

Nottingham City Council

Children's Partnership Board

Minutes of the meeting held remotely over Zoom on 26 March 2024 from 4.00pm - 5.23pm

Membership

	Cllr Cheryl Barnard (Chair)	Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education, NCC
✓	Cllr Samina Riaz (Vice-Chair)	Executive Assistant - Children, Young People and Education NCC
	Catherine Underwood	Corporate Director for People, NCC
✓	Sam Morris	Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement, NCC
✓	Ailsa Barr	Director of Children's Integrated Services, NCC
✓	Nick Lee	Director of Education, NCC
	Jon Rea	Engagement and Participation Lead Officer, NCC
	Karon Foulkes	Head of Children's Commissioning and Transformation, NHS ICB
	Amanda Payne	Regional Manager, East Midlands, Futures Group
	Rachel Wadsworth	Further Education representative (Nottingham College)
✓	Ekua Ghansah	Child Friendly City Programme Lead
	Maria Ward	Maintained Primary School Governor
	Sonia Burton	Youth Justice Service, NCC
	Becky O'Brien	Director of Nursing and Allied Health Professionals, Nottingham CityCare Partnership
	Sarah Fielding	Nottingham Schools Trust and Virtual School
	Supt. Kathryn Craner	Nottinghamshire Police
	Nicky Bridges	Primary Schools' representative (Robin Hood Primary)
	Chad Thompson	Head of Children's Transformation
	Sandra Stapleton	Secondary Schools' representative (Nottingham Emmanuel School)
	Karla Capstick	Small Steps Big Changes representative (Director)
✓	Karla Banfield	Strategic Commissioning Manager, NCC
	Cheryl Steele	Special Schools' representative (Rosehill School)
✓	Nichola Rose	Children's Society
	Celina Adams	Voluntary Sector
	Claire Perry	Voluntary Sector (Children & Young People's Provider Network)
✓	David Johns	Consultant in Public Health, NCC

✓ Indicates present at meeting

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Liz Anderson - Education Consultant
Natalie Baker Napier - Head of Violence Reduction Partnership
Siobhan Buxton - Maternity Commissioning Manager, Integrated Care Board

Mike Carey	- Governance Officer, Nottingham City Council
Jennifer Hardy	- Head of Access to Learning, NCC
Karen McAndrew	- Service Manager for the Education Welfare Service, NCC
Samina Ring	- PEIA Attendance Project Lead, Department for Education

26 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Cheryl Barnard - personal
Judith Douglas
Karon Foulkes (Siobhan Buxton nominated to substitute)
Jon Rea
Elizabeth Richardson
Sarah Fielding

In the absence of Cllr Cheryl Barnard, Cllr Samina Riaz (Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

27 Declarations of Interest

None.

28 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 12 December 2023 were confirmed as a true record.

29 Children's Services Ofsted Update

Ailsa Barr, Director of Children's Integrated Services, delivered the presentation, highlighting the following points:

- a) OFSTED most recently undertook a full inspection of Children's Services in July 2022, primarily focusing on the delivery of services to Children in Need, children with a Child Protection Plan, children in care and care leavers. At that time OFSTED rated the service inadequate, and gave guidance on what needed to be improved. This presentation gives an overview of the improvement work undertaken by Children's Services, including an update from the last OFSTED monitoring visit which took place in November 2023;
- b) OFSTED highlighted eight areas requiring attention:
 - i. the point a referral is first made to Children's Services;
 - ii. management oversight and direction of front-line work, including management oversight in relation to the designated officer role;
 - iii. sustaining social work capacity;
 - iv. the sufficiency of placements, particularly for those with complex needs;
 - v. services for care leavers aged 21 and over, while the duty of responsibility has been extended for care leavers up to the age of 25;
 - vi. duties in relation to young people aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless;

- vii. the quality and timeliness of return home interviews for children who go missing;
 - viii. oversight of children who are missing from education and those electively home educated.
- c) An action plan was submitted in December 2022, within the time set, with oversight from the Children's Improvement Board, which now has the support of an independent improvement advisor appointed by the Department for Education, who Chairs the Board;
- d) any local authority with an 'inadequate' rating will have a period of monitoring visits undertaken by OFSTED staff. Nottingham has received three two-day visits since the full inspection, with a fourth expected shortly. These focused on:
- i. February 2023 – Front Door activity, (MASH, Duty social workers, and the emergency duty team);
 - ii. July 2023 – Children with a Children in Needs plan or a Child Protection plan, focusing primarily on the field work social work service;
 - iii. November 2023 – care leavers over the age of 18.

These inspections are not graded, but there is a clear narrative report published on the OFSTED website and available from Children's Services;

- e) common areas of progress have been identified across the monitoring visits. Inspectors have seen a clear link between the service's transformation work and its improvement activity, leading to improvements in the quality of practice and the experience of practitioners. There has been an investment in posts, increasing front-line and management capacity (for example, in the first response and missing from home services, the care leavers service, and the children in care service), alongside some reduced capacity in areas where demand has reduced (such as in child protection);
- f) inspectors spend little time with senior managers, spending the majority of the visit speaking to front-line practitioners and looking through casework. Feedback from the workforce is that they feel generally supported by managers and can feel in the impact of reduced caseloads, developing stronger and more meaningful relationships with children and young people;
- g) it has been recognised that there is a committed senior leadership team, with strong knowledge and oversight of the service. The quality assurance framework has been strengthened, and correctly identifies areas of improvement and development;
- h) common areas of development have also been identified. The quality of assessments and plans is inconsistent. Some children and young people experience too many changes of social worker, linked to staff instability, though this has improved significantly in parts of the service. There is inconsistency in the frequency and quality of supervision, though the workforce describes feeling supported, this is not always translated into written

work on case files or linked directly to positive outcomes. There is further work to be done with partners to avoid delays in assessment and intervention;

- i) the presentation gives a visual representation of the service improvement plan, with 'Changing Lives. Changing Futures.' as its strapline. The plan is underpinned by the Together for Nottingham plan, the Strategic Council plan, and regulatory oversight by OFSTED. The aim is to create structural arrangements which drive sustainably improved and financially secure services. There are two major streams to the plan – service development and practice improvement, and the transformation projects, which sit alongside each other and become increasingly connected;
- j) the presentation includes graphs showing the impact of improvement and transformation work on various metrics. The percentage of Child Protection plans open for two or more years has fallen since January 2022, and their average duration has fallen. The total numbers of Child Protection and Child in Need plans have also fallen;
- k) modernising the fostering service is a key area of improvement and transformation. When children come into care, they are typically placed either in foster care or in a residential home. Nottingham aspires to have the majority of children in care living in foster homes if they cannot live with their family. Local authorities use a mixture of in-house foster carers and those recruited by independent agencies. In Nottingham the proportion of external placements grew too high, but this is being redressed through improved recruitment, retention, and utilisation of foster placements;
- l) a lot of work has been undertaken regarding the recruitment and retention of staff. Children's Services has improved its advertising and social media presence, embarked on a rolling programme of recruitment, and streamlined its recruitment processes. The team is starting to see recruitment of experienced social workers, and conversion of agency social workers to being permanent staff members. The result is a reduction in the service's reliance on agency staff in some teams, a reduction in caseloads, and better opportunities for learning and development;
- m) there has been an improvement in support and resources provided to staff across Children's Services who work directly with children, including the 'worry monster' tool and a suite of thinking tools;
- n) the service has focused on celebrating success, with a monthly shout out awards to staff exhibiting excellent practice, and an annual celebration event, 'Looking Back, Moving Forward';
- o) these changes have contributed to a noticeable change in the culture of the service. There is a greater focus on data, with new dashboards enabling a visual overview of the service's work. The service feels more connected, staff feel more confident, and there is a greater culture of learning;
- p) the next steps are to continue to improve and transform the service. This includes continuing to develop consistency of practice through learning and

development resources, embedding quality assurance and audit work to drive improvement, learning from service users more effectively to shape delivery of services, and working more closely with partners to embed the Early Help strategy and the Thresholds of Need model to ensure timely support to families. The team will continue to review its recruitment and retention strategies, and use data to profile future workloads, making sure resources are directed in the right areas;

- q) the service is preparing for the next monitoring visit, focused on Children in Care. A further visit is expected before the summer holidays, and then at least one more between September and December.

The Board thanked Ailsa Barr for the presentation.

30 Improving School Attendance

Jennifer Hardy, Head of Access to Learning, delivered the presentation entitled Nottingham City Council: Working Together to Improve School Attendance, highlighting the following points:

- a) the Working Together to Improve School Attendance guidance was issued by the Department for Education in 2022, and is due to become statutory guidance in August 2024. Nottingham has been operating as if the guidance is statutory for a year to prepare for the shift. The guidance outlines the responsibilities of schools and local authorities to tackle problems with attendance, and includes specific guidance regarding those who struggle to attend school due to health reasons, including mental health reasons;
- b) early intervention and partnership working are key to the guidance. Local authorities are expected to have a strategic approach to improving attendance, and a team to manage it. They should work across teams, across regions, and in partnership with OFSTED and the DfE. Best practice should be shared between schools, access to services improved, and severely absent children prioritised to mitigate safeguarding concerns;
- c) the Education Welfare team has a key role, organising and chairing support meetings and supporting schools, including with formal and legal options around attendance. They will also monitor daily attendance data covering every child in the City, which is a new policy the DfE are making statutory;
- d) health-related absence is significant in Nottingham. One of the biggest upcoming changes is that, from September, schools will be expected to refer students to the local authority after fifteen days of absence for health reasons, and the local authority will become responsible for their education. This will mean establishing a new arm for the service and commissioning new interventions. Referrals have started to be received from parents directly, who have found template letters online. The service will be developing a new policy alongside schools ready for the next academic year, which will clarify the responsibilities of the local authority;

- e) prosecution for absence is an option, though it is the last resort. When the guidance was launched, the updated fixed penalty notice was a key message picked up in the media;
- f) the team now have access to a lot of new data, via the new DfE portal, comprising attendance information for 52,000 children. This will help in targeting support to the right areas, and picking up trends as they arise. The team is working on a dashboard to ensure this data can be used in an effective way;
- g) there are additional statutory amendments to take account of. School registration codes have been amended, and local authorities must submit data to the DfE on Children Missing in Education and Elective Home Education. There is a new national framework governing penalty notices for absences;
- h) the key message is that it is crucial to embed partnership working across all of the organisations making up the partnership.

Liz Anderson, Education Consultant, delivered the presentation entitled Nottingham Priority Education Investment Area: Attendance, highlighting the following points:

- i) as part of the Levelling Up agenda, the government has announced twenty four Priority Education Investment Areas, including Nottingham and Derby. This means funding coming into the City, and the establishment of a partnership board including local authority representatives, academy trust representatives, and representatives from the universities. The DfE's main priority is around improving literacy and numeracy, and attendance is a key issue;
- j) in Nottingham, overall attendance is just below the national average, but persistent absenteeism (regarding students attending less than 90% of lessons) is higher. Before Covid-19 this figure was around 14% for all schools, and has now reached over 20%. Covid-19 has made a significant difference to attendance figures, and has led to a change in attitudes towards school attendance across the country and globally;
- k) there are concerns that Nottingham has become disjointed, across many different academy trusts, and the project aims to pull schools together and share best practice in improving attendance and tackling persistent absenteeism;
- l) the project has three main waves, operating concurrently:
 - i. wave 1 is universal, targeted at all schools and academies, with a focus on children with attendance largely above 70%. This involves sharing good practice and promoting continual professional development;
 - ii. wave 2 is a partnership with Raleigh Education Trust to form a taskforce, focused on students vulnerable to involvement in criminal activity when absent from school. This builds on a team already in place working with children who have been excluded but were not attending

alternative provision, which has doubled and now has eight practitioners;

- iii. wave 3 involves a team of six family support workers, based in communities across the City, to support families to improve attendance. This stream of work focuses on children with attendance between 40% and 70%, who are not already working with a social worker or on a Child in Need plan. Schools refer students to the local authority, and cases are heard at a triage meeting which determines whether a taskforce or a family support approach is most appropriate.
- m) Statistics show that Nottingham is not far behind in terms of overall attendance, but while persistent absence is reducing it is still a concern. The team did not want to present the data as a league table of schools, so focused on wards across the City for their data sets. This allowed the team to target the four wards with the lowest attendance initially. Nationally, data shows that the group with the lowest attendance is white British disadvantaged girls. In Nottingham, the lowest attending are white British boys, who are more likely to have Special Educational Needs and be disadvantaged. 551 children were identified in the 40%-70% attendance group initially, which has dropped slightly to 521 as of early March;
 - n) the focus on wards means working with secondary and primary schools in the target ward or just outside of it. Of the original four wards, Aspley has seen a slight improvement, Bestwood a significant improvement, Bulwell has slipped slightly since the February half-term, and Clifton East has seen improvement. The team intend to include the next two target wards, Hyson Green and Basford, soon;
 - o) the team are actively engaged with twenty one primary schools and eight secondary schools. When a student requiring support is identified, the Attendance Project Lead will conduct a school visit initially to gather the context and assess the suitability of intervention;
 - p) a launch event was held in November at Trent Vineyard, focusing on the literacy and attendance strands. It included headteachers, literacy leaders, and attendance leaders, and 95% of City schools were represented. Additionally, a recent meeting of the Designated Safeguarding Lead network focused on attendance;
 - q) the number of cases triaged and accepted is provided in the presentation, with 78 individual cases accepted and eighteen cases closed after a six week cycle, while 78% of cases have seen improved attendance;
 - r) the government is running an attendance campaign nationally, with new visual material and posters provided to schools. Leaflets have been sent to all homes in the target wards after Easter, to help promote regular school attendance, and there are plans for a City-wide campaign;
 - s) it is important to look at individual circumstances, engage with families and seek to provide support, rather than just nagging parents. The new data sets

are useful, but will take time to interpret and to ensure reliability. It is crucial to shift the narrative about attendance more broadly, and create a whole-school approach to improving attendance rather than just relying on the attendance officer. A conference was held on the 17th May which sought to focus on the positive message around engagement, and the next steps are to broaden that out to work with community groups and parents.

In the discussion which followed, and in response to questions from the Committee, the following points were made:

- t) the Violence Reduction Partnership is keen to support initiatives that will keep children in school feeling safe, and involves a lot of agencies who may be useful for the improving attendance agenda. It is crucial to involve a wide variety of agencies, including bodies like the police, who may be in a position to identify children with problematic absences from school and raise the issue;
- u) a general increase in anxiety is part of the reason for absenteeism, and in such cases sometimes the relationship between the parent and the school can become strained. Family Support Workers are well-placed to act as intermediaries and find solutions adapted to the individual needs of the child.

31 Key Messages and Items for Information

Sam Morris, Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement, informed the Board that this will be the last meeting of the Children's Partnership Board pending further news.

There has been a review of the different partnership meetings taking place across the City, and there appears to be a lot of overlap in membership and focus. With the launch of the Early Help Partnership, it is a good time to step the Children's Partnership Board down pending a review at a later date, when it may return with new terms of reference.