

**Executive Board
21 September 2021**

Subject:	Ofsted Focused Visit and Children's Services Improvement Programme
Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Report author and contact details:	Michelle Roe, Executive Officer michelle.roe@nottinghamcity.gov.uk
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Helen Watson, Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services
Subject to call-in: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Key Decision: <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Criteria for Key Decision:	
(a) <input type="checkbox"/> Expenditure <input type="checkbox"/> Income <input type="checkbox"/> Savings of £1,000,000 or more taking account of the overall impact of the decision	
and/or	
(b) Significant impact on communities living or working in two or more wards in the City <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No	
Type of expenditure: <input type="checkbox"/> Revenue <input type="checkbox"/> Capital	
Total value of the decision: Nil	
Wards affected: All	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s): 12 August 2021	
Relevant Council Plan Key Theme:	
Nottingham People	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Living in Nottingham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Growing Nottingham	<input type="checkbox"/>
Respect for Nottingham	<input type="checkbox"/>
Serving Nottingham Better	<input type="checkbox"/>
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):	
<p>The Council has core statutory responsibilities for the help and protection of children, regulated by Ofsted, and it is vital that these are met. The Council's Children's Services were last inspected by Ofsted in November 2018 and were judged to "Require improvement to be good". At a subsequent Ofsted Focused Visit in February 2020, inspectors found that the experience of Children in Need and Child Protection had deteriorated, resulting in formal requirements: two Priority Actions</p>	

and four Areas for Improvement being set.

On 30 June 2021, Ofsted undertook a follow-up Focused Visit of the same elements of service. This report provides an update on the outcome of the Focussed Visit and considers the further improvement of Children's Services and preparation for inspection.

Exempt information: None.

Recommendation(s):

1 To note the outcomes of the Ofsted Focused Visit of 30 June 2021.

2 To reflect on the Council's ambitions for its Children's Services and note the importance of securing continuing improvement of the Service.

1 Reasons for recommendations

1.1 The Council has core statutory responsibilities to provide services for children and families. The Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) is responsible for inspecting and regulating Children's Services. Nottingham's Children's Services have priority areas for improvement following Ofsted's Focused Visit of February 2020. This report provides feedback on the most recent inspection activity and reflects the Council's commitment to continuing to improve its services for children and families.

2 Background (including outcomes of consultation)

2.1 In February 2020, Ofsted undertook a Focussed Visit to look specifically at the 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 and Nottingham remains rated as 'Requires Improvement', but two Priority Actions we identified:

- to 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; and
- to 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.

2.2 In response to the findings of the Focussed Visit, an action plan was developed and the 'Children at the Heart' Improvement Board was established to oversee the improvement. Support has been received from the Department for Education through the Partners in Practice (PiP) programme, which provides peer support from a partner local authority.

2.3 From 30 June to 1 July 2021, Ofsted undertook a second Focused Visit. Inspectors again looked at the Council's arrangements for children in need and those subject to a child protection plan. Their findings are set out in a published report.

2.4 The report recognises the exceptionally difficult year for Nottingham, responding to the Covid-19 pandemic, but also significant bereavements within the Service and it notes that, in spite of this improvements have been made.

- 2.5 Inspectors noted that leaders were realistic about the progress they have made, and about the change still required in order to embed workforce stability, raise the quality of social work practice, and ultimately improve the lives and experiences of children living in Nottingham in need of help and protection.
- 2.6 Staff were positive about working for Nottingham and reported feeling well supported by managers. Staff also reported positively about the training that they received in relation to relaunched practice standards.
- 2.7 Inspectors highlighted that there was still significant work required to embed workforce stability, raise the quality of social work practice and ultimately improve the lives and experiences of children living in Nottingham in need of help and protection. Areas for improvement are noted in the report.
- 2.8 There is no graded inspection judgement a Focused Visit and the two priority actions remain until a full inspection takes place.
- 2.9 Taking the Service through the next steps of our improvement journey is an important priority for the Council and for the Service. The improvement programme has been revised and will remain under the governance of the Children at the Heart Improvement Board.

3 Other options considered in making recommendations

- 3.1 Not applicable.

4 Finance colleague comments (including implications and value for money/VAT)

- 4.1 In response to the initial inspection in February 2020, the organisation invested one-off funding of £1,753,000 to deliver the improvement plan for children, young people and families. No additional funding is assumed in the Medium-Term Financial Strategy.
- 4.2 The work plan and delivery of change will be reviewed between the Service and the Transformation Director, including the identification of necessary resources from the transformation funding. This should be fully considerate of the Council's financial pressures, with clear outcomes to ensure affordable and sustainable change.
- 4.3 The advice recommends performance is regularly monitored through the Children's Sustainability Board.
- 4.4 A full Ofsted inspection is expected in early 2022. There is a significant financial risk should Children's Services fail to address the concerns highlighted.

Advice provided by Christine Green, Strategic Finance Business Partner, on 10 August 2021.

5 Legal and Procurement colleague comments (including risk management issues, and legal, Crime and Disorder Act and procurement implications)

- 5.1 The statutory duties relating to the safeguarding and protection of children arise from the Children Act 1989. Ofsted in their regulatory capacity have a wide range of powers depending on the outcome of any inspection. The risk in failing to address the concerns highlighted by Ofsted would mean that we would be failing to meet our core statutory safeguarding functions. Legal Services will continue to support the People's directorate.
- 5.2 Transformation resource will be sourced through appropriate procurement routes.

Advice provided by Beth Brown, Head of Legal and Governance and Deputy Monitoring Officer, on 9 August 2021.

6 Strategic Assets & Property colleague comments (for decisions relating to all property assets and associated infrastructure)

- 6.1 Not applicable.

7 Social value considerations

- 7.1 Not applicable.

8 Regard to the NHS Constitution

- 8.1 Not applicable.

9 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 9.1 An EIA is not required because the report does not represent proposals for a new or changing policy, service or function.

10 List of background papers relied upon in writing this report (not including published documents or confidential or exempt information)

- 10.1 None.

11 Published documents referred to in this report

- 11.1 Ofsted Children's Services Focused Visit (30 June 2021)
<https://reports.ofsted.gov.uk/provider/44/892>