

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Ground Floor Committee Room, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 28 July 2022 from 10.00 am - 12.10 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)
Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Phil Jackson

Absent

Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Georgia Power

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Declan Barker	- Project Manager, Holiday Activity Fund
Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools
Jennifer Hardy	- Programme Manager, Holiday Activity Fund
Nick Lee	- Director of Education
Graham Moran	- Chief Executive, Nottingham Forest Community Trust
Matt Smith	- Marketing and Communications, Nottingham Forest Community Trust
Karen Smith	- Evolve Nottingham
Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer

9 Committee Membership Change

The Committee noted that Councillor Nayab Patel had been removed as a member of the Committee.

10 Apologies for absence

Councillor AJ Matsiko – personal
Councillor Georgia Power - personal
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos - leave

11 Declarations of Interest

None

12 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2022 as an accurate record and they were signed by the Chair.

13 Holiday Activity Fund

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools, Nick Lee, Director of Education, Jennifer Hardy, Programme Manager, and Declan Barker, Project Manager attended the meeting to speak to the Committee about the Holiday Activity Programme. Graham Moran, Chief Executive, and Matt Smith, Marketing and Communications, from Nottingham Forest Community Trust spoke about the role of the Trust as lead partner, supported by Karen Smith from Evolve Nottingham. During their presentation and in response to questions from the Committee the following points were discussed:

- a) The Holiday Activity Fund is provided by the Government to local authorities to provide free holiday activities and food for children and young people eligible for free school meals. 15% of the funding can be used to provide activities and food for other vulnerable groups.
- b) In Nottingham 24 days of delivery is taking place during 2022. The funding is intended to cover the main holiday periods and Government has agreed that, in Nottingham, this can include the October half term which is a two week holiday period for the City.
- c) The funding is allocated to Nottingham Forest Community Trust (NFCT), as lead partner, Area Based Grant leads and through an open bidding process to which schools, local community organisations etc can apply.
- d) Between 2021 and 2022 there was increase in the proportion of funding to Area Based Grant leads reflecting recognition of the importance of providers having local links and local knowledge, and the benefits of provision that links to existing and ongoing activities in local communities to provide continuity for children and families.
- e) The Open Bidding process was advertised through Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service (NCVS), Neighbourhood Managers, mailing lists of organisations that have expressed interest or previously been involved and information was also provided to ward councillors. NFCT offered support to organisations, particularly smaller groups who are likely to have less capacity, with developing and writing bids. As lead partner, NFCT focuses on commissioning local organisations rather than delivery itself and therefore it is important for all organisations to feel involved and engaged.
- f) It is important that good governance processes are followed in the allocation of funding in order to minimise risks and therefore it isn't possible to allocate funding to organisations who didn't meet the criteria, including the deadline for applications.
- g) There has been no negative feedback about the Open Bidding process, although it is acknowledged that organisations may be reluctant to complain about the organisation funding them. It is acknowledged that there are challenges for some community infrastructures in engaging effectively and it is intended to strengthen this through local networks. Evolve Nottingham has set up an independent scrutiny panel to provide a mechanism for grassroots organisations to say what works best for them, to discuss targeting and specialist requests and for them to provide feedback on how things can be improved. There is a budget to

compensate organisations for their involvement with this as it is recognised that voluntary sector organisations can't be asked to do everything for free.

- h) In the first year, the programme was relatively isolated but from this year the ambition is to shape the programme around what is best for Nottingham in the medium to long term with links to youth engagement activity, work to reduce youth crime etc. This is difficult given the tight parameters of what the funding can be used for, which are set by Government. The City is challenging the Government on this, but also looking at levering in resource beyond the Government funding so that the programme can do more and be more sustainable.
- i) There are approximately 45,000 school aged children in the City with 36.7% eligible for free school meals. There is nowhere near enough funding for them all to attend the programme and the Council also recognises that eligibility for free school meals is not necessarily an indicator of need. Therefore, the Council makes full use of the 15% funding for other groups.
- j) The Council has to provide data returns to Government on use of the funding, including who attended the programme. This data is broken down by primary, secondary age, free school meals and special education needs and disability. Providers are asked to indicate the percentage of attendees who are eligible for free school meals, which can be difficult if parents don't declare it.
- k) All providers have places for children and young people with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND), mostly at the lower levels of need. Parents are asked to indicate need and work will then take place to try and meet that need. There has been an increase in budget for SEND specialists from £80,000 in 2021 to £208,000 in 2022, but in 2021 it was very difficult to get suitably qualified people and specific requests were made to reach out to specialist teachers to see if they would be willing to work during the holidays, and the programme is trying to engage link workers who are already embedded in systems. Another factor is transport to activities and this is another reason why provision in local communities close to home is important. NFCT is working with Area Based Grant leads to upskill on SEND provision and the new Project Manager will be working with smaller organisations to offer more in terms of SEND provision.
- l) It is not always appropriate for a child with more complex needs to attend mainstream sessions and therefore some specialist provision is through Special Schools. It is important that parents have confidence in the level and quality of SEND provision and involvement of Special Schools can also help with this, but this relies on them being willing to deliver provision during the holidays when they traditionally would not be operating. One of the challenges is the lack of market for specialist provision particularly for those with complex needs and a bid has been made to the Department for Education to improve the short breaks market, which would help with this.
- m) It is acknowledged that provision for those with SEND is not perfect but the programme is learning on how and where to improve.

- n) It is important that the programme can be sustained beyond the period of Government funding and this requires other sources of funding to be identified. Other funding sources that are not bound by the same Government funding criteria will also enable the programme to be developed to better meet the specific needs of Nottingham. For example, the programme aims to have impact beyond provision of social activities and food, by linking to the work of the Violence Reduction Unit and provision of education and training.
- o) For next year the intention is to map providers and activity sessions to shape the bidding process and try and ensure hot spots and times identified by the Violence Reduction Unit are covered appropriately. At the moment there are nine holiday clubs funded for 168 hours with highly skilled practitioners that specifically target those at risk or involved with anti-social behaviour. Broken Barriers Building Bridges in the City also refer into activities. Feedback from the Violence Reduction Unit will be used to shape the programme strategy going forward.
- p) One of the challenges for the programme is access to venues and facilities. Schools, especially secondary schools that have lots of space, are ideally situated within local communities but some have been reluctant to open up to local communities and/or provide access to facilities for free/ at a price that only covers cost. Any money that is spent on venue hire reduces the amount available for activities and food. Those schools do not seem to recognise the benefits of the programme for their pupils, and also for the schools themselves in terms of the knock-on impacts on pupil engagement and development during the holiday period and the benefits of developing links with the Football Club.
- q) As part of its work, NFCT invests in local facilities for which there is a need, for example the Forest Sports Zone and Birchover Park. It works with large organisations such as the FA, Premier League, Tesco, Wilkos etc to bring in resources to the City. It has a long term presence in the City which will help the programme to be sustainable.
- r) Evolve Nottingham is putting together a programme to upskill local people into employment, for example after school provision, and then support them to also deliver provision as part of the holiday activity programme. One of the aims is to engage a different cohort of people who would not normally be involved.
- s) There is a mix of activities provided as part of the programme including rugby, boxing, creative arts, dance, drama, virtual reality, rock climbing, football, cycling and arts and crafts.
- t) The programme aims to keep every child 'in' and not exclude children or young people from involvement. To this end, providers can receive training on trauma informed practice, sensory integration, ADHD, safeguarding, de-escalation techniques etc, and there is background support available to deal with any situations that arise. The involvement of local organisations experienced in working with young people from the local area and who understand the local need and context will help with this.
- u) The provision of healthy food happens on a huge scale both for consumption during the sessions and also in terms of food hampers with essential items.

From this year the aim is to use Nottingham-based food providers local to the activity venue and support is being given to sandwich shops etc to scale up provision for this period, and potentially throughout the year to provide food for other schemes. Distribution of raw ingredients and prepared food is a significant logistical challenge and social value has been added through the involvement of some ex-forces personnel involved with Nottingham Forest Football Club, who have experience in logistics and have been able to gain employment for this purpose.

- v) The programme is promoted and advertised by NFCT in a variety of ways including direct contact with those who have previously attended; word of mouth; social media; videos; printed flyers; signage at venues; and the provision of marketing and communications material and a toolkit to community organisations help them promote their activities. One of the challenges is effectively targeting older teenagers who can often be reluctant to sign up. There is scope to utilise the 'reach' of Nottingham Forest football players for this. The Council also promotes the programme through ward newsletters, Arrow magazine and directly with schools.
- w) Evolve Nottingham has spoken directly with teams of social workers in the City about the programme and asked them to pass on information about the programme to families that they are working with. Family Support Workers in schools with the highest proportions of children eligible for free school meals have also been asked to encourage families most in need to access the programme. Schools have been asked to identify 'just about managing' families who may benefit from accessing the programme but some schools have been reluctant to do this, and it is acknowledged that there can be a stigma associated with being identified for such programmes. This is one of the reasons why a more universal programme would be better. Committee members suggested that referrals could be taken from local food banks and that ward councillors are likely to know of families in need, although the challenge is that Government funding criteria is that the majority of participants must be eligible for free school meals.
- x) It is acknowledged that the electronic booking system could be a challenge for those with digital access difficulties and the programme tries to be flexible about this and will manually sign up individuals if necessary.
- y) Consideration is being given to creating a dedicated booking site for which eligible and targeted families can be given a code to book on.
- z) Independent evaluation of the programme is taking place. Nottingham Trent University is the lead partner in undertaking the evaluation and will be engaging with children and young people, parents and carers and providers through a range of surveys, visits and focus groups. The findings should be available in 2023.
- aa) Over the short term, plans for development of the programme include looking at what else could usefully be provided for families e.g. English lessons, health and social care provision/ access; developing the voluntary and community sector to be successful in bidding for funding; and developing strategic steering groups in issues such as activities, food, education and SEND.

bb)As Nottingham has now been identified as a Priority Education Investment Area, there is now a place at which Academy Trusts can be held to account on a place-based basis. The development of this programme will be taken to that conversation space.

cc) Over the longer term, plans for the programme include contributing to public health approaches around activities and food; and driving private investment to ensure the programme is sustainable over the long term. Evidence from the independent evaluation will be useful in demonstrating the impact and benefits of investment. Some Committee members raised concern about the potential fickleness of private investment and risks associated with this.

dd)A Committee member suggested that it would be good to do a play celebration event at the end of each summer to celebrate the people and organisations who deliver play and other associated activities each year.

14 Work Programme

The Committee noted its work programme for the remainder of municipal year 2022/23.