

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 30 January 2020 from 10:00am to 12:01pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Salma Mumtaz (Chair)
Councillor Azad Choudhry (items 16-21)
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Chantal Lee
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Maria Watson (items 16-21)

Absent

Councillor Carole McCulloch
Councillor AJ Matsiko

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard - Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Helen Blackman - Director of Children's Integrated Services
Sara-Jane Brighthouse - Programme Manager, Children's Integrated Services
John Dexter - Education Director
Jane Garrard - Senior Governance Officer
Councillor Neghat Khan - Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment
Nick Lee - Director of Education Services
Adrian Mann - Governance Officer
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People

• Chair

As Councillor Carole McCulloch (the Chair of the Committee) was absent, Councillor Salma Mumtaz (the Vice Chair) chaired the meeting.

16 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Carole McCulloch - unwell
Councillor AJ Matsiko - personal reasons

17 Declarations of Interests

None.

18 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 26 September 2019 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

19 Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Integrated Services, presented a report on the November 2018 Ofsted inspection of the Service and the actions taken to address the areas identified for improvement. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the 2018 full inspection of Children's Services identified a number of strengths, including clear leadership vision, effective strategic partnerships, ongoing investment in early intervention and services at the edge of care, effective arrangements to identify and assess children at risk, effective oversight and multi-agency work with vulnerable children and young people at risk of exploitation, and stability of placement for the majority of children in care. However, the need for further improvement was identified in some areas to ensure that the full range of services are consistent in being good, and some over-complex processes were identified;
- (b) the inspectors felt that there should be more oversight of the 15 to 20 children in private fostering arrangements at any one time, as children in these circumstances have the potential to be at a high risk and, in some cases, may need to come into care. This oversight is now in place;
- (c) the inspectors considered that the action taken to safeguard a small number of children living in neglectful situations should have been carried out sooner, and that capacity should be increased for work with families where children are suffering from neglect. They recommended that the planning template used to address issues should be more bespoke and accessible for both families and social workers, be clearer in showing what the concerns of the professionals are and what action needs to be taken, by whom, and when;
- (d) inspectors identified some cohorts of young people and care leavers for whom appropriate accommodation was not available, with bed and breakfasts being used for care leavers in some cases. Some young people have also had to stay in Police custody overnight. Work is underway with the Police to avoid this wherever possible. Young people who enter the criminal justice system are often suffering from trauma and are vulnerable to criminal exploitation. In many cases, they have a criminal record before coming into care, so measures are put in place to mitigate against the risk of them being exposed to further exploitation;
- (e) inspectors felt that there is more to do to ensure that plans to achieve permanence for children are progressed more quickly, particularly plans for children to be adopted, so this is a major focus and a new audit framework is in place. Grant funding from the Government is in place to ensure that young people who want to stay in full care until they are 18 are able to do so, while semi-independence options are in place for young people who would prefer this kind of living arrangement. Steps are being taken to engage with young people on their ultimate transition from care as early as possible;
- (f) the inspectors felt that the quality of supervision for social workers should be enhanced, due to their work with vulnerable people and complex risks on a day-to-day basis. Further support has been put in place and grants are being sought

for capacity-building, and a new system of training is in place for future cohorts of social workers, with an aim to recruit from local communities. The scheme has national recognition for its effective training of social workers and support is provided to social workers in accessing further courses during their careers. A new supervision model is in place with better recording, to enable more effective management oversight of cases. An updated pay model is also in place, with progression dependent upon the competence and skill of the social worker, but the pay grades are not as competitive as elsewhere in the wider region, or in comparison to the private sector. Consideration is being given to the introduction of a higher pay scale for people with the most critical responsibilities;

- (g) although a high volume of concerns are referred to the Service and some may be spurious, attention must still be paid to cases that appear to be very minor, as significant incidents often take place after a long series of minor ones. As such, it is necessary for the Service to be open and receptive, and to record and respond to the minor issues so that it is possible to identify any patterns in them that could indicate the potential for a greater incident in the future. However, many initial referrals are allocated to the Early Intervention teams for action, rather than added to the caseload of the social workers. Early safeguarding networks are in place in schools and support is offered to the safeguarding leads in other sectors, as part of the educational work carried out with the universal service providers to build resilience there. Partnership working is being developed to address youth and mental health support in schools, and a unified working approach is in place with children's centres. There is additional investment in family resilience within the community with Parent and Family Support Teams carrying out targeted parenting work;
- (h) however, there is a shortage of back-office administrative support and, due to resourcing constraints, it is not possible to transfer capacity from front-line social work to back-office administration. Some administration apprenticeships are in place, but these still need to be funded from the overall budget. The existing management roles are also stretched. A review is underway to explore how Service staffing could be deployed differently but, ultimately, it is vital that social worker numbers are maintained due to the significant volume of cases;
- (i) work to promote and support the educational achievement of children in care, led by the Virtual School, was identified as a priority by the inspectors, who felt that there was more to do beyond the improvements and investment in roles that have been put in place to date. There is a drive to increase opportunities for care leavers, so one-to-one mentoring and support is available in schools on potential careers;
- (j) given the substantial needs for the Service amongst citizens, the level of resourcing available is challenging and staff are stretched, so it is difficult to develop all of the areas for improvement at once. Action to address the points raised by the inspection is being progressed in a staggered way as resources allow, with the primary focus on combating neglect. Refreshed training has been rolled out to the whole workforce to raise the understanding of neglect and how it can be identified, approached and addressed effectively. Additional training on trauma is also in place, as parents struggling with poverty and childhood trauma of their own may lead to the neglect of their children. The planning templates and

the electronic case management system has been redeveloped to make case histories simpler and clearer;

- (k) the close focus on neglect has increased the demands on the capacity of the Service, with more children on plans for neglect and more children coming into care due to neglect – many of whom are teenagers. However, it has ensured that action is being taken for children suffering from neglect at a much earlier age than was previously the case, which is beneficial to their long-term wellbeing;
- (l) an Ofsted focus visit will take place at the start of February to review the current progress on the improvement plan, in the context of the high local needs, increasing caseload and financial challenges. To achieve 'good' in all areas will require a significant level of investment that cannot be put in place fully at this time. Improvement is being made and is ongoing, but it is difficult to respond to very complex issues with limited resources. However, this is also a national issue that is reflected in both the public and private sectors.

The Committee thanked Helen Blackman for her report.

Resolved to request that the outcomes of the upcoming Ofsted focus visit are shared with the Committee when they are available.

20 Scrutiny of the Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment

Councillor Neghat Khan, Portfolio Holder for Early Years, Education and Employment, gave a presentation on the education priorities set out in the new Council Plan. The following points were discussed:

- (a) the new Council Plan has 18 performance measures relation to education, three of which are in the Top 20 commitments. The performance indicators are to ensure that all Nottingham children attend a school judged 'Good' or 'Outstanding' by Ofsted; the gap of GCSE attainment is within 5% of the national average; at least 75% of eligible two-year-olds access free nursery provision; every primary school in Nottingham has an affordable breakfast club; and attendance in both Nottingham primary and secondary schools is above the national average;
- (b) it is a primary objective to reduce the number of permanent exclusions from schools by 50% overall, and to campaign against permanent exclusions and 'off-rolling', to make sure that every Nottingham child has a school place. It is aimed to reduce the number of exclusions for the current academic year to 86, from 98 in the previous year. However, 54 exclusions have been made in the year to date already, up from 41 in the same period, last year. In total, 30 of these exclusions have been made by three schools, so there is a need for significant engagement with their academy trusts to try and involve them in the Council's 'inclusion model' to support children at risk of exclusion to stay in school. Trigger points are in place for intervention, but it is vital to understand why schools are excluding pupils and what support would help them in avoiding carrying out these exclusions;
- (c) so far, ten schools have signed up to the model and hold weekly monitoring meetings, and it is hoped to get many more schools involved. It is no longer

possible to have a full cost recovery model in place for schools that exclude children permanently. The 'inclusion model' represents a service-level agreement where schools commit to helping children at risk from exclusion stay in school, with the incentive of some extra funding to support inclusion. There is capacity for claiming funds back from schools within the model who exclude too many children, but entering into this agreement is entirely voluntary;

- (d) it is important to guarantee a choice of places for Nottingham children at local primary and secondary schools. However, the demand for secondary places is increasing (particularly in the north of the city), with peak demand projected in 2022. A bid to establish a new free school has been made, but there have been difficulties in establishing a satisfactory site with the Department for Education;
- (e) other major aims are to support mainstream schools in ensuring that children with additional needs are able to progress well; tackle holiday hunger by supporting school holiday lunch clubs in the most deprived neighbourhoods; campaign to extend free school meals to all primary school children by 2025; and work with schools to promote an understanding of mental wellbeing amongst staff and children. It is also intended to protect the school uniforms grant, the Education Welfare Service and the Education Improvement Board from budget cuts.

The Committee thanked Councillor Neghat Khan for her presentation.

Resolved to carry out further scrutiny into the high levels of permanent exclusion from schools within certain academy trusts, and to invite these trusts to discuss this issue with the Committee, within the wider context of effective secondary school provision within the city.

21 Educational Attainment

Nick Lee, Director of Education Services, gave a presentation on the attainment of children and young people for the 2018/19 academic year. Currently, this information does not contain the data from the Virtual School, which is yet to be validated and released. The following points were discussed:

- (a) for Early Years (ages 4 to 5), 66.9% of pupils in Nottingham reached a 'Good Level of Development', though this is 0.7% less than the previous year. The national average is 71.8%, ranking Nottingham at 143 out of 151 Local Authorities. However, the general trend is that Nottingham is narrowing the gap from the national average, due to the great deal of work being done in Early Years. The current dip in the trend is being investigated. Special educational needs and/or disabilities have been identified and there are a number of children with complex needs. There have been a series of children who have started at their schools mid-year, who also have English as a second language. Further targeted, tailored support has been implemented, with a review of the partnership work in place to support boys, in particular;
- (b) at the end of Year 1, there has been no change in the Nottingham and national percentages for Phonics, which remains a significant area of national scrutiny. Nottingham remains 3% behind the national average, though it has increased its position by 4 in the Local Authority rankings, rising to 132nd;

- (c) at Key Stage 1 (ages 6 to 7), the gap between Nottingham and the national average for the Expected Standard has reduced by 1%. Nottingham has gained ten Local Authority rankings for maths, rising to 134th. For reading, the gap in the national average has reduced by 2%, with Nottingham rising five places to 141st. For writing, the national average gap has remained at 4%, and there has been no major change in Nottingham's ranking of 128th;
- (d) at Key Stage 2 (ages 10 to 11), the proportion of pupils attaining the reading, writing and mathematics benchmark (RWM) increased by 1% to 63.45%. Nottingham recorded mixed changes in ranking year-on-year for pupils achieving the expected standard in each subject, but the gap with the national average is reducing. Nottingham is at the national average for maths, and is only 1% below in grammar, punctuation and spelling. The Key Stage 2 Progress Scores have increased for reading and writing, and remain stable for maths;
- (e) improvement between Key Stages 1 and 2 is strong and is reflected across both the Nottingham Schools Trust and the other primary academies. This should have a good impact on future attainment in Key Stage 4, where average attainment scores are starting to increase. A number of young people go on to attend secondary schools outside of the city area, but the number staying on is now growing;
- (f) the School Heads Partnership is working closely to share best practice on how to best support boys from white, working-class backgrounds, who can often underperform at school. Investment is being made in these children at the Early Years stage, with tailored support and the introduction of role models;
- (g) academies are being encouraged to work in partnership to support high-ability children, though no formal, funded programmes are in place. The Committee considered that the current system has an apparent lack of individual focus, follow-up and funding for children who show potential for high academic attainment.

The Committee thanked Nick Lee for his presentation and noted the report.

22 Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities

Sara-Jane Brighthouse, Programme Manager for Children's Integrated Services, presented a report on how the Council is meeting its duties and responsibilities to children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The following points were discussed:

- (a) there are 46,869 children and young people attending schools in Nottingham. Of these, 6398 children and young people have some kind of SEND, which represents 13.7% of the school population. There are five special schools, with 585 young people attending specialist schools and Post-16 settings, while 40 attend Focus Provision. There are five Focus Provisions in Nottingham, which are specialist resources in mainstream schools for Autism and deafness. Currently, 905 children and young people receive additional high needs and inclusion funding;

- (b) the current Code of Practice for supporting people with SEND is intended to improve outcomes for children and young people aged 0-25 and their families; establish Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans to replace Statements of Special Educational Needs; replace School Action/Plus with SEND Support; ensure that a graduated response and support is implemented to meet the needs of children with SEND; give access to a personal budget; ensure that the local area co-produces services and strategic developments to involve children, young people and families in decision-making; offer impartial mediation and advice; provide independent Information Advice Support; publish the local offer of support and services; ensure joined-up service delivery through joint commissioning with partners, and health services in particular; and ensure that young people are prepared for adulthood, good health, employment, community inclusion and independent living;
- (c) significant progress has been made in implementing the reforms in Nottingham. The transfer of the Statements of Special Educational Needs to EHC plans has been completed in advance of the national deadline and 98-100% of the new EHC plans have been issued within the statutory 20-week deadline. There are many more personal budgets than the national average, with joint strategic needs assessment and joint commissioning arrangements in place. Significant joint work is underway with SEND and social care Whole Life Disability services, while SEND services continue to work closely with health and social care partners, including delivering practice improvement days. The local offer is on 'Ask Lion' Nottingham City directory;
- (d) the current five-year SEND strategy, co-produced with young people and families and published in September 2018, aims to support all schools and settings to be inclusive, develop provision, make transition easier, promote co-production with children, young people and their families, improving links between agencies, and help young people prepare for adulthood. A new facility for young people with Autism will open in September 2020. Support and ring-fenced funding is being provided to mainstream schools to improve provision for young people with SEND. A review of the high-level needs funding system has been completed and a new system will be piloted with schools in spring 2020. 'Routes to Inclusion' is being rolled out to all schools in the city, with a specific toolkit to support children with social, emotional and mental health issues. The toolkit was developed and launched with primary schools in October 2018 and work has now begun with secondary schools;
- (e) periodic Local Area Reviews are carried out to inspect how all partners in the city identify children and young people with SEND, assess and meet their needs, improve outcomes, and lead, manage and govern arrangements for SEND in the local area. The inspection will look at the contribution of all partner agencies (education, health and social care in particular) and will consider children and young people who are resident in that area, but receive their support from outside of that area. The inspection results in a published report that will give an assessment judgement about how well the local area is performing and identify areas for improvement. The report may require the local area to consider improvement actions that it should take through a formal 'statement of action';

- (f) unfortunately, only 6% of children with SEND go on to regular employment, as many employers have difficulty in supporting their particular workplace needs. Work is underway to establish creative opportunities and placements, and an employment strategy document is being produced. It is vital that Post-16 providers engage closely with their SEND students, and supported internships are being created.

The Committee thanked Sara-Jane Brighthouse for her report.

Resolved to request that the outcomes of the upcoming Local Area Review are shared with the Committee when they are available.

23 Work Programme 2019/20

The Committee noted the Work Programme for the remainder of the 2019/20 municipal year.