

# 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 1 December 2022 from 10.00 am - 12.05 pm

### Membership

#### Present

Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)  
Councillor AJ Matsiko  
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos  
Councillor Maria Watson  
Councillor Georgia Power

#### Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch  
Councillor Phil Jackson  
Councillor Cate Woodward

### Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Ailsa Barr - Director of Children's Integrated Services  
Chad Thompson - Children's Services Transformation Delivery Lead  
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People  
Jane Garrard - Senior Governance Officer

### 22 Chair

In the absence of the Chair, the Vice Chair Councillor Maria Joannou chaired the meeting.

### 23 Change in Committee Membership

The Committee noted that Councillor Sam Gardiner had been appointed as a member of the Committee

### 24 Apologies for absence

Councillor Carole McCulloch – unwell  
Councillor Cate Woodward – other Council business

### 25 Declarations of Interests

None

### 26 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

### 27 Children's Services Transformation Programme

Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People, Ailsa Barr, Director of Children's Integrated Services and Chad Thompson, Children's Services Transformation Delivery Lead, gave a presentation updating the Committee on the progress of the Children's Services Transformation Programme. They highlighted the following information:

- a) The Programme is branded as 'Changing Lives. Changing Futures' and reflects a number of influences including the Together for Nottingham Plan, the Strategic Council Plan and the regulatory framework. The aim is to bring together service development, practice improvement and transformation to ensure sustainably improved services for the City.
- b) There is a coherent programme of improvement covering ten goals: five relating to service development and practice improvement; and five relating to transformation projects.
- c) The goals relating to service development and practice improvement are:
  - i. Goal 1 – A challenge from Ofsted has been that children and families are not always getting the right support at the right time. The aim is to consistently get this right from early help through to significant social work support.
  - ii. Goal 2 – Workforce challenges are not unique to this Council but there needs to be workforce stability where staff are supported to progress as they develop, in order to achieve Goal 1. Part of this will be creating an environment that enables staff to progress.
  - iii. Goal 3 – Managers need to have the opportunity to effectively drive forward plans for improvement as part of the goal to have effective managerial oversight.
  - iv. Goal 4 – Having an effective learning and development offer will contribute to achieving Goals 2 and 3. Staff cannot stand still in their development and need the appropriate skills, knowledge and experience. The Council will also need to create an environment that enables staff to take advantage of the offer.
  - v. Goal 5 – The Service needs to understand and respond to individual need and diversity rather than treating people as a cohort. The Service has talked before about hearing the child's voice but it needs to really consider what this means.
- d) Transformation projects will support service development and practice improvement. The goals relating to transformation are:
  - i. Goal 1 - Supporting children to remain with their families where that is safe and appropriate.
  - ii. Goal 2 - Supporting children to leave care through reunification or Special Guardianship Order where appropriate.
  - iii. Goal 3 - Plans relate to complex situations and often have competing priorities so it is important that the Service ensures ideal outcomes and strong management around plans.
  - iv. Goal 4 – While the Service will prioritise supporting children to stay in the care of their own family where safe and appropriate, some children will require short or long term care. The Service needs to be confident that it is able to identify the right placement if needed. Some needs are

very complex and require residential care but most care can be provided by foster carers, ideally within the City's own resources. A mixed economy of provision is important and therefore the Council is looking to invest in foster care to keep children closer to home and help build positive relationships with those in the City.

- v. Goal 5 – The best models of early help across the country are underpinned by strong partnerships, in recognition that the Council cannot and should not deliver all early help support. Therefore, there is a goal to develop an early help strategy based on stronger partnerships and clearer service design.
- e) Confidence in whether this is delivering sustainably improved outcomes will be gained through feedback from external mechanisms, such as future Ofsted inspections.
- f) The Programme has been scoped through diagnostic work with Newton Europe to follow a child's potential journey through the system, noting that not every child will become a looked after child.
- g) It has been identified that there are four particular opportunities to improve and transform the way that the Service works: children identified as being Children in Need; children with Child Protection Plans; children entering care; and leaving care.
- h) Most children that the Council works with are Children in Need. They will have a plan developed by a social worker and it is important that all stakeholders, including the child if they are old enough, understand that plan and work together to bring it forward. The aim is to meet their needs to a point where they no longer need a plan or a social worker.
- i) Child Protection Plans can only be put in place through a multi-agency process where there is ongoing evidence of significant harm or risk of significant harm. Multi-agency meetings are chaired by an independent child protection chair and the process is governed by statutory guidance. The aim is to provide interventions and support to a point where the child is no longer at risk and the plan can be brought to an end.
- j) For some Children in Need or children with a Child Protection Plan concerns may escalate and they move further along the pathway. Some may reach the point where they can no longer be safely cared for by their own family and so become a Child in Care. The aim is to ensure that support is provided at the earliest opportunity to reduce need and achieve a possible outcome as soon as possible, but it is important that the change is sustainable.
- k) Some children can be safely cared for by their wider kinship and may need short term care before a wider family member is approved as their foster carer. The aim is to provide support to achieve this where possible and progress to a legal outcome for that child to stay with that individual through a Special Guardianship Order if they are unable to return to their parent(s).

- l) Special Guardianship Orders can be particularly relevant when adoption is not appropriate but there is a desire for legal protection and it can also help the child feel less different to their peers because they no longer have to engage with a social worker on the same basis.
- m) It is important that the Service is open-minded to reassessing opportunities for reunification with a child's family throughout their childhood.
- n) For times when things are becoming too difficult for families to manage, it is appropriate to increase the use of edge of care services for support through a particularly challenging period rather than the child coming into care.
- o) One challenge is placement sufficiency and to address this the Council is investing in growing, supporting and retaining its own foster carers to provide care for older children with challenging needs, in addition to younger children. The aim is also to provide opportunities for care leavers to stay with their foster family for longer.
- p) The Programme is being owned and led by the Service. Newton Europe is working with the Service rather than doing it for the Service. Newton Europe are contributing a different way of thinking and different methodology to how the Service is working to improve outcomes for the City's children.
- q) The diagnostic work with Newton Europe was carried out in 2021 and in March 2022 there was approval granted to go out to procurement for further work. Newton Europe was awarded this contract in July and work started on site towards the end of August. It will be at least a two year project with scope to call Newton Europe back in after that.
- r) The Programme has been discussed with staff. Staff engagement started during the diagnostic phase and staff have been involved with lots of service improvement while the transformation programme progresses.
- s) Programme governance is in place and the necessary resources have been allocated to support delivery.
- t) The Design, Prototype and Trial phase is currently underway and co-production is taking place with the workforce who are looking at quick wins and are able to test ideas in a safe place. Over the next 12-18 months this will move into the Implementation and Sustain Phase and then benefits will be tracked.
- u) Key activity over the previous eight weeks has been holding a kick off workshop with the Children's Leadership Team who will be driving cultural change and providing high level support and challenge; setting up a programme multi-disciplinary team, which includes finance representation to ensure monitoring is linked to the Medium Term Financial Plan; identifying workstream leads from within Children's Services; and finalising the contract with the delivery partner.

- v) Over the next month the focus will be on formally launching the Programme, refreshing evidence to inform the workstreams and moving to the wider design phase. The voice of the child and family will be key to this and audit work will include feedback from families and analysis of case records. Assurance on progress will be provided by RAG rating and narrative on key measures as the Programme progresses.
- w) The Service has to continue to deliver its service alongside making change, so change will be iterative and incremental.
- x) When the financial profile was originally drawn up it was anticipated that the Programme would commence in May/ June 2022. However, it did not commence until later due to the time taken for procurement and the Ofsted inspection in July. Therefore, the financials have been reprofiled. There will be a delay in realising savings but over the lifetime of the Programme the savings will be the same.

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

- y) Across the country the number of children in care has increased exponentially over the last 30 years for a range of reasons including changes in interpretation of legislation and case law (although the actual legislation has not changed). Therefore, all local authorities are working out how to respond to, and meet that challenge. Practitioners are already working to try and achieve the best outcomes and the Council needs to create an enabling environment that enables them to do this. In addition to better understanding the impact for children, the diagnostic work has identified the financial impact that justifies the investment necessary to make changes to that environment.
- z) The Service has a range of indicators and key performance measures to help managers understand how it is performing, in addition to the regulatory regime. However, Newton Europe has been able to contribute a vast wealth of capability and capacity to analyse data and work with frontline staff to carry out detailed reflections on a child's journey. The Service aims to continuously improve, but this Programme provides a real step change to support improvement.
- aa) Going forward, it will always be appropriate for the Service to be reviewed against best practice and to ensure it is still appropriate for the ever-changing context, and there may be times when it is appropriate to engage an external partner to support with this but there must also be challenge within the Service. There will be full knowledge and skills transfer into the Council as the Programme progresses to support sustainability. Staff have been upskilled through the Change Academy to develop skills in areas such as analysis and insight and problem solving. This will enable them to use their practitioner knowledge through a transformation lens.
- bb) The delivery leads are practitioners from a mix of levels including senior practitioners and child protection chairs, but they will not be case-holding whilst undertaking this role. They will be working with two teams, each

including seven frontline case-holding workers to undertake the prototyping, implementation and cascading to other practitioners. The delivery leads will make use of the skills, knowledge and experience of frontline workers.

- cc) The length of time for the Programme reflects its complexity and the need to make sustainable change.
- dd) A project management approach is being applied to ensure pace. This will also enable progress to be easily updated and reviewed.
- ee) Staff are positive about making change as they can see the benefits. They have not waited for the Programme to make changes and there are important changes taking place from the business as usual approach to continuous improvement.
- ff) One of the biggest risks to the project is that ideas sound good but don't work in practice or are counter-productive. This is why ideas are being tested out in a controlled way. Design is being led by a practitioner and then tested out by a team with a small cohort. Outcomes from testing are recorded.
- gg) Early help services are best delivered in a partnership context depending on need and do not necessarily need a physical 'thing' or place. It can be more about having a co-ordinated approach to drawing on the resources available across the City that some people might otherwise not be aware of or find difficult to access, for example through the new Family Hubs.

The Committee was supportive of the objectives and goals of the Programme and welcomed the involvement of staff from all levels in development and delivery of the Programme. The Committee encouraged continuation of this approach.

**Resolved to:**

**(1) request that:**

- a. **more information on how the voice and feedback from children, young people, families, carers and former service users is heard, understood and reflected in the Programme is provided to the Committee;**
- b. **a copy of the Programme's risk register is provided to the Committee; and**
- c. **in future updates on progress to the Committee specific examples of changes are provided**

**(2) recommend that the Programme joins up with other strategies and services to take full account of the whole context affecting children's lives, for example homelessness services.**

**28 Work Programme**

The Committee considered its work programme for the remainder of municipal year 2022/23. Committee members commented on the importance of not losing sight of child exploitation as an issue on its work programme and it was agreed to schedule it

for the meeting in March. In order to accommodate this, the items on Changes to Children's Centres and Play and Youth Services and Special Education Needs and Disabilities would be moved to a later meeting.

**Resolved to:**

**(1) consider the following items at the Committee's meeting in January 2023:**

- **Children's Integrated Services Improvement Plan**
- **Medium Term Financial Plan – Children's Integrated Services and Education**
- **Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2021/22**

**(2) consider the following items at the Committee's meeting in March 2023:**

- **Education Investment Area**
- **Child Exploitation**