

# Nottingham City Council

## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held remotely via Zoom and livestreamed on the Council's YouTube Channel - <https://www.youtube.com/user/NottCityCouncil> on 26 November 2020 from 10.00 am - 12.15 pm

### Membership

#### Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)  
Councillor Maria Joannou  
Councillor Jane Lakey  
Councillor Chantal Lee  
Councillor AJ Matsiko  
Councillor Salma Mumtaz (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos

#### Absent

Councillor Maria Watson

### Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People  
Councillor David Mellen - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Schools and Communications  
Helen Blackman - Director of Children's Integrated Services  
John Dexter - Education Services  
Wilf Fearon - Head of Service for Early Years  
Nick Lee - Director of Education Service  
Jenny Millhouse - Youth Justice Service  
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People  
Jane Garrard - Senior Governance Officer

### 15 Apologies for absence

Councillor Maria Watson (personal)

### 16 Declarations of Interests

None

### 17 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 September 2020 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

## **18 Youth Justice Service Inspection**

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services, and Wilf Fearon, Head of Service for Early Years spoke to the Committee about the work taking place to respond to the findings and recommendations of Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Prisons Inspection of Youth Justice Services. They highlighted the following information:

- a) The full joint inspection of the Youth Justice Service was carried out in December 2019.
- b) The Service was rated as 'Requires Improvement' and six recommendations were made for improvement. Three of those recommendations were directed at the Youth Justice Service Board and three were directed at the Youth Justice Service Heads of Service.
- c) The Inspection found that the delivery of statutory work was strong with a lot of positive aspects that were making a difference to the lives of young people. The focus of the recommendations was on Out of Court Disposals and young people on the edge of criminality.
- d) The recommendations directed to the Board related to services being based on an assessment of individual needs; and relatively high numbers of very young people known to the Service and how those young people can be supported without entering the justice system unnecessarily. In response to the incidence of knife crime in the City, the Police, in partnership, had developed a robust response to all knife-related incidents and the Inspection Report recommended that this 'one size fits all' approach was not appropriate and should be stepped back from. There was also a recommendation about work with victims and a focus on restorative justice.
- e) The recommendations directed to Heads of Service related to staff access to clinical supervision; the approach of using mandatory intervention while promoting a trauma-informed approach; seeking the views of children and young people; and improving quality assurance processes and management oversight.
- f) An Improvement Plan was developed to address the six recommendations from the Inspection, in addition to a requirement for the Board to review the existing Youth Justice Service Management Board Action Plan.
- g) The Management Board is chaired by the Corporate Director for People and involves a range of partners including Education, Police and Probation Services. The Board oversees the implementation of the Action Plan.
- h) An Out of Court Disposal Protocol has been agreed, which includes a revised approach to dealing with knife crime incidents and improved quality assurance and oversight processes.
- i) The Out of Court Disposal Panel has become more multi-agency with involvement of Play and Youth Services, Police, Education, Health and Social

Care colleagues. These colleagues have input into the assessments carried out and the planning of interventions.

- j) A review of assessment tools, with a focus on the wellbeing and safety of young people has been carried out and intervention plans are now completed alongside the assessment process.
- k) Data on engagement with very young people is now reported to the Youth Justice Board so that they can analyse the data and the work taking place.
- l) It has been well-known that young people from Black, Asian and Ethnic Minority (BAME) communities are disproportionately represented in the youth justice system and this is now a focus of work alongside Nottinghamshire Police.
- m) The approach towards victims and the use of restorative justice is being reviewed. Consideration was given to commissioning an external provider but the Service is now confident that internal staff can take the lead on this and be trained to operate at the Quality Mark level. Discussions are also taking place about victim care services that are commissioned by the Police and Crime Commissioner for Nottinghamshire.
- n) The Service was one of the first Services nationally to provide clinical supervision for staff, with additional funding made available by the Youth Justice Board due to the number of serious incidents that staff had had to deal with. Therefore, it was surprising that access to clinical supervision was identified as an area for improvement. Ongoing training has been embedded and there are processes in place to ensure this is sustained and access to supervision is available when needed. There will need to be additional funding to sustain this going forward. The Wellbeing Policy has been approved by the Youth Justice Board and there is a staff member on the Board to contribute to the review of policy.
- o) Work is taking place to improve the ways in which the views of children and young people are captured, for example rolling out ipads to provide access to timely and simple electronic surveys. The standard Youth Justice Board assessment tool is also used to get views and feedback about user experience of the service. The Management Board is looking at how feedback gathered is used to inform service delivery.

Jenny Millhouse, Case Manager in the Youth Justice Service, spoke to the Committee about her views of the Service and its impact on the lives of young people who experience it. She gave anonymised examples of how the Out of Court Disposal process can support young people to address the issues in their lives e.g. by helping them access educational opportunities and get support from social care to address challenges with their family situation. She also spoke about how the Service supports young people who are defendants in court and their families through the process and in the way forward for their future. She highlighted the following information:

- p) Good working relationships between key partners such as social care, education and the Police are important and can make a real difference to the quality of service.

- q) The Service is focused on changing lives so that young people have a better future, with opportunities for education and employment that help protect them from dangerous influences.
- r) It is important to remember that many offenders are victims themselves and involvement with organised adult networks can have implications for safeguarding, hope and ambition by those young people. In this context, the challenge from the Inspection to have an individual trauma-informed approach is appropriate.

In response to questions from the Committee and in the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- s) The Service accepts the comments made in the Inspection report, considers it to be a fair outcome and acknowledges that there are areas for improvement, for example ensuring a response to individual need.
- t) The Youth Justice Service has a 'whole family' approach, including looking at siblings who may need support and/or whether parenting support is required. Assessments also look at other factors affecting a young person's life such as whether they have recourse to public funds, access to welfare support and housing.
- u) The Out of Court Disposals Panel is multi-agency and looks for opportunities for positive interventions e.g. through the Play and Youth Service to divert young people from the path that they were on. Case Managers are aware of what is available in their local area and knowledge of individual staff members is communicated within teams.
- v) It is acknowledged that partners, with their differing roles and functions, have differences of perspective on achieving a balance between safeguarding and support. The challenge is for partners to work together to make the right decisions in the interests of young people. An example of this is the recently approved Out of Court Disposals Protocol that was a challenge to get agreement on but has been achieved.
- w) For the last year, the number of Out of Court Disposals was higher than numbers for statutory interventions through the Court process. In previous years it has been the opposite and this is a positive shift to focus on more preventative work.
- x) The Youth Justice Service is funded by a grant from the Youth Justice Board and partner contributions. As the grant has fallen in recent years there has been a need to restructure staffing. There has also been a drive to better align the Service with other service areas and the Head of Service responsible for the Service is also responsible for Play and Youth Services and mental health support to try and achieve a joined-up system for early response work.
- y) The Service is managing with current staffing levels. During the Covid-19 pandemic, numbers of young people coming through the system have been

lower than the 18 months before but it anticipated that the number of cases will rise as lockdown eases.

- z) The number of permanent exclusions from schools is a challenge due to the links between permanent exclusion and offending.
- aa) Feedback is sought all the time but it is recognised that some young people are not ready to give feedback and that feedback is often influenced by the outcomes for that young person and not only the support they have received.
- bb) It is difficult to compare the Service with similar services in other areas because data isn't always reported in the same way.
- cc) Action is being taken to improve leadership of the Service and this work had commenced prior to the Inspection. The Board has explored 'what makes a good Board' and is working to implement this. This has included ongoing training and development sessions for the Board and expanding the Board's membership. Changes are also being made to the performance reporting to the Board to ensure that the Board has oversight of the key issues e.g. ensuring that they are sighted on disproportionality related to BAME young people. The Director of Integrated Services expressed the view that she was confident that the Inspectorate would take a different view if it looked at the Service now but this is an area for continuing improvement.
- dd) The Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People confirmed that she was satisfied that the feedback from the Inspection had been taken seriously, an Action Plan has been developed and the Board is robustly monitoring progress against the Action Plan.

Based on the evidence available to it, the Committee concluded that it was satisfied with the progress that had been made so far and the plans for further improvement to address the recommendations arising from the Inspection.

Having heard about the importance of the Youth Justice Service closely aligning to Play and Youth Services to ensure that there are appropriate opportunities to divert lower level offenders to and that there is sufficient knowledge within the Service about making referrals, the Committee decided to explore the provision of Play and Youth Services and how effectively that is targeted to support young people most in need of diversion and intervention at a future meeting.

## **19 Scrutiny of Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People**

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, gave a presentation about progress against objectives within the Council Plan 2019 to 2023 that relate to children and young people. She highlighted the following information:

- a) Out of the 11 commitments relating to children and young people, nine are on track to be achieved and two are currently not on track and rated as 'amber'.
- b) Some of the key highlights from Quarter 1 include the continuation of recruitment of foster carers with 11 new carers recruited in Quarter 1 and 18 applicants at the

assessment stage; continuation of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library with 5603 children registered with Scheme and 260,819 books delivered up to July 2020; and continuation of early intervention and prevention programmes during the Covid-19 pandemic. Most Children's Centre buildings had to close in response to the Covid-19 restrictions but support moved online quickly and during Quarter 1 Early Help Services delivered 237 virtual advice/ support sessions and 21 virtual parenting groups.

- c) The commitments to protect frontline social workers and assessment and consultation for children with poor mental health from cuts have been maintained, and the Covid-19 pandemic has demonstrated the need for mental health support for children and young people.
- d) There has been activity to support new mums to breastfeed for longer. There is still work to do with businesses on this, although that has been challenging during the Covid-19 restrictions.
- e) Support for parents to look after their children at home has continued during the pandemic through the Early Help Team and Priority Families Team and the Council has received funding to continue this work.
- f) The Covid-19 pandemic has made the target for at least 75% of eligible 2 year olds to access free nursery provision more challenging to achieve. Issues include that some settings are not open/ not full open due to Covid restrictions; some parents have lost their jobs or are working at home as a result of the pandemic and therefore do not feel that they need to send their child to nursery; and some families do not feel that it is safe to send their child to nursery in the current circumstances. This is concerning. There will be targeted campaigns about the importance of early years provision for child development, socialisation and school readiness.
- g) Going forward, many of the challenges relate to dealing with and mitigating the impact of Covid-19 on young people, their families and service provision.

In response to questions from the Committee and in subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- h) A cost-benefit analysis is being carried out to look at balancing the costs of supporting the Fostering Panel to reduce delays and avoid loss of potential foster carers compared with potential reduced numbers of foster carers.
- i) The caseloads of social workers working in child protection are monitored as part of the quality assurance process. However, looking at the average caseload can be misleading because the caseloads of newly qualified social workers are protected at 10 and therefore can mask the higher caseloads of other, more senior colleagues. The average caseload is 14-15 but because the caseloads of newly qualified social workers are protected, the majority of caseloads are up to 18. There are a few caseloads of 19/20 and a handful of caseloads over 20 (the majority of which are in the early/ mid 20s). Once caseloads reach the high 20s they become unmanageable.

- j) There are currently 29-32 agency social workers which equates to 15-16% of the workforce. The Service does not want lots of different agency workers coming in and out of the Service as that is disruptive, but in many cases agency workers are some of the most qualified and experienced workers. The pay model has recently changed and there is now more stability in retention. There are currently 12 permanent vacancies but they have nearly all been recruited to. Recruitment of newly qualified social workers has temporarily stopped until there is space for these roles as others progress. There are some temporary gaps filled with agency workers as a result of things such as maternity cover and staffing gaps as a result of Covid-19. The Service is currently fully staffed using a range of permanent and agency staff. The Director of Children's Integrated Services commented that, in terms of staffing, the Service is in the best position it has been in for a number of years.

## **20 Impact of Covid-19 on education and attainment**

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder with responsibility for schools, Nick Lee, Director of Education Services and John Dexter, Education, gave a presentation about the current position with schools and education in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. They highlighted the following information:

- a) As term has gone on more and more children are being sent home from school to self-isolate. In the previous week (w/e 20 November 2020), 33 city schools were reporting partial closure due to Covid-19, affecting 51 pupil year groups. There were a total of 2367 pupils self-isolating as a result, which is approximately 5% of city pupils.
- b) Cases of Covid-19 in the City are currently falling in all age groups apart from those aged 12-17 years and this is unsurprising when schools are being expected to operate in a normal way.
- c) Before half term schools also had issues with having sufficient staff to stay open and a close watch is being kept on this.
- d) Attendance at school has been affected. Attendance has been better in the second half term so far than in October, but this may change. Attendance rates are a long way short of what is desirable and this situation adds to the pressure on pupils. The Council is working closely with families to ensure that no one uses this as an excuse not to send their children to school when they need to be there and can be there. Data shows that children with special needs and children open to school care have attendance lower than the average and this is concerning.
- e) School leaders have raised a range of issues including school budgets, as more supply staff are required and this is reflective of challenges in ensuring staffing levels; learning gaps and risks of losing achievements in improving standards, including the impact on the mental health of young people and how this affects learning; and providing remote blended learning. These issues accord with the findings of the Inspectorate visits to schools in October. Ofsted is not doing routine inspections and making judgements at this time, but are still going into schools. Informal conversations about their findings have been full of praise for

headteachers and their teams. Currently, Ofsted is still looking to come back to schools in January and this prospect is putting schools under pressure.

- f) It is difficult for learning to continue in a smooth way if teachers are absent from school and temporary staff need to be brought in. This can affect rates of progress. The research shows that disadvantaged children returned to school in September with the largest gaps in learning.
- g) Schools are waiting for a Government announcement about assessments and it would be good for schools to have certainty about this.
- h) Families may be trying to manage learning at home with one device between multiple children and this can be difficult. The Government has not delivered on its promises about the provision of hardware. Vodafone has provided 1500 sim cards to Nottingham Schools Trust (NST) and has recently announced that it will be providing 25,000 sim cards across the country. This is helping to address connectivity issues. Training is also taking place with NST and Greenwood Academy Trust to exploit online learning platforms to best advantage.
- i) The Government has announced that it will support families with food over the Christmas holidays. The Council is now looking at how best to support schools to support families entitled to free school meals – ideally this will be through a voucher system.
- j) One positive thing that has come out of the current situation is the close working between Education and Social Care colleagues to support vulnerable children. If a vulnerable child is not in school for more than three days, their social worker is informed and they will work with the school to make sure that the child is ok.

In response to questions from Committee members and during subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- k) It is understood that the National Education Union has called for schools to close a week earlier at the end of term. A balance needs to be found between the schools' workforce and the impact on working parents including keyworkers. In addition, children have already had many weeks out of school this year and for education and safeguarding reasons, children need schools to stay open.
- l) A voucher scheme is the most appropriate and straightforward method for supporting families entitled to free school meals during the school holiday periods.
- m) There are currently 383 live cases of home education in the City which is approximately 90 more than same time last year and previous years. This needs close attention, with the support of social care colleagues.

## **21 Work Programme**

The Committee noted its work programme for the remainder of 2020/21.