

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at LB 31 - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 18 October 2016 from 11.00 - 12.56

Membership

Present

Councillor Azad Choudhry
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Glyn Jenkins (Vice Chair)
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor Brian Parbutt (Chair)

Absent

Councillor Josh Cook
Councillor Georgina Culley
Councillor Mohammed Ibrahim
Councillor Chris Tansley

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Helen Blackman	- Director of Children's Integrated Services
Rob Caswell	- Programme Manager
Judith Harris	- PA to Corporate Director for Children and Adults
Rav Kalsi	- Senior Governance Officer
Councillor David Mellen	- Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years
Michelle Roe	- Executive Officer
Maria Ward	- Networks Officer – Children and Young People, NCVS
Councillor Sam Webster	- Portfolio Holder for Education, Employment and Skills
Sarah White	- Senior Project Manager

21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Josh Cook – personal
Councillor Georgina Culley – personal
Councillor Chris Tansley – personal

22 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Maria Ward, Networks Officer at Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service declared that she is the Vice-Chair of Governors at Dunkirk Primary School. This did not preclude her from speaking on the item.

23 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

24 AGENDA ORDER

The Chair agreed to take the item on Capital Improvements to Schools in Nottingham first due to the availability of colleagues to present.

25 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS TO SCHOOLS IN NOTTINGHAM

Councillor Sam Webster, Portfolio Holder for Education, Employment and Skills, Rob Caswell, Programme Manager and Sarah White, Senior Project Manager, delivered a presentation on capital school improvements in Nottingham. The following information was highlighted:

- (a) The Council has a statutory responsibility to provide school places for children and young people in Nottingham. There has been a significant increase in the need for additional primary school places and over the past five years, the Council has invested £41.850 million in expanding 22 schools across the city;
- (b) Additional investment has been placed into improving the condition of schools in Nottingham. Over £13 million of Capital Maintenance Grant has been invested to ensure that the conditions in schools meet health and safety requirements. The Council has invested £200,000 per year since 2012/13 in improving access into schools across the city;
- (c) The capital improvement scheme represents value for money in challenging financial times. The Council operates within the East Midlands Property Alliance framework for contractors.

Following questions and comments from the Committee, the following information was highlighted:

- (d) The Council is well placed to monitor the condition of schools in the city. The Council uses a series of condition surveys and feedback from visits to local authority maintained schools in the city;
- (e) At the moment, one of the few tools the Council can employ is to expand existing school sites in the city as local authorities no longer retain the power to build new schools.
- (f) The Council has worked in partnership with a number of academies in the city to increase the availability of primary school places, such as Djanogly Academy, Bluecoat Academy and Nottingham Samworth Academy. The Council has recognised that there is a particular need for school places in certain parts of the city, such as Wollaton but the free-market approach to free schools means that the Council would not necessarily be involved in the decision to determine the suitability of a free school site;
- (g) The Council is trying to think differently about how it can attract funding earmarked for schools. The Council is currently exploring plans to establish a multi academy trust in Nottingham that might represent a viable opportunity to access free school funding streams;
- (h) The Council has used former school sites by bringing them back into use, where appropriate. Often the case with former, historic school sites is that they lack the outdoor space to present a viable modern-day educational environment.

RESOLVED to

- (1) Thank Councillor Sam Webster, Rob Caswell and Sarah White for their informative presentation around capital improvements to schools in Nottingham;**
- (2) Schedule a discussion on Admissions and Place Planning at a future Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee.**

26 STABILITY OF SOCIAL WORKERS IN NOTTINGHAM

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Years and Early Intervention and Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services at Nottingham City Council, delivered a presentation on social workers in Nottingham, highlighting the following information:

- (a) Nationally, there is a high level of demand for social workers. This is partly down to changes in legislation and a number of high profiles cases, in particular since 2009;
- (b) Social workers undertake a statutory role in relation to children in need, child protection, children in care and in Fostering and Adoption work. The high demand for social workers across the country has created a potentially mobile workforce and an increase in the use of agency staff;
- (c) The National Audit Office has noted that child protection services in England remain "unsatisfactory and inconsistent", six years after the government vowed to improve provision. Following inspection of Council services there has been increase in the level of investment into this service provision;
- (d) Feedback from children and young people has suggested that maintaining a stable relationship with a social worker is important to them. Maintaining a stable relationship also enhances the stability of placements, court proceedings and supports social workers in their understanding of local priorities;
- (e) The role of a social worker is to support young people and their families, undertake statutory assessments and direct families to the services they may require. The different levels of social workers are: a level 1 social worker, who is a relatively new member of staff not yet ready for a complex caseload or to lead on child protection; a level 2 social worker is more experienced and has gained valuable experience and has started to lead on child protection proceedings; a level 3 social worker is experienced and able to lead on complex care proceedings and act as a mentor to newly qualified social workers;
- (f) There is a progression route that social workers have to follow in order to progress throughout their career, for example, a social worker would have had to have completed levels 1-3 before progressing into a senior practitioner role, or a team manager role. This progression allows staff to grow with experience into more senior position across the authority;

- (g) Locally, the Ofsted inspection in 2014 identified the capacity of social workers as a key issue, commenting that quality direct work with families is critical in stopping the needs of children escalating. As a result, Nottingham City Council has taken steps to strengthening the workforce and a Peer Review conducted in 2015 confirmed that the Council are not risk averse and are working with the right children and families;
- (h) Mid-year population estimates project a 5.8% increase in the child-age population in Nottingham City between 2015-2021, however the growth in the demand for social care services outstrips overall population growth in the city;
- (i) The Council has engaged agency social workers when it has not been possible to recruit to vacancies quickly enough, or to cover sickness and maternity cover. Agency staffs are usually experienced social workers but this usually comes at a higher cost. In September 2015, the number of agency social workers employed by the Council stood at 57 and this had increased to 76 by April 2016. As of September 2016, the number of agency social workers employed by the Council had reduced significantly to 46;
- (j) There are a number of associated risks in social care and caseloads are quoted in the Ofsted Annual Social Care Report (2016) as one of the most critical elements of the system. A high number of caseloads will have an impact on the quality of direct work done with children and families across the city. Local authorities judged to be good by Ofsted usually report 12-14 cases being managed by each full-time equivalent (fte) social worker. Generally speaking, most local authorities report an average caseload of 16-20 cases per fte social worker;
- (k) Unallocated cases present a risk if workforce numbers are not adequately balanced and the demand is high. In order mitigate this, the Council regularly monitors the number of cases being dealt with and those that are unallocated. In fact, Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Years and Early Intervention, receives regular updates on caseload numbers and any unallocated cases, together with what action is being taken to address this;
- (l) The Council is committed to recruiting permanent social workers and has fed this into its Recruitment and Retention Strategy. The use of agency staff is extremely expensive and not affordable going forward. In order to recruit more social workers, the Council has fast-tracked experienced workers into social work with periods of intense training over 16 months;
- (m) The Council offers a market supplement and competitive pay to encourage agency staff to become permanent members of staff. The Council has also supported a Regional Agency Memorandum which has stabilised agency pricing and reference expectations across Nottinghamshire. This prohibits agency workers leaving one authority and moving to a neighbouring authority for a higher salary.

Following comments and questions from the Committee, the following information was provided:

- (n) Caseloads are monitored to ensure that social workers are supported with a manageable number of cases, particularly around periods of ill-health or distressing periods. The approach is to grow the Council's workforce to relieve the burden on existing staff and the use of agency workers;
- (o) The Council has an existing relationship with both local universities to encourage students into local placements with a view to a permanent job in the future. The Council has also worked with Manchester University to develop a distanced learning scheme where the Council can retain a workforce whilst offering a learning programme, potentially on a loan arrangement with the employee;
- (p) The Council offers a competitive payment scheme to social workers and, although they're no longer in a position to offer the sort of incentives they would have in the past, they are putting their efforts into recruiting more staff. The Council has to acknowledge that they're not going to be in a position where they can match or exceed the pay offered by agencies to social workers;
- (q) Social workers provide a paramount service and in financially challenging times, it is essential that the affect that wider corporate policies, such as the Workplace Parking Levy, is mitigated on social workers.

RESOLVED to

- (1) Thank Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Years and Early Intervention and Helen Blackman, Director of Integrated Children's Services for their informative presentation;**
- (2) Ask the Council to consider the wider implications of Corporate Strategies on workforces such as social workers.**

27 WORK PROGRAMME 2016/17

Rav Kalsi, Senior Governance Officer, updated the Committee on the work programme:

- (a) Following an invite to the Regional Schools Commissioner for East Midlands and Humber, Jennifer Bexon-Smith has agreed to attend the Committee on 16 May 2017.

RESOLVED to agree the work programme for 2016/17.