited to consider the contents of the report which was being presented to the Executive for a decision on 3 October 2023.

Support was given to the new secure children's home and its proposed location which would help to generate economic growth in this area. It was recognised that the existing secure unit was very dated, and the current location did not allow for any expansion.

During its discussion, the Committee explored the following topics:

Invoking Section 203 Powers

- Assurance was provided that invoking Section 203 to override the restrictive covenants was a managed risk and was a power that had been used by other local authorities to also override restrictive covenants. The process used at other local authorities had been examined to ensure the Council followed the same route and was not doing anything different. Several lawyers in Legal Services Lincolnshire have been working on this issue and external barristers have also been consulted with on multiple occasions.
- Any challenge to the engagement of the Section 203 provisions would be from an adjacent landowner if they felt the value of their land had suffered a loss. Legal advice had confirmed that there was limited risk that loss would be suffered by overriding the restrictive covenants due to the nature of the development. All the landowners had been contacted on a regular basis to provide them with an opportunity to comment on the proposals. As this was evidenced, the Council would have a very strong case if any challenge was received and would be able to demonstrate that the Council had acted reasonably and taken every step to mitigate the risk and engage adjacent landowners.

Enabling Works Contract

- The cost for the enabling works was being negotiated and had already been reduced from the £7.26 million stated in the report. Legal advice had confirmed that the formal decision would still give the Council authority to continue with the scheme even if the final value was less.

Timescales and Next Steps

- In relation to the timescales for completion, it was confirmed that the plan was to start construction on site in early 2024, with the new secure home being completed at the start of 2026.
- With regards to next steps, a full scheme appraisal would be brought through the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and then for a decision towards the end of 2023. This would set out the main works contract and would be for the totality of the project and include the full cost for construction.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee supports the recommendations to the Executive as set out in the report.
2. That any additional comments be passed on to the Executive in relation to this item.

22 RECOMMISSIONING OF THE PORTAGE SERVICE

Consideration was given to a report Sarah Gregory, Commissioning Manager – Children’s Strategic Commissioning, on the recommissioning of the Portage Service. The Committee was invited to consider the contents of the report ahead of a decision by the Executive Councillor for Children’s Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration between 18 and 22 September 2023.

During its discussion, the Committee explored the following topics:

Lead Provider Selection Process

- In relation to selecting a lead provider to provide the Portage Service, it was confirmed that special schools within the Lincolnshire SEND Alliance would be approached and invited to nominate a lead provider. The Council would then engage in discussions with the lead provider. A draft service specification had been developed setting out proposals for service provision as well as clear performance targets and outcomes. As this would be a partnership collaboration agreement, the Council would work in partnership with the lead provider to also identify anything else that they could offer above the minimum service provision and agree any other targets and outcomes that the Council would like to see included as well.
- Assurance was provided that special schools had been engaged with during the review process and officers were confident that they would be able to identify a lead provider based on the proposed model.

Potential Impact of not recommissioning the Portage Service

- If the Portage Service was not recommissioned, there would be increased pressure on SEND services and other services that support children during their early years. This could mean that services would not be able to meet a child's needs quick enough, which could result in more children going into special schools or more specialist provision. Through early intervention, different services could work together to provide support to these children earlier to prepare them for school, which and support as many as possible to have their needs met in mainstream school. Without the Portage Service, there could be more children starting school with speech, language and communication needs, which would put increased pressure on primary schools and on speech and language services, and delay support being provided to children who were already behind where their peers might be.

Funding the Cost Pressure

- With regards to funding the cost pressure of nearly £53,000 per annum, it was confirmed that a strategic board considered the cost pressures on the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant, and this cost pressure had been factored in, in anticipation that it would come through. Through the transformation work and strategies such as the Portage Service, it was hoped that the demand on the High Needs Block could be managed and met within the overall budget for the next financial year, and this cost pressure would be mapped into the budget moving forward.

Single Point of Access

- It was expected that the new single point of access to the Portage Service would be managed by the lead provider after further discussions with the special schools to ensure that it would not become a bottleneck. The lead provider would be responsible for looking at where the requests come in from and moving staffing resources around to where the demands were in order to support families sooner.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee supports the recommendations to the Executive Councillor for Children's Services, Community Safety, Procurement and Migration.
2. That any additional comments be passed on to the Executive Councillor in relation to this item.

**23 SERVICE LEVEL PERFORMANCE REPORTING AGAINST THE SUCCESS FRAMEWORK
2023-24 - QUARTER 1**

Consideration was given to a report by Jo Kavanagh, Assistant Director – Early Help, which provided a summary of the Service Level Performance Reporting against the Success Framework 2023-24 for Quarter 1.

The Committee was guided through the report, and during the discussion the following points were highlighted:

PI 45 16-17 year old Children in Care participating in learning

- This measure did not meet its target; Members noted that the cohort of Children in Care (CiC) assessed by this measure fluctuated each quarter and had varying backgrounds and needs.
- The Assistant Director – Early help noted the work of the Virtual School which supported 16–17-year-old CiC to engage with education, employment, or training.
- This cohort of CiC included Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC), who were cared for by the Local Authority.
- Members raised several concerns about the potential impact on Children’s Services due to the possible arrival of UASC in Scampton later in the year, on top of the current 89 UASC already in Lincolnshire. It was assured that Children’s Services and the Home Office were working to mitigate risks. It was noted that social workers in Lincolnshire would have to be supported to conduct age assessments.
- The Committee considered the benefits of introducing online learning tools to help CiC who struggled to attend or engage with school.
- LCC Children’s Services engaged regularly with the Education Endowment Foundation which aimed to improve the educational attainment of the poorest pupils in schools, and used the data produced by the Foundation to assess the effect of interventions on various cohorts of pupils. Additionally, it was noted that The Assistant Director for Children’s Education worked closely with the teaching school hubs to further shape pupil interventions to help improve outcomes.

PI 23 Children in Care

- It was noted that this measure was 50.1% but achieved its target of 49.8% as it fell within the tolerance range.
- Members considered the ramifications of the gradual increase of CiC since 2021. The Executive Director – Children’s Services acknowledged the potential risk of the increase and informed it was compounded by national increased costs of placements for CiC since the pandemic meaning a small increase of CiC could cause significant financial pressures. Members were assured that Children’s Services prioritised early intervention to prevent young people from entering the care system, and further assurance was provided that CiC received an excellent service in Lincolnshire despite financial pressures.
- The Executive Director – Children’s Services highlighted that central government intervention would be required to stabilise the cost of CiC placements.

RESOLVED

1. That the report be received.
2. That the Committee’s satisfaction with the Children and Young People Service Level Performance for 2023-24 Quarter 1 be noted.

24 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME

Consideration was given to a report by Tracy Johnson, Senior Scrutiny Officer, which provided the opportunity for the Committee to comment on its work programme to ensure that its scrutiny activity was focused where it can be of greatest benefit. There had been no changes published, although the Senior Scrutiny Officer informed Members that the next meeting would include an item inviting the Committee to consider potential topics for a Scrutiny Review.

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Upon request, the Executive Director – Children’s Services agreed to speak with the Chief Executive to determine the most appropriate Committee to consider an item on the impact of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children and young people on LCC’s services.

RESOLVED

That the Work Programme be reviewed and agreed upon.

25 CONSIDERATION OF EXEMPT INFORMATION

That in accordance with Section 100A of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following items of business on the grounds that if they were present there could be a disclosure of exempt information as defined in paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Section 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended.

26 HOLBEACH WILLIAM STUKELEY COFE PRIMARY SCHOOL - SINGLE CLASSROOM EXTENSION, HALL AND STAFFROOM EXTENSION.

Consideration was given to the exempt report, and the Committee raised a number of questions which were answered by the Officers present.

RESOLVED

1. That the Committee supports the recommendations to the Leader of Lincolnshire County Council as set out in the report.
2. That the Committee’s comments be passed on to the Leader of Lincolnshire County Council in relation to this item.

The meeting closed at 12.23 pm