

<b>CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE</b>
<b>27 OCTOBER 2015</b>
<b>CHILDREN IN CARE - UPDATE</b>
<b>REPORT OF HEAD OF DEMOCRATIC SERVICES</b>

1. **Purpose**

To consider a brief overview of the current demands and to receive an update on Nottingham City Council's Children in Care.

2. **Action required**

The Committee is asked to consider an overview of Nottingham City Council's arrangements for Children in Care.

3. **Background information**

- 3.1 The term looked-after children or children in care refer to all children under the age of 18 being looked-after by a local authority. It includes both those subject to a care order under section 31 of the Children Act 1989 and those looked after by a volunteer agreement with their parents under section 20 of that Act.
- 3.2 Once a child becomes looked after, children may be placed by the local authority with a family member, foster carers or in a residential children's home. The purpose of the care system is to look after children where parents are unable to do so for a variety of reasons. These include situations where parents are abusive or cannot provide adequate care, or where there is no parent or relative available, such as unaccompanied asylum seeking children or those whose parents have died.
- 3.3 The welfare of all children and young people in the local community is a top priority for any local authority. Safeguarding ensures that children are kept as safe as possible by identifying needs, views and any risks they face.
- 3.4 Over the last five years overview and scrutiny committees have become increasingly aware of the need to consider the effectiveness of local safeguarding arrangements. This was highlighted by Professor Jay's 2014 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham and the response by the Communities and Local Government Select Committee.

**Children in Care or Looked after children**

- 3.4 Since 2012 there have been a number of significant changes to the legislation and policy context for looked after children. Whilst many of the

underlying principles of good practice remain the same there has been a renewed impetus to improve and develop the system. This has included:

- A new drive to speed up the adoption process for children by establishing clear time frames and 'fostering for adoption' regulations.
  - The 'staying put' framework to enable care leavers to remain living with their foster families till the age of 21 to support them in education and training.
  - New quality standards for children's services in general and for the health and wellbeing of looked-after children in particular.
  - A focus on narrowing the gap in educational attainment for looked-after children by introducing the Virtual School Head (VSH) role and implementing the use of Personal Education Plans (PEPs).
  - New regulations for children's homes with a focus on quality, management and leadership.
  - A new national level multi-departmental Care Leavers Strategy.
- 3.6 Children in the care of a local authority are one of the most vulnerable groups in society. The majority of children in care are there because they have suffered abuse or neglect. At any one time around 68,000 children are looked after in England with over 90,000 passing through the care system each year.
- 3.7 There has been an overall increase in the numbers of children entering care country-wide since 2007 and a rise in the proportion who are removed through the intervention of the courts as opposed to coming into care by agreement with parents.
- 3.8 When elected, all councillors take on the role of 'corporate parent' to children looked after by their local authority. There is a duty to take an interest in the wellbeing and development of those children. The scrutiny function provides a key way in which councillors can fulfil this responsibility as it presents an opportunity to ask questions to service providers and assure themselves that the systems are in place to ensure children in care are being well looked-after.

#### Focus for review of children in care

- 3.9 As of 1 October 2015, Nottingham City Council was responsible for 601 children in care in the city, which equated to 94 children per 10,000 population. In the 2014/15 financial year 70 children in our care were adopted. At 1 October in 2015/16 financial year 44 children in our care have been discharged as a result of permanent outcomes, such as Adoption Order, Child Arrangement Order or Special Guardianship. There are 7 children's homes, which are registered with OFSTED, and 5 Semi-independent homes preparing young people to leave care.

3.10 Nottingham City Council provides educational support for children in care via a Virtual School. The Virtual School for children in care is a cross phased school supporting children in care from 4 to 18 years and keeps track on how pupils are progressing. The school works collaboratively across various departments within Nottingham City Council, external organisations and schools to ensure that the Council's cohort of children in care receive the best education possible.

4. **List of attached information**

Performance Indicator Report for Children in Care September 2015

5. **Background papers, other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information**

None

6. **Published documents referred to in compiling this report**

None

7. **Wards affected**

Citywide

8. **Contact information**

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