

## **NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL**

### **CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES of the meeting held remotely via Zoom on 28 January 2021 from 10am – 11.52am**

#### **Membership**

##### Present

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

##### Absent

Councillor AJ Matsiko  
Councillor Maria Watson

#### **Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:**

Councillor Cheryl Barnard - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People  
Wilf Fearon - Head of Early Help Services  
Nicholas Lee - Director of Education Service  
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People  
Councillor David Mellen - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Schools and Communications

Jane Garrard – Senior Governance Officer  
Kim Pocock – Scrutiny Officer

### **22     APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Councillor AJ Matsiko (bereavement) and Councillor Maria Watson (medical appointment).

### **23     DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS**

None.

### **24     MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2020 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

### **25     WORK PROGRAMME**

The Chair agreed to take this item first due to the need to resolve technical issues to enable participation of officers in the Play and Youth Services item.

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

Items were agreed for the March meeting as follows:

- Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse - to review progress in implementing outstanding actions from the action plan
- Children's Integrated Services Improvement Programme - to scrutinise progress in implementation of the Improvement Plan
- Speech, Language and Communication Services - to review support for children and young people with speech, language and communication needs

The Committee will also discuss the work programme for 2021/22 at its March meeting. There is a list of suggestions for consideration on the 2020/21 work programme

## **26 PLAY AND YOUTH SERVICES**

Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People, and Wilf Fearon, Head of Early Help Services spoke to the Committee about the work of Play and Youth Services and how provision is targeted to support those children and young people most in need of support. They highlighted the following information:

- a) The service delivers a whole range of social and recreational activities to children and young people aged 5-16 years. There has been a recent reshaping of the service to look at a more targeted approach to delivery in the light of the available budget and concerns about serious youth violence.
- b) County Lines has been a concern for a while. Those who have had contact with the Police are from a range of ethnic and social backgrounds, but there is limited knowledge about young Asian boys.
- c) The Exploitation and Violence Reduction Hub works with partners to map and understand young people and how to share intelligence and engage with them.
- d) Play and Youth Services delivers activity from a number of venues in three localities, covering the north, south and central city.
- e) Covid has impacted on the Service, for example in quarter 4 last year (January – March 2020) the service had approximately 8,000 attendees. In quarter 3 this year (October – December 2020) this was down to 2,000.
- f) Two members of staff are seconded to the Exploitation and Violence Reduction Hub to ensure closer working and sharing of training and experience.
- g) Other partnership working includes working closely with voluntary groups and Area Based Grant partners, the Youth Justice Services, which has just received a grant for youth work, some of which is being used to develop a detached youth team, which will work closely with Play and Youth Services staff to support the work they are doing with children most at risk across city. The fund will also be used to support other partners to increase their capacity to work with children and young people.
- h) The Youth and Play Service works with children and young people in schools and alternative provision, particularly in the area of knife crime and serious youth

violence, to let them know how they can engage with support and get to know staff.

- i) The Service is also involved in family support work, offering constructive activities and interventions to those referred via targeted youth support.
- j) To ensure that work is aligned with partners, Play and Youth Services staff attend a range of meetings to share and receive information, for example the Child Criminal Exploitation Panel and the Out of Court Disposal Panel.
- k) Joint training is undertaken with partners, including training on young women and gangs, targeted youth work and sexual exploitation.
- l) In full lockdown staff are liaising with children and young people through online activities. Those regarded as vulnerable are seen more often and staff have dropped off resource packs to support them to stay engaged.
- m) The Service doesn't record if a child or young person has been excluded from school unless there is a safeguarding issue.
- n) Staff are trained on signs of safety and how to identify risk and needs. This includes how to build trust and relationships with young people to encourage them to talk should there be a safeguarding concern.
- o) The Service focuses on the child or young person. It does not have a specific whole family approach. If family issues are identified, then staff signpost and/ or refer families to appropriate targeted services.

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

- p) In response to a question about what the Service is doing to reach out to young Asian boys following a stabbing incident in Berridge Ward, it was noted that this is an area where more work is needed. Staff know that they need to work on liaising with Asian communities to attract Asian boys and they are looking at how to do more targeted work.
- q) To try to prevent such incidents as this stabbing, partners are working together. The Youth and Play Service does not have the capacity to do it alone. Area Based Grants (ABG) are used to secure the most appropriate service and this includes activity geared towards this sort of need. There is ongoing consideration to introduce a quality mark as an assurance that the work of ABG partners meets the standards and requirements to achieve agreed outcomes.
- r) It was suggested that youth networks within each area, including partners and residents would be helpful to share intelligence and tackle the challenging issues. This could then be shared across the three areas. This was acknowledged as a good idea by Wilf Fearon, although he expressed concern about the capacity of the service given current proposed budget reductions.

- s) The Play and Youth Services workforce is representative of the community it seeks to work with, but this does not mean that the service can provide all that it would like to. Every member of the workforce is not necessarily skilled to work with specific groups. As well as Asian communities, there are other pockets of the community where the Service needs more knowledge and insight, eg the Somali community. The Service is always mindful of what skills it needs when recruiting, but is also difficult to get into those communities and build relationships.
- t) Play and Youth Services staff are not trained to work with adults and wider families but rather the service is designed to be delivered to 5-16 year olds from specific buildings (when not in lockdown). Wider family events are held so that children and young people and their families can work together. However, targeted family work is carried out by other agencies. Youth and Play Services works closely with other agencies to ensure a joint and holistic approach, for example, the MST (the Multi Systemic Therapy) team will do the therapeutic work but will refer the child or young person to Youth and Play Services to provide additional support. Youth and Play Services is not designed to work with a caseload as other services such as the Youth Justice and Social Care, but is engaged with all services which surround children, young people and their families.
- u) While the Service does collect data, it is difficult to quantify this and there is currently no hard data to measure impact. The Service is also likely to be very different in the near future if the budget reductions are agreed. Evaluating how good the service is and whether it is making sufficient difference will be essential to assess whether activity delivered is working well.
- v) The size of the Play and Youth Service means that it cannot do all of the work it wishes to do. It cannot record exclusions or the assessments which may or may not have taken place in relation to these. There is not the capacity to work more with County Lines on youth violence, so the Service focuses on working the children and young people who attend the Service's centres for both fun as well as targeted work. The service will need to continue to work closely with the Area Based Grant funded voluntary sector to deliver.
- w) The Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Schools and Communications, who was in attendance, noted that, having been a portfolio holder for youth services for over a decade, he has seen the challenge the Play and Youth Service has faced. From when he first started working with youth services the workforce has been reduced from approximately 100 to 30 following several reorganisations; and services are now facing further reductions. This does not mean that the workforce is not doing a good job with children and young people, but roles have been changed so much over time that it has become difficult to define the approach to take.
- x) It was noted that in the light of budget reductions it is even more important to work closely with other organisations to bridge gaps created by reduced capacity.
- y) It was also noted that services need to be designed to avoid duplication in some areas and lack of support in others. When allocating Area Based Grants, the Council should be satisfied that organisations are delivering what is wanted to the standard required.

The Chair thanked Wilf Fearon for his work and recognised the pressures he and colleagues are working under.

**27    SCRUTINY OF PORTFOLIO HOLDER WITH RESPONSIBILITY FOR SCHOOLS**

Councillor David Mellen - Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Schools and Communications, supported by Katherine Underwood and Nicholas Lee, Director of Education Service, gave a presentation about progress against objectives within the Council Plan 2019 to 2023 that relate to children and young people. He highlighted the following information:

- a) Covid has had a significant impact on schools, especially as arrangements have changed several times. Ofsted has stopped inspecting and there are no exams. The Portfolio Holder's report was provided to the Committee in the context that schools are not able to do what they would like to be doing, but are doing amazingly in the light of a lack of internet access and IT equipment. In spite of this, all actions are expected to be rated amber or green, indicating that progress is in the right direction
- b) Highlights include the following:
  - I. breakfast clubs, which were few and far between 10-15 years ago, are now a common feature;
  - II. every child will get a school place, even if not in the location they would prefer, and a new free school, to be run by the Archway Trust, is being built on the former Clarendon site;
  - III. 240 school staff from 80 schools have accessed mental health first aid training.
- c) It is known that the mental health of children and young people has suffered during Covid and the extent of that (including the impact on behaviour) has yet to be established. CAMHS (Children and Adolescent Mental Health Services) podcasts and video training is being provided to equip school staff with the basics.
- d) There has been a decrease in referrals to CAMHS in the current circumstances, but they are beginning to increase again. It is difficult to work in schools on a face to face basis, given the current safety arrangements, so CAMHS staff are having to rely on other methods, which are not always the easiest for children and young people with mental health difficulties.
- e) The aim is to ensure that all children go to a school rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding but inspections have now been paused for a year. The city now has a higher level of such ratings than in the past, but is still not at 100%.
- f) There has been a reduction in exclusions, influenced to some extent by Covid. Close working is ongoing with the small number of schools which have the highest proportion of permanent exclusions. Engagement is taking place on a number of different levels, including portfolio holder conversations with the school Head/ Trust Director. If some schools with a mixed catchment are able to achieve low levels of exclusions, it means that all schools should be able to manage this.

Exclusion often solves issues for the school, but not for the child/ young person and their family. Unofficial exclusions should never happen, eg asking the child/ young person not to attend at certain times. Schools are being asked to sign up to a pledge not to use permanent exclusions. The local authority can only try to influence schools they are not responsible for, but the portfolio holder was pleased to report that nine schools have signed up to the pledge so far.

- g) Work is ongoing to close the gap in achievement, but without any GCSE exams there is no current progress to report.
- h) Areas where performance requires more work include:
  - i. attendance, which is another area difficult to assess during Covid. The ideal would be to get both primary and secondary school children back as soon as possible;
  - ii. potential budget reductions to the Education Welfare Service and the Education Improvement Board;
  - iii. support to children and young people with additional needs in mainstream schools; and
  - iv. tackling holiday hunger.
- i) The majority of schools are very inclusive. The School's Forum has recently considered the budget to fund higher support needs. The majority of children with special needs are supported in mainstream schools, with a small number in special schools. The authority is committed to keeping children with additional needs on main sites, going to school with their friends, wearing the same uniform, etc, and will increase funding as it becomes available. Some work has been delayed by Covid, eg where a physical extension or other building work is required.
- j) The national holiday hunger campaign has added value to local work and the hope is that there will be a commitment from the Government to continue the voucher scheme. Work is still ongoing to extend free school meals to all primary school children; a green rated expected outcome may be a bit ambitious.
- k) Attendance data shows that since the key worker definition has been extended in this lockdown 67% of children in school in January are those of key workers. There are 5,760 children in schools, which remain busy places during lockdown. Compared with lockdown 1, the number of all children attending schools has increased by 5,080. Of the total number of children in schools in January, 3,777 are children of critical workers and 744 are vulnerable children.
- l) 317 vulnerable children (7%) are unable to be placed due to the limits imposed by Covid safety requirements. In line with national decisions, the children of key workers are accommodated first, but the authority is discussing this with schools.
- m) The authority distributed 1200 laptops, tablets and data dongles to vulnerable children in March – July 2020. This was not sufficient to meet all need so distribution was prioritised. However, a deal was brokered with Vodaphone for a free, unlimited offer for all pupils identified by schools. During the second phase

(September to date) there has been a national roll out from all of the main operators (BT EE O2, Three etc.). Schools can now order devices directly following an audit of families. Most households now have a device, but the concern is that where there are multiple children in a household, access to a single device may remain limited. Work on developing the best use of online learning continues.

- n) At 26 January 2021 a total of 457 children of statutory school age and 101 pre-school children were self-isolating due to Covid (either because they had Covid or had been in contact with someone with Covid). There has been a decrease in numbers in self-isolation compared with previous weeks.

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

- o) Children and young people with no recourse to public funds (eg due to immigration delays) can still attend school and will be provided with necessary internet access and equipment as for other children, if needed. NEST (Nottingham Education Sanctuary Team) provides for children of asylum seeker and refugee families. Young people in their mid-teens can attend College Street where there is a welcome programme to support them with language, dealing with the trauma of settling in a new country etc.
- p) In response to a question about his view on the return to schools and vaccination, the Portfolio Holder agreed that vaccination of the school workforce is vital to bring schools back, but the difficulty is that there are lots of vulnerable staff who work with the public, all of whom are making a case for early vaccination. In his opinion, there is a case for vaccinating staff of special schools where medical care is part of their role. In terms of returning to school, the Government has to balance the 100,000+ deaths in the country against the prospect of schools being places where the virus can be passed on, not just in school, but also on the journey to and from school. In addition, the number of a-symptomatic cases has to be balanced against the need to get children back to school as soon as we possibly can. This is a difficult decision to make.
- q) Closing the gap for those who have not been able to engage with online learning (whatever the reason), is very important. These children will need to be identified as quickly as possible. They cannot be expected to just pick up from where they left off and will need to feel safe when back at school. Children did settle back quickly in September, but there were some fears from children and from staff too.
- r) Conversations are ongoing with headteachers. There is a lot of anxiety around the impact on younger children. If a child's experience of the first stages of early education are impacted severely, there is a lot of catching up to do. In terms of the authority's responsibilities, work is primarily with primary and special schools but there are discussions taking place with secondary schools. The approach needs to be holistic to meet all needs and this will involve more than a rigorous regime of learning, ie there will need to be attention paid to mental health and emotional wellbeing, as well as supporting the narrowing of the attainment gap. There will be a range of additional support available but the detail of this has not

yet been provided to local authorities or schools. The disruption and stop-start nature of changes has resulted in a challenging weight of pressure and expectation on school staff, who will need to be supported in the overall recovery programme.

- s) In terms of longer term attainment objectives, Ofsted ratings are not the same as educational outcomes and attainment figures remain concerning, particularly for specific groups, including white working class boys and Gypsy/ Roma traveller children. The authority's powers to intervene in secondary schools has been much reduced, but work is ongoing with the Regional School Commissioner and to build relationships with academy headteachers, a number of whom have worked in the city for a long time and who remain committed to city children doing as well as they possibly can. The city's primary schools are moving up the attainment table. They were at the bottom of all schools when the City Council inherited responsibility for Education in 1998 and are now in the mid-range, comparing well with areas that have lower levels of deprivation.
- t) Achieving stability in the workforce, understanding what children in schools face and changing the low expectations of Nottingham children is a long term task, but one which must be tackled as education is the key to lifetime chances. The measure of 5 GSCEs is narrow but is key – without it success may be more difficult.
- u) In terms of outcomes, while still low, the direction of travel is in the right direction and what can be seen currently in primary schools is beginning to translate into their transfer into secondary schools. Some primary school children are making progress in the top 10-15 % in the country. Secondary schools are also raising attainment levels.
- v) The Archway Trust free school bid has been supported by the local authority on the basis of their commitment to Nottingham children and the growth of their leadership, who are based in and have experience of Nottingham. There are real signs of improvement and progress, but there is still a need to challenge the Regional Schools Commissioner who has responsibility for performance management for the secondary schools in the city. The local authority has an academies cause and concern process, whereby concerns (eg academic performance, inclusion, exclusion) can be escalated by notifying the Portfolio Holder and on to the Regional Schools Commissioner.
- w) The authority is aware of the issues of under attainment by white working class boys and other groups. This is a frustration for the authority as it does not have a direct role in what academies deliver. It has been easier to influence academies in relation to exclusions as the authority has a statutory responsibility for managing exclusions and, therefore, has the staff capacity for this specific work. Data on under attainment is presented to the Education Improvement Board but several academies are not based in Nottingham and have their own ethos and ethics.

- x) The Committee agreed to invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to a future meeting to discuss a range of issues of concern in relation to schools within the Commissioner's remit.

The Chair of the Committee recorded her thanks for the amazing job currently being carried out by teachers in Nottingham schools.