

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 19 September 2017 from 11.06 am - 12.44 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Azad Choudhry
Councillor Josh Cook (Vice Chair)
Councillor Mohammed Ibrahim
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora
Councillor Brian Parbutt
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor David Mellen

Absent

Councillor Sue Johnson - Chair
Councillor Georgina Culley
Councillor Chris Tansley

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Helen Blackman - Director of Children's Integrated Services
Steve Comb - Head of Children in Care
Jane Garrard - Constitutional Services
Judith Harris - Leadership Support Officer
Kate Morris - Governance Officer

17 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Georgina Cully - Unwell
Councillor Sue Johnson - Unwell

In the absence of the Chair, the meeting was chaired by Councillor Josh Cook, Vice Chair.

18 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

19 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on the 18 July 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

20 OFSTED PILOT INSPECTION OF CHILDREN'S SERVICES - FOLLOW UP FOCUS ON SUPPORT FOR CARE LEAVERS

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years introduced the report on the OFSTED pilot inspection of Children's Services – follow up focus on support for care leavers. Helen Blackman, Director of Integrated Children's Services and Steve Comb, Head of Children in Care provided additional information. They highlighted the following information:

- (a) there are currently 219 young adults open to the Leaving Care Team. The team continue to work with care leavers into their 20's and until they leave full time education;
- (b) the Council's duty to provide accommodation for looked after children ends when they turn 18 and become care leavers, unless they are in full time education then Council has a duty to provide assistance with education fees and living costs;
- (c) in January 2017 Nottingham City Council's Children's Services were inspected by OFSTED using the new pilot scheme of inspection. As reported to this Committee previously the OFSTED report offered mainly positive comments.
- (d) at the time of the inspection there were 70% of care leavers in full time education, employment and training, 14 care leavers at university and 7 were employed as apprentices at Nottingham City Council, 85% were in appropriate housing;
- (e) OFSTED identified a small group of around 15 individuals who were hard to engage and challenged the Council to be more tenacious in its attempts at keeping in touch with these care leavers;
- (f) the Leaving Care Team is now in touch with around 50% of those hard to engage care leavers;
- (g) there are a number of difficulties in engaging all care leavers. They are adults and it is not possible to compel them to stay in touch if they do not want to. Some people want to forget that they were in care and refuse to acknowledge attempts at contact, and some move away and don't inform the Council;
- (h) Nottingham City Council's in-house employability scheme for care leavers started in 2015 and achieved its aim of employing at least 10% of care leavers within the City Council. A dedicated employment worker placed within the Leaving Care Team offers support to the most disengaged care leavers and the work has been recognised by the Department of Work and Pensions;
- (i) OFSTED found that the majority of care leavers were in suitable accommodation. However a small number, 25, were found to be in accommodation deemed unsuitable. This unsuitable accommodation included returning to the family home and custody;
- (j) an independent review took place of the leaving care services and an action plan put in place to more tenaciously pursue contact with care leavers. This has led to the development of a keeping in touch protocol and strengthened links with external agencies;
- (k) in 2016 the Government announced the Keep on Caring strategy. This will allow all care leavers up to the age of 25 to go back to their leaving care

team to ask for help and support. This could place additional demand on the service, more will be known in April 2018 when guidance is issued;

Following questions from the Committee the following points were made:

- (l) once a child in care turns 18 they become an adult, and a care leaver and as such they do not have to inform the Council where they are living, who they are living with, whether they are moving away etc. At this point the Council cannot tell the care leaver where they should live, or who they should live with;
- (m) in 2014 Children's Integrated Services was inspected by OFSTED and found to require improvements. After a sustained work programme OFSTED now rate the service as good;
- (n) the level of staffing within the Leaving Care Team is comparable to other teams in comparable authorities;
- (o) the Government has introduced a staying put option for care leavers, where the young person stays with the foster family. The young person has continuity in care, and stability and the foster family is paid a "staying put" grant. This does however mean that the City Council loses a foster family placement;
- (p) changes in data protection are introducing the right to be forgotten. It will require a balance between being tenacious in keeping contact with care leavers and respecting their right to be forgotten and not wishing to have further contact with the Council;
- (q) at present it is between 2 and 3% of care leavers that the Leaving Care Team are not in touch with in any way.

RESOLVED to thank Councillor David Mellen, Helen Blackman and Steve Comb for their attendance and to note the content of their report.

21 SOCIAL WORKER RECRUITMENT, RETENTION AND CASELOAD MANAGEMENT

Helen Blackman, Director of Integrated Children's Services, introduced a report on social worker recruitment, retention and caseload management. Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years provided additional information. They highlighted the following points:

- (a) nationally there is high demand for Social Workers. Since 2009 there have been some big changes in legislation and high profile cases which have caused a lot of turbulence in social care. This has led to a very mobile workforce with lowered retention and it is common practice for social work agencies to approach permanent staff with offers of much higher rates of pay than permanent roles;

- (b) nationally, in 2009 1 in 9 social work roles were not filled and in 2015-16 there was a 10% increase in agency joiners;
- (c) the title “Social Worker” is a protected title, social workers are required by law to register, have their training audited and there is an expectation of continuous development and training;
- (d) nationally the annual turnover of Social Workers is around 15%. Nottingham City currently has an annual turnover of around 11%. Approximately 19% of the Council’s Social Workers are agency staff, which is comparable to other local authorities in the East Midlands;
- (e) over the last three years Nottingham City Council has over recruited newly qualified Social Workers who have then started an assessed and supported year of employment (ASYE). This programme allows them to experience the different aspects of social work across a range of teams and gain a solid grounding to becoming a long term member of social work staff at the Council. It has been very successful and had a positive impact on existing Social Workers;
- (f) in addition to the ASYE scheme there is a new “Grow Our Own” scheme which, in partnership with Manchester Metropolitan University provides a fast track distance learning course for existing staff with experience of social work roles but who are not qualified as Social Workers, such as play and youth staff. The degree takes 2 years and costs are covered by a work place loan paid back over a number of years on qualification. There has been good uptake with 28 students on the first cohort;
- (g) case load management is still challenging. Nottingham City Council aims for all Social Workers to have 23 cases or less. This is generally achieved, although there are still a number of Social Workers who’s caseload exceeds this number;
- (h) the Council is also doing well in converting agency staff into permanent staff. In the last 4 months 8 agency staff have become permanent members of staff;
- (i) OFSTED described Nottingham City Council as an employer of choice for Social Workers and recognised it as a place where social work can flourish. It acknowledged the investment in social work working to ensure a stable and secure workforce;

Following questions and comments from the Committee the following points were highlighted:

- (j) early intervention work could be an easy target for cuts as they are not statutory services. However, a reduction of resources there would lead to less work with families at an earlier stage, families in need of help would be identified at a later stage leading to more intensive work by Social Workers when children have suffered for longer and are more expensive to support.

Retention of Early Intervention Services reduces pressure on Social Workers and identifies families in need of support early;

- (k) the ASYE scheme has been an important tool for recruitment and development of Social Workers. It would be beneficial for this scheme to continue to run as staff recruited and trained are more likely to stay within the Council longer term;
- (l) there is an agreement with the other regional local authorities that no council will pay above a certain amount for Social work agency staff. The agencies are offering permanent staff between 50-100% more than their regular wage to become agency workers, so the council has to find a very fine balance between not paying too much for agency staff, but also having enough agency staff to alleviate the work load of permanent staff so as not to push them to join the agencies;
- (m) the local universities were approached to design the bespoke “grow our own” scheme for the distance learning social work degree, however they could not offer the course and Manchester Metropolitan was the only institute who could offer the fast track course in the format the Council felt was most appropriate;
- (n) the Council has considered forming a regional agency with other local authorities, however given the large sums of money being offered to agency staff it makes travel outside of the region more attractive;
- (o) Nottingham currently has around 19% agency staff. Looking at the national picture there are more people leaving social work than joining making retention more difficult. Nottingham City is working hard to be a good authority to work for, rewarding work with challenging cases. The Council wants to be attractive to work for because of the difference it makes to lives and believes that this will be attractive to potential employees;
- (p) national attitude to social work is one of the major influences on the reduction of people joining social work. It is an emotionally demanding job, with long and unsociable hours all of which contributes to its decline in appeal as a career.

RESOLVED to thank Councillor David Mellen and Helen Blackman for their attendance and to note the content of the report.

22 WORK PROGRAMME 2017/18

Jane Garrard, Senior Governance Officer, introduced the report on the Work Programme 2017/18.

Resolved to note the work programme for the municipal year 2017/18