

Nottingham City Council

Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom and livestreamed on the Council's YouTube Channel <https://www.youtube.com/user/NottCityCouncil> on 27 July 2020 from 9.00 am - 10.30 am

Membership

Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Rebecca Langton
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Cate Woodward

Absent

Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Neghat Khan

Councillor AJ Matsiko (substitute for Councillor Neghat Khan)

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Clive Chambers - Head of Service Children in Care
Jasmin Howell - Head of Service Virtual School
Sophie Russell - Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement
Alison Wakefield - Service Manager Children in Care
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People
Jane Garrard - Senior Governance Officer

1 Apologies for absence

Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Neghat Khan (other Council business)

2 Declarations of Interests

None

3 Minutes

The Board confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 March 2020 as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chair.

4 The impact of Covid 19 on services to children in care

Clive Chambers, Head of Service for Children in Care, gave a presentation about the impact of the current Coronavirus outbreak on services to children in care. He highlighted the following information:

- (a) There has been a significant impact on ways of working and how services are being delivered.
- (b) Risk assessments were carried out for all children in care to identify what contact should look like during this period. These risk assessments are being reviewed in line with new guidance and to reflect changing circumstances.
- (c) The majority of contact with children and young people has been undertaken virtually. Generally, there has been positive feedback about the virtual contact arrangements and some young people have said that they prefer it. Two complaints have been received about contact between children and their parents, both towards the end of the lockdown period when restrictions were being eased but it was still important to ensure that contact arrangements were conducted safely. Face-to-face contact between staff and children/young people has been maintained when needed and appropriate personal protective equipment is provided for staff.
- (d) There has been more frequent contact with children in care, even for those in long-term stable placements. However feedback was received from some young people that this was too frequent and therefore, where it was safe to do so, the frequency of contact has now been reduced.
- (e) All children in care reviews are taking place virtually and this has been really successful. There have been particular benefits in relation to efficiency, for example even if a child has been placed in a different part of the country their review could take place without colleagues having to travel. Again we have had positive feedback from some young people about this way of working
- (f) There have been some limited mental health services for children in care continuing face to face but this has been challenging, and the majority of support has either been virtual such as the provision of online resources or suspended because virtual support isn't appropriate e.g. art therapy has been suspended and will be returning as a face to face service when it is safe to do so.
- (g) The majority of engagement with foster carers has been done virtually, but face-to-face contact has taken place when necessary.
- (h) Internal residential care service has been particularly challenged by the impact of staff shielding and therefore staff from the youth and play services were deployed to support that service. Staff are now returning to work but there is concern about the service if there are further local outbreaks plans required. So far there has been one suspected case of Covid-19 in an internal residential care setting, which was a challenging situation to deal with but colleagues were well supported by the Council's Public Health Team.
- (i) Children in care medicals have been taking place virtually and there is a recovery plan in place to return to a face-to-face service.
- (j) There have been a number of issues and challenges relating to court proceedings which has meant delays and some cases being prioritised over others. National guidance was produced that enabled some less complex cases

to proceed without the need for individuals to be present. One area impacted has been adoption and the service has had to work creatively to help children transition to adoptive placements.

- (k) All children with a social worker have been entitled to attend school during this period but in reality the situation has been more complex for example some carers have been shielding and/or concerned about the safety of children they are caring for attending school. Therefore attendance rates have been relatively low (approx. 45%), although this is in line with the national attendance rates. Regular meetings are being held with colleagues from Education Teams to identify ways to promote education opportunities and resources have been developed for foster carers and residential providers.
- (l) There has been an increase in breakdowns in foster care placements for a variety of reasons including the challenges some children have found in social distancing, and the pressures of caring for children during this period. The child placement market is currently very challenging and a commissioning review will be taking place to look at capacity.
- (m) The Department for Education introduced a range of flexibilities to the regulatory framework, but the Council has not used the majority of these. Flexibilities have been adopted in relation to health self-declarations by potential foster carers; first reviews of foster carers where there are no concerns or issues; changes to Panel membership; and arrangements for independent visits to children's homes. It does not appear that the majority of the flexibilities will be continued and therefore even though feedback about some of the changes has been positive e.g. virtual contact with children in long-term stable placements.

During the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- (n) Council staff and foster carers have done a great job in supporting children and young people during this time.
- (o) The reasons why some children have said they prefer virtual contact include that it fits better within their lifestyle; online communication is how they communicate with other people in their lives; it can sometimes be more comfortable and less intense to discuss issues without physically sitting close to someone. However, it is unlikely that virtual contact will be able to continue once the current period of regulatory flexibilities expires.
- (p) The Children in Care Council has continued and is working well.
- (q) The impact on children's mental health is being assessed, including by working with carers, mental health services and other partners. A range of resources have been developed to support people but it is anticipated that there will have been a negative impact as a result of factors such as isolation from peers. This is one of the reasons why the continuation of the Children in Care Council has been so important.

- (r) There has been a reduction in safeguarding referrals but there has been less of a reduction amongst those whose need is greatest. The number of children in care and children subject to Child Protection Plans is higher than usual.
- (s) Recruitment of foster carers has continued and there have been several successful foster carer recruitment events.

The Board thanked colleagues for their work in adapting services to respond to the circumstances of the current Coronavirus outbreak.

5 Children in care and care leavers strategy

Clive Chambers, Head of Service for Children in Care, introduced the draft Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy in order to enable the Board to provide feedback as part of the consultation process on development of the new Strategy. He highlighted the following information:

- (a) It is important to recognise that 'corporate parenting' does not just refer to the work of Children's Services but all parts of the Council can and should contribute e.g. through provision of access to leisure facilities.
- (b) Children in care and care leavers have contributed to development of the Strategy and, in particular, members of the Children in Care Council have spoken openly with passion and insight. Evidence has also been obtained from the Have Your Say surveys.
- (c) The Strategy aims to promote aspiration in children and young people.
- (d) An important aspect of the Strategy is preparing care leavers for independent living. The use of appropriate language and communication on this is crucial so that care leavers don't feel that they are being told to leave, but are prepared and able to move on when the time comes.
- (e) Safety is a really important concept and children have to be assured that being in care will keep them safe. Signs of Safety training is being reintroduced and all colleagues within the Department will have completed the training by the end of August.

During discussion the following comments were made about the draft Strategy:

- (f) The Strategy should recognise that, in some cases children in care have been abused. The Council is implementing the action plan developed in response to the findings of the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and the NSPCC has recently carried out an audit of harmful sexual behaviour, looking at practice now. Overall outcomes from the audit were positive but some things have been identified that need to be done differently. When it is identified that a child has been sexually abused while in care (whether by a carer or peers) there is now a robust reporting process. In the last 5-6 months that this process has been in place, there has been one case.

- (g) Following learning from events in Rotherham, an audit of local practice was undertaken. A Child Sexual Exploitation Manager is in post to lead on this work and multi-agency arrangements are in place. However, there is no complacency and the Council needs to continually challenge its self on this.
- (h) It is important for the Strategy to focus on preventative work to increase resilience and confidence amongst children in care and care leavers. One way of doing this is through ensuring placement stability and work in settings such as schools to promote resilience, positive relationships and aspiration so that children in care and care leavers understand that it is ok for them to feel valued.

Resolved to request that the feedback and comments made on the draft Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy are incorporated into the final Strategy document.

6 Education attainment of children in care

Jasmin Howell, Head of Virtual School, presented the report detailing the verified 2018/19 attainment data for children in care. She highlighted the following information:

- (a) During the current Coronavirus outbreak, the Virtual School has undertaken some additional roles, including:
 - i. issuing laptops to those who need them. 230 laptops have been provided to children in care and 20 to children subject to Special Guardianship Orders. During this period, the Pupil Premium has been used to directly benefit pupils, such as through the provision on laptops, rather than going to schools;
 - ii. monitoring school attendance of children in care has required a different approach. Virtual school and social care colleagues worked closely in relation to this and this allowed us to understand why children were not attending, which will help plan to support them to return
 - iii. developing a recovery plan for children who are particularly vulnerable e.g. unaccompanied asylum seekers and children in Year 6 transitioning to Year 7.
- (b) At Key Stage 2, lots of the data is suppressed due to the small numbers. Performance was lower than the previous year and in comparison with the rest of the East Midlands and statistical neighbours. The reasons for this are being explored and will be reported to the Board in due course. Of the 23 children in the cohort, 18 didn't achieve the expected standards in maths however 7 were working at lower levels due to special education needs. There was a similar picture for reading, writing, grammar, punctuation and spelling.
- (c) At Key Stage 4, data is also suppressed but performance was better, with an improvement compared with the previous year although not as good as in 2016/17. 20% of pupils achieved Grade 4 or above for English and Maths. This is higher than other areas in the East Midlands and statistical neighbours. While this improvement is positive, it is important to recognise that it was a small cohort (40 children) and therefore individual performance can make a significant difference overall.
- (d) It is known that multiple placement moves impacts on educational outcomes.

- (e) Work is taking place to identify whether interventions can be more targeted to help current Key Stage 2 pupils improve for Key Stage 4 assessments.
- (f) It is concerning to see drops in attainment and it will be important to understand why this has happened and how the Council can address the issues.

During discussion the following points were made:

- (g) The cohort that performed well in 2016/17 had fewer vulnerabilities than other cohorts, for example less pupils with special educational needs.
- (h) A Coronavirus recovery plan is being developed and as part of this schools will be carrying out learning loss assessments. This will help to identify what interventions are required. It is anticipated that there will be learning loss for all children, not just children in care. The potential for learning loss was one of the key drivers for using the Pupil Premium to fund the provision of laptops, develop resources for foster carers and to offer some 1:1 tuition particularly for Year 10 pupils.
- (i) The introduction of the EPEP system in September 2020 will facilitate ongoing monitoring of progress. Every term and at every assessment point, cohort information will be tracked to monitor improvement and decline enabling appropriate and timely intervention. In future reporting to the Board it would be useful to have some of this context behind attainment data so that progress by children can be reviewed by the Board. However, it was noted that one of the challenges in doing this is that people enter and leave care at different points.
- (j) Action is taken to minimise the number of school moves, especially for older children, as it is known that this impacts on educational outcomes. Most school moves are a result of placement changes that result in a school being too far to travel to. However, some school moves are due to temporary exclusion. The Virtual School challenges permanent exclusions as much as possible, emphasising the particular vulnerabilities of children in care.

The Board noted the recent trends and current levels of educational attainment for Nottingham City's children in care in comparison to all children and children in care nationally; and the current and planned work of the Virtual School to promote and support the educational achievement of Nottingham City's looked after children.

7 Next meeting date

The Board noted that the date of the next meeting was provisionally scheduled to be 21 September 2020 at 2:30pm.