

Meeting Title	Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Children's Integrated Services Improvement Journey
Meeting Date	25 March 2021

Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People Helen Watson, Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services
Portfolio Holder(s):	Cllr Cheryl Barnard
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Summary of issues:

In February 2020, Ofsted undertook a Focussed Visit to look specifically at Nottingham City Council's arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan, with a focus on children at risk of neglect.

There is no inspection rating given during a Focussed Visit, but given the issues inspectors found in the service areas they looked at, Ofsted issued two Priority Actions:

1. 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.
2. 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.

In response to the findings of the Focussed Visit, an action plan was developed and shared with Ofsted. This report sets out progress undertaken over the last 12 months to address the Priority Actions and to improve our services for children and families.

Recommendation(s):

- 1 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider progress undertaken by Children's Integrated Services over the last 12 months against the requirements to improve services.

1. Background

In response to the two priority actions, and wider recommendations made around practice improvement, an action plan was developed and provided to Ofsted in March. The key headline actions are:

Priority Area for Action 1 – Social Work Practice

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

Priority Area for Action 2 – Workforce Capacity

Stabilise the workforce and address the significant shortfall in capacity to enable social worker and fine line managers to respond effectively to children in need of help and protection.

Attached as Appendix A is progress is against the action plan.

To drive delivery of this action plan and to secure sustainable improvement which will make a real difference for children, young people and families, the Children at the Heart Improvement Board was established in April 2020 and has met monthly. The Improvement Board is chaired by the Chief Executive and membership includes both the Leader of the Council and the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, along with senior officers of the Council. Key health, education and police partners are members.

Throughout our improvement journey we have continued to work closely with Ofsted and the Department for Education. To support our improvement, the Department for Education have enabled to us access support from the Partners in Practice (PiP) programme, which provides peer support from a partner local authority to support improvement. Our Partner in Practice is Essex County Council. The scope of the programme was co-produced between Nottingham City Council and PiP colleagues. In spite of an initial delay due to covid-19 and the continuing restrictions, the PiP team began work with us during May 2020 to understand practice issues, undertaking sampling of case files as well as discussions, diagnostics and training sessions with senior managers, team managers and a range of practitioners, including those with specific case involvement.

In December 2020 Essex undertook a review of improvement progress using their Partners in Practice review framework. The review found:

- Strong feedback that improvements are happening at pace, based on deep and genuine changes to culture.
- A motivated workforce who are aligned to the organisation, understand the vision and the approach to practice, and feel supported and valued
- Good partner relationships and buy-in
- Positive impact felt by families (small sample)
- Areas for development: staff stability, caseloads & allocations, interventions during assessment, working cases at lowest level
- Strong recognition that it is early days. Continued focus and investment is required if progress is to be sustained and produce better outcomes

We are currently exploring opportunities to continue our work with Essex and agree a further programme of support.

2. Next Steps

Phase Two of the Children at the Heart Development Plan was agreed by Children at the Heart Improvement Board (October 2020). There are four workstreams and each workstream has a sponsor.

Children at the Heart Improvement – Plan on a Page

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Actions have been developed against each workstream and progress is monitored by the Children at the Heart Improvement Board and, for financial sustainability, by the Children's Integrated Services Sustainability Board.

3. Finance Implications

An Improvement Fund of £1.5m one-off funding was identified by the Council to support short-term work force capacity and delivery of the improvement plan. As we are now one year into our improvement journey we have been working to ensure that any improvement work undertaken is sustainable.

There are significant pressures on the Council's financial position and to achieve a balanced budget, savings have been required across the Council. At the time of writing this report, savings totalling £1.189m in 2021/22, rising to £1.848m in 2023/24 and workforce reductions totalling £590,000 for 2021/22 are proposed.

4. Risk

Following February's Focused Visit, Ofsted informed us that they would undertake a further Focused Visit and that this would result in either assurance of sufficient improvement or a full inspection. Since Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns, Ofsted adjusted their inspection activity and we still await this follow up visit. Under the new inspection regime there will be a fuller review of children's experiences under

Covid-19, which would look at a wider range of our children's services than those areas considered under the Focused Visit.

The implications of an inadequate inspection would bring major external scrutiny with ministerial oversight and potential intervention. In addition, very substantial additional cost would be incurred. Achieving fast and demonstrable improvement required significant additional resource.

5. Views of citizens/children and young people

The Children in Care Council and the Youth Cabinet have been invited to meet Improvement Board members and their feedback has been presented to the Board to inform future developments and strategic planning.

Ongoing opportunities to hear the views of young people through established forums, annual surveys and consultation exercises, will inform our continuous improvement.

Priority Area for Action 1 – Social Work Practice <i>Address the systemic failures in social work practice to ensure that planning and intervention for children improve their experiences, and that new and emerging risk are identified and responded to.</i>		
1.	Ensure that there is sufficient capacity for strong leadership of immediate and ongoing practice improvement.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Essex Partners in Practice have undertaken a programme of improvement. • A Director of Practice Improvement was employed for 9 months to provide additional leadership capacity • A Communications Plan was developed in consultation with the Practice Forum. • A Principal Social Worker was recruited in November 2020.
2.	Ensure that Nottingham City Council has an operating model which enables good practice and workforce capacity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Business Case for capacity and structural changes is in development in the context of wider budget planning. This will be carried forwards as an action into the Phase Two programme
3.	Ensure that all staff and managers are clear about Nottingham's social work practice models and 'what good looks like'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice Model confirmed (strengths-based, using Signs of Safety approaches). 2 day training courses took place for all staff. • Practice tools were launched in the Neglect Practice Guidance in June 2020 with work is ongoing to strengthen the tools available. • A Workforce Strategy has been developed. • We have re-joined Research in Practice and developed a plan around how RiP resources and support will be utilised to support improvement
4.	Ensure that assessments and plans are of good quality and accurately evaluate risk and address the needs of children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice Standards have been developed and disseminated to all colleagues. • All Children's Social Care teams have been engaged in the PiP Diagnostic and have had the opportunity to attend learning workshops to help reflection on practice. • Group supervisions have commenced to embed the practice model in frontline social work teams. • We have re-launched the escalation policy, which makes it clear what actions staff can take if they are concerned about practice and decision making.
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.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We undertook immediate scrutiny of current Children in Need 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. • We have developed and launched a Neglect Practice Guidance and Toolkit, including consideration of the impact of parental drug and

		<p>alcohol misuse, mental health and evaluating parenting capacity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have drafted a Partnership Neglect Strategy. • Neglect Training has been rolled out to the Social Care Workforce. • A multi-agency thematic audit on neglect has been completed.
6.	<p>Ensure that all managers are clear about the expectations of their oversight on casework, to ensure children's needs are understood and effectively addressed</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We are redeveloping our Practice Management Standards for Team Managers. • We have re-launched guidance for Managers in relation to management of allocation and oversight and review of any unallocated work. • We have relaunched our Supervision Policy. • We are undertaking regular audits to consider the quality and effectiveness of supervision in driving improved outcomes for children
7.	<p>Develop an effective audit framework which provides an accurate appraisal of the experience of children and drives systematic improvements in practice.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have reviewed and re-shaped the audit programme and governance to ensure that audits are focused on the impact of practice for children and to ensure that learning from audits is embedded across the Directorate. • Regular case file audit programme is now up and running with a moderation panel proves in place, involving the case holder, relevant Managers and the IRO to ensure reflection on the quality of practice and impact for the child. • Further work is ongoing with the Essex PiP to review the audit framework to identify further improvements, which will be included in the Phase 2 programme. • All auditors have had training in September 2020 and four colleagues attended regional 'train the trainer'. Further work is now identified in Phase Two Plan to improve guidance and develop an in-house training programme to improve the quality of audits. • We have implemented a clear communication strategy to ensure that the learning from audits is embedded in practice.
8.	<p>Ensure that senior managers and leaders have an accurate understanding of the experience of children</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Children at the Heart Improvement Board was established in April 2020. • The Children at the Heart Practice Forum has been established for frontline practitioners. • We have refreshed the quality and performance assurance framework to ensure leadership oversight and assurance of Children's Services. • Performance and Quality meetings have been streamlined to ensure timely consideration of performance information by senior leaders. Monthly Performance and Quality Lead Member briefing and monthly CEO briefing. • We have reviewed and refreshed the framework

		<p>for hearing and acting on the voice and experience of the child.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have piloted a relaunch of Mind of My Own
9.	<p>Ensure effective Independent Reviewing Officer service which ensures effective plans and progress for children in care and children in need of protection</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have undertaken a short-term options appraisal for creating capacity in the Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) service and additional capacity has been added. This has had a very positive impact in relation to the timeliness of reviews and Initial Child Protection Conferences. • PiP Support is in place to look at practice improvements in relation to Reviewing Service. Further work will be incorporated into the Phase 2 Improvement Programme.
<p>Priority Area for Action 2 – Workforce Capacity <i>Stabilise the workforce and address the significant shortfall in capacity to enable social worker sand fine line managers to respond effectively to children in need of help and protection.</i></p>		
10	<p>Stabilise the social work workforce increase capacity in the short-term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have refreshed our advert and offer for agency social workers. • We recruited an agency social work fieldwork team for 6 months to drive. • Contact Workers have been recruited. • We have recruited temporary additional business support in field work teams
11	<p>Develop a sustainable plan to ensure the sufficiency of social workers in the long-term.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We have introduced a new Social Work progression and pay structure. • We have launched a new microsite to support social work recruitment. • Rolling recruitment of Social Workers has continued. • We are undertaking a review of the wider factors which contribute to social work capacity and retention (including IT- enabled working and support, parking and office space).