

Corporate Parenting Board - 15 November 2021

Title of paper:	Children in Care and Care Leavers Strategy 2021-2023	
Director(s)/ Corporate Director(s):	Helen Watson, Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People	Wards affected: All
Report author(s) and contact details:	Treza Mann, Interim Service Manager for Children in Care and Leaving Care Services. Sameer Patel, Interim Team Manager Leaving Care Service	
Other colleagues who have provided input:	Tajinder Madahar, Head of Duty, Housing Aid, Children in Care and Leaving Care Services.	
Date of consultation with Portfolio Holder(s) (if relevant)		
Does this report contain any information that is exempt from publication? No		
Relevant Council Plan Key Outcome:		
Clean and Connected Communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Keeping Nottingham Working	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Carbon Neutral by 2028	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Safer Nottingham	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Child-Friendly Nottingham	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Healthy and Inclusive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Keeping Nottingham Moving	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Improve the City Centre	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Better Housing	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Financial Stability	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Serving People Well	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Summary of issues (including benefits to citizens/service users):		
<p>This report outlines Nottingham City Council's priorities and actions outlined in the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy for 2021-2023.</p> <p>A copy of the full draft strategy report is attached</p>		
Recommendation(s):		
1	To note the outline of the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy.	

1 Reasons for recommendations

- 1.1 As Corporate Parents, we are required to publish a Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy, to outline how we will work together to deliver good support and services for this cohort of vulnerable children and young people.

2 Background (including outcomes of consultation)

Leadership Changes

- 2.1 Following the sad loss earlier this year of our Director Helen Blackman, Helen Watson has been serving as the Interim Director and we are grateful to her for her leadership during these difficult times. We are pleased to announce the appointment of the new Director for Children's Integrated Services, Ailsa Barr, who will be joining us in January 2022. In addition, Tajinder Madahar who is the Head of Service for Children's Duty, Children in Care, Leaving Care and Housing Aid will be retiring at the end of this year. We acknowledge and thank Tajinder for her many years of service in Nottingham. We are currently recruiting to fill the post.

Covid-19

- 2.2 During the Covid19 Pandemic and resulting lockdowns the Local Authority has followed Government guidance to ensure the safety of our children and young people. Our young people, our staff and the professional network have remained our priority. There has been continued and managed use of PPE in day to day practice. The workforce is now continuing a hybrid model of working which means colleagues are coming into the office once or twice a week.
- 2.3 The statutory visits by social workers have continued face to face, however during the restricted measures of lockdown, some young people expressed preference to continue with virtual means, where the engagement has improved. However, social workers have expressed the importance of seeing their young people, completing direct work with them when undertaking visits as a way of capturing 'the voice of the child'.

Strategy (Survey Feedback)

- 2.4 The Have Your Say survey previously identified three specific areas for further focus through Children in Care Council meetings. Progress against these areas has been impacted by Covid, however is a priority focus going forward.
- 2.5 There is a meeting scheduled for 1st November 2021 with the Children in Care Council, (this was briefly discussed at their last meeting on 27th September 2021), with good representation of young people of all ages, and which is being held at Loxley House in the evening. Unfortunately, the meeting scheduled for 18th October 2021 did not take place, due to low turnout response and the half term holidays.
- a) **Changing the culture of care**
We are working towards ensuring that children in care have stability through permanent living arrangements. We have established a tracking system to identify all children in care who have been in a stable placement for 12 months to consider if the carer is able to offer permanency through long term fostering for the child if it is in their interest. We are able to address barriers to achieving this. We are assessing the potential for children to return to their parents or wider family through 2 projects; STARS and Reunification. Each one has staff who work closely with children, young people and families to support with the transition and permanency.
- b) **Improving opportunities for children in care and care leavers to prepare for independent living and successful adulthood**

Through a newly established Transitions Panel we are identifying the support young people may need to assist with their independence plan. Through this work we are identifying additional support that can be accessed with referrals to Adult Services post 18, Aspirations Champion, ASDAN, and the Local Offer.

c) Supporting the Have Your Say survey

We are engaging more care experienced children and care leavers to support as peer interviewers to encourage more children in care and care leaver to share their views, experiences and ideas for change.

Mind of my own

2.6 Nottingham City is currently also using Mind Of My Own, an app designed to help further capture children and young people's voice in a digital forum. The use of the app by children in care remains low and we need to understand the barriers. We are continuing to roll out training on the use of Mind of My Own to frontline staff, including the training for Independent Reviewing Officers who chair our children in care reviews so that they can promote the use of the App. We have also worked with foster carers to increase their confidence in the use of the App so that they can support children in care to have their wishes and feelings heard. We have regular monthly meetings, to support the use of Mind of My Own.

Looked After Reviews

2.7 Children in care have regular reviews taking place to make sure the care arrangements are meeting their needs and to make sure their care plans are progressing at the pace they should. In May 2020 91.7% of reviews were taking place in timescale and in September this rose 94.6% which is good.

2.8 Independent Reviewing Officers continue to support and encourage young people to chair their own meetings or set their own agendas where appropriate. Independent Reviewing Officers make a conscious effort to further increase the participation of children by undertaking child friendly reviews, which are individualised to each child's needs and abilities. Furthermore, children are reassured in between reviews or before the review starts to give them the confidence needed to participate fully in their own review.

The impact of the Virtual School

2.9 The role of the Virtual School is to monitor, support and provide interventions to ensure that children in care achieve the best possible educational outcomes.

2.10 The Virtual School moved to having an electronic Personal Education Plan (ePEP) in November 2020, which requires the PEP to be updated each term. Full training has been provided to frontline social workers and we have seen significant improvement with the latest performance for ePEPs in our latest Summer 2021 report 88% of pupils had completed a PEP this is an improvement from our Spring 2021 at 86%.

2.11 Social workers and Virtual School colleagues have found that the electronic version has improved the engagement and performance with young people and our education partners.

Health Outcomes

2.12 Making sure that children in care have had a health assessment and dental and opticians check in timescale has been a particular challenge during the Covid pandemic. Dental practices were shut for a significant period and whilst treatment continued to be offered, dental checks were not possible. We are committed to ensuring that this improves with the relaxing of restrictions.

2.13 In Sept 2021, our performance headlines in relation to health were as follows:

- 80.0% of children in care have had a health assessment recorded in the last 12 months (6 months if they are 5 years and under)
- 61.5% of children in care have had a dental check recorded in the last 12 months
- 75% of children in care have had a strengths and difficulties questionnaire (SDQ) recorded in the last 12 months.

CAMHS

2.14 The CAMHS Children in Care team comprises social workers as well as staff from other disciplines such as psychology, psychiatry and other health disciplines. The CAMHS Children in Care team provides a specialist service and training to support and maintain the emotional and mental health needs of our young people. The team ensures the emotional health needs of young people are reflected in Health Plans and are part of the review process.

2.15 Care Leavers have been identified as a priority group for the Nottingham City Integrated Care Partnership, which is a joint City Council/Health led body that coordinates strategic development work across local services. One of the priorities we have just begun to work on is to revise the process for transitions for young people from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

The Placement Service

2.16 The Children's Placement Service is the single point of access for the formation and quality assurance of care placements. The Service is responsible for providing every child and young person with the best possible placement, which meets their needs, wishes and feelings and provides them with the opportunity to thrive and achieve. At Nottingham City Council during 2018/19 we expanded our internal residential and semi-independent provision and we continue to progress our ambitious plans for further expansion.

2.17 In August 2021, 67% of children in care were placed in foster placements. Of those placements, 54.1% were with city council foster carers. This is a consequence of focussed recruitment activity and a recent appointed team manager overlooking the service who will maintain and increase in the number of children placed with family members.

Reunification

2.18 The Reunification social worker and the therapeutic family support worker work closely with families and young person to ensure a smooth transition home, whilst assessments are being completed as part of parallel planning.

STARS Project

2.19 The project aims to support stepping down from residential care into foster care to enable children and young people to experience family life.

Leaving Care Service

2.20 The Leaving Care Service fulfils the Local Authority's statutory duties to young people who are transitioning towards or have left care.

2.21 Following the extension of statutory duties in 2018, the service continues to support care leavers aged 21-25 years, with approximately 60 young people returning to request support between April and October 2021.

Care Leavers Local Offer

2.22 The Local Offer is uploaded to the Ask Lion webpage to support Care Leavers, setting out the services on offer from both the Local Authority and its partners <https://www.asklion.co.uk/kb5/nottingham/directory/advice.page?id=wtrOoglUhDY> . The offer continues to develop, with opportunities such as the Aspirations Champions Network now being added.

2.23 A number of care leavers who have experienced struggles with their mental health have participated in recent commissioning work to improve the Local Authority's offer in respect of placement choice / providers.

Independent Living Skills

2.24 The Leaving Care Service is a registered centre for the delivery of ASDAN courses and awards. These provide young people with the opportunity to develop their skills and achieve a wide range of accredited certificates that support their aspirations. The Leaving Care Service have been involved in the development of this course with ASDAN, and a series of training to initially support our internal foster carers and children's residential staff is being rolled out between September and November 2021.

2.25 The Employability Training & Support Coordinator identifies our care leavers who are in most need of support and manages referrals, creating a package of appropriate activities and support around each young person that best meets their needs. This has also included close links with alternative provision providers to support young people into college and training, such as Catch 22, Enable, People Plus, and Access Training. Whilst opportunities were restricted by Covid-19 over the past 18 months, the programme is currently performing well above expected outcomes.

2.26 Nine young people started University this September, increasing the total number of Nottingham City Care Leavers currently studying at university to 27.

2.27 Aspiration Champions Network continues to progress, which has now recruited 18 volunteer “Aspiration Champions” from across the Council and its partners. The scheme will support our work around increasing opportunities for Nottingham City Care Leavers to progress into sustained education, training and employment, by creating more work experience and work tasters internally within the City Council.

CIC Police Officers and Youth Justice Service

2.28 Nottingham City have two established Children in Care Police Officers (CICPO) posts which continue to be jointly funded by Nottinghamshire Police and Nottingham City Council. These posts were created to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers.

2.29 The Youth Justice Service work closely with young people who have or are at risk of getting into trouble as a consequence of criminal behaviour. The Youth Justice Service (and its partners) work hard to prevent offending and re-offending behaviour. It has been effective in its efforts to do this through its use of Restorative Justice (RJ).

3 Other options considered in making recommendations

3.1 None

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

4.1 None

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

5.1 None

6 Strategic Assets & Property colleague comments (for decision relating to all property assets and associated infrastructure) (Area Committee reports only)

6.1 None

7 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

7.1 Has the equality impact of the proposals in this report been assessed?

No

X

An EIA is not required because the report is for noting:

8 List of background papers other than published works or those disclosing confidential or exempt information

8.1 None

9 Published documents referred to in compiling this report

9.1 None