

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 21 March 2017 from 11.00 - 12.37

Membership

Present

Councillor Brian Parbutt (Chair)
Councillor Azad Choudhry (minutes 37 onward)
Councillor Georgina Culley (minutes 37 and 38)
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora (minute 34 to 37)
Councillor Glyn Jenkins (Vice Chair)
Councillor Neghat Khan
Councillor David Mellen
Councillor Chris Tansley

Absent

Councillor Josh Cook
Councillor Mohammed Ibrahim

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Rav Kalsi - Senior Governance Officer
Helen Blackman - Director of Children's Services
Sonia Cain - Service Manager Fostering and Adoption
Alison Michalska - Corporate Director for Children and Adults
Kate Morris - Governance Officer
Sophie Russell - Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement

34 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor Josh Cook - Personal

Councillor Sam Webster
Maria Ward – Nottingham Community and Voluntary Services

35 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

36 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 January 2017 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

37 OFSTED FRAMEWORK AND THEMATIC INSPECTIONS

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years introduced a report on the Ofsted framework and thematic inspections. Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services and Sophie Russell, Head of

Children's Strategy and Improvement outlined the main findings of the pilot inspection, highlighting the following points:

- (a) For 2 weeks at the end of January 2017 a team of Ofsted inspectors conducted an inspection of Nottingham City Council's Children's Services piloting the new framework focusing far more on the journey of the child and looking in depth at 274 case;
- (b) as the inspection was voluntary the results and final report will not be published but the Council are permitted to release the results, which it will do at an appropriate opportunity;
- (c) the inspectors recognised the impact of changes made since the last inspection in 2014, most notably all services being bought under one Director and all first contact coming through a multi-agency hub;
- (d) the inspectors praised Nottingham City Council for the strong corporate and political support for Children's Services ensuring that children's needs are prioritised. They stated that significant progress has been achieved from the previous inspection in 2014 when the Council was judged to require improvement;
- (e) in the pilot inspection framework there are now 4 areas of judgement:
 - The impact of leaders on practice with children and families, in which the Council was judged as good;
 - The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection, in which the Council was judged as good;
 - The experiences and progress of children looked after and care leavers achieving permanence, in which the Council was judged as requiring improvement;
 - Overall effectiveness, in which the Council was judged as good;
- (f) the key areas of positive feedback were:
 - The creation of one directorate being the catalyst for subsequent improvements;
 - There is good involvement in, and use of, regional interactions, peer review and learning;
 - The over recruitment of Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) was a sound decision and the induction process is strong with staff giving positive feedback. It was noted that Nottingham City Council is becoming an employer of choice for Social Workers in the region;
 - Good and outstanding social work can flourish within Nottingham City and there are a number of examples of both;
 - The diversity of the community is well understood and services fit well;
 - Voice of the Child is a real strength;
 - Ability to access Early Help services means that risks are being reduced;
 - The introduction of the Integrated Locality hubs look to strengthen multi-agency work;
 - Assessments of children's needs are consistently good leading to meaningful plans;

- Support for disabled children is good and services provided are tailored to their needs;
 - The Multi systemic therapy and Edge of Care Hub show creative use of resources and work to reduce the numbers of children in care;
 - Social Workers know their children well;
 - Carers are seen as ambitious and proud of their young people and their needs are well considered;
 - Educational outcomes are improving;
 - Early Help services are seen as outstanding;
- (g) There are some areas that the Council has been challenged to improve, although these represent very small proportion of cases, these are:
- To have a more robust response to 16-17 year olds who present as homeless:
 - There were very small number of cases where more thorough consideration could have been given to alternative options;
 - To be more tenacious in order to sustain contact with care leavers not currently engaged with the Council:
 - This relates to a very small cohort of care leavers who have clearly stated that they do not wish to have further contact with the Council and the care leavers services provided;
 - To develop a better understanding of why children go missing and ensure they receive the help that they need:
 - Attention is being focused on being more proactive before a child goes missing;
 - Independent reviewing Officer capacity could still be improved:
 - The Council have invested in additional resources and created new posts to help alleviate the workload pressure on independent reviewing officers, however to offer further resilience further posts should be considered;
 - To bring better consistency in setting clear expectations for responses from partner agencies:
 - There are a small number of cases where the Council has not been as consistent in setting expectations which can be improved;
 - Partners, particularly schools and Police to contribute in a timely manner to initial fact finding/assessments and plans:
 - Police have requested and are receiving additional resources to provide this timely response. Police staff will be moving in to the Early work hub in June;
 - Case file audit arrangements should be strengthened for Children's Social Care:
 - There is already a rigorous audit process in place, but emphasis should also be placed on audit and review at all levels, this is being worked into work methods throughout Children's social care;
- (a) as this was a pilot inspection and on a voluntary basis the Council can expect to have a full inspection in around 12 months' time;

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

- (b) work with children and young people starts very early to prepare them to transition from being cared for to being a care leaver. The vast majority of care leavers maintain contact with their personal advisor after turning 18 but a very small cohort of care leavers, approximately 6%, choose not to engage further for a variety of reasons, they may be unaccompanied asylum seekers who have exhausted options to stay in the country and do not want contact with any service or authority, they may have received a custodial sentence of more than three months which automatically gives them cared for status despite never having been cared for by the Council;
- (c) there is a fine balance to be struck between being tenacious in maintaining contact and respecting the privacy and the wishes of the care leaver. Improvements to some recording and clarity in records of attempts to contact the care leaver will help to push the Council's grading into good as will trying a range of communication methods;
- (d) there is no alert system which notifies the Personal Advisors if housing placement starts to break down or rent arrears start to build up once the young person leaves care, however as the vast majority of care leavers still have contact with their personal advisors they are able to access help and advice at an early stage;
- (e) the Council's payments to foster carers has recently increased and is now much closer to that of the Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA's). A recent piece of work showed that the difference in the fee paid to carers was around £11 a week;
- (f) the Council continue to advertise on the Internet and on social media for foster carers. The Council's website pages dedicated to fostering and adoption are due to be refreshed and updated;
- (g) Social Workers caseloads continue to be slightly higher than recommended. The Council aim for a caseload of between 18-23 cases, but the average caseload is closer to the mid 20's at present. However with continued recruitment, of NQS's as well as fast track recruitment of more experienced Social Workers, this is beginning to reduce;
- (h) there are regular meetings of school safeguarding leads and Council safeguarding staff. These are very well attended, usually around 90% schools are represented. This feeds very well into the joint work on safeguarding;
- (i) the inspection did not highlight any issues that the Council were not aware of. If Children's Services continue on the same course, implement the changes suggested and meet the challenges set by Ofsted then the Council can work towards achieving a grade of "good" at the next inspection with various areas of work having the potential to be graded as "outstanding";

- (j) performance indicators show that Nottingham City Council is successful in helping care leavers into work, training or education. The Virtual school is going to be recruiting further staff to offer more intense support around education for 16 and 17 year olds.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank Councillor David Mellen, Helen Blackman and Sophie Russell for their attendance and the update on the OSTED framework and thematic Inspection;**
- (2) note the content of the presentation;**
- (3) consider the service provision for Care Leavers during 2017/18.**

38 ADOPTION IN NOTTINGHAM

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Years and Early Intervention introduced a report on Adoption in Nottingham. Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services and Sonia Cain, Service Manager for Fostering and Adoption informed the Committee of the process for adoption in Nottingham and the work that the Council is doing to ensure positive outcomes for looked after children. They highlighted the following points:

- (a) Across the UK the number of adoptions is decreasing. In Nottingham City the number of adoptions completed continues to rise. In 2011/12 there were 33 adoptions, in 2016/17 there have been 48 adoptions;
- (b) there are currently 96 children in care in Nottingham City awaiting adoption;
- (c) there are a number of misconceptions about who can adopt, and as long as carers are over the age of 21 and have the ability to offer a child a permanent home then they will be considered as an adopter;
- (d) Adoption Services are advertised on the Council website, once someone has expressed an interest in adopting they will be invited to an information evening, these are held every 6-8 weeks. Following this meeting a series of assessments are completed including home visits, medical checks and reference checks. This process takes about 26 weeks at which point the potential adopter will go before a panel who will assess their suitability. If they are deemed suitable then the process of matching the carer to a child or children can begin;
- (e) carers are supported with a full training programme, including managing challenging behaviour, health needs and managing disability, and caring for sibling groups. The Council also offers some financial support for adopters, and the pupil premium in schools is available for children after adoption;
- (f) there is a Post Order support team who are available to support adopters after the Adoption Order has been finalised and who can help carers access therapeutic support;

- (g) between three years prior to and including 2014/15 financial year the Council achieved permanency through adoption for 153 children, 59% of which who fell into one or more of the “hard to place” categories;
- (h) the national performance tables drive for quicker outcomes for children leading to a focus on easy to place children such as babies and toddlers. The Council is working hard to ensure that all children are given the same chance and works hard to place those children who fall into the “hard to place” categories;
- (i) each year the target for securing an adoption from the time a child entered into care becomes shorter and the target more challenging especially around securing placements for the children in hard to place categories;
- (j) much work is focused on suitable placement and ensuring that the correct placement is found for children. Nottingham’s disruption rate (the breakdown of a placement) is very low and this is attributed to the extensive work put into prior to placement;
- (k) Ofsted feedback highlights the following points:
 - Adoption is considered for all children, and is achieved for sibling groups as well as older children and those with complex needs;
 - Assessment of adopters and special guardians is comprehensive and appropriate support is offered sensitive to their needs and the needs of the children;
 - Children looked after live in stable and secure homes and are supported to live full and enjoyable lives;
 - Very careful consideration is given to children living with carers who can meet their needs. Robust quality assurance is in place to oversee and ensure the quality of placements;
- (l) in financial year 2014/15 the Council achieved 70 adoptions, which was a very large rise in numbers achieved. The following years numbers have not been so high, but this large increase in numbers was attributed to the sustained and intensive focus on placement made possible by various grants, including the adoption support grant;
- (m) in June 2015 the government indicated its desire to reshape the adoption provision into regional adoption agencies. They want to reduce the number of adoption agencies operating in the UK. Nottingham City Council have expressed an interest, in collaboration with other local authorities in the region, in running one of these Regional Adoption Agencies and made a bid, the pilot scheme is due to go live by April 2018;
- (n) the Council currently also have the opportunity to work with the D2N2 Local Enterprise Partnership fast tracking adoption social work across Nottingham, Nottinghamshire Derby and Derbyshire in order to place children quickly but securely. This scheme will be run over the next year;
- (o) there are a number of challenges facing adoption in Nottingham:

- Recruitment – it has always been a challenge to recruit carers but collaborative work across the region will improve chances of increased recruitment;
- Adoption Support Grant – approximately £320,000 extra funding is coming to an end within the next year;
- Timescale for Adoption – year on year the target time scales set nationally are getting shorter and the expectation is that the adoption process should be quicker;
- Legal Challenges – there are many legal complexities around adoption. The courts want children to stay with birth relatives where possible although they acknowledge that this is not appropriate in all cases;
- Changes to interagency funding – Interagency funding changes are likely to create some pressure. Grants previously available to help cover the costs are no longer accessible;

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

- (p) the 26 week assessment period ensures that carers are suitable to offer a child or children a permanent home. The Council will continue to focus on the quality of assessment and placement. The process is getting quicker but the Council is committed to focus on all children rather than just the easy to place children. Very few placements disrupt in Nottingham and the careful approach is working;
- (q) in addition to finding a permanent family for the child's life the adoption process costs significantly less than keeping a child in care until they become care leavers;
- (r) if a placements breaks down then it is treated the same as any family breakdown and the child will return to care. A huge amount of work goes into each placement to ensure that the chance of disruption is minimal;
- (s) if a carer was approved and matched with a child but required extra space to accommodate the child/ren then it would be possible for the Council to consider help to rehome or provide extra space at the family home.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank Councillor David Mellen, Helen Blackman and Sonia Cain for their attendance and update on Adoption in Nottingham;**
- (2) note the content of the presentation.**

39 WORK PROGRAMME SESSION

Rav Kalsi, Senior Governance Officer, introduced the work programme for 2017/18 to the Committee. He outlined mandatory topics as prescribed in the terms of reference, items scheduled for 2017/18 and possible items for further discussion.

RESOLVED to schedule the following items for the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme for 2017/18:

- i. Safeguarding of looked after children in Nottingham**
- ii. Vulnerable Children (disability, domestic violence and missing children)**
- iii. Child Sexual Exploitation**
- iv. Educational attainment**
- v. Commissioning of services for children and young people in Nottingham**
- vi. Post Ofsted improvement journey**
- vii. Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board Annual Report**
- viii. School admissions and Place Planning**
- ix. Missing Children**
- x. Service provision for Young Carers in Nottingham**
- xi. Service Provision for Care Leavers in Nottingham**
- xii. Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and Dublin III Reunified Families**
- xiii. Edge of Care Services**
- xiv. CSE and Children with Special Educational Needs and Disability**
- xv. Effectiveness of Home Education in Nottingham**
- xvi. Recruitment and Retention of Teachers in Nottingham**
- xvii. Regional Schools Commissioner for East Midlands and Humber**
- xviii. Secondary Education Provision – Funding and Place Planning**