

**Children, Young People, Families & Learning Overview and Scrutiny Commission****1:30 p.m. – 4:13 p.m. Monday 16<sup>th</sup> February 2026****Room 77, The Guildhall, Alfred Gelder Street, Hull, HU12AA and MS Teams (Officers Only)****Present:**

Councillors: Payne (Chair); M. Collinson; Grozav; Henry; Hofman (substituting for Councillor A Thompson); Kassim and Kennett.

**In attendance:**

Councillor Tock, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services, Hull City Council  
P. Turner, Executive Director Children/Family Services/Deputy Chief Executive, Hull City Council  
R. Roberts, Strategic Lead for Early Help and Prevention, Hull City Council  
M. Meredith, Assistant Director for Learning and Skills, Hull City Council  
L. Davidson, Head of Safeguarding Partnerships, Hull City Council  
  
P. Todd, Scrutiny Officer, Hull City Council

**Apologies:**

Councillor A Thompson.

<b>Minute Number</b>		
<b>61</b>	<b>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST (2)</b>	
<p>Councillor Collinson declared a personal interest in minute 66 insofar as he has a child with Special Educational Needs.</p> <p>Councillor Henry declared a personal interest in minute 66 insofar as she has a child with Special Educational Needs.</p>		
<b>Recommendations:</b>		<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
a) That the declared interests be noted.		a) To ensure the Register of Members' Interests is updated accordingly.
<b>62</b>	<b>MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 19<sup>TH</sup> JANUARY 2026 (3)</b>	
<p>P. Todd (Scrutiny Officer) submitted the minutes of the meeting held on Monday 19<sup>th</sup> January 2026 for approval.</p>		
<b>Recommendations:</b>		<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
a) That the minutes of the meeting of this Commission, held on Monday 19 <sup>th</sup> January 2026, be taken as read and correctly recorded.		a) N/A.

63

**PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES  
UPDATE (4)**

Councillor Tock (Portfolio Holder for Children's Services) attended the meeting to provide an update as the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services. The update highlighted:

- i. Children's Services continued to experience a high-pace year with major national changes and announcements, supported by strong partnership working across education, health and regional networks.
- ii. An Ofsted full inspection was expected imminently, following significant improvement work since the previous inspection.
- iii. Nationally, councils faced major overspends in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), but Hull was comparatively well-positioned and better prepared than many local authorities.
- iv. Eleven Hull Education Trust schools were nationally recognised for strong outcomes for disadvantaged pupils.
- v. Healthy Holidays continued to run a smaller half-term programme with funded activities and food.
- vi. Peer review of leaving-care services highlighted strengths including a strong learning culture, committed workforce, strong leadership, good partnerships and openness to innovation.
- vii. The Hull Voice & Influence Partnership Strategy had been launched.
- viii. Progress updates included:
  - a. Willowfield specialist school plans submitted;
  - b. Oakfield becoming an academy;
  - c. SEND outreach expansion;
  - d. Private fostering awareness work;
  - e. Virtual memory boxes for children in care;
  - f. Over 50% of babies breastfed at 6 weeks — a major public-health milestone (up from 6% in 2008).
- ix. "Grow Your Own" workforce strategy reduced reliance on agency social workers, with Hull now below comparator groups for agency use.
- x. Hull now had 17 registered children's homes, including solo and disability provision, with more children placed locally than with external providers.

- xi. The national Post-16 Education & Skills White Paper would strengthen transitions, require two weeks' work experience, and reform vocational pathways.

The Commission discussed:

- i. Concerns about allocating fixed places for Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) children within colleges, noting that some young people worked in local shops or takeaways due to poverty and might never use those reserved places, potentially wasting capacity when other learners were waiting. The Commission was advised that services held a strong understanding of the NEET cohort and would not ring-fence spaces for young people unlikely to take them up. Instead, the approach would involve working directly with providers and known NEET individuals to tailor provision to need, including young people in short-term employment who might still benefit from re-engagement. It was noted that formal guidance would follow as the relevant white paper progressed through government, but the principle was to ensure reserved places reflected actual, identified need.
- ii. Positive examples of joined-up working in the city, referencing feedback from the Parent Carer Forum and alignment with the approach described by the Assistant Director for Learning & Skills. The Commission was advised that this reflected real lived experience and supported ongoing collaborative work across services.

Recommendations:	Reasons for Recommendations:
a. That the update be noted.	a. N/A

64

**EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE &  
FAMILY SERVICES UPDATE (5)**

P. Turner (Executive Director Children/Family Services/Deputy Chief Executive) attended the meeting to update the Commission on current/key issues and for members to identify matters to be considered and raise questions and issues that may lead to further work being undertaken. The Executive Director's highlights included:

- i. National guidance on screen use for under-5s would be published in April 2026, following research showing high screen use negatively affects children's language development. Practical, non-judgemental advice for parents would be included.
- ii. Early work was underway with regeneration colleagues on a funding bid to the Combined Authority to support 16–25s who are NEET or at risk of becoming NEET; an outline proposal had already been shortlisted. A full business case would now be required.
- iii. The Post-16 Education and Skills White Paper would be considered later in the year, outlining major implications for reducing NEET and strengthening post-16 pathways.
- iv. Fostering recruitment work continued, including a redesigned website, updated content and new videos to improve accessibility and support prospective carers. Councillors were encouraged to promote fostering opportunities.
- v. Bright Spots survey results would be reported to Corporate Parenting once analysis was complete, with findings to be shared with scrutiny members.
- vi. The Healthy Activities and Food (HAF) programme would run again over February half-term.

The Commission discussed:

- i. The confusion being created by the volume of current white papers and overlapping reforms. The Commission was advised that a Director of Children's Services had compiled a full list of all forthcoming white papers and associated reforms, which could be circulated to members if helpful.
- ii. National ambitions to recruit 10,000 foster carers—despite an estimated 8,000-carer shortfall—and asked whether this target related to a national pool or to localised recruitment, and whether new funding would accompany it. The Commission was advised that the reforms were moving toward Regional Care Co-operatives (RCCs), where individuals contacting a central number would become carers

available across a region while still aiming for placements close to home. Officers emphasised that Hull continued to prioritise local placements, had increased recruitment efforts, and were strengthening retention. Further detail and associated resourcing were still awaited nationally.

- iii. Screen-use concerns and referenced Hull’s previous success in improving breastfeeding rates through coordinated partnership working, suggesting the same model could drive progress on this issue. The Commission was advised that investment for NEET support remained important and that maintaining open pathways reinforced to young people that the system continued to value and support them. Officers also confirmed that young people in employment without training were still classified as NEET and would continue to be encouraged into appropriate learning or training opportunities.

<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
a) That a list of all forthcoming white papers and associated reforms be provided to the Commission off agenda.	a. For information.

<b>65</b>	<b>BEST START FAMILY HUBS AND HEALTHY BABIES PROGRAMME 2026-2029 (6)</b>	
<p>R. Roberts (Strategic Lead for Early Help and Prevention) attended the meeting to present the Best Start Family Hubs and Healthy Babies Programme for 2026-2029. The officer provided an overview of the report highlighting that: the Council was entering a national early-years programme aimed at improving the Good Level of Development (GLD) at age 5, in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage expectations; The work was funded by the Department for Education and aligned with wider national targets; The biggest area of underperformance locally continued to be literacy, speech, language and communication, with screen-time impact identified as a key contributing factor; The GLD target for children eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) had been increased to 64%; From September, changes to local FSM eligibility criteria would mean more children becoming eligible, and this had already been mapped and planned for.</p>		

The Commission discussed:

- i. The expected impact of upcoming changes on the voluntary sector, noting that reduced Integrated Care Board (ICB) capacity could affect community networks such as the Neighbourhood Network, CVS, Forum and health-related support that underpins participation in programmes like HAF. The Commission was advised that the issue represented a major challenge, that rebranding was not permitted under the forthcoming “Best Start in Life” framework, and that the service was awaiting new guidance due in March; officers stressed that branding was not the priority and that planning would begin once national direction was confirmed.
- ii. The continuation of school-holiday vouchers funded through the Household Support Fund and asked how long the arrangement would remain. The Commission was advised that the fund had now become the Crisis Resilience Fund, with no delivery plan required until July, and that no immediate changes were anticipated to free school meal vouchers. Members were informed that from September the eligibility criteria for free school meals would expand to all families receiving any level of Universal Credit, increasing eligible numbers by approximately 600 children each year at £15 per child.
- iii. Whether both HAF funding and free school meal vouchers could be sustained long-term, expressing concern that the Government may remove one of the schemes. The Commission was advised that the Crisis Resilience Fund aimed to build families’ financial resilience and that partners such as Citizens Advice Bureau (CAB) provided vital support, though planned cutbacks would affect capacity. Officers emphasised the importance of ensuring strong liaison with CAB and other community organisations so families continued to benefit despite staffing changes.
- iv. The broader operation of the family hubs programme and the need to ensure engagement from families who could benefit most. The Commission was advised that registration was at 100% due to birth-linking, though many families accessed support through GPs, nurseries and other settings rather than hubs. Targeting remained focused on the most disadvantaged 30%, and although additional hubs would be beneficial, financial constraints limited expansion. Performance was tracked through postcode data.
- v. The value of understanding the impact of family hubs on school readiness, requesting data on the proportion of children achieving required standards who were engaged with hub services. The Commission was advised that such data could be provided, including breakdowns by age-two development checks and home learning interventions, noting that COVID-19 disruptions had significantly affected early-years development. Members were informed that GLD outcomes had recently begun to rise again and that a deeper-dive workshop could be arranged through future scrutiny.

vi. Inequalities within family hub delivery and whether the programme prioritised new and emerging communities or children with additional needs. The Commission was advised that initial guidance placed a strong focus on SEND, requiring each family hub to have an embedded SEND specialist, with emphasis on speech, language and communication. Investment and delivery models were still being developed, but guidance also required specific emphasis on addressing gaps affecting Black and ethnic minority communities.

<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) That due to the emerging issues relating to ICB reductions and their impact on early-years / Best Start programmes, the report be referred to Health Overview and Scrutiny Commission for noting off-agenda.</li> <li>b) That an off-agenda update be circulated to provide more detail on the proportion of children achieving a good level of development linked to family hub engagement, and what is working and not working with regards to the hub functionality.</li> <li>c) That a future workshop on Good Level of Development (GLD), potentially held in a Family Hub, be explored.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) To ensure Health Overview and Scrutiny Members are informed.</li> <li>b) To allow for additional detail to be provided.</li> <li>c) To examine GLD in depth and support better informed scrutiny.</li> </ul>

66	<b>HULL'S SEND IMPROVEMENT PLAN (7)</b>	
----	-----------------------------------------	--

M. Meredith (Assistant Director for Learning and Skills attended the meeting to present the SEND Improvement Plan for Hull. The presentation highlighted that: the current SEND Improvement Plan was expected to change format soon, as the council needed a single integrated plan that

combined the existing improvement plan with the forthcoming national reform plan for the DfE; the reforms did not change the direction of travel, as the national expectations aligned with work already happening locally; the SEND system involved health, education and social care, all contributing to a complex, multi-agency landscape; the existing plan had six strategic priorities, co-produced with the Parent Carer Forum, each led by a senior officer responsible for tracking progress; strong governance arrangements included six-monthly DfE reviews, providing assurance on progress; the SEND team had achieved a year with no agency workers, a significant achievement given the intensity and pressure of the work; Upcoming national reforms would introduce seven pillars, but these were very similar to the current six priorities, offering continuity with minor enhancements rather than major change.

The Commission discussed:

- i. The charts in the appendix and queried why some items, listed as “on track” or “some concerns”, did not appear in the narrative text, which referred only to embedded or completed actions. The Commission was advised that the items shown on the right of the chart reflected actions that had gone to the SEND Strategic Board and been signed off as complete, while those still in progress were not duplicated in the narrative. Members noted it would be useful to see clearly what remains outstanding.
- ii. The strategic priorities in section 2.3 of the report and observed that priorities one and two were closely aligned, with the reforms largely reinforcing an already established system. The Commission was advised that the next update would be provided alongside the development of the new SEND plan and that a workshop could be arranged to support this process.
- iii. The timescales for producing the new plan and asked how long development would take. The Commission was advised that the plan must be submitted in June or July, with local authorities receiving sustainability grants capable of writing off up to 90% of their high-needs deficits once reforms were submitted. Officers indicated that preparatory work would need to align with scrutiny scheduling.
- iv. How best to scrutinise development of the new plan and whether examining one pillar—such as co-production—would be more manageable within meeting time constraints. The Commission was advised that an informal session would be appropriate and that early years SEND work taking place in February could feed into this, with a further session being arranged for April or early June depending on capacity.

Recommendations:	Reasons for Recommendations:
<p>a) That a future workshop session be explored that focuses on one SEND reform pillar, as part of developing the new SEND plan.</p>	<p>a) To allow focused engagement, supported by early-years SEND work already underway.</p>

67	FAMILIES FIRST PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMME (8)	
<p>L. Davidson (Head of Safeguarding Partnerships) and R. Roberts (Strategic Lead for Early Help and Prevention) attended the meeting to provide an update on the Families First Partnership Programme. The update highlighted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. The Families First Partnership Programme was published last year and represents significant national reform of children’s social care.</li> <li>ii. The reforms are being driven through the Safeguarding Children Partnership, as expectations on all key partners — local authority, police, health and the voluntary sector — are substantial.</li> <li>iii. The reforms aim to rebalance the system, with fewer children in care or on child protection plans and more families receiving earlier help to prevent escalation and improve long-term stability.</li> <li>iv. The programme applies up to age 25, reflecting a whole-family, whole-life approach and recognising that needs do not stop at 18.</li> <li>v. The emphasis is on multi-agency working, with partners jointly responsible for safeguarding and delivering support at every stage of a child’s journey.</li> <li>vi. A core principle is ensuring children and families receive “the right support at the right time”, operating as one system across universal, early help, targeted support, child protection and care pathways.</li> </ul> <p>The Commission discussed:</p>		

- i. Concerns raised by young people about repeatedly having different social workers, leading to disengagement when they felt they had to retell their story each time. The Commission was advised that this reflected past instability caused by heavy reliance on agency staff, but the city now had a far more stable workforce with significantly fewer agency workers, resulting in reduced handovers. It was explained that under the new family help model, a lead practitioner—whether a social worker, family support worker, health visitor, school nurse or school pastoral lead—would stay with the family throughout the process as part of a whole-family approach, supported by family help assessments addressing both individual and family strengths and needs.
- ii. The prevalence of neurodiversity within families and asked where parental rights sat when needs were complex or undiagnosed. The Commission was advised that the Children Act and Working Together guidance remained unchanged and continued to apply robustly. Officers explained that SEND was no longer viewed as a separate issue but one that permeated all systems, with 60–70% of families supported through targeted early help presenting with SEND-related needs, including parents who themselves may be undiagnosed.
- iii. Concerns that many parents had struggled for years without identification of their own SEND needs and asked how early help would reflect this. The Commission was advised that SEND would be integrated across family help rather than delivered as a stand-alone service. All staff had received neurodiversity training to support early identification, and a test-and-learn programme was under way to explore how specialist disability support would align with the new model. Officers noted that all local authorities were designing approaches differently due to varying local contexts.
- iv. The re-emphasis on long-standing values within family-led practice, noting that many of these principles had remained embedded in the workforce even before the new reforms. The Commission was advised that the renewed focus on family networks, decision-making and strengths-based practice represented a continuation and strengthening of work already carried out in Hull.
- v. The importance of engaging fathers and ensuring that more men were visible and supported within the system. The Commission was advised that this was recognised within the Best Start approach, and that family hubs were planned to open on Saturdays to improve access for working families and ensure greater inclusion of fathers.
- vi. The need to maintain workforce confidence, strong supervision and safeguarding during the major cultural shift required by the new model. The Commission was advised that high-quality supervision and oversight were central to the approach, and engagement sessions—including video-supported consultations—were being used to build staff confidence, gather feedback and ensure changes reflected professional experience rather than being perceived as abrupt system changes.
- vii. The long-term development of multi-agency working and how strong inter-service relationships had now become embedded across the city. The Commission was advised that Hull benefitted from being a smaller geographic area with lower workforce churn than larger authorities, helping create continuity in partnership arrangements.

viii. The strengthened passion and stability among social workers, noting the significant reduction in agency staff and improved continuity for children and families. The Commission was advised that while some practitioners would always prefer agency work, the marked decline in agency dependence had improved consistency and service quality. It was further noted that government funding had been allocated to the VCSE sector to support partnership working as part of the reforms.	
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
a) That the update be noted.	a) N/A

<b>68</b>	<b>CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, FAMILIES &amp; LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION – OUTSTANDING ACTIONS (9)</b>	
<p>P. Todd (Scrutiny Officer) submitted the outstanding action list.</p> <p>The Commission discussed the action list and agreed that the completed items be removed and the Scrutiny Officer follow up those actions that were still awaiting a response.</p> <p>The Licensing referral was discussed, as the Commission was not satisfied with the response provided due to their strong concerns surrounding exploitation and the risks associated. The Commission requested an agenda item be added to the work programme that provided further information from Licensing including the number of spot checks; when/where they occurred; what was found; how risks are being addressed.</p>		

Recommendations:	Reasons for Recommendations:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. That the completed items be removed and the Scrutiny Officer follow up those actions that were still awaiting a response.</li> <li>b. That an item be added to the work programme to explore more detail on safeguarding children using taxi services; the driver verification process, to ensure license holders are the only drivers operating their vehicles; the number of spot checks; when/where they occurred; what was found; how risks are being addressed.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. To ensure any outstanding actions are being addressed in a timely manner.</li> <li>b. To ensure all appropriate measures are being taken to safeguard children in the city.</li> </ul>

<p>69</p>	<p><b>CHILDREN, YOUNG PEOPLE, FAMILIES &amp; LEARNING OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION WORK PROGRAMME 2025-26 (10)</b></p>	
<p>P. Todd (Scrutiny Officer) submitted the draft work programme.</p> <p>A discussion took place with regards to unauthorised school absences, and the Commission requested further information on how this looks like in Hull. The update would include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>i. primary vs secondary</li> <li>ii. time-of-year patterns</li> <li>iii. comparison with statistical neighbours</li> <li>iv. drivers and context (including cultural factors)</li> </ul>		

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>v. whether local holiday patterns are contributing</li> <li>vi. whether Hull is doing enough to reduce absence</li> </ul>	
<b>Recommendations:</b>	<b>Reasons for Recommendations:</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. That the work programme be noted.</li> <li>b. That an off-agenda update be provided on unauthorised school absences.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) N/A</li> <li>b) To generate understanding of the trends and if anything further needs addressing.</li> </ul>