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Nottingham City Council Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Date: Thursday, 30 July 2020

Time: 10.00 am (pre-meeting for all Committee members at 9:30am)

Place: Meeting to be held remotely via Zoom - councillors and colleagues attending the meeting will be provided with access details
The meeting will be livestreamed on the Council's YouTube Channel
<https://www.youtube.com/user/NottCityCouncil>

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

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Director for Legal and Governance

Senior Governance Officer: Jane Garrard **Direct Dial:** 0115 8764315

1	Apologies for absence	
2	Declarations of Interests	
3	Minutes	3 - 10
	To confirm the minutes of the last meeting held on 30 January 2020	
4	Impact of Coronavirus on Children's Services	11 - 18
5	Children's Integrated Services Ofsted Focussed Visit and Improvement Programme	19 - 26
6	Work Programme 2020/21	27 - 30

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 in the Ground Floor Committee Room, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 30 January 2020 from 10:00am to 12:01pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Salma Mumtaz (Chair)
Councillor Azad Choudhry (items 16-21)
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Chantal Lee
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Maria Watson (items 16-21)

Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch
Councillor AJ Matsiko

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Helen Blackman	- Director of Children's Integrated Services
Sara-Jane Brighouse	- Programme Manager, Children's Integrated Services
John Dexter	- Education Director
Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer
Councillor Neghat Khan	- Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Adrian Mann	- Governance Officer
Catherine Underwood	- Corporate Director for People

• **Chair**

As Councillor Carole McCulloch (the Chair of the Committee) was absent, Councillor Salma Mumtaz (the Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

16 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Carole McCulloch	-	unwell
Councillor AJ Matsiko	-	personal reasons

17 Declarations of Interests

None.

18 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

19 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services, presented a report on the November 2018 Ofsted inspection of the Service and the actions taken to address the areas identified for improvement. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the 2018 full inspection of Children's Services identified a number of strengths, including clear leadership vision, effective strategic partnerships, ongoing investment in early intervention and services at the edge of care, effective arrangements to identify and assess children at risk, effective oversight and multi-agency work with vulnerable children and young people at risk of exploitation, and stability of placement for the majority of children in care. However, the need for further improvement was identified in some areas to ensure that the full range of services are consistent in being good, and some over-complex processes were identified;
- (b) the inspectors felt that there should be more oversight of the 15 to 20 children in private fostering arrangements at any one time, as children in these circumstances have the potential to be at a high risk and, in some cases, may need to come into care. This oversight is now in place;
- (c) the inspectors considered that the action taken to safeguard a small number of children living in neglectful situations should have been carried out sooner, and that capacity should be increased for work with families where children are suffering from neglect. They recommended that the planning template used to address issues should be more bespoke and accessible for both families and social workers, be clearer in showing what the concerns of the professionals are and what action needs to be taken, by whom, and when;
- (d) inspectors identified some cohorts of young people and care leavers for whom appropriate accommodation was not available, with bed and breakfasts being used for care leavers in some cases. Some young people have also had to stay in Police custody overnight. Work is underway with the Police to avoid this wherever possible. Young people who enter the criminal justice system are often suffering from trauma and are vulnerable to criminal exploitation. In many cases, they have a criminal record before coming into care, so measures are put in place to mitigate against the risk of them being exposed to further exploitation;
- (e) inspectors felt that there is more to do to ensure that plans to achieve permanence for children are progressed more quickly, particularly plans for children to be adopted, so this is a major focus and a new audit framework is in place. Grant funding from the Government is in place to ensure that young people who want to stay in full care until they are 18 are able to do so, while semi-independence options are in place for young people who would prefer this kind of living arrangement. Steps are being taken to engage with young people on their ultimate transition from care as early as possible;
- (f) the inspectors felt that the quality of supervision for social workers should be enhanced, due to their work with vulnerable people and complex risks on a day-to-day basis. Further support has been put in place and grants are being sought

for capacity-building, and a new system of training is in place for future cohorts of social workers, with an aim to recruit from local communities. The scheme has national recognition for its effective training of social workers and support is provided to social workers in accessing further courses during their careers. A new supervision model is in place with better recording, to enable more effective management oversight of cases. An updated pay model is also in place, with progression dependent upon the competence and skill of the social worker, but the pay grades are not as competitive as elsewhere in the wider region, or in comparison to the private sector. Consideration is being given to the introduction of a higher pay scale for people with the most critical responsibilities;

- (g) although a high volume of concerns are referred to the Service and some may be spurious, attention must still be paid to cases that appear to be very minor, as significant incidents often take place after a long series of minor ones. As such, it is necessary for the Service to be open and receptive, and to record and respond to the minor issues so that it is possible to identify any patterns in them that could indicate the potential for a greater incident in the future. However, many initial referrals are allocated to the Early Intervention teams for action, rather than added to the caseload of the social workers. Early safeguarding networks are in place in schools and support is offered to the safeguarding leads in other sectors, as part of the educational work carried out with the universal service providers to build resilience there. Partnership working is being developed to address youth and mental health support in schools, and a unified working approach is in place with children's centres. There is additional investment in family resilience within the community with Parent and Family Support Teams carrying out targeted parenting work;
- (h) however, there is a shortage of back-office administrative support and, due to resourcing constraints, it is not possible to transfer capacity from front-line social work to back-office administration. Some administration apprenticeships are in place, but these still need to be funded from the overall budget. The existing management roles are also stretched. A review is underway to explore how Service staffing could be deployed differently but, ultimately, it is vital that social worker numbers are maintained due to the significant volume of cases;
- (i) work to promote and support the educational achievement of children in care, led by the Virtual School, was identified as a priority by the inspectors, who felt that there was more to do beyond the improvements and investment in roles that have been put in place to date. There is a drive to increase opportunities for care leavers, so one-to-one mentoring and support is available in schools on potential careers;
- (j) given the substantial needs for the Service amongst citizens, the level of resourcing available is challenging and staff are stretched, so it is difficult to develop all of the areas for improvement at once. Action to address the points raised by the inspection is being progressed in a staggered way as resources allow, with the primary focus on combating neglect. Refreshed training has been rolled out to the whole workforce to raise the understanding of neglect and how it can be identified, approached and addressed effectively. Additional training on trauma is also in place, as parents struggling with poverty and childhood trauma of their own may lead to the neglect of their children. The planning templates and

- the electronic case management system has been redeveloped to make case histories simpler and clearer;
- (k) the close focus on neglect has increased the demands on the capacity of the Service, with more children on plans for neglect and more children coming into care due to neglect – many of whom are teenagers. However, it has ensured that action is being taken for children suffering from neglect at a much earlier age than was previously the case, which is beneficial to their long-term wellbeing;
- (l) an Ofsted focus visit will take place at the start of February to review the current progress on the improvement plan, in the context of the high local needs, increasing caseload and financial challenges. To achieve ‘good’ in all areas will require a significant level of investment that cannot be put in place fully at this time. Improvement is being made and is ongoing, but it is difficult to respond to very complex issues with limited resources. However, this is also a national issue that is reflected in both the public and private sectors.

The Committee thanked Helen Blackman for her report.

Resolved to request that the outcomes of the upcoming Ofsted focus visit are shared with the Committee when they are available.

20 Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment

Councillor Neghat Khan, Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment, gave a presentation on the education priorities set out in the new Council Plan. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the new Council Plan has 18 performance measures relation to education, three of which are in the Top 20 commitments. The performance indicators are to ensure that all Nottingham children attend a school judged ‘Good’ or ‘Outstanding’ by Ofsted; the gap of GCSE attainment is within 5% of the national average; at least 75% of eligible two-year-olds access free nursery provision; every primary school in Nottingham has an affordable breakfast club; and attendance in both Nottingham primary and secondary schools is above the national average;
- (b) it is a primary objective to reduce the number of permanent exclusions from schools by 50% overall, and to campaign against permanent exclusions and ‘off-rolling’, to make sure that every Nottingham child has a school place. It is aimed to reduce the number of exclusions for the current academic year to 86, from 98 in the previous year. However, 54 exclusions have been made in the year to date already, up from 41 in the same period, last year. In total, 30 of these exclusions have been made by three schools, so there is a need for significant engagement with their academy trusts to try and involve them in the Council’s ‘inclusion model’ to support children at risk of exclusion to stay in school. Trigger points are in place for intervention, but it is vital to understand why schools are excluding pupils and what support would help them in avoiding carrying out these exclusions;
- (c) so far, ten schools have signed up to the model and hold weekly monitoring meetings, and it is hoped to get many more schools involved. It is no longer

possible to have a full cost recovery model in place for schools that exclude children permanently. The ‘inclusion model’ represents a service-level agreement where schools commit to helping children at risk from exclusion stay in school, with the incentive of some extra funding to support inclusion. There is capacity for claiming funds back from schools within the model who exclude too many children, but entering into this agreement is entirely voluntary;

- (d) it is important to guarantee a choice of places for Nottingham children at local primary and secondary schools. However, the demand for secondary places is increasing (particularly in the north of the city), with peak demand projected in 2022. A bid to establish a new free school has been made, but there have been difficulties in establishing a satisfactory site with the Department for Education;
- (e) other major aims are to support mainstream schools in ensuring that children with additional needs are able to progress well; tackle holiday hunger by supporting school holiday lunch clubs in the most deprived neighbourhoods; campaign to extend free school meals to all primary school children by 2025; and work with schools to promote an understanding of mental wellbeing amongst staff and children. It is also intended to protect the school uniforms grant, the Education Welfare Service and the Education Improvement Board from budget cuts.

The Committee thanked Councillor Neghat Khan for her presentation.

Resolved to carry out further scrutiny into the high levels of permanent exclusion from schools within certain academy trusts, and to invite these trusts to discuss this issue with the Committee, within the wider context of effective secondary school provision within the city.

21 Educational Attainment

Nick Lee, Director of Education Services, gave a presentation on the attainment of children and young people for the 2018/19 academic year. Currently, this information does not contain the data from the Virtual School, which is yet to be validated and released. The following points were discussed:

- (a) for Early Years (ages 4 to 5), 66.9% of pupils in Nottingham reached a ‘Good Level of Development’, though this is 0.7% less than the previous year. The national average is 71.8%, ranking Nottingham at 143 out of 151 Local Authorities. However, the general trend is that Nottingham is narrowing the gap from the national average, due to the great deal of work being done in Early Years. The current dip in the trend is being investigated. Special educational needs and/or disabilities have been identified and there are a number of children with complex needs. There have been a series of children who have started at their schools mid-year, who also have English as a second language. Further targeted, tailored support has been implemented, with a review of the partnership work in place to support boys, in particular;
- (b) at the end of Year 1, there has been no change in the Nottingham and national percentages for Phonics, which remains a significant area of national scrutiny. Nottingham remains 3% behind the national average, though it has increased its position by 4 in the Local Authority rankings, rising to 132nd;

- (c) at Key Stage 1 (ages 6 to 7), the gap between Nottingham and the national average for the Expected Standard has reduced by 1%. Nottingham has gained ten Local Authority rankings for maths, rising to 134th. For reading, the gap in the national average has reduced by 2%, with Nottingham rising five places to 141st. For writing, the national average gap has remained at 4%, and there has been no major change in Nottingham's ranking of 128th;
- (d) at Key Stage 2 (ages 10 to 11), the proportion of pupils attaining the reading, writing and mathematics benchmark (RWM) increased by 1% to 63.45%. Nottingham recorded mixed changes in ranking year-on-year for pupils achieving the expected standard in each subject, but the gap with the national average is reducing. Nottingham is at the national average for maths, and is only 1% below in grammar, punctuation and spelling. The Key Stage 2 Progress Scores have increased for reading and writing, and remain stable for maths;
- (e) improvement between Key Stages 1 and 2 is strong and is reflected across both the Nottingham Schools Trust and the other primary academies. This should have a good impact on future attainment in Key Stage 4, where average attainment scores are starting to increase. A number of young people go on to attend secondary schools outside of the city area, but the number staying on is now growing;
- (f) the School Heads Partnership is working closely to share best practice on how to best support boys from white, working-class backgrounds, who can often underperform at school. Investment is being made in these children at the Early Years stage, with tailored support and the introduction of role models;
- (g) academies are being encouraged to work in partnership to support high-ability children, though no formal, funded programmes are in place. The Committee considered that the current system has an apparent lack of individual focus, follow-up and funding for children who show potential for high academic attainment.

The Committee thanked Nick Lee for his presentation and noted the report.

22 Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities

Sara-Jane Brighouse, Programme Manager for Children's Integrated Services, presented a report on how the Council is meeting its duties and responsibilities to children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The following points were discussed:

- (a) there are 46,869 children and young people attending schools in Nottingham. Of these, 6398 children and young people have some kind of SEND, which represents 13.7% of the school population. There are five special schools, with 585 young people attending specialist schools and Post-16 settings, while 40 attend Focus Provision. There are five Focus Provisions in Nottingham, which are specialist resources in mainstream schools for Autism and deafness. Currently, 905 children and young people receive additional high needs and inclusion funding;

- (b) the current Code of Practice for supporting people with SEND is intended to improve outcomes for children and young people aged 0-25 and their families; establish Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs; replace School Action/Plus with SEND Support; ensure that a graduated response and support is implemented to meet the needs of children with SEND; give access to a personal budget; ensure that the local area co-produces services and strategic developments to involve children, young people and families in decision-making; offer impartial mediation and advice; provide independent Information Advice Support; publish the local offer of support and services; ensure joined-up service delivery through joint commissioning with partners, and health services in particular; and ensure that young people are prepared for adulthood, good health, employment, community inclusion and independent living;
- (c) significant progress has been made in implementing the reforms in Nottingham. The transfer of the Statements of Special Educational Needs to EHC plans has been completed in advance of the national deadline and 98-100% of the new EHC plans have been issued within the statutory 20-week deadline. There are many more personal budgets than the national average, with joint strategic needs assessment and joint commissioning arrangements in place. Significant joint work is underway with SEND and social care Whole Life Disability services, while SEND services continue to work closely with health and social care partners, including delivering practice improvement days. The local offer is on ‘Ask Lion’ Nottingham City directory;
- (d) the current five-year SEND strategy, co-produced with young people and families and published in September 2018, aims to support all schools and settings to be inclusive, develop provision, make transition easier, promote co-production with children, young people and their families, improving links between agencies, and help young people prepare for adulthood. A new facility for young people with Autism will open in September 2020. Support and ring-fenced funding is being provided to mainstream schools to improve provision for young people with SEND. A review of the high-level needs funding system has been completed and a new system will be piloted with schools in spring 2020. ‘Routes to Inclusion’ is being rolled out to all schools in the city, with a specific toolkit to support children with social, emotional and mental health issues. The toolkit was developed and launched with primary schools in October 2018 and work has now begun with secondary schools;
- (e) periodic Local Area Reviews are carried out to inspect how all partners in the city identify children and young people with SEND, assess and meet their needs, improve outcomes, and lead, manage and govern arrangements for SEND in the local area. The inspection will look at the contribution of all partner agencies (education, health and social care in particular) and will consider children and young people who are resident in that area, but receive their support from outside of that area. The inspection results in a published report that will give an assessment judgement about how well the local area is performing and identify areas for improvement. The report may require the local area to consider improvement actions that it should take through a formal ‘statement of action’;

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee – 30.01.20

- (f) unfortunately, only 6% of children with SEND go on to regular employment, as many employers have difficulty in supporting their particular workplace needs. Work is underway to establish creative opportunities and placements, and an employment strategy document is being produced. It is vital that Post-16 providers engage closely with their SEND students, and supported internships are being created.

The Committee thanked Sara-Jane Brighouse for her report.

Resolved to request that the outcomes of the upcoming Local Area Review are shared with the Committee when they are available.

23 Work Programme 2019/20

The Committee noted the Work Programme for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
30 July 2020
Impact of Coronavirus on Children's Services
Report of Head of Legal and Governance

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To hear about the impact of the current coronavirus outbreak on the delivery on Children's Services and review work to mitigate the impact on children and families.

2. Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to identify the focus and timescales for further scrutiny.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The Corporate Director for People and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People have been invited to attend the meeting to update the Committee on the impact that the current Coronavirus outbreak has had on the delivery of Children's Services and the impact that this has had on children and their families in the City.
- 3.2 Attached is written information provided by the Corporate Director for People and the Director for Children's Integrated Services on the impact on the different services, how the Council is working with partners, the use of temporary regulatory flexibilities during this time, and the impact on staff within the service.

4. List of attached information

- 4.1 Report from Corporate Director for People and Director of Children's Integrated Services

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 None

7. Wards affected

- 7.1 All

8. Contact information

- 8.1 Jane Garrard, Senior Governance Officer
Tel: 0115 8764315
Email: jane.garrard@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Impact of Coronavirus on Children's Services

July 2020

Background

Our children and families have experienced the swift and extensive impact of Covid on their daily lives, both the direct experience of Covid and the lockdown, but also the experience of living through the uncertainty of this unprecedented situation. This will include impact on emotional, social and physical wellbeing as well as the impact due to reduced service availability and protective contacts during lockdown.

It has been vital to maintain robust and good quality services for our children and families at this time of unprecedented challenge for them. With a national focus on keeping vulnerable children visible to services, the Department for Education guidance has been clear that it remains the responsibility of local authorities to meet their key statutory responsibilities for the welfare of children and families. These responsibilities include safeguarding children, although recognising the difficulties in seeing children a small number of limited adjustments have been provided for in national guidance (see flexibilities below).

Action Undertaken

Our priority under Covid has been safeguarding and protecting the welfare of children and young people. National guidance and public health guidance has been adhered to. The Department for Education has published a significant range of guidance throughout the period and we have ensured that we have understood and responded accordingly. We have sought to ensure that we understand risk and prioritise our work to reflect this.

As lockdown approached the service prioritised all children for whom we had the greatest concerns for ongoing face to face visits. All families receiving early help or social work support have been risk-assessed to determine the level of support required (face-to-face or via phone/video conference). Children and families supported by Children's Social Care have been receiving at least fortnightly contact and those children most in need of protection are seen more often in planned and unannounced visits to ensure they are safe. This level of visiting has been below normal requirements but for a period we wanted to ensure that children's needs were well understood and visible.

Nearly 2,500 individual risk assessments have been carried out since lockdown for children currently open to services:

- 354 were risk assessed as red
- 1334 were risk assessed as amber
- 783 were risk assessed as green

During May 2020, risk assessments were randomly dip sampled using a regional template and findings have been available to the Corporate Director and Portfolio Holder to provide assurance regarding the practice during this period.

We engaged more social work capacity from agencies as we approached lockdown, with additional resources being invested by the Council to make sure we had enough staff to keep children safe. There have been no significant issues that we could not manage in terms of staff absence due to illness, although a number of staff are shielded or isolating at different points, many staff are working remotely. Staff usually deployed within universal services, including youth workers and Children's Centre workers, have worked flexibly to support vulnerable children, young people and families to ensure that critical services continue. Some of our youth workers have been trained to work in our children's homes to help fill any gaps. Family support staff have continued to visit children who may be vulnerable and robust arrangements are in place to monitor staffing levels and agree where necessary the emergency deployment of staff.

Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub and Duty

There was initially a significant decrease in multi-agency safeguarding hub enquiries and resulting social work assessments in our duty service. The number of referrals to the multi-agency safeguarding hub reduced during the lockdown, but referrals gradually increased and are now largely restored to pre-Covid levels. However, this short period of decrease in referrals has not resulted in major changes to the number of children supported through child protection plans. Just before lockdown we had a significant rise in the number of children coming into care and an increase in children on child protection plans. The duty service is working as usual to keep children safe. They are visiting homes and working with the police where necessary, providing help and support. A member of the duty team spoke on local and national radio to share the message that we have social workers in Nottingham City ready and waiting to help. Work is underway to prepare for a possible increase in referrals following the end of lockdown, although with a slow return of children to schools we have seen referrals increasing. We are working with our education colleagues to actively manage new concerns as children return to school.

Government has acknowledged that measures introduced to tackle Covid, such as requirements to stay at home, are particularly problematic for people at risk of harm from others in the home setting. We have worked closely with partners to monitor and respond to domestic violence and abuse (DVA). Risks associated with domestic abuse are a frequent cause of referrals to social care. Whilst there has been a reduction in formally recorded crimes and some reduction in referrals related to DVA, levels of referrals are now almost restored to pre-Covid levels. We are not as high as we would normally be at in the run up to school holidays, but we are at pre Covid levels. It is a concern that it is likely that there will be hidden instances of DVA, which will have been impacting on children and young people during lockdown.

Independent Reviewing Services

All independent reviewing services for Child Protection and Children in Care conferences and reviews are now taking place via video link (Microsoft Teams), telephone calls and written reports (email). Parents/Carers/Young people are included in these meetings. Every effort is made by the child protection chairs and IRO's to involve parents/carers in the child protection conference/Child in care process. This is on Microsoft Teams where possible. We have parents and young people on speaker phone during reviews and they are also spoken to by the chairs before and after the review. Chairs make sure they have understood everything discussed and have been able to participate fully in the plan, to work with them to keep their children safe.

Early Help Services and CAMHS Services have developed materials online for children and families to use and for staff supporting families who may be under stress. Throughout the Covid period, we have maintained our commitment to the early intervention targets set out in the current Council plan. Early Help (Children's Centre) colleagues have been delivering materials and contacting families identified as most in need of Early Intervention. We have continued to meet the needs of families experiencing increased behaviour struggles, increased relationship and domestic abuse concerns through the development of and delivery of virtual evidence-based programmes. We have been supporting families who do not have the resources to promote child development and learning at home through the delivery of Peep learning resource packs.

Youth and Play Services have continued to provide essential targeted support in a virtual way to divert young people from risk taking behaviour. Provision is linked to the Serious Youth Violence and Exploitation offer, with a focus on engaging young people at risk of exploitation or anti-social behaviour. Our Youth and Play colleagues have had regular contact with 278 young people who usually attend sessions and have been identified as the most vulnerable. They have also been delivering activity materials, and engaging young people in the message of 'stay at home' through virtual mediums like regular telephone calls.

Respite services

Short breaks are provided by Whole Life Disability. The regular short breaks service was largely paused during this period, delivered instead as a reduced support service. The respite provide by children's residential services at Crocus Fields have also continued in a scaled down version of support visits rather than overnight stays, as below. Short breaks and Crocus Fields service worked together to avoid duplication and offer support where most needed with some sitting service, shopping collection etc.

Fostering

The impact of Covid has been quite diverse for children and foster carers. Some have found that the time at home as a family has allowed the children and young people to form strong attachments with their foster carers. However, for others this time has been one of real challenge, either due to the vulnerability of the carers or the difficulty the young person has had in responding to the lockdown (for example where behavior has become more difficult to manage). Due to some of these difficulties there has been an increase in breakdowns in foster placements. Our foster carers have been incredibly creative, caring and resilient. They deserve recognition for their commitment to our children and young people in these challenging circumstances.

Adoption

Nottingham City is part of the East Midlands Regional Adoption Agency (EMRAA), with Nottinghamshire County Council managing the provision of adoptive homes, homefinding and post adoption support. They have continued to provide all of these services during lockdown, but with careful risk assessed plans to support introductions for new placements. As with some of our foster carers, many adoptive families have found this period of lockdown and often home working, a good bonding opportunity. We have not seen any adverse impacts, other than delays in final orders at court. The courts are working to resume hearings at the frequency of pre Covid level but this will still take some time. The courts have had to delay or postpone hearings if parents were not able to take part in a meaningful way.

Residential Children's Homes have continued to operate as far as possible as family settings responding to the Covid-19 crisis, supporting young people to stay safe, to maintain their wellbeing and to maintain their learning. Staff sickness and shielding has been high in this service, but staffing has been maintained by redeploying colleagues from Play and Youth into our children's homes. In one home, children and staff needed to isolate due to potential Covid-19.

Service Closures

The following service closures were authorised in order to maintain health and safety and to meet government guidance:

- Crocus Fields: building-based overnight respite service closed, alternative support/ outreach provided where possible and appropriate
- Children's Centres: most centres closed, targeted non-building based outreach provided. A few centres remained open, but limited on to access to health clinics delivered on sites.
- Contact: contact centres closed and building-based contact reduced to a minimum, virtual contact used where possible and appropriate. Where exceptional.
- Play and Youth: building-based and group service closed, targeted engagement maintained according to prioritised need in liaison with Youth Justice Service.

Working with schools and education providers

There has been an important focus on the education offer to vulnerable children, recognising the importance of learning and the protective benefit of school attendance in the protection and wellbeing of children.

Children's services have worked with the Education team and with schools to ensure a closely coordinated response to vulnerable children as defined in the guidance – children and young people with a social worker and those with special educational needs and disabilities – alongside children who may not meet the guidance but about whom we are concerned. This has been underpinned by a shared understanding of individual risk assessments and agreed joint work to support and protect the child.

Safeguarding Partnership

The Nottingham City Safeguarding Children's Partnership has increased its schedule of partnership meetings to provide robust oversight of the changes to our system to support children and families in Nottingham under Covid-19 and that we have identified and addressed risks and actively shared our learning and good practice.

Regional Connections

We have worked closely with other East Midlands Councils to make sure that we are all following best practice, sharing learning and checking the local need and response against what other councils are seeing in the region. We have used shared regional approaches to quality assure practice in this difficult time.

Temporary Regulatory Flexibilities

On 23 April 2020, the Department for Education (DfE) introduced a series of temporary regulatory flexibilities for local authorities and children's social care providers. They have made no changes to primary legislation and the vast majority of secondary legislation remains unchanged. The Regulations will expire on 25 September unless

there is a clear need to extend them. The DfE are monitoring the use of the Regulations through a range of channels including the Department's regional teams.

The Children Integrated Services Directorate have not enacted all of the available easements. Instead, the expectation is that it is "business as usual" and the easements considered as required, dependent on service capacity and levels of risk experienced within services. We have used some of the process changes available in how medicals for foster carers are arranged for example, which is now undertaken on the basis of self-declaration given that GPs are not seeing people face-face unless there is urgent need. We have kept a list of all of those carers where we have used this approach and will revisit these assessments when circumstances allow. We are also sending carers first reviews straight to the ADM rather than through panel and to ADM, unless there are concerns raised. Once again this will be kept under review.

The use of flexibilities has been subject to review with the Portfolio Holder during July. The Secretary of State must review the effectiveness of the amendments made by these Regulations during the period in which the amendments have effect.

The Adoption and Children (Coronavirus) (Amendment) Regulations 2020 temporarily amends 10 sets of secondary legislation relating to children's social care to support services to manage the coronavirus outbreak. The changes are intended to support services to manage the increased pressure on children's social care and cases of staff and carer shortages arising from illness due to coronavirus.

A process for considering and determining the use of amendments was agreed at Corporate Leadership Team. This is led by the Director of Children's Services in consultation with the lead member for children's services, the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People and with the advice of the Director for Children's Integrated Services and her senior leadership team.

Our Colleagues

Covid has of course impacted our colleagues in their home lives as it has for all of us, and we have sought to recognise individual need and to work with colleagues to support them at this time. It has been particularly important that we understand disproportionate impact of Covid and use a risk assessment process with colleagues to agree how to support them (including specifically in relation to our BAME colleagues).

The majority of colleagues have been working from home much of the time, even if they are visiting children and families. The importance of team working in children's social work is well-established in research literature and efforts have been made to mitigate the risk of losing the connection of being in the same office. We are actively considering how we enable teams to spend more of their working time together in a socially distanced way.

In the early stages of the pandemic, personal protective equipment (PPE) was a concern for children's social care due to an initial lack of clarity about the national guidance and concerns about access to necessary supplies.

Colleagues have also stepped into different roles to allow us to meet priorities. Our colleagues in children's social care deserve real commendation for their responsiveness

to the challenges of working in the pandemic and to their work to safeguard and support the wellbeing of some of our most vulnerable children and young people.

Risk

Child Protection Plan admissions were high in February and March 2020 resulting in the highest volume for a quarter during this financial year. The resultant number of children with a child protection plan in place has increased by 25% compared with the previous year. It is suspected that this increase can be explained by high profile cases and an Ofsted inspection as opposed to the resultant impact of Covid.

Higher child protection numbers often translate in to more children coming in to care too as with intervention and scrutiny more risks are often identified. The number of children in care has increased from 617 in April 19, to 653 at the end of March 20, and 677 as at 29th June. We have seen increased pressure on placement stability as a consequence of Covid. In some cases there is a direct impact, e.g. we had a placement breakdown where the carer was shielding and the child refused to comply with social distancing measures. In other cases increasingly challenging behaviour from the child has left carers feeling unable to manage placements.

There is a further financial consequence of the impact of Covid, which has compromised transitions for care leavers into their own accommodation. It should also be noted that Housing Aid have seen a significant increase in demand from single homeless households and in particular, an increase in the number of single individuals meeting the threshold for a statutory response and therefore requiring a social let. This is likely to impact on the time it takes to identify properties for young people post-18.

Next steps

As the pandemic progresses, we will continue to focus on recovery.

Catherine Underwood
Corporate Director for People

Helen Blackman
Director of Children's Integrated Services

Contact Officer:
Michelle Roe, Executive Officer

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
30 July 2020
Children's Integrated Services Focused Visit and Improvement Programme
Report of Head of Legal and Governance

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To scrutinise the action being taken in response to the issues identified by Ofsted in its focussed visit of Children's Services in February 2020.

2. Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- a) review the action being taken, and progress being made in responding to the issues identified by Ofsted in its February 2020 focussed visit;
- b) seek assurance regarding ongoing and future work to address these issues; and
- c) consider next steps in the scrutiny process.

3. Background information

- 3.1 Ofsted carried out an inspection of children's social care services in November 2018 and the report was published in January 2019. The report noted that there were areas of good practice across the services and a range of services had improved since the previous full inspection in 2014, but that there were also areas where improvements were required to ensure that all children get the right support at the right time. Overall, the services were found to be 'requires improvement to be good'. The Committee has explored work relating to some of the areas identified in that inspection report and in January 2020 the Committee reviewed the extent to which the need for improvement identified by Ofsted had been met and whether there was further work required. The Committee noted that the Council anticipated there would be a re-inspection within the next year.
- 3.2 In February 2020, Ofsted carried out a focused visit looking specifically at arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan, with a focus on children at risk of neglect. The Committee was due to hear about the outcome of the focused visit at its meeting in March, but the meeting was cancelled as a result of the coronavirus outbreak.
- 3.3 Information about the outcomes of the visit is attached, including details of two Priority Actions identified by Ofsted. The Corporate Director for People and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People have been invited to attend the meeting to expand on the issues identified by Ofsted and the action that has

been taken so far and planned to be taken in response. Written information about those actions is attached.

4. List of attached information

- 4.1 Report from Corporate Director for People and Director of Children's Integrated Services

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 Children's Social Care Services (January 2019)
- 6.2 Report to, and minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 30 January 2020

7. Wards affected

- 7.1 All

8. Contact information

- 8.1 Jane Garrard, Senior Governance Officer
Tel: 0115 8764315
Email: jane.garrard@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Report to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

Children's Integrated Services Ofsted Focussed Visit and Improvement Programme

Background

Ofsted, the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills inspect and regulate services that care for children and young people, including local authority children's services. In November 2018, Ofsted undertook an inspection of Nottingham City Council's children's services where Inspectors found that the service 'Requires Improvement to be Good'. NCC acted on the findings and in response developed an Improvement Action Plan which was led by the Director and Heads of Service.

In February 2020, Ofsted undertook a Focussed Visit to look specifically at the City Council's arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan, with a focus on children at risk of neglect.

There is no inspection rating given during a Focussed Visit, but overall inspectors concluded that the experience of children in need of help and protection has deteriorated since the last inspection.

Given the issues they found in the service areas they looked at, Ofsted issued two Priority Actions:

1. Address the systemic failures in social work practice to ensure that planning and intervention for children improve their experiences, and that new and emerging risks are identified and responded to.
2. Stabilise the workforce and address the significant shortfall in capacity to enable social workers and first line managers to respond effectively to children in need of help and protection.

In response to the findings of the Focussed Visit, an action plan was developed and shared with Ofsted in March this year. This report sets out progress to date on the key actions taken to address the identified Priority Actions and to improve our services for children and families. Given the nature of the Priority Actions, we have seen the scope of improvement across the wider services rather than confined only to the areas considered in the Focused Visit.

The Wider Context

Nottingham's vision, as set out in our Children and Young People's Plan, is for 'A city where every child and young person can enjoy their childhood in a warm and supporting environment, free from poverty and safe from harm; a city where every child grows up to achieve their full potential'.

The experience and outcomes of the most vulnerable children in our city are of paramount importance. The Focused Visit specifically looked at the arrangements put in place by Nottingham City Council, however, we know that achieving outcomes for children who need help and protection takes place in partnership and we are also working with partners both within the council and in partner organisations to secure the improvements needed.

The requirement for these improvements is set in the context of the high and increasing levels of deprivation and need experienced by our families in Nottingham and the impact of national government budget cuts to the local authority.

The improvement of our children's services is a priority for the council and it is important that corporate support has been committed, not just the resources of the children's services. For example, the expertise and capacity of the human resources team, communications expertise and support of our ICT services are required for success.

Action Undertaken

In response to the two priority actions, and wider recommendations made around practice improvement, an action plan was developed and provided to Ofsted in March. The improvement programme is led by the Director of Children's Services and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People.

The key headline actions are:

Priority Area for Action 1 – Social Work Practice

Address the systemic failures in social work practice to ensure that planning and intervention for children improve their experiences, and that new and emerging risk are identified and responded to.

- | | |
|----|---|
| 1. | Ensure that there is sufficient capacity for strong leadership of immediate and ongoing practice improvement. |
| 2. | Ensure that Nottingham City Council has an operating model which enables good practice and workforce capacity |
| 3. | Ensure that all staff and managers are clear about Nottingham's social work practice models and 'what good looks like' |
| 4. | Ensure that assessments and plans are of good quality and accurately evaluate risk and address the needs of children |
| 5. | Assertive practice ensures that children's needs are understood and appropriate action/intervention is put in place to improve outcomes for children, including those experiencing neglect. |
| 6. | Ensure that all managers are clear about the expectations of their oversight on casework, to ensure children's needs are understood and effectively addressed |
| 7. | Develop an effective audit framework which provides an accurate appraisal of the experience of children and drives systematic improvements in practice. |
| 8. | Ensure that senior managers and leaders have an accurate understanding of the experience of children |
| 9. | Ensure effective Independent Reviewing Officer service which ensures effective plans and progress for children in care and children in need of protection |

Priority Area for Action 2 – Workforce Capacity

Stabilise the workforce and address the significant shortfall in capacity to enable social worker sand fine line managers to respond effectively to children in need of help and

protection.

10	Stabilise the social work workforce increase capacity in the short-term.
11	Develop a sustainable plan to ensure the sufficiency of social workers in the long-term.

To drive delivery of this action plan and to secure sustainable improvement which will make a real difference for children, young people and families, the Children at the Heart Improvement Board has been established. The Improvement Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership includes both the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, along with senior officers of the Council. Key health, education and police partners are members. The Board has now met four times.

An Improvement Fund of £1.5m one-off funding has been identified by the Council to support short-term work force capacity and delivery of the improvement plan.

We have recruited a temporary Practice Improvement Director to provide additional senior leadership capacity to drive improvement, working with the Children's Services leadership team. A proposal has been developed to establish and to recruit a full time permanent Principal Social Worker role at a sufficiently senior level to embed and to sustain a strong focus on practice.

To support our improvement, the Department for Education have enabled to us access support from the Partners in Practice (PiP) innovation programme, which provides peer support from a partner local authority to support improvement. Our Partner in Practice is Essex County Council. The scope of the programme was co-produced between Nottingham City Council and PiP colleagues. In spite of an initial delay due to covid-19 and the continuing restrictions, the PiP team began work with us during May to understand practice issues, undertaking sampling of case files as well as discussions with senior managers, team managers and a range of practitioners, including those with specific case involvement. A series of feedback workshops are taking place with front line teams and the senior leadership team and this work will help to shape the plan for further work which they will undertake with us. Feedback has also been presented to our Children at the Heart Improvement Board and the improvement plan will be updated to reflect priorities identified from working our with PiP partners.

Phase 2 of the PiP innovation programme will include a focus on Public Law Outline and Permanency Strategy a review of the Independent Reviewing Officer service and a virtual visit to Essex.

A prioritised practice development programme has been put in place to address the issues identified in the Focused Visit. Training workshops are in train, using virtual training events to support strong and focused learning founded on a clear strengths-based practice model and directly relating to current practice examples with specific inclusion of neglect.

We are reviewing other elements of our Learning Improvement Framework, particularly to strengthen our audit process, to ensure that audits reflect a consistent and accurate appraisal of the quality of practice and that effective learning is secured both by individual practitioners and by the wider service in response to audit findings.

Both the full inspection in 2018 and the Focused Visit in 2020 told us that workforce capacity was not sufficient to the demands and complexity of meeting children's needs in a city like Nottingham. An urgent priority has been to address the practitioner and front line manager workforce. Staffing gaps were swiftly filled, initially with agency staff, but it is vital to further stabilise staffing and to continue to strengthen recruitment with the support of our human resources team. We have improved our pay and progression model for social workers and have refreshed our rolling recruitment with adverts being sent out each month. We will also be developing a rolling recruitment microsite.

We are actively engaged with the Association of Directors of Children's Services Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliance, Local Government Association and the Department for Education to support improvement. We are also maintaining ongoing dialogue with Ofsted around our progress and our response to covid-19.

Risk

The Ofsted inspection activity tells us that in spite of the commitment of our practitioners and managers, some children in neglect are experiencing drift and delay. The children's service management team have ensured reviews have been undertaken to identify actions which have been required to address this.

Covid-19 has had a major impact on the lives of our children and families and on the activity of our children's services. A risk assessment process has ensured that we have considered each child's needs under covid-19. We have been working closely with partners, especially schools, to ensure we understand children's experiences under covid-19 and that we provide appropriate help and protection. Referrals to children's services have decreased during lockdown and although they are now increasing, it is anticipated that some children will have experienced hidden harm.

Following February's Focused Visit, Ofsted informed us that they would undertake a further Focused Visit in the autumn and that this would result in either assurance of sufficient improvement or a full inspection. Since covid-19 and the lockdown, Ofsted have been considering their inspection programme and are indicating that they are likely to be adjusting their activity. We anticipate a fuller review of children's experiences under covid-19, which would look at a wider range of our children's services than those areas considered under the Focused Visit. Our approach to improvement has taken in wider services, although this requires cultural and system improvement which will take time to fully address and to embed.

The implications of an inadequate inspection are most importantly that we would be failing to serve Nottingham's children well. However, it would also bring major external scrutiny with ministerial oversight and potential intervention. In addition, very substantial additional cost would be incurred. Achieving fast and demonstrable improvement will require significant additional resource. We need our practitioners and managers to be able to devote their attention whole-heartedly to the practice and improvement in a very short space of time.

Both the full inspection in 2018 and the Focused Visit in 2020 told us that workforce capacity was not sufficient to the demands and complexity of meeting children's needs in a city like Nottingham. This is of course a challenge in a very difficult financial context, but Ofsted is clear that the statutory requirements within which children's services will not be adjusted to take account of circumstances. The improvement plan

includes a review of the operating structure for sustainable services which will need to be considered within the council's financial priorities.

In relation to covid-19, DfE guidance has been clear that it remains the responsibility of local authorities to meet their key statutory responsibilities for the welfare of children and families and for safeguarding children although a small number of limited adjustments have been provided for.

It is vital that we have robust and good quality services for our children and families. They are a key statutory duty, but also good services improve the experiences and the life chances of our most vulnerable children as they progress into adulthood and that makes a long term difference for them and for our city.

Next Steps

Planned improvement activity has been impacted by covid-19, but plans have been reprioritised where necessary and we are seeking to close delays wherever possible. We have had to be creative to deliver some of the planned activities, such as training workshops, but we have sustained positive engagement and created powerful learning opportunities. The improvement is closely monitored by the Children at the Heart improvement board to ensure delivery of the improvement plan, but most importantly the impact on the outcomes and the experience of children.

Recommendations

- Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the outcome of the Focussed Visit.
- Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note and support the actions being undertaken to address the two Priority Actions and wider improvement, including the establishment of a Children's Services Improvement Board and commitment to an improvement fund.

Catherine Underwood
Corporate Director for People

Helen Blackman
Director of Children's Integrated Services

Contact Officer:
Michelle Roe, Executive Officer

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Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
30 July 2020
Work Programme 2020/21
Report of Head of Legal and Governance

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To consider the Committee's work programme for 2020/21.

2. Action required

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to identify the issues that it would like its work to focus on during municipal year 2020/21.

3. Background information

- 3.1 The purpose of the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee is to provide robust scrutiny of issues and services relevant to the wellbeing and safeguarding of children and young people, in the light of recommendations from the Council's Ofsted Inspection April 2014, and the Jay and Casey Reports (Child Sexual Exploitation in Rotherham).
- 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. Changes and/or additions to the work programme will need to take account of the resources available to the Committee.
- 3.5 The Committee is asked to identify the issues that it would like to focus on during 2020/21. A list of issues that the Committee had previously identified for inclusion on its work programme is attached as an appendix. The Committee is asked to consider whether these are still priority areas for inclusion and/ or whether there are different issues that warrant inclusion. Following the meeting, identified issues will be developed into a work programme for the year.

4. List of attached information

- 4.1 List of issues previously identified for inclusion in the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2020/21

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 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Terms of Reference, as set out in the Council's Constitution.

7. Wards affected

7.1 All

8. Contact information

8.1 Jane Garrard, Senior Governance Officer
Tel: 0115 8764315
Email: jane.garrard@nottinghamcity.gov.uk

Issues previously identified for inclusion on the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee Work Programme 2020/21

- **Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse**
To review progress in fulfilling the recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse and implementing associated action plan
- **Semi-independent living arrangements for 16/17 year olds**
To review the semi-independent living arrangements for 16/17 year olds in care
- **East Midlands Regional Adoption Agency**
To review performance against expected outcomes for the first year of operation and plans for the future
- **Youth Offending Service Inspection**
To scrutinise action being taken in response to the findings and recommendations of HMIP Inspection of Youth Offending Services
- **Educational attainment**
To review academic attainment for 2019/20 academic year and work to drive improvement
- **Discussion with local academy trusts about city wide and/or academy specific issues**
- **Take up of Early Years Entitlement**
To review action being taken to increase the take up of Early Years Entitlement with a focus on awareness of opportunities and cultural issues
- **Portfolio Holder Scrutiny Sessions**

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