

# Nottingham City Council

## Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 20 March 2023 from 2.02 pm - 3.20 pm

### Membership

#### Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)  
Councillor Merlita Bryan  
Councillor Eunice Campbell-Clark  
Councillor Jay Hayes  
Councillor Phil Jackson  
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)  
Councillor Georgia Power

#### Absent

Councillor Salma Mumtaz  
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos  
Councillor Andrew Rule

### Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Dr Melanie Bracewell	- NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board
Mike Carey	- Governance Officer
Mary-Anne Cosgrove	- Head of Children in Care, Care Leavers and Children's Regulated Services
Colette Elliot-Cooper	- Interim Service Manager, Children in Care and Care Leavers
Lee Kimberley	- Head of Nottingham Catering
David Johns	- Consultant in Public Health
Jon Rea	- Engagement and Participation Lead Officer
Patrick Skeete	- Representation and Complaints Manager

### 36 Apologies for absence

Councillor Andrew Rule – personal

Aila Barr  
Peter Ireson  
Nick Lee  
John Matravers  
Lynn Pearce  
Alison Platkiw  
Jane Richardson  
Audrey Taylor  
Catherine Underwood

### **37 Declarations of Interests**

In the interests of transparency Councillor Georgia Power stated that she works for the Children's Society. This did not prevent Councillor Power from taking part in the discussion.

### **38 Minutes**

The Board agreed the minutes of the meeting held on 16 January 2023 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

### **39 Children in Care Social Care complaints**

Patrick Skeete, Representation and Complaints Manager, presented the report on Children in Care Social Care complaints. The following points were highlighted:

- (a) this report specifically concerns complaints made by young people in their own right, not complaints made by parents or others on their behalf. This allows a focus on the experiences of young people themselves;
- (b) there are inherent barriers for young people seeking to make complaints about the people and services that provide care for them, and it can be demanding for young people so follow the statutory process, so it is crucial to make the complaints process as accessible and comfortable as possible;
- (c) children and young people in care can make complaints by a number of methods: over the internet, by phone, or email. The Complaints team have a dedicated mobile that young people can text or call. They can also use an advocacy service, such as the Children's Society;
- (d) the team are currently redesigning the leaflets which inform young people about the complaints process, and are looking at engagement and participation from young people to inform the design and make it user-friendly;
- (e) Colette Elliot-Cooper, interim Service Manager for Children in Care and Care Leavers, has recently introduced face-to-face meetings with young people who submit complaints, which helps to inform the response to complaints and avoid escalation. This gives young people a response relatively quickly, with meetings held within around five days, compared to the statutory twenty days response time;
- (f) the team are taking a pragmatic approach, actively resolving complaints and meeting desired outcomes as soon as possible, rather than putting young people through the protracted complaints processes. By actively engaging with the young person at an early stage, the team help to avoid escalation to the second stage of the complaints process, which can take three months and includes an independent investigation;

- (g) it is recognised that some individual young people are the source of quite a lot of complaints, and there are examples of this in the report. It is important to note that in these examples, all the complaints were resolved within 24 hours. The team do not want young people to feel uncomfortable making multiple complaints, and each complaint is considered on its own merits;
- (h) it would be useful to clarify with the Board how much information they would like to be included in further reports, to ensure that the reports are as useful as they can be to the Board.

In the discussion which followed and in response to questions from the Board, the following points were made:

- (i) Members expressed support for the co-design approach to creating leaflets advertising the complaints service to children and young people;
- (j) a Member reported feedback from young people that they are unhappy that Mind of My Own is no longer used;
- (k) the majority of complaints are resolved locally and quickly, and the team aim to address them within 24 hours where possible rather than running to the end of statutory timescales. Some of these complaints can be simple differences of opinion rather than issues with services, and when a lot of these are submitted by a few individuals it can skew the figures. 11 of 31 complaints in the last two reports were submitted by the same individual and were resolved quickly. The key goal is to maintain relationships, and ensure that the young person is comfortable to stay in the environment after making their complaint, and that they would still be comfortable to make another complaint if they felt they wanted to;
- (l) officers clarified that, when children and young people request an escalation of their complaint to Stage 2, the Council has up to 65 working days to arrange an independent investigation and respond. This can feel like a long time to a young person, so the team is committed to taking a pragmatic approach and avoiding escalation wherever possible. Only one complaint has been taken to Stage 2 and the individual young person was supported through the process;
- (m) two of the examples state that the children 'remain unhappy' after the end of the complaints process. Officers advised that work continued to support these individuals after the end of the complaints process to move towards a resolution;
- (n) Members felt it would be useful for reports to address particular themes that arise throughout the year. In this report, the main theme appears to be young people making complaints when they did not have clarity on what their next steps were. Officers advised that there are nine discrete themes for complaints set by national guidance, and noted that this would be useful for future reports;

- (o) in the previous report there were a couple of complaints from young people around the recommendation that they return to their birth parents, when they did not want to. Officers confirmed that individual circumstances are taken into account, and it is recognised that the traditionally understood best outcome may not be the best for all young people;
- (p) Members felt it would be useful to see feedback on how complaints have led to changes in policy. It is important that young people see that they can make a difference and change how the services that affect them are delivered, so they can enjoy a sense of agency and participation;
- (q) Officers noted that the team are increasing capacity in the Independent Reviewing Officer service. The Independent Reviewing Officers meet the children and young people frequently between reviews and provide a robust challenge to services;
- (r) the team look at each case and determine any reasonable adjustments needed to ensure fair access. This could be working with appropriate advocacy services where young people speak different languages, for instance. Members noted that it might be useful to discuss equity of access to the complaints process at a future Board meeting, to look at children and young people who may struggle to make a complaint in the first place, for example, due to being outside of the City or lacking confidence to make a complaint;
- (s) for children and young people who may lack confidence to submit complaints themselves, often the carers and foster carers will be assertive on their behalf. The Independent Review Officers will also act as the young people's voice, and colleagues in education or health will also identify issues. Every school has a designated lead teacher, who will discuss issues with the authority as they would any parent;
- (t) a Member noted that a lot of the complaints related to private residential homes. There are a number of ways that concerns about private residential placements can be addressed, such as OFSTED, the Quality Assurance Officers who complete spot checks with external providers, and Contracts Officers who challenge external providers if there are concerns about the service. If a residential children's home falls from Good to Requires Improvement, officers would complete a comprehensive report to investigate if it is still an appropriate provider.

**Resolved to note the report on Children in Care Social Care complaints.**

#### **40 Quarter 3 2022-23 (Oct-Dec) performance**

Mary-Ann Cosgrove, Head of Children in Care, Care Leavers & Children's Regulated Services, outlined the performance data as of 31 December 2022 and highlighted the following points:

- (a) it is positive to see the dentistry figures improving, as it is a national challenge. Paediatric dentistry is important of reasons of health, self-esteem, and the avoidance of pain. There is some innovative work in the West Midlands that officers would like to see implement in Nottingham. The first priority is to get children and young people their own dentist, and the team are looking at pathways for children when this is not possible;
- (b) the service delivered a joint paper with the Integrated Care Board to the Improvement Board in January, looking at the challenges around health. Initial health assessments figures have improved this month, as have reviews. Performance is improving but this is variable, and there are remaining challenges;
- (c) a lot of work has been ongoing to increase the amount of foster carers, such as the 100 Homes Campaign. Councillors have been helping the team get the message to communities, and there is a marketing budget to help attract new foster carers;
- (d) transformation work is underway to look at how the Council utilises and retains its carers. There is a new team with six specialist workers and a team leader, who will be highly trained to support carers to deliver trauma-informed parenting, and an out of hours service will be started soon so calls do not have to go to the emergency duty team;
- (e) the data shows an increase in children in care with three or more placement moves within the last twelve months. That is due to data cleansing;
- (f) adoption rates have just exceeded last year's figure, and may rise further. This is despite challenges in the court system getting dates for adoption hearings, and a change to give children longer introductions;
- (g) transformation work is underway to look at reducing admissions to care and increasing discharges from care, to prevent children and young people being in the care system unless they need to be;
- (h) education, employment and training has dropped, though it is still a good performance. The service will be recruiting a tutor for post-18-21 year olds who have missed out on education, along with mental health workers and other posts to help with accommodation.

In the discussion which followed and in response to questions from the Board, the following points were made:

- (i) at the moment the data shows the most recent quarter and the previous quarter for comparison. A Member suggested it would be useful to include data from the previous quarter as well, to show where movement is a one-off and when it indicates a trend;

- (j) NHS England previously flagged up access to dentistry for children and young people in care as a key concern in the City. Work has started alongside NHS England to make improvements based on the West Midlands model, once this is embedded a report can be delivered to the Board at a future meeting;
- (k) the drop for education, employment and training is concerning, especially compared to statistical neighbours such as Barnsley and Leicester. This is a combination of a large number coming into care at 16, and the high exclusion rate in the City for all children. The new tutor for ages 18 to 21 should help address this, and work is being undertaken by the educational psychologist service to build relationships with schools;
- (l) Nottingham City Children's services received an 'inadequate' OFSTED rating last year, which indicates systemic challenges. A lot of investment is going into trauma-informed support for children and young people in care, and fieldwork can help make quick improvements, but it is important to recognise there will be children and young people who have been in the service for years when it may not have been focused in the right way;
- (m) a Member recently met with the new head of Bulwell Academy, and was reassured about exclusion rates. There is early intervention for children in care when they become at risk of exclusion. The Board agreed a recommendation to Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee to look at exclusions;
- (n) there is also a concern with the lack of alternative provision places, meaning excluded children are out of education for longer.

**Resolved to:**

- 1) request that reports include data from the two previous quarters alongside the most recent quarter;**
- 2) request that a report on access to dentistry for children and young people in care is prepared for a future meeting, once the approach based on the West Midlands model is embedded;**
- 3) recommend that Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee look into exclusions.**

#### **41 Children in Care Council update**

Jon Rea, Engagement and Participation Lead Officer, delivered the verbal update on the Children in Care Council. The following points were highlighted:

- (a) the Children in Care Council and the Board are jointly developing a number of pledges that the Board can make to children and young people in care. There was a charter previously, but this is due to be refreshed. The aim is genuine coproduction involving children and young people, professionals, and elected Members;

- (b) it is hoped that these will not be large, abstract promises, but promises with substance, in terms of what is deliverable within the resources of the Board and its partners;
- (c) there was a successful session held at Bulwell Riverside recently, which included the Chair of the Board, officers, social workers, and children and young people. The session was used to start work on what these pledges might be;
- (d) there will be an informal session after the Board meeting to continue this work, and then a further session with the Children in Care Council in the Whitsun half-term. The issue will then be brought back to the Board in summer, and by October half-term there will be agreed pledges to launch and celebrate;
- (e) there is a lot good practice on this. For example, Essex have a series of pledges to communicate their ambitions to make sure young people in care are respected and valued, and that their needs are met. Local authorities communicate pledges in different ways, and Worcester provides an example of good communication;
- (f) so far, the project has defined five key areas:
  - i. a happy and healthy life, with support available when needed;
  - ii. a safe place to live, with high quality care;
  - iii. support to achieve in school and college, and to progress into jobs and careers;
  - iv. support around essential life skills and personal development;
  - v. support to develop trusting relationships and friendships, and to keep in touch with family and friends wherever possible;
- (g) the important thing is to link these broad areas to tangible pledges, for example, pledging to ensure that all young people in care get a high quality work experience placement;
- (h) in addition to the pledges, there are value statements that the Board can make, such as:
  - i. the Board will listen to what children have to say;
  - ii. the Board will promise to act on what children say;
  - iii. the Board will celebrate achievements;
  - iv. the Board will show that it cares, and that safety and care needs are put first;
  - v. the Board will strive to do its best, as will all social workers and partners;
- (i) the Children in Care Council have a summer social at Trent Bridge planned. In the meantime it will follow a working group approach, with children and young people joining on Teams to help plan events.

In the discussion which followed and in response to questions from the Board, the following points were made:

- (j) the most important element of this exercise will be linking the broad pledges to concrete actions that make a tangible and measurable difference;
  
- (k) A Board Member requested action from the Board to make sure the motion passed by the Council to treat all people with care experience as if they have a protected characteristic is communicated across Council services and to partner organisations to invite them to follow the example.

**Resolved to note the Children in Care Council update.**

**Resolved for the Chair of the Board to write to the Chief Executive and ask him to write to partner organisations to publicise the motion that all people with care experience should be treated as if they have a protected characteristic.**