

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at LB 41 - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 27 May 2021 from 10.02 am - 12.01 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)
Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor Chantal Lee
Councillor Maria Watson

Absent

Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Nancy Barnard	- Governance and Electoral Services Manager
Evelyn Hailwood	- Principal Manager, Independent Reviewing
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Peter McConnochie	- Head of Access to Learning
Helen Watson	- Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services

35 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Maria Joannou (leave), Councillor AJ Matsiko (unwell) and Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos.

36 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

37 APPOINTMENT OF THE VICE CHAIR

Resolved to appoint Councillor Maria Joannou as Vice Chair for the 2021-22 Municipal Year.

38 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 25 March 2021 were approved as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

39 CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Committee noted their Terms of Reference.

40 PRIMARY SCHOOL EXCLUSIONS AND FAMILY SUPPORT

Nick Lee, Director of Education Services, and Peter McConnochie, Head of Access to Learning, attended the meeting to give a presentation on exclusions from primary school and the support available to families and children when a child is excluded.

They highlighted the following information:

- a) Based upon 2018/19 data (the most recent available) the national rate of permanent exclusion has remained unchanged while the rate of fixed term exclusion has increased slightly. Persistent disruptive behaviour is the main reason for exclusions which peak nationally amongst 14 year olds (year nine). Those with Free School Meals and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are excluded at a higher rate than those without.
- b) In 2018/19 Nottingham was ranked 121st of 151 local authorities for permanent exclusions from primary schools and 99th for fixed term exclusions. This is below the rates of our statistical neighbours. The number of exclusions in Nottingham has reduced further since then with only four permanent exclusions from Nottingham primary schools last year and three to date this year. Work is done by schools, Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) and with parents to avoid potential exclusions.
- c) Since the full return to schooling there hasn't been a spike in exclusions suggesting the supportive approach with a focus on wellbeing has been effective in supporting children back into learning.
- d) The two main reasons for exclusions in Nottingham are disruptive behaviour and physical assault which account for 80% of exclusions.
- e) Primary exclusions are male dominated with 93% of fixed period exclusions and 100% of permanent exclusions issued to male pupils over the last three years. During the same period 52% of permanent exclusions were issued to white pupils and 48% to BME pupils. Mixed and multiple ethnic groups have seen the highest rate of exclusions. The recent Timpson Review found a correlation between deprivation, SEND and exclusions.
- f) Exclusions are issued predominantly to older primary aged children and peak in year six.
- g) Those without SEND are more likely to be excluded and nationally those with an Education and Health Care Plan are also more likely to be excluded. However, in Nottingham, no primary children with an EHCP have been excluded in the last three years. If a child is referred to Denewood Learning Centre they will carry out assessments which can identify previously unidentified needs.
- h) Children from across the city are excluded from schools with some concentration in Aspley/ Broxtowe/ Bilborough and St Anns/ Bakersfield and Bestwood. There is a link to levels of deprivation with those areas with the highest levels of deprivation having higher levels of exclusions.
- i) Fair Access Protocols have avoided over 57 possible permanent exclusions over the last 3 years. Possible exclusions are tracked by the Council and schools are supported to take alternative actions. Routes to Inclusion and the Intensive Support Team operate in primary schools to support the reduction in permanent exclusions.
- j) If the Council is concerned about the rate of exclusions in a particular school this will be raised with the Portfolio Holder and the Regional Schools Commissioner.

- k) Following exclusions some children are supported with reintegration back into school while others continue in alternative settings including those accessing specialist placements as part of their EHCP. Reintegration has been impacted by Covid this year, but children are reintegrated at transition points.

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

- l) For the first five days of a fixed term exclusion the school is responsible for providing work for the child. The Council does not have the capacity to monitor this but if the school did not provide work it would be in breach of exclusions law. It would be helpful if parents were aware of this responsibility and had more accessible information if their child is excluded.
- m) Transition points are not affected by exclusions. If a child already has a place at secondary school, they keep the place and work will be undertaken with families and schools to support the transition and avoid a second exclusion. SATs will be taken out of school if a child is excluded.
- n) Data is being gathered on the length of time it takes for an excluded child to be admitted to a learning academy, but this should take place within six days of the exclusion coming into effect. Covid has challenged this. It is more straightforward with younger children.
- o) When a new academy trust becomes responsible for a school it faces a challenge of driving improvement, often including pupil behaviour, but not at the expense of individual children. The level of churn at primary level is far lower.
- p) Parental responsibility is important and support is offered to parents but some children are on Child Protection Plans and some parents are not capable of managing their child's behaviour. SENCOs are responsible for family liaison. Work is being done to embed support around families based on the Priority Families work.
- q) The work of Small Steps Big Change is likely to have an impact but this will take time to come through. An example is that children with speech and language difficulties are more likely to be excluded and this is one of the issues being addressed but Small Steps Big Change.
- r) Children are not excluded from Denewood. If a child's needs can't be met they will be found alternative provision, often through an EHCP.
- s) Work around trauma informed practice is being pursued, providing information to teachers and SENCOs about the impact of trauma and how to support those who have experienced it to give them a broader understanding of roots of poor behaviour.

The Committee thanked the contributors for the informative presentation.

Resolved to recommend that Nottingham City Council produce guidance for parents whose children have been temporarily and permanently excluded, to be shared with schools and passed on to parents when required. The guidance should advise parents of school, local authority and others' responsibilities in relation to their child's education and signpost further sources of support and advice.

41 REVIEWING SERVICES FOR CHILD IN CARE/ CHILD PROTECTION

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services and Evelyn Hailwood, Principal Manager, Independent Reviewing gave a presentation on the Council's Reviewing Services, comprising Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) working with Children in Care and Child Protection Co-ordinators (CPC) working with Children with a Child Protection Plan. They highlighted the following points:

- a) All IROs and CPCs are experienced and qualified Social Workers. The Service has a balance of male and female workers and reflects the diversity of the city population. They and their managers are independent of those delivering services.
- b) It is a legal requirement for every child in care to have an IRO appointed to them to monitor the performance of the Local Authority in relation to their case, participate in any reviews of the case, and ensure that that child's wishes and feelings are properly considered. The service must be delivered within the framework outlined in the national IRO Handbook.
- c) Effort is made to ensure children in care understand the role of the IRO. Each IRO has a personal introduction to every child they're working with and builds a relationship with them. Information is provided in a pack given to all children when they enter care which also contains practical items such as a toothbrush and toothpaste. Children are also supported to chair their own review meetings as much as possible.
- d) There are currently 689 children in care in Nottingham. Staff are watching our regional and statistical neighbours closely to understand the impact of Covid on the numbers coming into care as numbers have been rising with an increase of 4.2% compared with the previous year.
- e) The IRO handbook stipulates maximum caseloads per IRO of between 50 and 70 cases. Nottingham caseloads are marginally under the maximum recommended with an average of 69 cases each across 9.5 IROs.
- f) Reviews held within timescales are at 95% against a 90% target, and child participation in those reviews is at 92% against a 94% target and a 100% aspiration.
- g) Service developments underway include re-designing the conduct of children in care reviews to make them more child focussed, engaging with the Child in Care Council, introducing the coming into care pack and using case review forms to share learning within the service.
- h) The priorities for the service include building good relationships between IROs and young people to increase their confidence so they can chair and set the agendas for their review meetings, link individual IROs with particular social work teams to advise and support with care plans, visiting every child before their 20 day review to understand their wishes and feelings, and to widen understanding of the service across the wider social care community.
- i) 623 children are currently subject to a child protection plan which is a higher number than our statistical neighbours. The core business of the team of CPCs is to chair child protection conferences within 15 days, to conduct reviews within three months and again at 6 months. The role of CPCs largely mirrors that of IROs but working with children subject to a child protection plan rather than those in care.
- j) CPCs have their own framework to work within which is updated yearly. It is recommended that CPCs can have up to 90 cases.

- k) The child is always involved in their conference (if of an age where they can do so) as are their parents. Cases have been conducted over Zoom during lockdown which some young people have found easier to take part in as it is less intimidating than coming into Loxley House. The person who chairs the initial conference will chair subsequent reviews wherever possible to ensure consistency. Chairs will ensure the views of children, parents and carers are taken into account.
- l) CPCs monitor the performance of the local authority to check how the plan is being progressed and will raise any concerns with the social work team.
- m) 89 children per 10,000 are subject to a Child Protection Plan while the rate amongst our statistical neighbours stands at around 63 per 10,000 children. However, a review found that appropriate cases are coming in.
- n) There are 6 CPCs with an average caseload of 103 cases (above the recommended level of 90). 93% conferences are achieved on time and 95% of reviews.
- o) Priorities for the service include continuing to embed the use of one category in the child protection plan process, to develop a new framework for minutes of child protection conferences, to pursue all CPCs being recognised as Signs of Safety Champions for the Council and to develop the system for young people to provide feedback on meetings.

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

- p) The Children in Care Council involves children and young people in care from a range of settings. They meet monthly to discuss issues and put forward their views and are consulted by services.
- q) The education of children in care is supported through the virtual school which has a headteacher and a team who ensure the child is receiving appropriate education that meets the aspirations for each individual child. The IRO would look at the child's personal education plan and talk to the child about it.
- r) IROs would review options for the care of a child at an early stage and, when a child leaves care, the IRO will review where the child is leaving care to, to ensure its validity and stability and minimise the risk of the child coming into care again.
- s) An annual survey is conducted of children in care which has a good response rate and which looks at how children feel about their experiences in care.
- t) Children come into care from across the city, but rates tend to be higher in areas with higher levels of deprivation. The main reason for children coming into care is neglect with domestic abuse, mental ill health and substance misuse all being common factors.
- u) Education outcomes for children in care are improving.

The Committee thanked the contributors for the informative presentation.

42 WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee noted its work programme for the remainder of 2020/21 and delegated authority to the Chair and officers to liaise with the Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People to agree the focus for discussions when she attends the meeting in July.

43 FUTURE MEETING DATES

Resolved to agree to meet at 10am on the following dates:

2021 – 29 July, 30 September, 25 November

2022 – 27 January, 31 March.