

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 10 July 2024 from 9:32am to 11:47am

Membership

Present

Councillor David Mellen (Chair)
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Michael Savage
Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Adele Williams

Absent

Councillor Naim Salim
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Fozia Mubashar

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Liz Anderson - Priority Education Investment Area Education Consultant
Councillor Cheryl Barnard - Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
Kathryn Bouchlaghem - Head of Early Years
Nick Lee - Director of Education
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Kate Morris - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Sarah Nardone - Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services
Samina Ring - Priority Education Investment Area Project Lead

1 Appointment of the Chair

As Councillor Naim Salim was absent and no Vice-Chair had yet been appointed, the Committee agreed to appoint Councillor David Mellen as Chair for this meeting.

2 Appointment of the Vice-Chair

Resolved to defer the appointment of the Vice-Chair to the next meeting of the Committee.

3 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Maria Joannou - on leave
Councillor Fozia Mubashar - personal reasons
Councillor Naim Salim - unwell

4 Declarations of Interests

None

5 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the Minutes of the meeting held on 15 May 2024 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

6 Committee Terms of Reference

The Chair presented a report on the Committee's Terms of Reference, the Council's structure for the Overview and Scrutiny function and the Overview and Scrutiny Protocol to provide clarity on the Committee's purpose, objectives and terms of operation so that it can work efficiently and contribute effectively to the good governance of the Council. The following points were raised:

- a) The Committee queried how it could hold the Chief Executives of Academy Trusts and other external partners to account effectively, given that the Council was not responsible for the management of many schools in the city. It was explained that, although the Committee cannot require the attendance of external partners, officers engage closely with Nottingham's Academy Trusts and they have often been glad to attend Committee meetings in relation to relevant topics. There are good operational relationships in place with partners across the city and a number of joint working parties are in place, with good representation from the Academy Trusts.
- b) The Committee noted that the Terms of Reference referred to Executive Assistants, which were roles that were not being used in the current municipal year.

The Committee noted the report.

7 Priority Education Investment Area Update

Nick Lee, Director of Education, Liz Anderson, Priority Education Investment Area (PEIA) Education Consultant, and Samina Ring, PEIA Project Lead presented a report on the work of the local PEIA programme. The following points were raised:

- a) Nottingham was named one of 24 PEIAs and is receiving funding to support work around three key areas: writing at Key Stage 2, reading across all ages and school attendance. Funding from the Department for Education runs through to March 2025. At the start of the project, a Partnership Board was established with representatives from the Council, many of the Academy Trusts established in the city and the local universities. Discussions have already started about the sustainability of the Partnership Board beyond March 2025 and Nottingham Trent University, as the existing Chair, has confirmed it is happy to continue hosting, ensuring better cohesion moving beyond the life of the programme.
- b) The Programme is now about halfway through, and attendance is improving faster than the national average at both primary and secondary level, and primary levels are now in line with the national average. Children who have an attendance between 40% and 70% are considered to be persistently absent. There are still a significant number of children within this cohort and there has been less impact on this number than on the cohort with higher overall attendance.

- c) As part of the work, the language used was altered to articulate the number of days' absence, rather than as a percentage. This allowed families and children to more easily understand the impact of their absence. A focus has also been to ensure a good start to the term, and not missing days at the start of the school year so that they do not remain in the persistent absent cohort for the rest of the year. Rather than highlighting schools with lower attendance, the programme is looking at data on a ward basis, identifying that attendance has been lowest in Bulwell, Aspley, Clifton East and Bestwood. Schools within these areas were targeted first for support and, over the Autumn and Spring terms, overall attendance improved.
- d) The launch event had attendance from 95% of Academy Trusts, and a recent meeting of Designated Safeguarding Leads had the highest turnout since the Coronavirus pandemic. A network event took place in May which saw 150 attendees, so it is clear that across the city enthusiasm and passion for this programme remains high. A focus on safeguarding and seeing attendance as a big part of safeguarding has moved to make this a wider responsibility and, of those who joined the network event in May, around 78 schools now have funded access to specialist resources around improving attendance.
- e) A total of 388 cases have been triaged by the PEIA team in both primary and secondary schools across the city, with 249 being accepted – mostly where other services were not involved with the family already. Where other services such as Social Workers and Family Support Workers were in place, the team has opted to not involve an additional Support Worker, but offer advice and signposting to existing workers in touch with the family.
- f) Of 96 cases where the initial six week cycle of work has taken place, 81% of families show improved attendance. This also has knock-on impacts that are not recorded formally, such as changed attitudes to attendance and learning, and better safeguarding for children whose location would otherwise not be known. These families continue to be monitored by the Attendance Support Worker, who can intervene again should it become necessary. Feedback from families the Attendance Support Workers have been engaged with has been positive. Research has shown that fining families around attendance is not effective and work with the Support Worker has improved attendance. However, where families have refused other intervention, then there is no other recourse than to issue fines as required by law.
- g) There are many reasons reported to Family Support Workers for non-attendance, a main one being mental health issues affecting both children and their parents and carers. This has become more prevalent since the pandemic and subsequent lockdowns. Unmet needs is the second highest reason stated by parents and carers, with significant numbers of children waiting specialist provision. Data around reasons for non-attendance has been helpful to ensure that resources are targeted for each family to ensure best outcomes. Other reasons cited included domestic violence issues, which are referred to a specific task force, and problems with school uniforms. Schools are becoming much more responsive to issues with uniforms and many primary schools use a less strict policy to ensure inclusivity.

- h) Through the project so far, there has been a number of learning points. The way the project uses language has changed since it started and now talks to families about days of education missed rather than percentages and reducing and revising use of legalistic jargon as it is more easily accessible and relatable. The way in which data is recorded at schools and then reported has been updated and developed, and schools now record that children that have left when appropriate rather than keeping them on roll.
- i) The voice of the child has become one of the most important factors in working with families, establishing from the child why they are not attending in their words and working towards resolving issues and barriers. The narrative from schools has shifted to working more closely with the Support Workers around attendance. For the last two terms of the project, the team will be returning to the schools where attendance has not shown as much improvement and will be undertaking targeted working with families to help improve attendance moving forward.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- j) The Committee asked whether there was a link between low attendance leading to fines and the increase in home-schooled children. It was explained that there has been a national increase in the numbers of families opting for home-schooling, which has risen since the pandemic. There does appear to be a link between families who are being fined and the choice to home-school, although there is more work needed to confirm the link. The legal process does not stop if a child is withdrawn from school for home-schooling, and if families wanted a child to return to mainstream education they would need to go through the application process for places.
- k) The Committee asked how the project linked the data-driven work with the actual outcomes achieved for children and families. It was set out that the data is used to report back to the Department of Education on the progress and impact of the programme so is the main metric used to communicate the effectiveness of the programme, however, behind the data is a wealth of information around how the work has positively impacted the lives of children and families across Nottingham and the work of the project remains outcome-driven.
- l) The Committee asked how the project was helping to address the significant rise in mental health issues in children since the pandemic, which had impacted attendance. It was reported that there is an proposal being developed to increase provision of mental health support in schools resourced through the Higher Needs Block funding. This will be driven forward from September with a focus on young girls and the impact of the rise of misogynistic content on social media. Schools are also working hard to tackle to impact of social media on pupils who identify as part of the LGBTQ+ community. The Government has made a number of pledges around mental health in schools, but there has been no formal announcement as yet.
- m) The Committee noted that school exclusions were not being addressed specifically as a piece of work within the programme. It was explained that, at the very start of the programme, there was discussion around whether exclusion

should be considered as a workstream in its own right, but the programme leads felt it sat better within the attendance workstream as many of the facts impacting exclusion numbers were the same as those impacting attendance numbers. Schools continue to work on ensuring children feel welcomed and valued in the classroom, and the Attendance Support Workers engage with families to build confidence in pupils to attend school. Many schools have strategies in place to help pupils feel comfortable, with quiet break-out areas, reflection areas and opportunities to step away if they are feeling overwhelmed.

- n) The Committee asked what support would be available to schools and families after this project ends in March 2025. It was reported that it is important that the services and support offered by this project are integrated into the Early Help Strategy currently under development, with a focus on preventative work. The Council is keen to build on the work of the Family Support Workers and helping to reinforce the learning and good practice across the schools involved in the project. The Council has a statutory obligation to pursue fines and would be in breach of its legal duty if it did not enforce fines where thresholds of attendance were not met. However, a focus will be on support and working with families and schools to avoid having to go down that route wherever possible.
- o) The Committee asked what impact the cuts in the Household Support Fund had been on families in terms of affording uniforms, and what was being done to support families with the cost of uniforms where it was a barrier to attendance. It was set out that various options for support for families whose children attended maintained schools were being considered. In some cases, Academy Trusts are introducing their own measures and many schools are far less prescriptive around branded items, which has helped to reduce the cost of uniforms. Many schools have introduced schemes that allow families to donate and receive uniform items. Access to a uniform is not one of the main reported barriers to attendance, although it is mentioned occasionally speaking to families the project is working with.
- p) The Committee asked what support was available to children and families who were waiting for a special needs assessment within schools, whether schools had the resources and strategies in place to support families in this situation, and how Fair Access was being supported. It was explained that there is extensive training in schools around supporting children and families awaiting an assessment for additional needs support. Schools within the programme are very good at working together to share learning and best practise. Additional needs have increased significantly, especially within Early Years and primary schools. Work is taking place in partnership with Special Educational Needs and Disability professionals to establish better pathways and practice. Work is also taking place with the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board to commission a joint strategy around this.

The Chair thanked the Director of Education and the representatives of the Priority Education Investment Area programme for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that further information is provided on the delivery planning underway for the implementation of the Early Help Strategy (particularly on how there will be effective integration with other support services to reduce barriers to attendance, including for children attending schools outside the City Council area).**
- 2) To recommend that all possible partnership work is done to grow inclusion activity, and the development of schools as welcoming environments to all needs (including through the effective training of teachers and the resourcing of their professional development), to overcome barriers to school attendance in a proactive way that is directly informed by the voice of children and their families.**
- 3) To recommend that the Council maximises its engagement with all schools to seek to avoid the need for their issuing of a fine for non-attendance wherever possible.**
- 4) To recommend that there is close partnership engagement with the provider organisations that deliver mental healthcare services to ensure that early intervention activity connects children and young people to the support that they need to break down potential barriers to school attendance.**

8 Early Years Entitlements and Wraparound Childcare Provision

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, Nick Lee, Director of Education, Sarah Nardone, Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services, and Kathryn Bouchlaghem, Head of Early Years, presented a report on the implementation of the national childcare reforms designed to support early education and help parents return to work. The following points were raised:

- a) The changes outlined in the Chancellor's Spring Budget are a national requirement and there are additional statutory duties for the Council to deliver:
 - working parents of 2-year-olds being able to access 15 hours of childcare from April 2024;
 - working parents of children aged 9-23 months being able to access 15 hours of childcare from September 2024;
 - working parents of children aged 9 months to primary school age being able to access 30 hours of childcare from September 2025; and
 - all primary school-aged children being able to access before and after-school provision from 8:00am to 6:00pm, during term time, from September 2026.
- b) This represents an opportunity for the Council to establish robust childcare infrastructure across the city that not only complies with these new statutory duties, but also helps to support people and business in the city. Looking at the current infrastructure, there is a rich provision already in place that can be built on to develop the further measures. There is already good, collaborative and partnership working in place to take learning from and established links into the voluntary sector. Developing this work links into the activity being done around

developing Family Hubs, and Health visiting partnerships. Work has been done with health visiting colleagues throughout the pandemic and after to improve communication and signposting for families.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- c) The Committee asked what understanding of capacity of provision by area of the city the Council had, as there was less provision available in some places – and even local provision was not necessarily easily accessible by public transport. It was reported that a Childcare Sufficiency Audit had been carried out in 2023 and there were some areas emerging that need a boost to provision, primarily in the Bestwood, Aspley, Clifton and Dales areas. Work is being done with the schools in these places to look at how provision can be developed, with an emphasis that the school does not have to make the provision directly. There are established and successful operating models that can be replicated and adapted that have worked in other areas of the city that will ensure provision is in place at no extra cost to the school.
- d) The Committee asked what the timescales were for ensuring that the new requirements were put in place effectively. It was explained that the Government have stated that September 2024 is when most of the new places should be delivered to allow them to embed and the market to settle before the start of the 2025/26 term. The Government's ambition being that, by 2026, all parents will be able to access childcare between 8:00am and 6:00pm. The September 2024 timescale is tight and a great deal of work is being done to meet it, so it is likely that most places will be made available within the 2024/25 year.
- e) The Committee asked about the status of the current market and whether there were sufficient providers currently, and what the Council could do to improve the market. It was set out that there are many different types of provision that are all valid under these new requirements, including breakfast and after-school clubs, private childminders and other types of service. There are direct providers who are willing and able to expand within the city that are able to offer provision tailor-made to local communities' needs. The challenge is to ensure that parents have enough information to ensure they are able to access the provision. Conversations are planned between Education, Economic Development and Children's Services, amongst others, to develop the provision to ensure it brings about the planned benefits to families.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, the Director of Education, the Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services, and the Head of Early Years for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that further information is provided on the outcomes of the 2023 Childcare Sufficiency Audit.**
- 2) To recommend that a 'One Council' approach is used to establish a solid childcare and early education infrastructure that is accessible to everyone**

in the city, with proactive work carried out to engage with wider Council teams and foster collaborative working to ensure a comprehensive childcare offer.

- 3) To recommend that work is done to ensure that the needs of individual communities within wards are fully understood, to ensure that everyone does have access to childcare and that there is a full equity of outcomes for families across the city.**

9 Children's Services Improvement

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, provided an update on the progress of the work on Children's Services Improvement. The following points were raised:

- a) There has been no further formal inspection since the report to the Committee meeting in May, but a further inspection is due before the end of July. The next monitoring visit is likely to focus again on front-door services, which was the subject of the first monitoring visit. Since then, there has been steady progress in improvement work, with a peer review completed with Lincolnshire County Council.
- b) There has been improvement in the quality and timeliness of contacts, but there are still large number of contacts taking place. Work has been undertaken with recruitment funding through the Small Steps Big Changes programme, with the launch of the Early Help Strategy to ensure that more families get the support that they need earlier.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- c) The Committee asked what was being done to mitigate against reduced funding when implementing the Early Help Strategy, support schools with capacity and that there was enough resourcing for training teachers in inclusion. It was explained that work is taking place within the Family Hubs to engage with partners and ensure the right service are in place to support families sooner. There is a strong focus on consistency in relation to the approach of practice and there is a push to ensure that partners, particularly schools who notice issues early, are well-informed to ensure effective signposting.
- d) The Committee welcomed the focus on partnership working and asked how the effectiveness and impact of that work would be tracked and demonstrated. It was set out that work with Lincolnshire is taking place to establish a system to track impacts that will work locally. Lincolnshire's Early Help Strategy is robust and well-established, with a wealth of good practice to draw on, and it also has a good example of how to record and recognise work that partners (and schools in particular) are already doing.
- e) The Committee noted that the effective provision of support to Nottingham children either not in school or in school outside of the city area was extremely important.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education for attending the meeting to provide the update and answer the Committee's questions.

The Committee noted the update.

10 Draft Work Programme

The Chair presented the Committee's proposed Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year. The following points were discussed:

- a) The Committee asked where the needs of and services provided to children in care were considered, and whether this should be a future topic for review. The Committee also considered that protecting children in schools from the influence of misogyny was an important issue.
- b) The Committee noted that there was a coming item to the Health and Adult Social Care Scrutiny Committee on savings proposals within the NHS as part of the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board's current and future budgets, which could have some impacts on the health services accessed by children and young people.
- c) The Committee asked whether it would be possible to see information relating to the establishment of the Council's 2025/26 budget at an early stage of the development of proposals.

Resolved to agree the proposed Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

11 Future Meeting Dates

Resolved to meet on the following Wednesdays at 9.30am:

- **11 September 2024**
- **13 November 2024**
- **15 January 2025**
- **12 March 2025**