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**Nottingham  
City Council**

## **Nottingham City Council Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**Date:** Thursday, 25 January 2024

**Time:** 9.30 am

**Place:** Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham,  
NG2 3NG

**Councillors are requested to attend the above meeting to transact the following business**

**Director for Legal and Governance**

**Scrutiny & Audit Support Officer:** Damon Stanton

**Direct Dial:** 0115 87 64345

- |          |  |         |
|----------|--|---------|
| <b>1</b> | <b>Apologies for Absence</b>   |         |
| <b>2</b> | <b>Declarations of Interest</b>  |         |
| <b>3</b> | <b>Minutes</b><br>To confirm the Minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2023                                 | 3 - 8   |
| <b>4</b> | <b>Children's Services Improvement</b><br>Report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer                               | 9 - 52  |
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If you need any advice on declaring an interest in any item on the agenda, please contact the Governance Officer shown above, if possible before the day of the meeting

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**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 30 November 2023 from 10.32 am - 12.31 pm**

**Membership**

Present

Councillor Samuel Gardiner  
Councillor Michael Savage  
Councillor Adele Williams

Absent

Councillor Naim Salim  
Councillor Fozia Mubashar  
Councillor Georgia Power  
Councillor Ethan Radford  
Councillor Maria Watson

**Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:**

Liz Anderson	- Independent Consultant
Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder Children, Young People and Education
Sally Gladwin	- Department of Education
Jennifer Hardy	- Project Manager - NCC
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services - NCC
Kate Morris	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer – NCC
Carl Pattison	- Flying High Multi Academy Trust
Helen Pledger	- Department of Education
Samina Ring	- Raleigh Learning Trust
Damon Stanton	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer – NCC

**18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillor Fozia Mubashar	- Personal
Councillor Georgia Power	- Personal
Councillor Ethan Radford	- Other Council Business
Councillor Naim Salim	- Unwell

**19 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

**20 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 October 2023 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair of this meeting.

**21 PRIORITY EDUCATION INVESTMENT AREA (PEIA) UPDATE**

Nick Lees, Director of Education introduced the report detailing the work of the Priority Education Investment Area. Attending alongside him was Sally Gladwin, Department for Education, Helen Pledger, Department for Education

Liz Anderson, Independent Consultant – commissioned by Department for Education, Samina Ring, Raleigh Learning Trust, Carl Pattison, Flying High Multi Academy Trust and Jennifer Hardy, Project Manager. They highlighted the following points during their presentations:

- a) Since Nottingham City was identified by the Department of Education as a Priority Education Investment area work has been undertaken to build a partnership between the Council, the DoE and Multi Academy trusts across the city.
- b) A Local Partnership Board was formed in 2022 with a focus on harnessing and sharing good practice. The Board acknowledged that there are a wide range of social factors impacting education both locally and nationally but established that improvement of 2 factors, literacy and attendance would have the widest reaching impact.
- c) A consortium of local providers offering evidence based interventions around literacy bid through a tender process to provide interventions across both Nottingham and Derby. An Attendance Board was established building on the best practice work already established at the Djanogly Academy which is being delivered by the Council in partnership with the Raleigh Education Trust.

#### Priority Literacy

- d) The Literacy offer focuses on writing at KS2 as good results at this stage usually lead to good results in secondary education. There are two elements to the offer provided by Priority Literacy, the first, a Literacy Audit for all schools to assess their current offer and to signpost to resources and best practice where needed. The second element is a programme to encourage a culture of reading across schools and communities
- e) The Literacy Audit is completed through a self-assessment tool, that is then reviewed by literacy specialists. It establishes what tools are in place, where support is needed and signposts schools to additional resources. Instilling good practice across a wide range of schools will help to ensure that the impact of the project outlives time limited funding.
- f) Alongside the universal offer there is a target offer that identifies, through the audit process a specific menu of resources to encourage fluency in literacy and provide additional support in specific areas. Target schools are also assigned a bespoke literacy specialist to work with them to establish best practice.
- g) Following the initial audit and self-assessment the literacy specialist then checks back in with the school through the online portal at six, twelve and eighteen months to support assessment of progress. If the school achieves targets before the end of the programme, then additional work is done to further challenge them and agree additional actions to further push improvement.
- h) The Programme also aims to improve the transition between primary and secondary education by developing a consistent approach across the city, especially for more vulnerable learners.

## Attendance

- i) Attendance is a national issue, and the Attendance Board is looking strategically at how it can tackle the issue. Nottingham City figures are around the national average and before the pandemic were better than the national average. The board is focusing on identifying and sharing best practice and putting children at the heart of decision making.
- j) Work of the Attendance Board is based on pilots that ran at Djanogly City Academy and Heathfield Primary that saw a 1.5% increase in attendance in one of the most diverse and challenging areas of the city. The Board aims to build a best practice toolkit that schools across the city can use to help improve attendance statistics.
- k) The Project has three planned waves, the first being a universal offer targeting pupils with an attendance of between 71 and 95% aiming to create high quality inhouse provision with best practice in place, an online toolkit, regular support meetings and improved communication across schools where siblings are involved.
- l) The first wave of work established that some schools and trusts are sharing data differently. This is now being standardised and has shown that schools are treating data differently, particularly around pupils deemed to be missing in education. Statutory guidance suggests removing those pupils from role after a certain length of time, but some schools are retaining them through concerns for safety. These pupils are tracked and monitored through other means.
- m) The second wave, planned for launch in January 2024, will see the creation of a task force of Multiagency professionals that expands on the work currently taking place through the Raleigh Learning Trust. This team will work with children where their absence puts them at heightened risk of being drawn into criminal activity.
- n) The third wave of work focuses on taking the successful model from Djanogly City Academy and boosting capacity within the Education Welfare Service to target specific wards initially to facilitate collaborative, cross-phase working between school leaders/attendance support staff and work with schools and families where attendance is below 70%. These dedicated family support workers will work with families, build a relationship and explore the barriers in place around attendance.
- o) The first wards to be targeted are Aspley, Bestwood, Bulwell, and Clifton East with a ward wide approach being taken to remove pressure from schools. Pupils with attendance between 40-70% are the target demographic for this work which equals 551 pupils.
- p) Work with this groups has been ongoing since the beginning of November 2023, with Family Support Workers working holistically as one contact for attendance for all siblings even where they attend different schools.

- q) Since the introduction of this programme in November, attendance across all 4 targeted wards is up on last year's figures and work will continue to target those children identified.

During discussion the following points were raised which attendees responded to:

- r) The Local Partnership Board and the work of the programme reports to the Department of Education (DoE) on a monthly basis that holds the Board to account for the allocation of funding and the impact of the programme. The funding from the DoE is time limited and will stop in March 2025.
- s) All schools are currently struggling with resources, particularly staff. The Programmes do not fund posts within schools but offer an easier and more convenient way to locate effective and efficient resources, which in turn has reduced some of the time pressure felt by staff. Part of the funding has been used to that schools have a range of books to encourage reading for enjoyment.
- t) The attendance programme aims to join up communication between schools where siblings are persistently absent so that there is one point of contact rather than each school contacting a family about individual children.
- u) Children considered missing from education are often tracked by a number of other services, including health services, for those with long term complex medical conditions, and children's services. Some Schools have historically not removed those children from role after the 20-day period as they have had safeguarding concerns, but in the very vast majority of cases the children will be involved with other services and all children seen as missing in education are tracked by education services.
- v) Part of the Reading for pleasure programme focuses on helping schools to establish what books children want to read, what interests them, and sparks their desire to read and how to engage with pupils to encourage reading. A big part of the programme is encouraging children to make book recommendations to friends. A recent initiative has seen a number of book donations to Nottingham City Schools focusing on depicting and representing the diverse culture within the city.
- w) There are a number of recognised barriers to attendance, including SEND diagnosis waiting times and cost of travel. In conversations with parents that have taken place since the start of the programme uniform has not come up as a significant issue, with many schools providing cheap and second-hand items for families. Travel has been highlighted as an issue particularly for primary aged children where free transport might be available for the child but not for the parent. Another issue commonly raised was housing and in particular private renting where families are moving a number of times through school life.
- x) When schools record absence there are a limited number of statutory codes they are allowed to use, with illness being one. This does not distinguish between physical and mental illness and doesn't allow schools to capture more in-depth data. A significant number of absences are around pupils mental health

and parents reluctance to send children to school when their SEND needs are not being met.

- y) The goal for the attendance programme is to raise the numbers back above national average, to levels seen in the city pre pandemic, numbers are already rising in the targeted wards and work will be further rolled out through the life of the programme. The impact of the literacy programme will not be seen as clearly in current primary age children until after the end of the programme but improved key stage 4 outcomes are the goal.
- z) Engagement across school staff and other professionals for the Priority Education programme has been enthusiastic. There is a sense of commitment and willingness to engage that has brought a sense of vigour to the work. Schools across the city are keen to build a lasting legacy from the DoE funding with a best practice tool kit and consistency across the city.
- aa) The city is very culturally diverse, and it is important that children are made to feel welcomed in schools and see that diversity reflected back. The Programme Board continues to look at how this diversity can be used and harnessed within its work as well as what specialist resources are available.
- bb) The Attendance Board has been looking at mental health as part of the holistic approach to attendance. Following Covid lockdowns some pupils have been struggling to attend school due to anxiety. Schools across the city are working to ensure that school is a welcoming and stress-free environment for children to maximise their learning. This best practise is being shared and spread from school to school.
- cc) The Council is currently developing a new Inclusion Strategy for schools. Part of this work will look at discipline in school and different approaches to ensure all pupils have equal opportunities and how exclusion is used and implemented as a late-stage measure. This strategy is due to come before this committee in the future for scrutiny.

The Chair thanked attendees for taking time to attend the meeting and for answering the questions put to them by Committee members. He commented that the dedication and commitment in those present was clear.

**Resolved to:**

- 1) receive the Public First Report on school attendance absenteeism;**
- 2) receive further information on support available for parents travelling with children to school; and**
- 3) receive the new Inclusion Strategy for at Committee for consideration.**

The meeting was adjourned at 12:12pm to allow for a short comfort break and reconvened at 12:20pm.

## **22 CHILDREN SERVICES IMPROVEMENT**

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education provided an update to the Committee on the progress of the Children's Services Improvement work. The following points were highlighted in discussion:

- a) A further Ofsted inspection took place on 22 and 23 November focusing on Care Leavers Services. Inspectors met with a range of staff and care leavers and also interviewed the Portfolio Holder. No grading will be given for this inspection and the full report is due to be published on the Ofsted website on 12 January 2024.
- b) Feedback from the inspectors, pending the final report, was largely positive and highlighted:
  - staff were tenacious and consistent in practice.
  - strong links with support services and specialists and care leavers mental and emotional wellbeing needs were met.
  - Strong Education, Employment and Training offers including options for further education and University.
  - Good range of suitable supported accommodation for transitioning into adulthood
  - Good learning tools were available for Personal Advisors.
- c) Areas highlighted for further focus were:
  - Consistent pathway plans ensuring that the plan has impact and continues to remain live and relevant to the individual.
  - The Dashboard is used to focus on practice management
- d) There is likely to be one further inspection between now and the end of March 2024, most likely to focus on Children in Care services.
- e) Where improvement was needed the inspection team acknowledged that work was already underway to implement change.

The Chair thanked the Portfolio Holder, and the Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement for attending to provide an update to the Committee.

## **23 WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair introduced the work programme highlighting the upcoming items.

Additional items were put forward by members including an item on what support schools were offering pupils around the cost of living crisis and the impact this may have on mental health. The Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer advised that there was limited space in the Committee's work programme for the current municipal year, but that it would be added as soon as possible.

Members noted the work programme.



## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

25 January 2024

### Children's Services Improvement

#### Report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer

#### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To scrutinise progress in improving outcomes for children and young people through delivery of Children's Integrated Services Improvement Plan.

#### **2 Action required**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked:
  - (a) If it wishes to make any comments or recommendations regarding the approach to, or progress in improvement of children's services; and
  - (b) To consider its approach to future scrutiny of improvement, including focus and timescales.

#### **3 Background information**

- 3.1 In November 2022, the Committee considered the findings of the inspection of children's services carried out by Ofsted in July 2022, and the action being taken and proposed to be taken to address the arising issues. The Council has been judged to be 'Requires improvement to be good' in the domains of the impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families and the experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers; and 'Inadequate' in the domain of experiences and progress of children who need help and protection. As a result, the overall outcome of the inspection judgement was 'Inadequate' and Ofsted identified eight specific areas for improvement. At that time the Committee was assured that work had already started on addressing the issues raised by Ofsted, alongside reviewing its pre-existing Improvement Plan to ensure that it reflects the specific areas identified for improvement by Ofsted as well as wider development of the Service.
- 3.2 In January 2023, the Committee reviewed the development and delivery of the Improvement Plan, including speaking to the Independent Advisor appointed by the Department for Education to provide support and challenge who is the Chair of the Improvement Board. He expressed the view that the Corporate Director, Director and Portfolio Holder have a real grip of the issues that need addressing and that a lot had already been achieved in relation to the 'front door' to services, but that there was more to do, for example in relation issues of consent and ensuring consistent thresholds across the service. The Committee was informed

that the most significant risk to delivery of the Improvement Plan was workforce.

- 3.3 The Committee also received a detailed update on progress in addressing the issues relating to the 'front door' to services (the multi-agency safeguarding hub [MASH] and duty and assessment services). At that time the Committee commented that this update was well evidenced and reassuring.
- 3.4 In March 2023, the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools updated the Committee on progress and the first Ofsted Monitoring Visit that took place between 28 February and 1 March. The letter summarising the findings of the visit was subsequently circulated to Committee members.
- 3.4 In September 2023, the Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Education, and the Director for Children's Integrated Services and Education updated the Committee on progress and the second Ofsted Monitoring Visit that took place between 25 and 26 July 2023. The visit focussed on children in need and children with a Child Protection Plan in place. The letter summarising the findings of the visit was subsequently circulated to Committee Members.
- 3.5 The Portfolio Holder for Children's Services and Education, and the Director for Children's Integrated Services will be present at the meeting to discuss the third Ofsted Monitoring Visit.

#### **4 List of attached information**

- 4.1 Report from the Director of Children's Integrated Services
- 4.2 Inspection of Nottingham City local authority Children's Services
- 4.3 Monitoring Visit to Nottingham City Children's Services February/March 2023
- 4.4 Monitoring Visit to Nottingham City Children's Services July 2023
- 4.5 Monitoring Visit to Nottingham City Children's Services November 2023

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

- 5.1 None

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

- 6.1 Ofsted inspection of Nottingham City Local Authority children's services July 2022

6.2 Ofsted Monitoring Visits February 2023, July 2023, and November 2023

6.3 Reports to, and minutes of, meetings of the Children & Young People Scrutiny Committee held on 03 November 2022, 26 January 2023, 30 March 2023, and 28 September 2023

## **7 Wards affected**

7.1 All

## **8 Contact information**

8.1 Damon Stanton, Scrutiny & Audit Support Officer  
E: [damon.stanton@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:damon.stanton@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)  
T: 0115 87 64345

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<b>Meeting Title</b>	Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee
<b>Report Title</b>	Children’s Services Improvement
<b>Meeting Date</b>	24 <sup>th</sup> January 2024

<b>Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):</b>	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People Ailsa Barr, Director for Children’s Integrated Services
<b>Portfolio Holder(s):</b>	Councillor Cheryl Barnard
<b>Report author and contact details:</b>	Sam Morris, Head of Children’s Strategy and Improvement Ailsa Barr, Director for Children’s Integrated Services

**Summary of issues:**

This report provides an update of the progress of the Children’s Integrated Services improvement and transformation journey since the inadequate judgement following the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) in July 2022.

- Recommendation(s):**
1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the findings of the last three Ofsted Monitoring Visits.
  2. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the progress made since the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services in July 2022 and the next steps
  3. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee confirm its commitment to improving Children’s Services and its ambition for Nottingham Children’s Services to be delivering consistently good social care services to children and young people

## 1. Background

1.1 Committee will be aware that Nottingham City Children’s Services received an Ofsted ILACS inspection in July 2022 with the report being published in September 2022 (appendix 1). The outcome of the inspection was:

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

	(limited by the grading within the domain of children in need of help and protection).
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It is of note that Ofsted inspect all the 153 local authority children's services in England and that only 8.5% (13) local authorities children's services are currently delivering inadequate services to children in their local areas.

## 1.2 The inspection identified 8 specific areas for improvement:

- Effectiveness and timeliness of responses to children's needs when first presented to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- Management oversight and direction of front-line work and the local authority designated officer (LADO).
- Social work capacity so that social workers and first-line managers can respond effectively to children in need of help and protection, and that children in care have greater consistency of social worker.
- Placement sufficiency for children in care and those with complex needs.
- The service response to care leavers aged 21 and over.
- The service response to young people who are aged 16/17 years who present as homeless.
- The quality and timeliness of return home interviews.
- Oversight of children missing from education and those who are electively home educated.

1.3.1 On 12<sup>th</sup> December 2022, the local authority submitted an action plan to Ofsted which addressed the inspection findings. Ofsted formally responded on 19<sup>th</sup> December 2022 confirming that the action plan accurately reflected the findings of the inspection. The Ofsted Action plan is monitored through the Children's Improvement Board, which is chaired by an independent Department for Education Improvement Advisor. The Children's Improvement Board has been restructured to form a monthly Executive Improvement Board and quarterly Partnership Improvement Board.

1.3.2 The monthly Executive Improvement Board focusses largely on improving the performance of the Council's Children's Services following the Ofsted inspection. It supports the work of the Board in delivering children's services in Nottingham that result in consistently good outcomes for children, young people and their families. The Executive Improvement Board membership includes the Portfolio Lead Member with responsibility for Children, Young People and Education, the Chief Executive as well as senior leaders, ensuring robust monthly senior leadership oversight of progress improvements. The quarterly partnership board has oversight of the progress being made by internal services as well as in the broader children's partnership. The Partnership Board is made up of senior partnership leaders in addition to the Executive Improvement Board members.

- 1.5 In addition to the monthly monitoring of the Ofsted improvement plan through the Improvement Board, the division has an internal process to ensure robust delivery and accountability. Programme management support and resources are being provided to each Head of Service to support delivery of the plan and ensure deadlines are met and evidence of impact is being gathered. Internal monitoring of progress of the Ofsted action plan and wider transformation plan is delivered through a monthly programme board, which is chaired by the Service Director for Children’s Integrated Services. This reports to the Corporate Director through a monthly Oversight and Assurance Meeting which she chairs.
- 1.6 As a result of the inadequate judgement the Local Authority has entered into a period of Monitoring Visits. These are 2 day on site visits focused upon a specific area of practice. Judgements are not provided, but a narrative letter of findings is produced. The first letter is not published, but all subsequent letters are published on the Ofsted Website. To date the service has received 3 Monitoring Visits:
- The Front Door (MASH, Duty and EDT) – February 2023 (appendix 2)
  - Children in Need and Children with a Child Protection Plan – July 2023 (appendix 3)
  - Care Leavers aged 18+ - November 2023 (appendix 4)
- 1.7 A programme of Children’s Transformation activity has been running in conjunction with the improvement work being undertaken in the service. Both are significant pieces of work but both work programmes complement each other, with the transformation activity supporting the service delivery on its wider improvement work. The diagram below shows how both service development and practice improvements work with the transformation projects to deliver effective sustainable services:



## **2. Improvement Journey Progress**

- 2.1 Following each of the three monitoring visits inspectors have noted evidence of tangible progress being made with some areas of ‘strong’ improvement being noted across the 3 visits. As anticipated inspectors have also noted areas where further focus is required but have been clear that these are areas of which senior leaders are aware and have clear plans for further improvement.
- 2.2 Inspectors have noted the continued progression of the ‘Changing Lives’ Changing Futures’ programme and could see the interlink between the transformation and

improvement strands and the positive impact this as having in improving the quality of practice and staff morale.

2.3 There have been common themes and areas of progression across the three visits. Inspectors could see:

- Investment in posts to increase front line and management capacity, which has helped manage workload and demand, increase management oversight, reduce caseloads and improve staff morale.
- The workforce feels supported by managers and can feel the positive impact that reduced caseloads are having, enabling them to deliver best practice.
- Staff develop strong and meaningful relationships with their children and young people, know them well and act as good parents. This enables them to assess children and young people's needs to offer good support, particularly to our more vulnerable children and care leavers (such as disabled children, care leavers with additional needs and 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless). Processes (such as child in need review meetings, visits etc) often take place sooner than the statutory minimum to meet the needs of the child, young person or family, meaning that children and young people are seen or have their circumstances reviewed in timescales appropriate to them.
- There is a committed senior leadership team who have clear oversight and knowledge of performance within service areas, and recently developed dashboards are enabling managers and front line staff understand performance and prioritise tasks that need to be completed, leading to timelier responses for children and families.
- The quality assurance framework has been strengthened and is being embedded. This is correctly identifying areas for improvement and development to help further strengthen practice and learning.

2.4 Inspectors noted that there were further common areas for development, which aligned with the service's self-evaluation of practice:

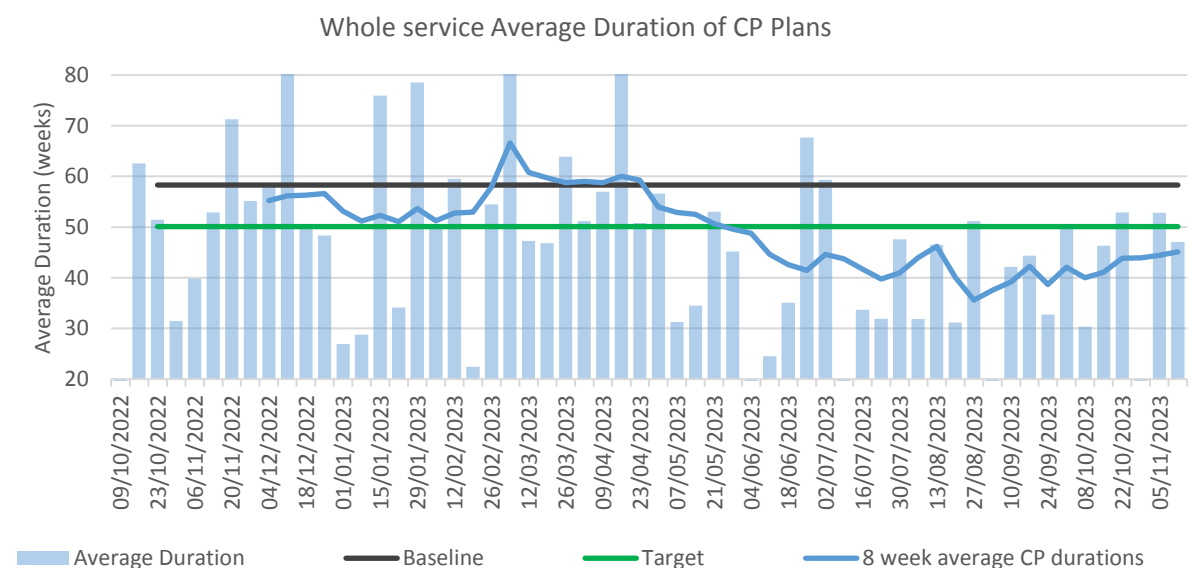
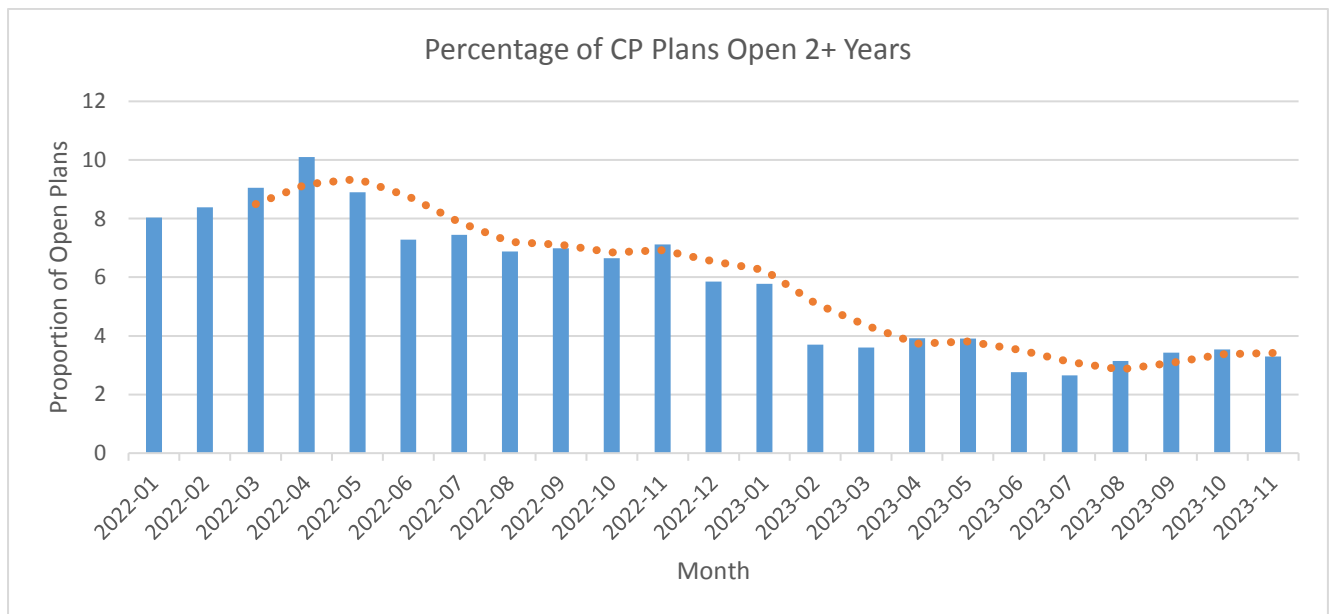
- Inconsistency in quality of assessments or plans.
- Inconsistency in the frequency and quality of supervision to help progress outcomes for children in a timely way.
- Some children and young people experience too many changes of social worker – due to difficulties around recruitment and retention of staff – an issue being experienced not only in Nottingham but nationally.
- Further work with partners needed to reduce delays in assessment and intervention which some children and families continue to experience.

2.5 Whilst the service has been making improvements through its wider service development plan, which was drawn up following the ILACS inspection, the transformation programme has been running alongside and supported this work move at pace by providing additional focus and tools to support the process. Progress against these areas has resulted in reduced demand and lower caseloads which has



enabled a focus on quality practice. This has supported cultural change, which has then in turn enabled the cultural change to provide further momentum to the improvement and transformation through increased staff morale and improved staff retention.

2.6 One of the areas noted within the ILACS inspection was the drift and delay to progressing outcomes for children and young people. As well as forming part of the service improvement plan, this was also one of the workstreams under the transformation programme. As a result of the focus, there have been significant reductions in the number of children with a child protection plan (from 7.7% to 3.3%) and where children do have a child protection plan, the length of time they are on a plan has reduced significantly (58 weeks to 44 weeks).

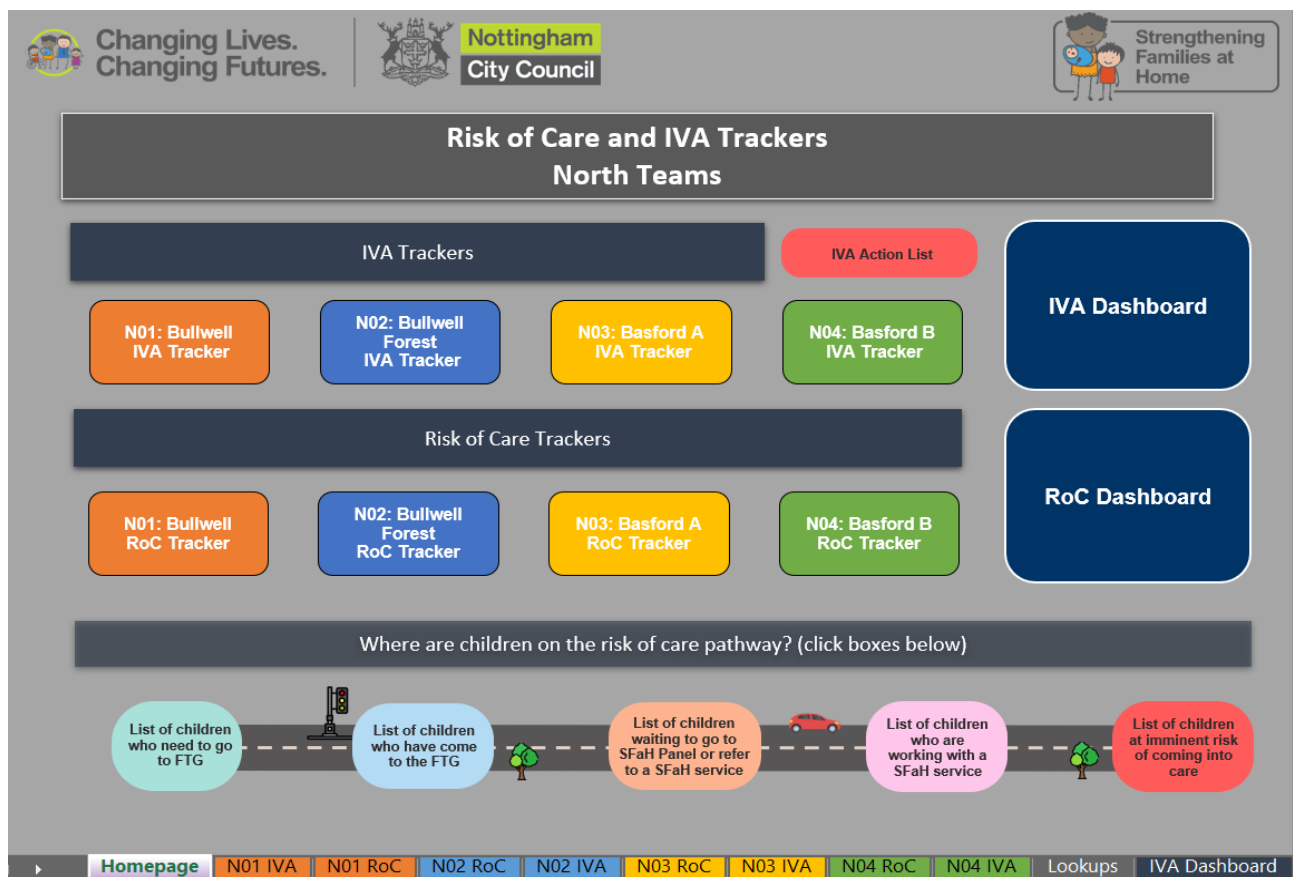


2.7 These improvements have been brought about through sustained work drive by the improvement plan, with activity such as increased managed oversight through regular

oversight panels, with further support provided through the transformation workstream in the form of additional tools to support management oversight, such as management dashboards.

2.8 Likewise placing children in care in family placements to enable them to stay within a family environment and achieve stronger outcomes has been a focus of improvement but supported with the tools and support of the transformation preventing long term care starts workstream. This has resulted in the number of children being supported to remain with family increasing from 32% in January 2023 to 40% in November 2023. This has been largely due to the transformation focus on supporting the roll out of family network meetings to identify appropriate family members who can offer support. The transformation work has also supported with a senior manager dashboard to support weekly management oversight of children at risk of coming into care or at risk of harm. These in turn support the caseload dashboard which allows case managers to prioritise their workload and tasks. An example of one of the management dashboard tools is below:

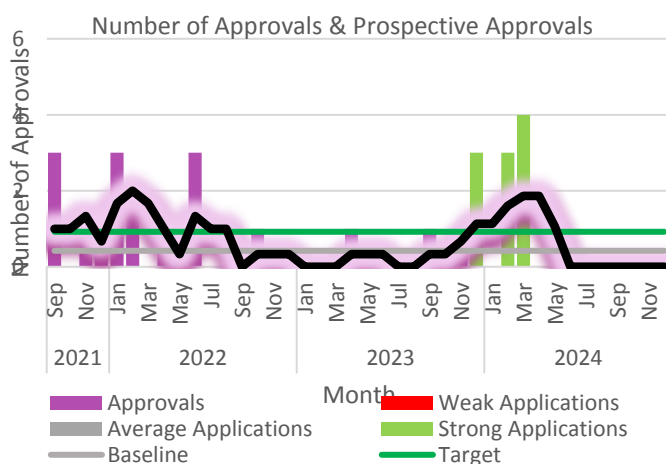
*Risk of care and Initial Viability Assessment Tracker dashboard:*



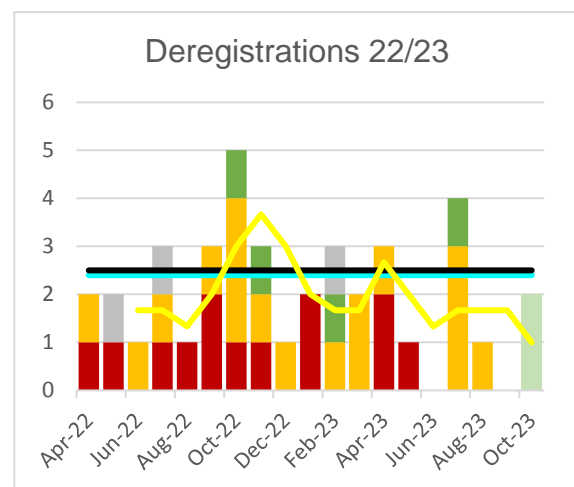
2.9 A further key focus of the improvement journey has been to ensure that children are in the right placement type to meet their needs. This includes reducing the number of children in residential children’s homes, which do not always produce the best outcomes for children and are high cost. We have done this through a number of initiatives including the implementation of a panel specifically looking at children in residential care and overseeing their transition to foster carer or reunification if this is assessed to be in their best interests. Those children moving to in-house carers are supported by the new Fostering Support Service and Out of Hours service.

2.10 Those moving to Independent Fostering Agency carers may qualify for support from the STARS project. The STARS project is a social impact bond project which provides a range of support services, including step down from residential to foster care. Weekly meetings between the relevant services look at all children who need a new provision. This also dovetailed with one of the transformation workstreams, which has been focussed upon improving the recruitment, retention and utilisation of foster carers. With new ways of working, a marketing resource and effective tracking systems the service is on course to recruit 12 more foster carers by the end of the year and are on course to lose 10 fewer foster carers and increased utilisation of carers by 7%. This will support more children being placed with foster carers – producing better outcomes for children, supporting them to stay close to home in a family environment, but also reducing the reliance on expensive residential home placements, reducing service and council budget pressures.

### Recruitment



### Retention



2.11 Both the improvement and transformation work has had a positive impact upon the workload and caseloads, which has improved morale by enabling staff and managers to focus on delivering quality intervention to children and families. This has in turn supported a culture change across the service ranging from the engagement of staff with the improvement and transformation journey, increased management oversight and better engagement with partner agencies to support delivery of outcomes for children and families. Staff feel engaged in, and part of, the improvement and transformation work and this has helped quicken the pace of change.

2.12 This has worked well within First Response where learning and themes from quality assurance, has fed into monthly action learning sets. This monthly forum with staff, managers and the Head of Service allows team members to share issues they are worried about and delivers key practice messages and has helped create a culture where learning is shared by all. The reduction in the caseloads brought about by the timeliness of response has enabled the management team to create a learning environment where staff feel connected to the senior management team and enabled a shared vision and common goal to be established and worked towards. The action learning sets are supported by the monthly quality assurance and dip sampling that takes place with learning from those feeding into the action learning sets. This is backed up by weekly performance clinics where themes and trends in key performance information can be identified and any barriers unblocked in a timely way.

**"I feel like we're working far less in silo. I know all the high-risk families that the other managers in my area are working with, and feel like we can learn from each other and help each other out"**

*Fieldwork Team manager*

**"Last year, it felt like I was doing everything on my own at times, but now we've got a much more streamlined approach, so we're so much more on top of it and can find placements for children a lot easier. I feel like I've got a lot more back up now"**

*Duty Lead*

2.13 Since February 2023, the service has been operating its 'Shout Out' nominations and awards – celebrating success across the service. This has been well received by staff and has further improved staff satisfaction and morale by recognising and valuing the work of teams and individuals.



2.14 The service has been working closely with Human Resources to review and improve its advertising of opportunities and the recruitment processes. There has been a focus on advertising routes and material, with the production of a recruitment video, improved adverts and supporting information and social media targeting. Rolling recruitment takes place to ensure that applicants are interviewed quickly. This is then supported by a more streamlined process once an applicant has been successful, with a reduction in time between interview and start date. In addition, due to the progress being made and the real sense of culture change we have seen some agency workers convert to permanent establishment. As a result of the recruitment activity, improving staff morale, increased staff retention and reducing caseloads, the service has been able to reduce reliance on agency staffing in some of its teams. Within Fieldwork agency staffing has reduced from 17 last year to 6 agency workers currently engaged. First Response has been able to release the agency project team that it had engaged to manage demand and now has no agency workers within the service.

2.15 It is significant that the transformation work has become business as usual within the service for the last 4 months and has been led and owned by the service facilitated and supported by Newton Europe colleagues, making the approach sustainable.



### 3. Areas for further development, challenges and next steps

- 3.1 The service is on an improvement journey and, although clear improvements have been made, there remain areas for further development. Encouragingly inspectors identified the same areas for improvement that have been identified by the service in its self-evaluation, leading them to note that the service knows itself well and has clear plans for further progression.
- 3.2 Areas of practice inconsistency continue to form part of the wider service development plan. Some of the work to improve consistency in practice has been supported by our transformation partner, in the form of a service away day with the care leavers service and scoping the views of care leavers as to what they would like to see in their plans. The ongoing improvements will continue to build on this. Department for Education funding is enabling ongoing team development days to build upon learning from quality assurance to support the continued learning culture to focus on continually improving practice. This is bringing teams together to focus on what good practice looks like and encourage team engagement in how to improve practice consistency.

Photos from some of the activity undertaken with care leavers:

*Pathway planning session with care leavers*



*Building the Bridges conference with care leavers and businesses*



- 3.3 Work is ongoing with partners to support them understand the Thresholds of Need to reduce the numbers of children referred to the service, where alternative early help services would be more appropriate. This is being supported by the launch of the Early Help Strategy and website, with the aim that children and families will be able to access timelier support more appropriate to their needs when they require it, reducing escalation to more costly statutory services.



- 3.4 Whilst inspectors have been encouraged by the progress and senior leader commitment they have seen, following each monitoring visit they have sounded a note of caution as to the sustainability of the change, given the fragile nature of the resource put in place and the budgetary challenges facing the Authority. First Response and Fieldwork have been able to reduce caseloads and workload through the improvements that have been made, which will support ongoing sustainability. However, this will remain challenging in the care leavers service and the children in care teams due to the interim nature of the increased staffing and management capacity, the turnover of staff within the service and the number of children in care, which will mean caseloads remain higher than desirable for the years ahead and will lead to increased numbers of young adults leaving care who are eligible for care leaving services. Reliance on agency staffing in the children in care teams is higher than in other services (32% as opposed to 11% in Fieldwork services), meaning more children experience several changes of social worker, limiting their ability to build trusting relationships with their social worker.
- 3.5 To mitigate some of the challenges, the service is using its data to profile the numbers of children in care to predict the number of young adults who will be eligible for leaving

care service to see whether service re profiling can support the changing profile of the caseloads.

- 3.6 Work remains ongoing with human resources to support robust recruitment and retention activity to make Nottingham City the Authority of choice for Social Workers and Personal Advisors to create stability in the workforce.
- 3.7 Nevertheless the sustainability of progress to date and the pace of change will remain fragile given the current budgetary and governance pressures that the Council is facing. This will potentially come into sharp focus with the next monitoring visit, which is anticipated to be in the Children in Care service by the end of the financial year. The service is unable to meet the challenges alone and a whole Council approach will be vital to demonstrate to inspectors that the service is enabled to make sustainable and at pace changes ahead of its anticipated full inspection in 2025.

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# Inspection of Nottingham City local authority children's services

**Inspection date:** 11 – 22 July 2022

**Lead inspector:** Andy Waugh, Her Majesty's Inspector

<b>Judgement</b>	<b>Grade</b>
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate

Services for children who need help and protection are inadequate because there are serious failures, leaving children at continued risk of harm when they are first presented as in need of support.

In February 2020, a focused visit found there were areas for priority action in Nottingham around support for children with child protection or child-in-need plans. Since that visit, progress has been slow and uneven, hampered by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the tragic death of a senior manager. There has been some improvement in the areas identified for priority action, although practice remains too inconsistent. Other services have deteriorated, particularly responses when children are first presented as potentially in need of help and protection. These services are too slow to identify and respond to risks of harm to children. Management oversight and supervision remains inconsistent and is not supporting social workers effectively. There has been a high level of staff turnover for children in care. Children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless do not always have their needs met by the local authority.

In the last six months, a new senior management team has been established for children's social care. This team has a sound understanding of the challenges it faces and has already delivered some improvements and positive culture shifts. Senior management oversight of vulnerable children has been strengthened through a

range of panels and monitoring systems. A quality assurance framework is embedded across the service, with an understanding of what constitutes good practice. Early permanence for children through adoption is a significant area of improvement. The recruitment and retention of workers is being appropriately prioritised.

## What needs to improve?

- Effectiveness and timeliness of responses to children’s needs when first presented to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- Management oversight and direction of front-line work and the local authority designated officer (LADO).
- Social work capacity, so that social workers and first-line managers can respond effectively to children in need of help and protection, and that children in care have greater consistency of social worker.
- Placement sufficiency for children in care and those with complex needs.
- The service response to care leavers aged 21 and over.
- The service response to young people who are aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless.
- The quality and timeliness of return home interviews.
- Oversight of children missing from education and those who are electively home educated.

## The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: inadequate

1. Weaknesses in the MASH are significant, widespread and systemic. Risk of harm is not always recognised, leaving too many children with insufficient protection. Some children who have met the threshold for social care intervention wait up to six weeks to be seen by a social worker. The majority of contacts in the MASH are delayed and not processed within timescales appropriate to the risks and needs of children.
2. Management oversight is not effective when applying thresholds to safeguard children, and it is not providing social workers with direction or overseeing how quickly contacts are progressed. However, once children are allocated, most social workers understand thresholds well and apply them appropriately for the majority of children.
3. Parental consent is not consistently obtained by partners in order to allow safeguarding information about children to be shared. Complicated systems in the MASH contribute to delays because partners do not respond to social workers’ requests for information in a timely way. For some children, this takes up to 16 days. A significant number of children experience repeated contacts and referrals before they get the help they need.

4. Where allegations of significant harm are first presented, decision-making within the MASH is not as timely as it needs to be, leaving some children in situations where they are at continued risk of harm and without safety plans.
5. The emergency duty service social workers do not have consistent management oversight and supervision. Social workers mostly respond effectively to the needs of children out of hours, but on occasions lack professional curiosity in order to ensure children are protected.
6. Most children and their families benefit from a comprehensive offer of early help services. However, not all children receive early help support at the right time, with many waiting too long for targeted support. Managers are not consistent in applying thresholds for children to step up and down between early help and children's social care.
7. Despite the delays in transferring from the MASH to duty teams, when children are allocated a social worker, strategy discussions take place when required and assessments are completed in a timely way. Strategy discussions are well recorded, with the right thresholds applied. Multi-agency discussion leads to effective information-sharing and analysis of risk. This includes consideration of family history and the next steps for intervention.
8. Most children are visited at levels relating to need. Outcomes following Section 47 enquiries are appropriate, leading to decisions and actions that reduce risks and ensure children are protected. Safety planning takes place for most children.
9. The majority of assessments have a clear purpose and rationale for intervention. Assessments address the risks and concerns and explore the impact for children. Direct work provides valuable insights into children's experiences. Where children are part of a large family, they are considered individually. Parents' views and family history are understood. Analysis of all the information addresses the concerns and risks and informs what needs to change. For some children, the neglect toolkit informs assessments. However, it does not always result in an overall analysis or contribute to actions.
10. The threshold decisions to proceed to the initial child protection conference are appropriate. Partner agencies contribute to analysis of risk, resulting in a clear rationale for decisions. Most plans are comprehensive, with immediate actions to improve children's circumstances, and are consistently reviewed and updated at core groups.
11. For children who are supported through child-in-need planning, where concerns are escalating, child protection enquiries are appropriately initiated. Children's needs are well considered in child-in-need and child protection plans. These plans include wishes and feelings, and they are written so that the child can understand them. Families have a clear understanding of the support they will receive and how it needs to be sustained. Most plans are reviewed within timescales. However, for some children, delays in circulating initial plans and meeting minutes impact on the new plans being progressed in a timely way.

12. Arrangements to manage allegations against professionals by the designated officer are overcomplicated. The service has an area of vulnerability because non-social work qualified staff are involved in gathering information in respect of child protection referrals in a complex and specialist area of safeguarding. This is further compounded by an absence of management oversight and effective tracking of referrals.
13. The overall quality and frequency of supervision is variable in duty and fieldwork teams. Team managers provide oversight and guidance at the point of allocation. However, for some children, written records are copied from previous supervision sessions, with no reflection on children's circumstances. Actions lack timescales to monitor progress and effectiveness of assessment. Where supervision is better, it is more reflective, detailed and focused on the needs and experiences of children.
14. When children's lives are not improving, children benefit from early authoritative decisions to escalate into pre-proceeding and care proceedings. Senior managers ensure effective review of the pre-proceedings stage of the Public Law Outline (PLO) through panels, which provides tight tracking to minimise drift and delay for children. Letters before proceedings are mostly clear and identify effectively the individual risks to children, as well as their needs.
15. Social workers establish positive working relationships with children and their families and have a good understanding of their needs. They are persistent when engaging parents to build relationships, which enables better participation with plans and improved outcomes for children. Social workers are skilled at gathering the views of children, using a range of age-appropriate tools.
16. The daily domestic abuse triage meeting is well attended by most partners, enabling effective information-sharing and prompt decision-making in respect of next steps. This ensures clear direction as to what needs to happen immediately in order to safeguard children. However, the absence of information from midwifery and schools prevents a full assessment in respect of some children.
17. Workers in the whole life disability team are committed to the children they work with. Child protection work is effective in making disabled children safer and improving their circumstances through multi-agency working, including regular core groups which monitor the progress of the child.
18. Arrangements for children who are privately fostered are managed effectively. Once in placement, children are visited regularly. A dedicated panel provides effective oversight of privately fostered children. This ensures that children continue to live with carers who can meet their needs.
19. Children who are aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless are not consistently provided with appropriate advice or options. Once children have been assessed, there is a lack of urgency from both the social housing provider and the local

authority in providing suitable accommodation that meets their needs. This lack of accommodation increases some children's existing vulnerabilities.

20. Children who are at risk from criminal and sexual exploitation receive detailed assessments in which risk factors are identified and effective analysis of the impact of criminal and sexual exploitation on young people and their families is provided. Multi-agency meetings and subsequent planning lead to plans that effectively reduce risks to children. Plans are reviewed regularly, with actions being updated in recognition of changes in children's circumstances. For some older children who are at risk of exploitation, there are issues of placement sufficiency, which has an impact on the ability of workers to keep them safe. This means that some children are left too long in situations when they have been assessed as needing to enter care.
21. For children who have been missing, return home interviews are not held consistently, or in good time. Return home interviews have often been recorded without sufficient analysis of the circumstances and with outcomes that are not specific to the child. Hence, return home interviews do not contribute effectively to children's safety plans. Children currently do not have access to a wide range of adults who they can relate to and share their experiences.
22. The local authority does not have suitable oversight for all children who are missing from education. Staff are unclear about the whereabouts of young people when attending part-time timetables. There has been a significant rise in the numbers of children being electively home educated, and the local authority has oversight of all these children. However, for some children, risks are not fully understood because safeguarding is not routinely considered when completing assessments.

### **The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers: requires improvement to be good**

23. Most children only come into care when it is necessary and in a timely way. For others, however, there has been some delay, meaning that some children had been living in neglectful circumstances for too long.
24. When children are unable to live with their parents or wider family or friends, alternative permanence options are considered concurrently. As a result, children who require permanence through adoption are being matched more quickly than they previously were. Brothers and sisters have been successfully adopted together, and the use of fostering for adoption placements has given some babies stability and security from the earliest opportunity. Sensitive direct work with children and their prospective adopters is helping to ensure positive and smooth transitions to permanence. Some children also achieve permanence through long-term fostering. These children are receiving consistent care from committed carers, and they are experiencing the quality of support as they would from a good parent.

25. Some children are living with their parents under care orders, where there has been drift in planning for the discharging of care orders. Consequently, children have been living with statutory intervention and with a level of uncertainty about their future for too long.
26. Too many children in care have experienced too many changes of social workers, including times when they are visited by duty workers. This has affected children's opportunities to form trusting relationships with their social worker and complete meaningful direct work. Some children have been able to develop positive and trusting relationships when their social worker has remained consistent.
27. Too many children who are in long-term foster homes do not have an up-to-date assessment of their needs, thus hindering effective planning to ensure that children are receiving the right support at the right time. There is not sufficient life-story work being undertaken with children who do not have an adoption plan to help them to understand their journey into care, develop their sense of identity or help them to feel proud of who they are.
28. The review of children's plans mostly takes place within statutory timescales, and minutes are sensitively written to children to help them understand the outcomes and plans. Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) do not consistently monitor children's circumstances in between reviews. Escalation processes are currently not effective in demonstrating impact or positive change for children because of concerns raised by the IROs.
29. Family time is carefully considered, and takes place based on children's views and an analysis of risk. Children are supported to take part in a range of leisure and social activities. Children told inspectors about the range of fun activities and social experiences they enjoy while living in their foster placements, which have enhanced their confidence and self-esteem.
30. The virtual school is ambitious in ensuring that most children in care make good educational progress at school or other provision. Most children achieve well relative to their starting points. The virtual school works in close partnership with schools to ensure that vulnerable children receive the right provision. For a small number of children, learning takes place full-time in unregistered provision. Sometimes, low levels of attendance are not prioritised as concerns and the voice of the child is not captured fully enough.
31. The emotional and mental health needs of children in care are appropriately met in Nottingham. Many children in care and their carers are benefiting from both direct support and consultation to help improve their emotional and mental well-being.
32. The help and support provided to children in care who go missing and who are at risk of exploitation is variable and is impacted by the quality and consistency of social workers relationships with children. In stronger work, multi-agency

packages of support are safeguarding children effectively. For some children, when practice is weaker, there is a lack of clarity in respect of safety planning and a lack of opportunity to learn and plan from return home interviews.

33. Support for children who arrived in the UK as unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) is tailored, supportive and recognises their need for a range of practical and emotional support. This includes a specific looked after children's nurse to support UASC.
34. Most children in care live in stable placements that meet their needs. There are sufficiency challenges, particularly for children with the most complex needs. This has resulted in a small number of children under 16 living in unsuitable and unregistered children's homes while placement searches continue. These placements are unlawful. Senior leaders are aware of these children and maintain effective oversight.
35. High staff turnover in the fostering service has impacted on the quality of work, resulting in foster carers having limited training opportunities and inconsistent support from supervising social workers. There is a shortfall in the number of foster carers being recruited, which affects the local authority's ability to be able to provide care for children within the local area.
36. There is effective working together with the regional adoption agency (Adoption East Midlands), which enables effective matching of children to adopters. Adopters are provided with the required training throughout their adoption journey, and post-adoption support is organised and specific to individual need. Adopters are provided with life-story books, which will help them and their children to understand their adoption journey.
37. The Children in Care Council provides some children and care leavers with an opportunity to share their views on services they receive. However, the council is underdeveloped, with only nine children attending regularly. This limits the capacity for children and young people to influence service development and co-production in Nottingham city.
38. Care leavers are allocated a personal adviser (PA) six months before they reach the age of 18, enabling them to begin to build a relationship before they leave care. Care leavers, some of whom have complex needs, are reassured when they transition into adulthood that there is a trusted person who can help and to whom they can turn, if needed. Most care leavers benefit from long-standing relationships with dedicated PAs who establish enduring relationships with them.
39. The majority of care leavers are informed of their rights and entitlements. The offer of support and entitlements are outlined for care leavers, although it has not been updated since 2018. The local offer does not confirm the statutory requirement to provide a PA to support care leavers post-21 years of age. The

local authority is not consistently fulfilling its duty to care leavers post-21 years of age.

40. Risk assessments for care leavers are not consistently reviewed. Some PAs are managing high-risk situations without the benefit of regular supervision, or appropriate staff care, including lone worker health and safety risk assessments.
41. Pathway plans are regularly updated. A new pathway plan template enables the engagement of care leavers in planning next steps, but this is not consistently happening. Some pathway plans are, therefore, completed without the benefit of co-production, and sometimes language lacks sensitivity and empathy.
42. Care leavers are supported to access accommodation that meets their needs. A significant number are benefiting from living in staying-put arrangements. Managers work closely with the housing department, providing appropriate identity documents to create accounts for care leavers to bid for, and, where necessary, they are facilitating direct housing offers. Care leavers can move into their own tenancies; if they encounter challenges, they are supported to return to semi-independent provision, allowing them access to further support.
43. Some care leavers are successfully undertaking university courses. The care leavers team works closely with specialist employment officers to enable care leavers to meet with local employers to discuss their futures. The processes to support young care leavers in post-16 education are inconsistent. For many, the review of their personal education plans does not happen frequently enough, including for those most vulnerable to not being in education, employment or training.

### **The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: requires improvement to be good**

44. In response to the areas for priority action identified in the focused visit in February 2020, leaders and senior managers developed a service-wide improvement plan as well as a plan to manage the subsequent pandemic. The service and its members then experienced the impact of the sad passing of their Director of Children's Integrated Services (DCIS). Corporately, the local authority also faced significant financial challenges with the council, being the subject of a section 114 notice (Local Government Finance Act 1988) in December 2021. Within this challenging context, slow progress was made against the areas for priority action and, while some services improved, others deteriorated.
45. A new, knowledgeable DCIS, along with a committed new leadership team, is beginning to have a greater impact on practice. There is clarity on the expectations of all staff, and leaders are developing a culture that promotes good practice through high support and high challenge. However, the scale of required improvements remains substantial, and the pace of change needs to



quicken for all areas of the service to provide safe and consistently good services for children.

46. In November 2021, significant shortfalls were identified in the MASH following a diagnostic report. Backlogs in the system meant that children's needs had not been responded to for significant periods of time, and some children were not appropriately safeguarded. Senior managers responded by altering some systems to improve the timely response to all children referred to the service. This, in effect, created a further backlog in the MASH, as more children were identified whose circumstances needed to be assessed. In May of this year, senior managers responded further by recruiting a team of qualified staff to manage the continuing demand at the front door. However, inspectors found the additional resources, alone, have not been effective in ensuring a timely and safe response to children who have met the threshold for a service. This includes some children who are at risk of significant harm.
47. During the inspection, leaders acknowledged that the level of delay and impact for children was unacceptable at the front door. In response, managers completed a significant amount of audit activity to ensure children's needs had been appropriately assessed. In addition, structural and systemic changes in the MASH, planned for August 2022, have been brought forward.
48. The quality of supervision and management oversight remains inconsistent across services and is not an effective process for the timely progression of children's assessments and plans. The poor application of threshold decisions by some managers leaves too many children in situations of unassessed risk, with their needs not fully understood.
49. Elected members and the chief executive remain committed to improving the quality of children's services, despite the local authority's financial challenges. Further investment has been agreed to increase capacity to manage the demand and improve outcomes for children.
50. There are positive working relationships with partners at a strategic and practice level that work together to achieve the best outcomes for children. The judiciary and the Children and Family Court Advisory and Support Service reported effective working relationships with the local authority, which ensures timely court proceedings and enables children to achieve permanence at the earliest opportunity. The application of the PLO has improved significantly.
51. The corporate parenting board is attended by social care staff and elected members, with partners only attending to share specific information. It is difficult to measure the impact the board has on service delivery and development because children's views are not consistently recorded. Leaders have acknowledged that the board is underdeveloped, and they are currently reviewing its functions to ensure that there is a greater commitment from partners to children in care and care leavers.

52. Senior managers understand the ongoing challenges regarding sufficiency of placements for the most complex children and young people. An ambitious sufficiency plan is in place, with funding secured to recruit more foster carers, along with block commissioning residential and semi-independent placements to increase placement capacity. However, the plan is at an early stage of implementation and is yet to demonstrate the impact it might have for children.
53. Senior managers welcome scrutiny from partners and peers in order to provide opportunities to reflect on current service delivery and make improvements to frontline practice. The chosen model of a strength-based approach has been implemented but requires further embedding for it to be consistently effective in supporting families. A career pathway has been developed for social workers through mentoring with heads of service and encouraging peer support.
54. A performance and quality management framework is beginning to provide managers with an effective oversight of the service. Consequently, managers have an improved grip on the service and a better understanding of practice. Audit activity provides evidence that managers and staff have an understanding of what good practice looks like. However, audits are not consistently used to improve individual practice or learning for the whole service. The local authority's self-evaluation mostly demonstrates a sound understanding of the service's effectiveness and impact on children. However, there remained shortfalls at the front door that were not fully understood.
55. The improvement plan implemented in response to the areas identified as requiring priority action has resulted in incremental improvements in the services delivered to children and families. The pace of change is slow, and practice in some areas of the service remains variable.
56. Senior managers are appropriately focused on the need to drive forward recruitment and retention, motivating current staff with an enhanced financial package, and reducing the reliance on agency social workers in order to stabilise the workforce. Although recently reducing, workloads for some social workers remain too high. For less experienced social workers, they have manageable workloads.
57. Team managers do not provide consistent oversight of key decision-making. Supervision is too variable, and there are gaps in frequency. The level of reflection and ability to consider impact on children is inconsistently recorded.
58. The staff that inspectors have spoken to are positive about working in Nottingham City and show a commendable loyalty to the children of Nottingham. Some social workers told inspectors that they feel valued and expressed their pride in working for Nottingham City and their drive to improve children's experiences. Workers remain committed to doing their best to support children in Nottingham.



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4 April 2023

Catherine Underwood  
Corporate Director of People  
Nottingham City Council  
Loxley House  
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Dear Catherine

### **Monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services on 28 February to 1 March 2023. This was the first monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2022. His Majesty's inspectors for this visit were Julie Knight and Margaret Burke.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- Timeliness and effectiveness of the first response service when children are presented as potentially in need of help and protection.
- The timeliness and effectiveness of responses to those children aged 16 and 17 who present as homeless.
- Workforce capacity, and the quality of supervision and management oversight.
- The impact of leaders on practice, including quality assurance processes.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

A committed permanent senior leadership team is driving forward its improvement and transformation plan for children's services, developed in response to the findings of the previous inspection. Senior leaders now have a clear oversight and knowledge of performance in the first response service and have appropriately invested resources, including an increase in workforce capacity and management oversight. This is resulting in recent improvements in the timeliness and quality of responses to children when they present as being in need of help and protection at the 'front door'. Senior leaders know that this is the beginning of improvement in services for

children and that there is more to do to ensure sustainability and continuation of this early progress.

### **Findings and evaluation of progress**

When children need help and protection, there has been recent improvement to the timeliness of response to children's contacts when information about children is sent to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), in the first response service. Senior leaders' investment in an additional eight social work permanent posts in the MASH is helping to manage the increase in demand for support for children, which has remained relatively high since September 2022. The creation of a dedicated service manager post provides additional management oversight and capacity for the MASH and Emergency Duty Team (EDT) service. This increase in capacity is having a positive impact on staff morale as their workloads have become more manageable and as a result this is having a positive impact on improving the timeliness in response for children.

The implementation of a new prioritisation system in the MASH since November 2022 has provided a structure which helps workers understand and prioritise risks to children. Family support workers and social workers are using it consistently to support their decision-making. While contacts receive swift oversight and direction from an advanced social work practitioner or team manager, decisions on progressing some contacts does not happen quickly enough and too much time is taken regathering information that may already be known about children from their family history.

Partner agencies do not always obtain consent from families before they submit an email or multi-agency referral form (MARF) to request support for children. This can lead to delays for children receiving the right help quickly, as family support and social workers in the MASH have to spend too much time seeking consent from families. In addition, the quality of information submitted by partners on the MARFs is inconsistent, with limited detail or focus on children's needs or the impact of their current circumstances on their welfare.

When children have experienced incidents of domestic abuse, information from the police takes too long to be sent through to the MASH. This means there is a delay in social workers being able to establish current risks and harm to children. Often, the best moment to engage meaningfully with families can be lost due to the passage of time. The MASH appropriately holds daily multi-agency high-risk domestic abuse meetings to consider the risks to children. Since December 2022, police have not been in attendance at these meetings due to their lack of capacity in the MASH, which leads to delays in information-sharing and decisions on next steps for children.

Once a decision is made on next steps for children, the response from the MASH is mostly appropriate. However, lots of requests for support or signposting are coming through the first response service unnecessarily. Often, contacts come into the MASH

for early help services that could be accessed directly in the community. Senior leaders' Changing Lives Changing Futures improvement programme seeks to address this as part of a new early help strategy and service design, but this is currently in the early stages of development.

Children aged 16 and 17 who present to the MASH as homeless receive an appropriate and quick response to meet their needs. This is a strong area of improvement since the previous inspection, as children are now made aware of their rights and entitlements. A homeless protocol, in partnership with housing agencies, has been refreshed and joint assessments of children's needs are completed when appropriate to do so. Advocacy support for children will be available from April 2023 and is being implemented in response to children's feedback. A live tracker is in place to monitor all new referrals, and this is monitored by the 16- and 17-year-old homeless panel, which has oversight and reviews children's needs regularly.

Once children are identified in the MASH as needing help and/or protection, they transfer to one of four duty and assessment teams for a child and family assessment. Following the previous inspection, caseloads of duty and assessment teams social workers became unmanageable due to the high demand for services coming through the MASH. To help manage this demand, senior leaders have commissioned a temporary additional duty and assessment team. The additional duty and assessment team consists of five social workers and one team manager and the team has been in place since late November 2022.

While this additional team is contributing to the recent improvement in the timeliness of responses for children, there are still delays in some children being visited when an assessment of need is identified. When children are allocated for an assessment, they are visited by social workers more quickly than at the time of the previous inspection. However, the appropriate local authority target of visiting children within five days from the contact being made to the MASH is not consistently being achieved. Timescales for visits to children are being monitored by senior leaders. However, the consequence for those children where there is delay means unknown risks being identified.

Social workers in the duty and assessment service report that their current caseloads and workloads have recently become much more manageable. Workers are having more time to complete children's assessments, which is having a positive impact on the assessment quality and on staff morale. While this is an improving trajectory, senior leaders recognise that more work needs to be done to further improve the timeliness in visits to children and the sustainability of the current additional staffing arrangements.

Children are visited regularly by social workers completing assessments and when appropriate to do so, children are seen alone. Direct work with children is completed by social workers who demonstrate a sensitive and caring approach to the child to understand their world and their views. They make creative efforts to ensure that

children have the opportunity to express their views and wishes. Although the social workers are involved with children for a short period of time, when they speak about children, they know them well.

The quality of children's assessments is inconsistent across the duty and assessment service. Some children's assessments are comprehensive and social workers demonstrate professional curiosity that helps to inform their analysis about children's needs and risks. However, some assessments are overly focused on the presenting need and not sufficiently considering the impact of children's family history. As a result, some children experience a second assessment in a short period of time because not all risks and needs have been previously identified. More recent assessments are of a stronger quality.

When risks to children increase, there is appropriate escalation to convening a multi-agency strategy meeting. The majority of meetings have the right professionals in attendance to share information about children's needs and risks. Strategy meetings are not always timely, and some delays have been due to a lack of staff and partner agency capacity. As a result, some interventions for children may not be actioned quickly enough. Safety planning and timely visits by workers help to keep an oversight of children until strategy meetings are held.

When children need help and protection out of office hours, social workers in the Emergency Duty Team (EDT) service take appropriate action to ensure children's immediate safety and well-being. EDT social workers have access to children's records, which gives them the ability to record their involvement, and this helps ensure that the daytime MASH and duty and assessment teams are able to see quickly what intervention has taken place out of office hours.

Workers are generally positive about working for Nottingham City, and social workers spoke of the positive impact of the additional capacity in the front door, which is helping with staff morale. Staff talked about being burnt out until the recent additional resources were provided, and there is some uncertainty about sustainability so that current workloads and caseloads remain manageable. Senior leaders know that recruitment and retention of staff are critical to the development of the improvement and transformation plans, and this is priority work in progress.

Staff feel supported by their teams and team managers, and workforce stability is slowly improving. The quality of management oversight across the first response service and staff supervision is not always sufficiently reflective of children's circumstances, needs and risk. The introduction of management review at the 10-day point of assessment is helping to keep timescales on track.

Senior leaders have taken appropriate action and identified the right things in the first response service that need to change. The improvement action plan has regular oversight and governance from the Children's Executive Improvement and Partnership Boards. While some actions have been undertaken swiftly, senior leaders



recognise that the current progress needs to continue and be sustained. Senior leaders' oversight of performance is much improved since the previous inspection. They know more work is needed on the quality assurance of frontline practice in the front door, including completion of single and multi-agency audit activity, to help inform them of the quality of practice for children.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education. Because this is the first monitoring visit to your local authority, we will not publish this letter on the Ofsted website. You may share this letter with others if you wish.

Yours sincerely

Julie Knight  
**His Majesty's Inspector**

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30 August 2023

Catherine Underwood  
Corporate Director of People  
Nottingham City Council  
Loxley House  
Station Street  
Nottingham  
NG2 3NG

Dear Catherine

### **Monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services on the 25 and 26 July 2023. This was the second monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2022. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Julie Knight and Margaret Burke.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

This visit reviewed progress made in support for children in need, including those subject to a protection plan and disabled children. Inspectors reviewed:

- The quality of children's assessments plans and reviews.
- The quality of visits and work with children.
- The quality of management oversight and supervision.
- Stability and sustainability of the safeguarding service workforce, including the impact of current caseloads on practice.
- Performance and quality assurance oversight of senior leaders.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Since the previous monitoring visit, a committed and stable leadership team has continued to progress the 'Changing Lives, Changing Futures' improvement programme for children's services. Senior leaders have an accurate and realistic understanding of the quality of frontline practice, which is supported by a revised quality assurance and performance framework. There are early signs of tangible improvements in field work practice and the environment in which staff work. A reduction in caseloads has been supported by investment in additional agency social

workers. However, this is a temporary arrangement and senior leaders know that improvements need to be sustainable. There continues to be inconsistency in the quality of practice for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan, compounded by challenges in achieving greater workforce stability.

## **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Some children with a child in need or protection plan have the opportunity to develop strong and meaningful relationships with their social workers. This helps children to feel confident in sharing their views and wishes so that workers understand what their daily life is like. This knowledge enables workers to assess and analyse children's needs and identify risks to inform planning. Disabled children's social workers in the whole life disability service have a sound understanding of the needs of children and the impact of children's disabilities on them and their family's day-to-day lives.

Some children have too many changes in social worker. When a change in social worker happens, necessary work to progress children's plans is delayed. As a result, some children and families find it difficult to begin a trusting relationship with a newly allocated social worker and for a small number of children it means risks can increase. Senior leaders know this and have an ambitious workforce offer and delivery plan that is leading to some stability in staffing. However, this continues to be an area of significant challenge, and the sustainability of a stable workforce is an area of priority for children's services.

Children are visited regularly by social workers, and when children need extra support, this can be more often than is specified in their plan. Visits to children are often supported by children and family practitioners, co-working with social workers, when involved with larger family groups. Children appropriately have the opportunity to see workers alone or at school. Children's records reflect some children's views and wishes well, and some are sufficiently detailed about the purpose of visits. This is an area of gradual progress, but the quality of recording is not consistent in all children's records. Some children's records provide limited information about children's views, and there can be a lack of information about children's presentation and their home environment.

Some children and families do not receive support quickly enough, due to waiting lists for services which support families experiencing domestic abuse or mental health difficulties. This can also lead to delays in children's plans progressing. Social workers try to be creative and find alternative support for children and their families. While many disabled children receive appropriate intervention and help, there are often long waiting lists for some short breaks services and there are challenges in finding direct payment and outreach workers.

Recent child and family assessments in the whole life disability service appropriately include children's and parents' views. Disabled children's social workers are skilled in

seeking children's views when children use alternative methods of communication. Assessments include a clear analysis of children's family history, their needs and current risks, which helps to inform decision-making at child protection review conferences for children with a child protection plan. Disabled children with child-in-need plans do not always benefit from having an up-to-date assessment of their needs. This reduces the quality of information in their child-in-need plan, so progress is not easy to monitor.

When assessments identify reduced risks to children on a child protection plan, social workers provide a recommendation to step down support to a child-in-need plan, and this receives appropriate oversight from the team manager. Child protection coordinators make appropriate efforts to ensure that parents and carers receive social work reports in time before meetings are held. Audit activity has identified that parents and carers do not always receive reports in good time, and this is something that senior leaders are sighted on as part of service improvements. Interpreters are appropriately used in review meetings to ensure that families can be fully engaged and understand the child protection process.

The majority of review meetings for children in need are held regularly and at a frequency which meets the needs of children and their families. Most child in need meetings are attended by the right professionals, who share up-to-date information about children's needs, or, if they cannot attend, they submit a report to update on progress. Child-in-need meetings do not always review the actions from the original plan, which makes it difficult to evaluate what difference intervention and support are making for children.

Most child protection core group meetings are held regularly and are attended by relevant partner agencies. Some children, about whom there are concerns of neglect, do not always have a health representative attending. This reduces the effectiveness of meetings and does not ensure that all risks are shared and known or that the family and professionals are fully updated about all of children's needs.

Children's plans do not always identify individual children's needs and refer generically to all the children in the family. The quality of plans is not consistent across the service and not all urgent actions have specific timescales or are prioritised so that families and professionals are really clear about what needs to change and when. Some plans are specific and clearly show what progress is being made to improve children's circumstances.

Senior leaders have strengthened the quality assurance and performance framework, and this is beginning to be embedded across the service. Audits identify the right areas for improvement and development, which helps focus senior leaders' work to strengthen practice and learning. Stability of the workforce and the quality of supervision and management oversight are high on senior leaders' agenda and are appropriate priorities as part of the transformation programme.

Senior leaders have focused on ensuring that social workers have the right tools to help them do their job well. Social workers are consistently positive about the direct work toolkit bags which they have all been provided with to help support their direct work with children. Children are beginning to benefit from the improvement in the quality of direct work completed with them. There has been a recent re-launch and revision of a neglect toolkit. This is very early in its implementation, so it is too soon to see its impact. However, staff are aware of this, and children's records demonstrate that it is beginning to be used in practice.

Senior leaders have taken appropriate action to reduce the caseloads of social workers and child protection coordinators so that children have the best opportunity to build a relationship with workers involved with them. This has been supported by investment in the additional resource of additional temporary agency social workers. Senior leaders have an appropriate focus on the wider areas of transformation across the service and across the partnership. They acknowledge that improvements need to be sustainable in the longer term.

Supervision for social workers is mostly taking place regularly, and the format of the supervision tool, when used well, is making the supervision process a reflective and focused discussion with a clear sense of risks and needs for the child. This includes a review of previous supervision actions that have been agreed. However, not all managers use the tool effectively. Some actions are not always followed through, and in some supervision records, there is no evidence of appropriate challenge or questioning by the manager to help progress children's plans. Senior management oversight of children on plans for a long period of time is not always visible in children's records.

Social workers are positive about working for Nottingham City and about the support they receive from line managers, who they describe as accessible, approachable and calm. Staff can access a comprehensive range of training opportunities, which is also available to agency social workers, and this appreciated and valued.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Julie Knight  
His Majesty's Inspector

12 January 2024

Catherine Underwood  
Corporate Director of People  
Nottingham City Council  
Loxley House  
Station Street  
Nottingham  
NG2 3NG

Dear Catherine

### **Monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services**

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Nottingham City children's services on 22 and 23 November 2023. This was the third monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in July 2022. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Margaret Burke, Andy Waugh and Sophie Wales.

### **Areas covered by the visit**

This visit evaluated the support to care leavers aged 18 to 25. Inspectors focused on:

- Quality and suitability of accommodation.
- Employment, education and training.
- Care leavers with specific needs (for example, unaccompanied asylum seekers, young parents or those who have had contact with the criminal justice system).

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

### **Headline findings**

Senior leaders in children's services have built on the progress seen at the previous monitoring visits. They have achieved this despite the considerable pressures on the leadership within the context of complex wider financial and governance challenges for the council. They have remained resolute in their improvement journey and have continued to make step changes and service modifications, which are improving the quality and impact of practice for vulnerable children and young people and their families in Nottingham City Council. There have been further financial investments in children's services, which have been necessary to ensure adequate staffing and manageable caseloads. However, many of these additional resources are temporarily

funded and, without the continuity of these resources, the current pace of change and service developments is unlikely to be sustained.

In the last few months, Nottingham City's care-leaving services have benefited from increased attention and direction for improvement. Leaders have invited external scrutiny and worked alongside staff and care leavers to refocus the service. The recent addition to the leadership of the service of an interim service manager, and the narrowing span of the head of service, have enabled leaders to have a clearer understanding of what is required to strengthen the delivery of support to care leavers and to address the shortfalls identified in the last inspection.

### **Findings and evaluation of progress**

Most care leavers in receipt of services are well supported by personal advisers (PAs). PAs build strong positive relationships with the young people they support. They act as good parents, providing consistent practical and emotional support. PAs demonstrate tenacity in maintaining contact with care leavers to ensure that they are safe and well, even working well with those care leavers who benefit from, but do not readily engage with, support. Care leavers are mostly positive about the support they receive from their PAs, with some reporting how difficult they have found it when PAs have changed.

Care leavers' health needs are prioritised and met through various health services. PAs demonstrate a strong understanding of young people's emotional well-being, and young people have the additional support of two mental health well-being practitioners co-located with the service. Where required, PAs liaise effectively with specialist workers both within and external to the service, including adult services, to draw in the support needed. Information about care leavers' health histories is routinely offered to young people but not always taken up by them.

The local offer has very recently been updated. It provides a comprehensive guide of what is available to care leavers and now clearly outlines the council's offer and responsibilities to care leavers aged 21-25 years old. Despite the reported efforts to ensure that care leavers understand their rights and entitlements, some young people, and their PAs, are not fully aware of the range of services that are available. Care leavers did not know where to find information on the local offer for care leavers. Leaders took immediate steps during the inspection visit to ensure that the local offer is now linked to the corporate council website, and a local offer app is planned to be launched in the coming months.

There has been focused attention on improving the quality, purposefulness and timeliness of pathway plans. Some progress has been made in the timeliness of these plans and most plans seek to identify needs. However, these plans are not consistently updated when young people's circumstances change, nor do they routinely capture young people's aspirations and ambitions for their future. Actions listed are often vague statements, which are mainly directed at the young person for



them to follow through. Where professionals are responsible for actions, these actions are frequently attributed to a role rather than a named person and are not broken down into SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant or timebound) tangible outcomes to check if progress is made or to hold others to account. Despite seeking care leavers' views, copies of pathway plans are not consistently shared with young people, and care leavers report that they do not see the purposefulness of them.

Very strong support is offered to the most vulnerable care leavers, and this is a strength. This support is also offered to care leavers over the age of 21 years. Disabled young people who qualify for adult care support have timely and well-planned transitions. PAs continue to support these young people to ensure that all wider aspects of their needs and entitlements are followed up. PAs demonstrate an understanding of the possible traumas and challenges former unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people may face and they provide suitable emotional and practical support. PAs offer sensitive support to young people who are care leavers and parents to support them in engaging with wider universal services for their children, alongside ensuring that their own needs are addressed. PAs support care leavers and ensure that their views are heard when their children are receiving services from children's social care. Care leavers in custody are visited regularly or spoken to via video link. When issues arise, PAs are proactive in alerting other professionals within the network to address concerns and prevent escalation. Young people are encouraged to engage in education or work in preparation for their release. Planning for young people's release from custody is considered early and there is a strong emphasis on liaising with probation and housing providers to prepare for when young people return to the community.

Leaders have been instrumental in ensuring that care leavers are well supported to access employment, education or training. A significant proportion of care leavers are supported in higher education. There is a clear focus on engaging care leavers who need more help to move into employment, education or training. Care leavers benefit from additional support provided by perceptive specialist practitioners, who engage with them to source routes into training or employment at their level of need.

The local authority has developed effective working arrangements with their own council housing provider and private providers. There is a range of accommodation available for young people that meets their needs and includes appropriate support for young people who are not yet ready to live independently. PAs and the specialist housing PA are proactive, increasing visiting to try and ensure that risks are minimised to prevent young people from becoming homeless. Managers have recently strengthened their oversight of young people's housing needs, including those young people who are bidding for accommodation or who are at risk of homelessness, to track and provide support where required.

A small number of former relevant care leavers who have returned to family members before leaving care at 18 years of age have not been offered the appropriate level of care-leaving support. Some of these young people have been

inaccurately considered as qualifying care leavers, which limits their access to support. Qualifying young people are not routinely made aware of their entitlements, which means that some who may require a service may not know they can ask for support when needed. Support to care leavers aged over 21 years is evident and some continue to receive appropriate support beyond the age of 21 years. However, formalised keep-in-touch arrangements with all care leavers over the age of 21 years are yet to be implemented.

Despite the challenges and the wider financial pressures on the council, senior leaders in children's services have recently focused their efforts on improving the quality of their services to care leavers. Some of these changes are beginning to have an impact. Increases in workforce have begun to ease some of the pressures of high workloads, although some workloads remain too high. While pressures remain, the current changes and additions are beginning to impact positively on the team culture and the quality of practice.

Changes made to the corporate parenting board, while very recent, demonstrate a clearer focus on the needs of children in care and care leavers and the council's commitment to its pledge and vision for children and young people. Leaders place a strong emphasis on participation, aspirations for young people and working in partnership to deliver improved outcomes for children and young people. The board appreciates that there is still much more work to do in this arena. Care leavers who spoke to inspectors were positive about the work of this board and how it has been instrumental in raising the status of care leavers in the council.

Managers and PAs use a dashboard to help them to track timeliness of key targets. There remains further development work to ensure that tracking includes the new practice standards expectation and targets for care leavers over the age of 21 years. Work has been carried out and a new dashboard is soon to be implemented.

Quality assurance and auditing processes are continually being strengthened. The audit tool is strength based and actions generally strike a fair balance between practice and compliance. Learning is collated and disseminated via learning bulletins and monthly reports, to promote the translation of learning into practice improvements.

PAs do not receive regular supervision. They state they do receive management oversight and case direction, but this is not recorded on care leavers' case records. Supervision records lack detail, reflection and analysis. Actions are not consistently identified for workers to complete to progress plans for young people, leaving some risks and needs not being overseen or managed for some care leavers and the PAs who support them. Managers have correctly identified these weaknesses in supervision and have recently introduced a new Supervision Policy and Practice Guidance. This document shows suitable ambition and sets clear practice expectations. The increases in management roles are enabling better oversight of PAs' effectiveness and workload pressures. It is too early to see these improvements

evidenced in practice, but the guidance and increases in management roles signal an important change in management culture.

Most PAs are positive about working for Nottingham. They feel supported by managers and their access to a useful range of training and development tools and opportunities, which are also made available to agency workers. Leaders are invested in revising the culture of service delivery. Practice thinking tools have been extended, as have practice standards, which have been co-created with PAs to aid understanding of expectations of them and ensure consistency of practice. Most workers feel included and involved in the change process, view these changes as positive and are signed up to them. However, these standards are new and are not yet fully delivered or evident in practice seen.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Margaret Burke  
**His Majesty's Inspector**

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## **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**25 January 2024**

### **Scrutiny of the Budget**

#### **Report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer**

#### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To scrutinise the service impacts of the specific proposals that fall within the remit of this Committee.
- 1.2 To note that the overall financial impact of the budget, and the service impact of proposals that fall outside of the remit of this Committee will be scrutinised by the other Scrutiny Committees at their meetings in January / February as these matters fall outside the terms of reference for this committee.

#### **2 Action required**

- 2.1 To discuss the service impact of individual proposals put forward from the Peoples Directorate concerning Children and Young People Services with the officers and Executive Councillors present, to gather information and draw conclusions.
- 2.3 To provide feedback to the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).

#### **3 Background information**

##### **3.1 The Role of Overview and Scrutiny**

All Council's operating Executive Governance arrangements are required to establish Overview and Scrutiny Committees. These Committees act as a check and balance to the power of the Executive, holding decision makers to account for their decisions, reviewing proposals and supporting the development of policy. When operating effectively Overview and Scrutiny supports effective decision making and good governance through processes of supportive but robust challenge and transparent public accountability.

- 3.2 As part of its governance improvement work, Nottingham City Council has recently reviewed the structure, operation and support for Overview and Scrutiny to ensure it can deliver the above aims as effectively as possible, thereby supporting the Council's overall improvement journey. A new structure for Overview and Scrutiny, with dedicated officer support, was established in May 2023 with five committees, each linked to one of the Council's Directorates, with separate Committees for Children's Services and Health and Adult Social Care. Each of these

Committees has a role to play in the scrutiny of the budget and these roles are outlined in this report.

### **3.3 Scrutiny of the Budget – 2024/25**

All Councils are legally required to agree a balanced budget, outlining how resources will be allocated to enable them to deliver their statutory responsibilities within their financial means. Drawing up proposals to deliver a balanced budget for 2024/25 has been exceedingly challenging due to reductions in funding for local authorities, increases in demand for services where statutory duties exist, particularly Children’s and Adult’s social care and homelessness, and inflationary and other pressures. This has resulted in the need to put forward proposals to stop or reduce some services in order to seek to balance the budget.

3.4 In Nottingham, proposals have been drawn up by the Council’s Executive Councillors and Senior Officers. At its meeting on 19 December 2023, Executive Board agreed to put these proposals to the public with a formal consultation process for those proposals requiring it. Proposals not requiring formal consultation were shared in the interests of transparency. Extracts from the appendices to the Executive Board report containing the proposals that fall within this Committee’s remit are attached to this report.

### **3.5 Scrutiny of the Impact of Individual Proposals**

This Committee is responsible for scrutinising the service impact of individual proposals put forward from the Peoples Directorate concerning Children and Young People Services. This falls outside of the formal consultation process but it is important that the service impacts are scrutinised by the relevant committee. Matters to consider could include:

- a) What impact the proposals will have on service users/ citizens and how these impacts might be mitigated
- b) How effectively equalities have been considered as part of the proposals
- c) The impact proposals may have on each other

Any comments or recommendations should be fed back to the Portfolio Holder responsible.

3.6 The service impact of the individual proposals put forward from the Council’s other directorates will be scrutinised by the four other Overview and Scrutiny Committees at their meetings in January/ February with comments fed back to the relevant Portfolio Holders. In addition, the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, as the Scrutiny Committee responsible for finance, will provide feedback to the Executive on the overall budget as part of the formal consultation process. These matters fall outside of the Terms of Reference for this Committee and should not form part of the considerations at this meeting.

**4 List of attached information**

4.1 Children's Integrated Services and Education Budget Proposals

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

5.1 None

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

6.1 Budget Strategy and Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 to 2027/28 report considered by Executive Board on 19 December.

**7 Wards affected**

7.1 All.

**8 Contact information**

8.1 Nancy Barnard, Head of Governance and Statutory Scrutiny Officer  
[nancy.barnard@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:nancy.barnard@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)

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<b>Meeting Title</b>	Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee
<b>Report Title</b>	Children’s Integrated Services and Education Budget Proposals
<b>Meeting Date</b>	25 <sup>th</sup> January 2024

<b>Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):</b>	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People Ailsa Barr, Director of Childrens Integrated Services Nick Lee, Director of Education
<b>Portfolio Holder(s):</b>	Councillor Cheryl Barnard
<b>Report author and contact details:</b>	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People

<b>Summary of issues:</b>	Budget proposals for 2024/25 have been developed through the duties and powers exercise of delivering statutory minimum level services. Budget proposals should be noted and considered by Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee.
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	For the committee to note Children’s Integrated Services’ and Education officer proposals for the Council’s budget 2024/25.

## 1. Background

Officers have undertaken the duties and powers budget exercise to identify statutory minimum level service provision accords the Council's services for 2024/25. This has led to the development of budget proposals across People Services in line with the duties and powers review. Budget proposals are currently grouped by 'Officer Proposals for Public Consultation' and 'Officer Proposals for Non-Public Consultation'.

Subsequently, at the request of Members, the following table contains budget proposals for Children's services and Education, to be considered by Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee, for information. The outcome of public consultation and employee consultation will follow before the commencement of the 2024/25 financial year.

## 2. Information Only:

### Children's Integrated Services budget reduction officer proposals 2024/25:

Proposal Reference	Option Type	Directorate / Department	Proposal Title	Proposal Narrative	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	Cumulative MTFP Impact £m	Cumulative Staffing Impact FTE
<b>Officer Proposals for Public Consultation</b>										
DP(A)-2473	Reduce Costs	Childrens – Peoples Department	Reduces Youth Service	Closure of the Ridge Adventure Playground and Bulwell Play and Youth Centre with increase targeting of youth services to those young people in most need.	(0.145)	(0.073)	0.000	0.000	(0.218)	(6)
<b>Officer Proposals for Non-Public Consultation</b>										
DP(C)-2403	Reduce Costs	Childrens – Peoples	Reduce Children's Care	Reduce costs through commissioning workstreams including negotiation and market	0.000	(2.109)	0.000	0.000	(2.109)	0

			Placements costs	sufficiency.						
DP(A)-2477	Reduce Costs	Childrens – Peoples	Reduction in administrative support	Reduction in resources for support work	(0.123)	(0.062)	0.000	0.000	(0.185)	(4)
DP(A)-2472	Reduce Costs	Childrens – Peoples	Youth Justice Service	Remove vacant posts and re-structure of staffing, roles and responsibilities.	(0.100)	(0.100)	0.000	0.000	(0.200)	(5)
DP(E)-2401	Manage Demand	Childrens – Peoples	Restructure support to prevent admission of young people in to residential care	Restructure resource to the Strengthening Families at Home service to prevent young people from coming into residential care	(0.900)	(0.400)	0.000	0.000	(1.300)	0

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### Education budget reduction officer proposals 2024/25:

Proposal Reference	Option Type	Directorate / Department	Proposal Title	Proposal Narrative	2024/25 £m	2025/26 £m	2026/27 £m	2027/28 £m	Cumulative MTFP Impact £m	Cumulative Staffing Impact FTE
<b>Officer Proposals for Public Consultation</b>										
DP(A)-2458	Cease/ Stop	Education	Close Colwick Park Activity Centre	Closure of Colwick Park Activity Centre which provides outdoor sport and learning opportunities for children and young people.	(0.095)	(0.032)	0.000	0.000	(0.126)	(5)
<b>Officer Proposals for Non-Public Consultation</b>										
DP(A)-2460	Charge More	Education	Health and safety in schools service	This is a service which schools pay for. Charges will be increased to ensure the	(0.010)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.010)	0

			increasing income	service covers its costs in full, and opportunities for increasing the number of schools purchasing the service explored.						
DP(E)-2404	Charge More	Education	Transport - annual pricing review	This is a service which schools pay for. Prices for 2024/25 will be increased in line with inflation to ensure that the service continues to fully cover its costs.	(0.007)	(0.007)	0.000	0.000	(0.014)	0
DP(A)-2453	Reduce Costs	Education	Review of customer support budgets with Education service	Review of service budgets to achieve greater efficiencies.	(0.006)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.006)	0
DP(A)-2443	Reduce Costs	Education	Maximisation of Dedicated Schools Grant for Education Welfare service	Service will be sustained at existing levels; however, it is proposed that going forward this will be fully funded by Dedicated Schools Grant (subject to School's Forum agreement)	(0.120)	(0.085)	0.000	0.000	(0.205)	0
DP(A)-2445	Reduce Costs	Education	Maximisation of Dedicated Schools Grant for Virtual School Team	Service will be sustained at existing levels; however, it is proposed that going forward this will be fully funded by Dedicated Schools Grant (subject to School's Forum agreement)	(0.009)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.009)	0

DP(A)-2446	Reduce Costs	Education	Maximisation of Dedicated Schools Grant for Teaching Teams	Service to be fully funded from the Dedicated Schools Grant, subject to Schools' Forum agreement.	(0.139)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.139)	0
DP(A)-2451	Reduce Costs	Education	Review of Education Partnership service	Review and reduction of Education Partnership Consultant resource	(0.060)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.060)	(1)
DP(A)-2452	Reduce Costs	Education	Reduce Schools Improvement activity	Reduce school improvement activity to future recruitment of a Standards Advisor.	0.000	(0.039)	(0.039)	0.000	(0.078)	(1)
DP(A)-2455	Reduce Costs	Education	Fund School Uniform Grant through the Household Support Fund	Children in families who are eligible for Free School Meals are currently eligible for support with their school uniform at key points throughout the year. This will be funded by the Household Support Fund grant. If the grant does not continue, this school uniform support will cease.	(0.020)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.020)	0
DP(C)-2406	Reduce Costs	Education	Catering in schools - annual pricing review	Annual uplift of fees for Schools Catering Service from April 2024	(0.113)	(0.038)	0.000	0.000	(0.150)	0
DP(E)-2403	Reduce Costs	Education	Seek approval for	Seek approval from the Secretary of State for	(0.375)	(0.125)	0.000	0.000	(0.500)	0

			additional funding for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities	the use of additional Dedicated Schools Grant funding for transport for Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)						
DP(E)-2405	Reduce Costs	Education	Education Psychology reducing costs	Securing Education Psychologists assessment capacity at better value.	(0.019)	(0.006)	0.000	0.000	(0.025)	0
DP(E)-2407	Reduce Costs	Education	Review of Catering in schools service	Review of management structure within the Catering service.	(0.015)	(0.005)	0.000	0.000	(0.020)	(1)
DP(A)-2444 DP(A)-2454	Reduce Costs	Education	Increase budget efficiencies	Review of service budgets to achieve greater efficiencies.	(0.061)	0.000	0.000	0.000	(0.061)	(3)

### 3. Proposal or Issue

Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee are invited to note the above officer budget proposals and consider the impact they will have on the Children’s Improvement Programme for 2024/25.

Children and Young People’s Scrutiny Committee are invited to note the above officer budget proposals and consider the impact they will have on Education Services for 2024/25.

### 4. Next Steps

Budget proposals will be finalised following public and employee consultation before the commencement of the financial year 2024/25.

## **Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee**

**25 January 2024**

### **Work Programme**

#### **Report of the Statutory Scrutiny Officer**

#### **1 Purpose**

- 1.1 To consider the Committee's work programme for 2023/24 based on areas of work identified by the Committee at previous committee meetings, the informal meeting of the Committee to scope its work programme for the year ahead and any further suggestions raised at this meeting

#### **2 Action required**

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to note the work that is currently planned for the municipal year 2023/24 and make amendments to this programme as appropriate

#### **3 Background information**

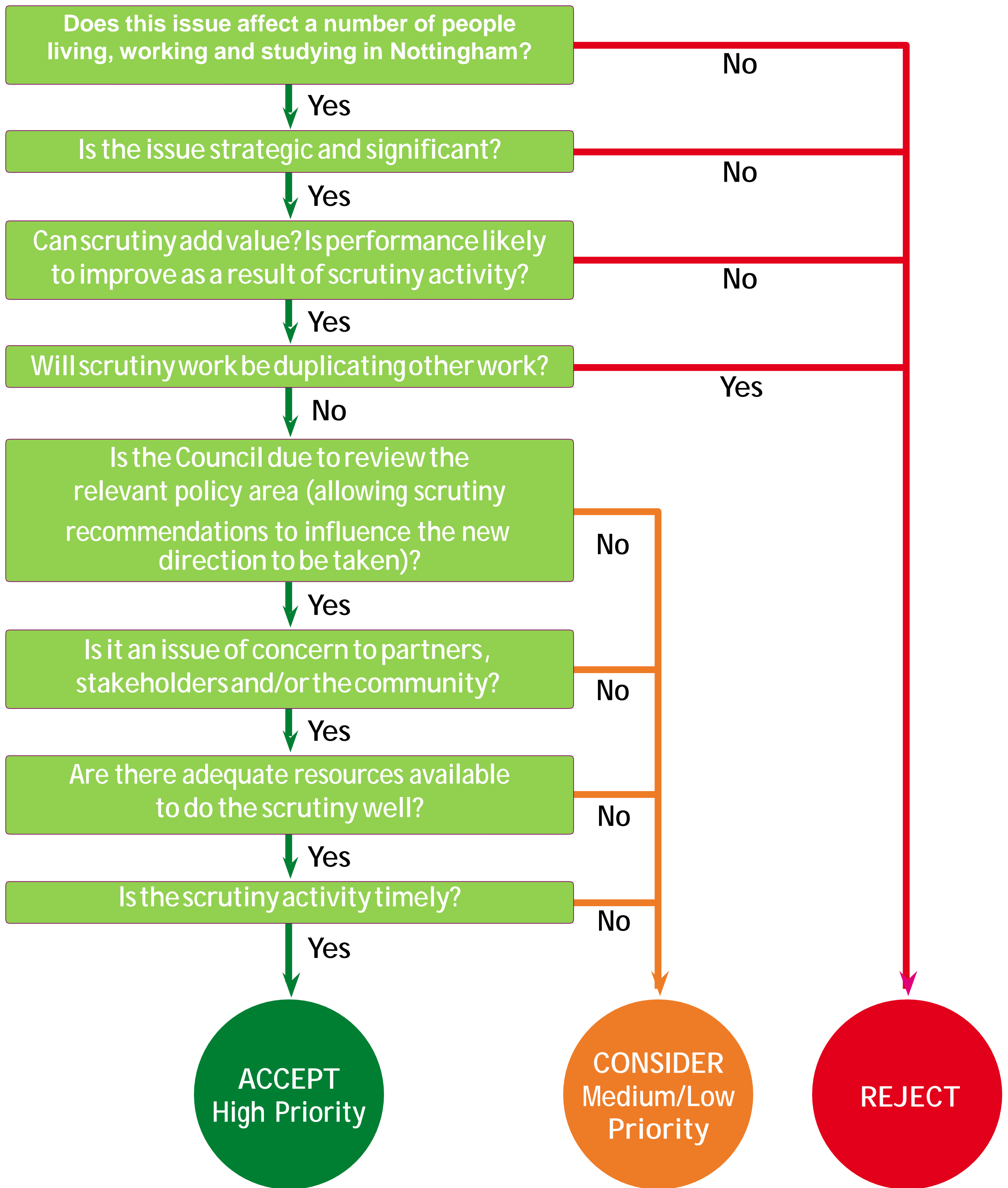
- 3.1 The purpose of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is to carry out the statutory overview and scrutiny function in relation to matters affecting children and young people.
- 3.2 The Committee is responsible for setting and managing its own work programme to fulfil this role.
- 3.3 In setting a programme for scrutiny activity, the Committee should aim for an outcome-focused work programme that has clear priorities and a clear link to its roles and responsibilities. The work programme needs to be flexible so that issues which arise as the year progresses can be considered appropriately.
- 3.4 Where there are a number of potential items that could be scrutinised in a given year, consideration of what represents the highest priority or area of risk will assist with work programme planning. The Scrutiny Prioritisation Process has been attached to assist Members on those considerations with the Committee advised to focus on two items per meeting so that due consideration can be given.
- 3.5 The current work programme for the municipal year 2023/24 is attached.

#### **4 List of attached information**

- 4.1 Scrutiny Prioritisation Process
- 4.2 2023/24 Committee Work Programme
  
- 5 Background papers, other than published works or those disclosing exempt or confidential information**
  
- 5.1 None
  
- 6 Published documents referred to in compiling this report**
  
- 6.1 Nottingham City Council Constitution
  
- 7 Wards affected**
  
- 7.1 NA
  
- 8 Contact information**
  
- 8.1 Damon Stanton – Scrutiny & Audit Support Officer  
[damon.stanton@nottinghamcity.gov.uk](mailto:damon.stanton@nottinghamcity.gov.uk)



# Nottingham City Council Scrutiny Prioritisation Process



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## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee 2023/24 Work Programme

Date	Items
<b>28 September</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="327 245 2134 395"> <p>• <b>Children’s Services Improvement</b> To scrutinise progress in the improvement journey, including the findings of and response to the second Ofsted monitoring visit.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="371 357 1120 395">- Workforce challenges – recruitment and retention</li> </ul> </li>   <li data-bbox="327 437 2134 542"> <p>• <b>SEND Improvement</b> To scrutinise progress in addressing areas for improvement identified following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Local Area Inspection of SEND Provision in 2021, with a particular focus on communication with parents and families</p> </li> </ul>
<b>26 October</b>  <div style="writing-mode: vertical-rl; transform: rotate(180deg); position: absolute; left: -40px; top: 50%; font-size: small;">Page 67</div>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="327 622 2134 772"> <p>• <b>Nottingham City Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report</b> To consider the Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="371 692 672 730">- Child exploitation</li> <li data-bbox="371 730 873 769">- Children out of school kept safe</li> </ul> </li>   <li data-bbox="327 804 2134 909"> <p>• <b>Youth Justice Service</b> To scrutinise response and progress in improving areas identified for improvement following HMIP Inspection in 2020 and Peer Review in 2022.</p> </li>   <li data-bbox="327 948 2134 1031"> <p>• <b>Children’s Services Improvement</b> To receive a verbal update from the Portfolio Holder on progress made on the improvement journey.</p> </li> </ul>
<b>30 November</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="327 1149 2134 1216"> <p>• <b>Children’s Services Improvement</b> To receive a verbal update from the Portfolio Holder on progress made on the improvement journey.</p> </li>   <li data-bbox="327 1254 2134 1337"> <p>• <b>Education Investment Area</b> To hold partners to account for delivery of the action plan</p> </li> </ul>
<b>25 January</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li data-bbox="327 1410 2134 1481"> <p>• <b>Impact of the Budget proposals on Children’s Services and Education</b> To scrutinise the proposed budget and its impact on service provisions</p> </li> </ul>

Date	Items
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Children’s Services Improvement</b> To scrutinise progress in the improvement journey</li> </ul>
28 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Support for Young Carers (spotlight review)</b></li> </ul>
25 April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Review of Early Help Strategy</b> To assess the impact of the Early Help Strategy and whether it was achieving its intended outcomes</li> <li>• <b>Child Exploitation</b> To scrutinise current arrangements in preventing child exploitation including cross partnership working and potential strategy development</li> <li>• <b>Children’s Services Improvement</b> To receive a verbal update from the Portfolio Holder on progress made on the improvement journey.</li> </ul>

\*Nottingham City Council Safeguarding Partnership Annual Report to be included on every committee work programme, scheduled for the October (or the nearest available) meeting

\* Update on PEIA – EST AUG 2024

\*Item on support offered to pupils during the cost of living crisis and the impact on mental health. To be added as soon as space permits in the work programme