



Meeting Title	Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Children's Integrated Services Improvement Journey
Meeting Date	30 September 2021

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

Nottingham City children's services were last fully inspected in November 2018 and were judged to 'Require Improvement to be good'. Following this full inspection there have been two subsequent Focused Visits (February 2020 and June/July 2021).

This report provides:

- A review of progress in implementing the Action Plan in response to inspection outcomes.
- The outcome of our recent Ofsted Focused Visit and our response to the findings

Recommendation(s):

- 1 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considers the outcome of the Focused Visit from June 2021 and the progress in implementing improvement in children's services.
- 2 Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee considers the next steps for Children's Integrated Services.

1. Background

Nottingham City Council has core statutory responsibilities for the help and protection of children, regulated by Ofsted and it is vital that these are met.

Nottingham City children's services were last fully inspected in November 2018 and were judged to 'Require Improvement to be good'. At a subsequent Focused Visit in February 2020, inspectors found that the experience of Children in Need and Child Protection had deteriorated, resulting in two priority areas for action:

- **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.

On 30th June 2021 Ofsted undertook a follow up Focused Visit reviewing the same elements of service. The report (attached as Appendix A) was published on 9th August.

2. Implementing the Improvement Plan

In response to the two priority actions from February 2020, and wider recommendations made around practice improvement, an action plan was developed and provided to Ofsted in March 2020.

The Children at the Heart Improvement Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, is established to oversee and drive delivery of the action plan to secure sustainable improvement which will make a real difference for children, young people and families.

Phase Two of the Children at the Heart Development Plan was agreed by Children at the Heart Improvement Board (October 2020).

The Children's Integrated Services Sustainability Board was established in November 2020 to provide a focus on financial sustainability.

Priority Area for Action	Action taken to improve the quality of practice for children:
	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Colleagues from all social work, Leaving Care, Targeted Family Support and Early Help teams, have received two days of virtual training to ensure a consistent understanding of Nottingham's practice model and Signs of Safety approaches.• Building on the 'Essential 8', that had only recently been launched at the time of the Focused Visit, the Director for Children's Integrated Services and Heads of Service have engaged with all social work teams to develop detailed Practice Standards and to identify priority actions to create an environment where social work can flourish.• Partner in Practice (PiP) Diagnostics have been conducted in Duty, Fieldwork and in relation to Public Law Outline. Improvement priority

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.

actions have been addressed in Practice Conferences with Essex. Circa 150 Nottingham City colleagues attended the Practice Conferences, which covered systemic/cultural genograms, assessment skills and safety planning. The Chief Executive, Corporate Director, Lead Member, Director for Children's Integrated Services and Heads of Service also attended a Strategic Workshop with Helen Lincoln, DCS at Essex. In December 2021, Essex PiP colleagues completed a review of the impact of their work with us which was reported to the Children at the Heart Improvement Board.

- We have launched Practice Guidance and an Identification Toolkit to support good assessment practice in relation to neglect. The launch event was attended by 114 colleagues, with a video and other resources created to support ongoing roll-out and embedding of the tools. We continue to share good practice examples and a 'thinking tool' through our Practitioner Resources intranet page. We have launched a Neglect Toolkit dashboard to help with monitoring and oversight of compliance. We also have a plan for Autumn 2021, to roll out Action Learning Sets, with Senior Practitioners as key practice champions in their teams.
- Safety Planning workshops were reintroduced in December 2020 and to date have trained 164 student social workers, ASYE social workers, social workers, Senior Practitioners and Team Managers. Workshop content is supported by resources developed and delivered by peer practitioners across the Directorate.
- We have worked with Nottinghamshire County colleagues to develop a cross-authority Neglect Strategy. This will form the basis of a stronger partnership action plan and governance around neglect through both Safeguarding Partnerships.
- Colleagues and Designated Safeguarding Leads were able to access a jointly delivered (Research in Practice and Council) training session on Child Neglect and Poverty Aware Practice. As part of this training, we also developed and shared additional tools and resources to support the completion of the Toolkit and a Goal Attainment Evaluation tool.
- Workforce have been provided with comprehensive set of resources to support them in delivery of good quality direct work with children and families.
- We have improved performance in relation to Child in Need Reviews and issued strengthened guidance to improve management grip and oversight of these cases. A practice review of Child in Need cases, conducted independently by Nottinghamshire County Council, is informing a robust plan for further improvements in this area.
- Case file audit and moderation processes have been strengthened to ensure that the quality of practice and the impact for the child is understood, to ensure that judgements are not over-optimistic and to secure practice improvement through the communication of thematic learning to the workforce.
- A Practice Forum was established in June 2020 to support practice-led improvement and provide opportunities for regular engagement to

	<p>ensure the experience of the frontline is visible to senior leaders. Meetings take place fortnightly and are regularly attended by circa 15 frontline social work colleagues.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Membership of Research in Practice (RiP) provides the workforce access to evidence-informed practice tools and resources, to support their work with children and families. 242 colleagues have signed up to the RiP website and are utilising the resources available. • We have used our tailored support package from RiP to focus on priority actions, prioritising training packages on Neglect and Analysis and Critical Thinking in Assessment. 36 colleagues attended the training on Critical Thinking in Assessment session on 9th September 2020 and 37 colleagues attended the Neglect training on 9th March 2021. • The Council has strengthened opportunities for young people's voices to be heard and to inform their plan and wider service developments (e.g. Mind of my Own relaunch, direct work toolkit, Corporate Director engagement to scope next steps). • The Supervision Policy has been refreshed to reflect the more recent developments in the practice model (e.g. group supervision model) and to reflect learning from the PiP Diagnostic and audit findings.
<p>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.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New social work progression and pay model implemented to improve permanent recruitment and retention. In 2019/20 Q4, 31 colleagues leave children's social work teams and this reduced to 18 in 2020/21. (Data represents a rolling 12 month period). • Ongoing involvement with successful programmes – ASYE programme, Grow Our Own, Step Up to Social Work and this year, an investment in three Frontline Student Units to grow our workforce. Since the introduction of the Grow Our Own scheme we have supported three cohorts of students, totalling 33 Children's Integrated Services colleagues to qualify as social workers. The Frontline programme has added 11 students into three Units across our services and this initiative will continue for 21/22. There are currently have seven Step up to Social Work students. • Securing a permanent workforce is a priority and active recruitment takes place, however there remain gaps and as a result agency social work staff are recruited whilst these ongoing efforts to fill posts with permanent staff take place. There are some long standing agency colleagues, who thereby maintain relationships with children and their families. Some agency staff have successfully moved into substantive posts. In 2020/21, 32 social workers were recruited through rolling recruitment, ASYE programme and agency conversions. • Investment in additional resources to create capacity for improving social work e.g. Permanence Workers, Child in Need Reviewers, Business Support, Contact Workers and an agency social work team). <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Three additional Child in Need Reviewers were added to Fieldwork Teams between March and July 2020, reviewing 170

	<p>Child in Need cases and securing an improvement in performance in relation to the percentage of Child in Need Reviews completed within six months (from 90% in January 2020, to 99% in September 2020).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management and leadership capacity added temporarily to support improvement and address performance challenges – Director-level Practice Improvement Lead, additional management capacity in Duty, additional Child Protection Chair capacity). Targeted additions have been made to address performance challenges to good effect. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Two additional managers in C&FD MASH and Children’s Duty Teams has reduced the average duration of screening referrals (from 16 days in December 2019 to 5 days in April 2021) and supported improvements in the timeliness of assessment (with 45.5% of assessments completed within 45 days of referral in Jan 2020, to 74.8% in March 2021) - Additional Child Protection Chair capacity has improved performance in relation to the percentage of Initial Child Protection Conferences taking place within 15 days of the strategy discussion (from 53.4% in Jan 2020, to 95.9% in March 2021). • We have invested in a in a full time, permanent and suitably senior Principal Social Worker (PSW) role.
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3. Current Position

The second Focused Visit of June/July 2021 can be considered to have been positive: Nottingham has received no further Priority Actions and no further Areas for Improvement (the existing ones cannot be stood down until the next full graded inspection.)

The report recognises the exceptionally difficult year for Nottingham and notes in spite of this improvements have been made. Whilst direction of travel is validated, concerns were voiced about capacity to maintain the pace of improvement and scale up improvement focus to a wider set of services.

Improvements in practice were noted by Inspectors, but there was more to do to evidence consistency in core social work practice. There remains a very substantial list of practice improvement requirements.

Improvements in staffing stability and capacity were recognised. The reduction in caseload for some staff was recognised, although noting other caseloads remain too high.

The report explicitly notes that improvements have been made *‘from a very low starting point’* indicating the extent of improvement still to be achieved.

4. Next Steps

Nottingham's next step is a full inspection. It is important to note the scale of a full inspection. The Focused Visit and focused improvement work has been targeted on a section of the statutory Children's Services and the full inspection will encompass the full extent of the authority's services for children. In addition, the Focused Visit takes place over two days with 2 - 3 inspectors, whereas the full inspection will be over three weeks with potentially six or more inspectors. Therefore it will be a significantly more testing process. It will result in a graded outcome for Nottingham City Council Children's Services. (The 4 point Ofsted rating is; Outstanding/Good/Requires Improvement/Inadequate).

Appendix A: the published Ofsted report of Focused Visit of Nottingham City Council (June/July 2021)