



Nottingham City's Children at the Heart Improvement Plan

Our Approach

Nottingham City Council is committed to putting children and families at the heart of our work. This improvement plan is being driven by putting children at the heart of our practice improvement in Children's Services and across the wider Council.

We are committed to working with our partners to deliver whole system approaches that will ensure that we achieve the best possible outcomes for children who need help and protection, and to achieving the sustainable improvement which will make a real difference for children, young people and families.

This plan is in response to the two Priority Actions which followed from the Ofsted Focused Visit of February 2020 and wider recommendations made around the practice improvements that need to be delivered. We are committed to achieving improvements at pace, to ensure that all children receive the standard of help and protection which they need. The improvements we need to make require concerted and effective improvement activity over a sustained period, but it is clear also that swift improvements need to be achieved in order to secure demonstrable impact on outcomes for children.

Our existing improvement plan from our inspection in November 2018 has been reviewed and actions will be incorporated into one improvement plan. Ofsted recognised that, in some areas, improvement activity was being delivered but not at the pace required to improve children's lived experiences in Nottingham at the time of the Focused Visit. This plan supports clear prioritisation of activity to enable us to embed practice improvements over the next 6 months and over two years.

Our plan is focused on good quality, child-centred practice. We will support this through robust actions to create the environment where good practice can flourish and by creating the support and challenge throughout leadership, management and practice which ensures that standards of good practice are consistently and sustainably met.

Impact for Children

- ✓ Children will benefit from a system where social work can flourish.

- ✓ Children will benefit from social workers who have capacity to spend time with them, build relationships and undertake joint activities to understand what their life is like and be clear about how this needs to be better.
- ✓ Children's assessments will provide a clear view of what life is like for the child and how the child's experiences and environment will affect their safety and wellbeing if things do not change.
- ✓ All children who need support will have a clear plan. Plans will ensure that the family, and all professionals involved, know what needs to change to make things better.
- ✓ All children will have access to services that meet their needs and they will get the right help at the right time.
- ✓ Children will benefit from social workers that are well supported through regular and effective supervision and oversight of their cases.
- ✓ Children will benefit from relationships with skilled and knowledgeable workers.
- ✓ Children and young people will benefit from timely reviews of their needs and the effectiveness of the work to support them and their families.

Working with Practitioners

We are committed to developing this plan iteratively, involving social workers, other practitioners and with managers at all levels to ensure our improvement is understood, owned and delivered by each of us. We recognise that all of us who work in and with Children's Services have responsibilities and the opportunity to secure improved outcomes for children in our city.

The Voice of Children and Families

The voice of children and families will provide the foundation of our understanding of what works and what impact it is making. We will ensure that the voice of children and their families are at the heart throughout our improvement: both in front line practice and in understanding the impact of our improvement plan.

Sustainable System Improvement

We recognise that the specific improvements required through our priority actions sit within a wider system of the council and partnerships. Creating sustainable improvement requires systemic and cultural change. Work has commenced on this change programme and we will seek to fully embed it from immediate actions and throughout a two years' timescale. We will set these focused actions into a wider strategic and partnership plan which will reflect our ambitions for children and young people in Nottingham to achieve the best possible outcomes.

The Council recognises that sustainable services require sustainable funding and has committed to resourcing a programme of improvement alongside additional base budget funding.

Governance

We will monitor the delivery of this plan through a Children at the Heart Improvement Board in order to ensure that the plan and responsibility for its delivery is owned across our entire partnership. The plan will identify individuals responsible for each action, timescales for delivery and key performance indicators or measures of success. The Board will hold individuals to account for their contribution, will identify where action needs to be taken to address delivery or to enhance the opportunities for improving outcomes. The Board will concern itself specifically with the evidence that activity is improving outcomes for children. A Children at the Heart Programme Board will hold responsibility for the detailed monitoring of delivery to plans to ensure the improvement activity across the system is securing the improvements to secure consistently good practice.

PRIORITY AREA 1 – SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Priority Area for Action: Address the systemic failures in social work practice to ensure that planning and intervention for children improve their experiences, and that new and emerging risks are identified and responded to.

- The quality of assessments and plans to ensure that they accurately evaluate risk and address the needs of children.
- Management oversight of work to provide effective support and challenge that improve the quality of work undertaken with children and ensure that children are not left at risk of harm.
- Quality assurance activity to make sure that senior managers and leaders have an accurate understanding of the experiences of children, and that this is used to inform service planning that leads to improvement.
- The capacity of senior leaders and managers to set appropriate standards for good social work practice, and their ability to implement effective plans to improve services at the pace that is required for children.

Objective	Action	By Whom	By When	Monitoring
1. There is sufficient capacity for strong leadership of immediate and ongoing practice improvement.	a) Agree Partner in Practice support with DfE.	DCS	April 2020	PiP in place.
	b) Source a Practice Improvement interim experienced AD to work with the service and external partners to improve practice.	DCS	April 2020	Practice Improvement AD in place.
	c) Review and agree interim senior leadership structure.	CEO/DCS	March 2020	Interim structure implemented.
	d) Develop a communications plan to support workforce engagement with the practice improvements required, including face to face senior leader engagement.	Head of S&I / Head of Comms	March 2020	Comms Plan approved by CEO/DCS and DCIS.
	e) Establish and recruit to the Principal Social Worker role, at a suitable level of seniority.	DCS/DCIS	June 2020	Principal Social Worker in place

	f) Review projects which Children's Services are committed to and agree a realistic and prioritised programme. Decommission or postpone any activity that will detract from the immediate improvement journey.	DCS/SLT PIP Team	May 2020	Report approved at Improvement Board re: prioritised programmes and rationale.
2. Nottingham City Council has an operating model which enables good practice and workforce capacity.	a) Develop a business case for a future operating model and service structure which supports good practice and improved capacity, including skill mix model and consideration of the Social Work Support Officer role.	DCS/SLT PIP Team	Sept 2020	Full and costed business case developed.
	b) Secure funding approval for operating model.	DCS	Oct 2020	Business case approved.
	c) Implement new operating model.	DCS/SLT/HR	Jan 2021	New staffing structure in place.
3. All staff and managers are clear about Nottingham's social work practice models and 'what good looks like'.	a) Review and re-launch Nottingham's social work practice model and practice standards, benchmarking against best practice regionally and nationally.	SLT/PIP	April 2020	Practice Model and Standards agreed at Improvement Board. % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that there is a clear vision and ways of working. % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that they are fully aware of the Practice Model.
	b) Review and re-launch practice guidance and tools.	SLT/PIP	May 2020	Practice Guidance and Tools available for all staff on CIS Intranet.
	c) Signs of Safety refresher programme roll-out.	IWDT	May 2020	% of social work colleagues who have attended SoS training since 2018. % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that they are using SoS whenever they can in their work.
	d) Refresh the workforce development plan and training offer to align to the practice model and standards.	Head of S&I / IWDT	May 2020	Workforce Development Plan agreed at Improvement Board.
4. Assessments and plans are of good quality and accurately	a) Develop and implement an immediate 'clarity and confidence' drive to include briefings, training and coaching	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	% of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that workshops / programmes / training has been beneficial.

evaluate risk and address the needs of children	b) Develop and implement locality-based learning and mentoring programme for frontline social work teams	DCIS/SLT/PIP	May 2020	% of assessments / plans judged to be good or better through audit programme.
	c) Re-launch the escalation policy, which makes it clear what actions staff can take if they are concerned about practice and decision making.	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	% of children with an active CiN plan that have been CIN for over 1 year. % of Child Protection Plans closing that lasted longer than two years % of completed assessments that are repeated within the current period of social care involvement The percent of Children's Assessments authorised within 45 days of the referral.
5. Assertive practice ensures that children's needs are understood and appropriate action/intervention is put in place to improve outcomes for children, including those experiencing neglect.	a) Immediate scrutiny of current CiN cases to be undertaken to ensure there is robust management oversight, decision-making is appropriate and that timely action has been taken to address any drift or delay identities.	Head of CSW / Service Managers	April 2020	% of social work colleagues who have attended 'clarity and confidence' training. % of cases judged to be good or better (analysis also available by practice standard).
	b) Child-centred, assertive practice to be driven across the service through 'clarity and confidence' and learning and mentoring programme, ensuring that social work intervention is meaningful and driving change for children.	DCIS/SLT/PIP	April 2020	% of children subject to a repeat CiN plan % of children becoming the subject of Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time.
	c) Ensure that practitioners are clear about the pathways of support and intervention across the Directorate and partnership.	DCIS/SLT	July 2020	% of children subject to CP Plans where the primary category of concern is neglect. % of children with an up to date visit (CiN and CP).
	d) Develop and launch Neglect Practice Guidance and Toolkit, including consideration of the impact of parental drug and alcohol misuse, mental health and evaluating parenting capacity.	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	Average SQRS % for CiN and CP.
	e) Develop and launch partnership Neglect Strategy and training programme.	NCSCP	July 2020	The Percentage of Referrals within 12 months of a previous Referral.

				No. of children in PLO and average length of time in PLO. No of children in care proceedings and average length of time in care proceedings.
6. All managers are clear about the expectations of their oversight on casework, to ensure children's needs are understood and effectively addressed.	a) Develop and launch practice management standards for TMs.	DCIS/SLT/PIP	April 2020	% of cases where there is evidence of supervision in the last 42 days. % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that they have regular supervision. % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that the supervision that they have is of benefit to them.
	b) Re-launch guidance for Managers in relation to management of allocation and oversight and review of any unallocated work.	DCIS/SLT/PIP	May 2020	
	c) Launch revised supervision policy and ensure expectations are clear for recording.	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	
	d) Training and support for all Managers to ensure that the practice management standards and supervision policy are effectively embedded.	DCIS/SLT/PIP	May 2020	
	e) Regular audits to consider the quality and effectiveness of supervision in driving improved outcomes for children.	Head of S&I	May 2020	
7. An effective audit framework provides an accurate appraisal of the experience of children and drives systematic improvements in practice.	a) Review and re-shape the audit programme and governance to ensure that audits are focussed on the impact of practice for children and to ensure that learning from audits is embedded across the Directorate.	DCIS/SLT	March 2020	% of cases judged to be good or better (analysis also available by practice standard). % of audits where the audit is discussed with the case-holder and where a reflective practitioner tool is completed. % of cases where judgement remains unchanged at moderation (NEW) % of social work colleagues who report in the CIS Health Check that they understand the learning from audit and how it impacts practice. (NEW)
	b) Ensure that all auditors have received appropriate training to support high-quality case auditing that reflects a clear and consistent view of what good looks like.	Head of S&I / PSW	May 2020	
	c) Review moderation arrangements to ensure that audits are not overly positive about the impact of practice for children.	Head of S&I	March 2020	
	d) Implement the regular programme of auditing to inform learning and practice improvement.	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	

	e) Implement a clear communication strategy to ensure that the learning from audits is embedded in practice.	DCIS/SLT	April 2020	
	f) Scope the requirement for a dedicated Quality Assurance Team.	DCS/Head of S&I	April 2020	
8. Senior managers and leaders have an accurate understanding of the experience of children.	a) Establish the Children at the Heart Improvement Board.	CEO / DCS	March 2020	Improvement Board convened and ToR in place. Regular, comprehensive and analytical reports are available for consideration by senior leaders.
	b) Refresh the quality and performance assurance framework to ensure leadership oversight and assurance of Children's Services.	DCS / DCIS	April 2020	Participation and Engagement Strategy approved by the Improvement Board.
	c) Review and refresh accountability, and reporting structures.	DCS / Head of S&I	April 2020	No. of Mind of My Own documents received in the last 6 months
	d) Review and refresh the framework for hearing and acting on the voice and experience of the child	Head of S&I / E&P Lead Officer	July 2020	% of cases audited where voice of the child is judged to be good or better
	e) Pilot re-launch of Mind of My Own within Children in Care and Targeted Family Support teams, to evidence ongoing investment and further roll out.	Head of S&I	Jan 2021	Analysis of social care complaints and any key themes.
	f) Confirm arrangements for child and family voice to be central to decision-making and governance of the Improvement Plan.	DCS/Director of Practice Improvement	June 2020	Reports to Corporate Parenting Board from commissioned providers of advocacy/independent visitor services. Feedback through the Annual Have Your Say Survey
9. Ensure effective IRO service which ensures effective plans and progress for children in care and children in need of protection.	a) Complete short-term options appraisal for creating capacity in the IRO service – reviewing volumes of complex strategy meetings/recruitment of additional IROs and minute-takers.	Service Manager, Safeguarding Partnerships	April 2020	% of children at an Initial Child Protection Conference that are within 15 days of the Strategy Meeting Discussion.
	b) Review the IRO service and make recommendations for change.	PIP	September 2020	The percentage of Child Protection Plans reviewed (that month) completed within the appropriate timescale. The percentage of Children in Care reviews within the appropriate timescale.

				The percentage of CiC reviews where the child participated.
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PRIORITY AREA 2 – WORKFORCE CAPACITY

Priority Area for Action: Stabilise the workforce and address the significant shortfall in capacity to enable social workers and first line managers to respond effectively to children in need of help and protection.

Objective	Action	By Whom	By When	Monitoring
10. The social work workforce is stabilised and capacity is increased in the short-term.	a) Refreshed advert and offer for agency social workers.	Head of CSW	March 2020	No of social worker gaps (total and case-holding). No of agency social workers. % of social workers with caseloads of 22 or less No. of unallocated cases. The number of cases that have been unallocated for more than 5 days. Social work turnover. % of children with 3 or more social workers in the last 12 months.
	b) Source interim team for field work for 6 months.	DCIS/ Head of CSW	April 2020	
	c) Review current sickness and other absence and ensure appropriate is action.	SLT/HR	April 2020	
	d) Recruit contact workers.	Head of CSW	March 2020	
	e) Recruit temporary additional business support in field work teams.	Head of S&I	March 2020	
11. There is a sustainable plan to ensure the sufficiency of social workers in the long-term.	a) Introduce new Social Work progression and pay structure.	DCIS/HR	April 2020	
	b) Complete an independent review and gap analysis of existing social worker recruitment and retention activity to inform any revisions to current approach.	PiP	June 2020	
	c) Address wider factors contributing to social work capacity and retention including IT-enabled working and support, parking and office space.	CLT	June 2020	
	d) Rolling recruitment campaign for permanent Social Workers.	HR	April 2020	
	e) Agree a costed and timed Workforce Plan.	DCS/SLT/PiP	July 2020	