

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham on 29 July 2021 from 10.00 am - 11.43 am

Membership

Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)
Councillor Jane Lakey
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Maria Watson

Absent

Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Chantal Lee

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer
John Matravers	- Service Manager, Safeguarding Partnerships
Audrey Taylor	- Service Manager, Fostering and Adoption
Catherine Underwood	- Corporate Director for People
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

44 Apologies for absence

Councillor Jay Hayes – other Council business
Councillor Maria Joannou – personal reasons
Councillor Chantal Lee – personal reasons

45 Declarations of Interests

None.

46 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 27 May 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

47 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse

Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People, introduced the report providing an update on progress in fulfilling the recommendations from the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse (IICSA) and implementation of the associated action plan. Information was also provided by the Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services. They highlighted the following:

- (a) the IICSA had two formal recommendations for the City Council, which were to assess the potential risk posted by current and former foster carers directly provided by the council in relation to the sexual abuse of children, and to commission an independent, external evaluation of their practice concerning

harmful sexual behaviour, including responses, prevention, assessment, intervention and workforce development;

- (b) a detailed assessment was made of the risks posed by foster carers by the Head of Service for Children in Care. Any notifications of concern are now submitted to a monthly performance meeting which is also overseen quarterly by the Children's Safeguarding Partnership. External assurance of processes was also commissioned and concluded that there was no evidence that foster carers posed a risk. Some weaknesses in record keeping were identified and these processes have been improved;
- (c) all agencies with whom NCC has placed a child were written to and a seminar held to provide further details of the responsibilities. Agencies have all confirmed that they have undertaken a review of information regarding current and previous foster carers to assess risks;
- (d) NSPCC were commissioned to undertake an external evaluation of practice in relation to Harmful Sexual Behaviour, and multi-agency meetings were held with staff across the partnership. NSPCC recognised that there were well-established processes and systems in place in Nottingham alongside opportunities for further strengthening. An action plan was developed to disseminate learning and recommendations.

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

- (e) a consequence of NCC's engagement with survivors has been the shared commitment to commissioning a new model of survivor support services in Nottingham and Nottinghamshire, strongly founded on the feedback from survivors. The Council has taken on board how difficult the process can be for survivors to approach them for records and claims. A specific post has been created for survivors to approach for more direct conversations, and written communication has been made less legalistic;
- (f) the post of Sexual Violence and Engagement Manager finishes after 2021/22 as it was specific to the IICSA process, but the responsibilities of this post will be absorbed into wider services.

The Committee thanked the Corporate Director and Director for the information provided. The Committee concluded that, based on the information provided at this and previous meetings, it was satisfied that the Council has learnt lessons from the IICSA Inquiry and built that learning, and outstanding issues from the Action Plan into core practice and the Service's wider Improvement Plan; and given the management and oversight arrangements in place there is no need for further specific scrutiny by the Committee at this time.

Resolved to

- (1) recognise and thank the Children's Integrated Services teams for all their work in responding to the findings and recommendations from the IICSA;**

(2) conclude that, based on the available to it, the Committee is satisfied that the Council has implemented the actions agreed in response to the IICSA Inquiry and incorporated lessons learnt into core practice with sufficient management and oversight arrangements in place.

48 Scrutiny of Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People, delivered a presentation highlighting the following:

- (a) the total budget for Children's Integrated Services in 2021/22 is £72.659m. The largest variable within this budget is the number of Children in Care. During and following the lockdown there has been a large increase in this number and more children with complex needs. The budget for Children in Care placements is £40.378m;
- (b) savings have been identified within the budget over the next 3 years in various areas including a reduced children's centre offer, removal of unfilled vacancies and a reduction in the activity budget;
- (c) based on 2020/21 outturn and the current forecast there will be no change to the Children in Care's pressures in the Medium Term Financial Plan until more information is available on which to base future trends/demands linked with the outcome of OFSTED and SEND reviews;
- (d) whilst it is always a last resort to take a child into care, this can be necessary with increases in self-harming behaviours, eating disorders and neglect. Other Local Authorities have also reported increases in the number of Children in Care;
- (e) delays in the court system are leading to increased numbers of Children in Care and, in addition to the impact on the child and their family, this results in additional cost and budgetary pressure;
- (f) the Children at the Heart Improvement Programme is embedding consistently good strength-based social work practice to support families to make sustainable changes and work is ongoing at the edge of care to provide practical, intensive and therapeutic support keep children with their families;
- (g) costs are being managed through regional commissioning arrangements, extension of the residential block contract, semi-independence block contract, supported lodgings scheme with Barnado's, and expansion of internal residential provision is progressing;
- (h) the Council is engaging with the Competition and Markets Authority on the high cost and poor availability of external placements and continues to work with the Local Family Justice Board to escalate concerns about delays for children;
- (i) the Covid-19 Pandemic has had an impact on children and families leading to an increase in domestic violence and mental health referrals. Staff have also been impacted with self-isolation and low morale. The costs of the pandemic have also

not been fully reimbursed by the government;

- (j) an external review of service transformation relating to children's services is currently being scoped. This will contribute to the Council's wider recovery and improvement activity and feed into future service and budget planning.

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

- (k) the Service works closely with education settings and other agencies to identify children who may be at risk of coming into care, and they receive training to help with this. Last year the Neglect Strategy was put in place to help identify signs that children might be starting to be neglected and support them families with mental health services and practical support with housing and benefits. The cessation of the £20 a week uplift in Universal Credit will cause families to be under further pressure;
- (l) the Duty Team refers cases to social workers, or gives advice if a social worker is not required. The percentage of referrals that turn into formal social work is monitored and compared to other local authorities to make sure that this is the appropriate threshold;
- (m) other family members are always assessed as possible suitable carers before taking a child into care is considered;
- (n) the number of external placements which fall into the higher cost bracket of £4,000 a week or more is increasing due to the increasingly complex needs of children;
- (o) opportunities for naming an award after Helen Blackman and possibly a memorial tree or bench are being explored. The Garden Street Centre is to be renamed Helen's Place.

The Committee thanked the Portfolio Holder for outlining the current context for the provision of services for children and young people, and discussed that it would be useful to explore in more detail plans for addressing the demand and budget pressures facing Children's Services at a future meeting.

49 Work Programme

Resolved to note the work that is currently planned for the municipal year 2021/22.