

Nottingham City Council Corporate Parenting Board

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room, Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on Monday 15 November 2021 from 2:00pm to 4:08pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Cheryl Barnard (Chair)
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)
Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Nicola Heaton
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos

Absent

Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Maria Watson

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Mary-Anne Cosgrove - Head of Childrens' Regulated Services
Tajinder Madahar - Head of Extensive and Specialist Services
Treza Mann - Interim Service Manager for CIC and LCS
John Matravers - Service Manager - Safeguarding Partnerships
Emma Powley - Governance Officer
Jon Rea - Engagement and Participation Lead Officer

30 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Phil Jackson - unwell
Councillor Maria Watson - self-isolating

31 Declarations of Interests

None.

32 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 20 September 2021 were agreed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

33 Independent Visitors Report

Michelle Brown, Volunteer Co-ordinator - Change, Grow, Live (CGL) elaborated on the report and updated the Board. The following points were highlighted:

- a) Volunteers are trained under the Change Grow Live Safer Volunteer Recruitment (SVR) process which is committed to anti-discriminatory law, policy and practice. SVR involves a seven-stage process including; application form, first interview, classroom training, enhanced DBS check, references, assessment pack and pre - commencement interview. Volunteers are prohibited from meeting with a child/young person until all of the stages have been successfully completed.

- b) Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, it became necessary for changes to be made to the recruitment and training of volunteers. Government guidance prompted adaptations to working methods to enable the Nottingham Independent visitor Service to continue operation during the lockdown period.
- c) All direct face to face work was suspended in order to minimise risk to staff, volunteers and young people. Communication via phone calls, text message, emails, and video calls continued.
- d) Prior to the pandemic, Change Grow Live would carry out face-to-face interviewing of volunteers, with successful applicants trained in groups of 10 or 12 in central locations or at the main office base within Derby City.
- e) However, due to increased cases of Covid, in March 2020 it became necessary for this to be suspended and Change Grow Live had to swiftly adapt their processes; initial interviews were carried out over the telephone; Trainers adapted their paper based training to provide online training, and after the implementation of Microsoft Teams capabilities the Independent Visitor volunteer training restarted in June 2020.

The Chair congratulated CGL on their continued work during the pandemic and in response to questions, it was explained that male volunteers were underrepresented but a concerted effort was being made to address the balance. The Board were also informed that there was a 50/50 split in the number of volunteers supporting foster children and those in residential care.

34 Advocacy Service Report

Due to extenuating circumstances, this item was deferred. The Board agreed that it be considered at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on the 17 January 2022.

35 Complaints Service Report

Patrick Skeete, Social Care Complaints Manager, presented a report and gave a summary of the statutory Social Care Complaints procedure. It was noted that Nottingham City has a legislative duty to ensure all young people have a robust complaints process to address any concerns that they are responsible for. The following points were highlighted:

- a) The aim of the Social Care Complaints Team is to resolve service user dissatisfaction and learn from complaints, allowing officers to improve service delivery. The complaints service operates a statutory complaints procedure, which includes the production of an annual report on the operation of the complaints procedure.
- b) Complaints were dealt with expediently and there was a strong relationship between the department and children. The process for dealing with non-statutory complaints worked extremely well; access to the complaints team was very good and could be done through various channels.

- c) There are 3 stages to the Children's Statutory Social Care Complaints Procedure and they are as follows:
- i) Stage 1 – the department is asked to provide a written response within 10 working days, this may be extended to 20 working days.
 - ii) Stage 2 – where an individual remains dissatisfied following a response at stage 1 the complainant may request an investigation of their complaint. This is ordinarily undertaken by an Independent Investigator, overseen by an Independent Person, both commissioned by the Complaints Team. A detailed investigation report is then compiled which should be available within 25 working days. However, this may be extended to 65 working days.
 - iii) Stage 3 – if the complainant remains dissatisfied after receiving the investigator's findings and any recommendations, they may request that an independent panel (comprised of 3 independent people) review the complaint and investigation. The complainant and any representative, and a representative from the department, along with the investigator and independent person are invited to the panel too.
- d) The Council have a duty to inform people how to complain and how to access advocates. Should individuals want to go through the statutory complaint process, the Complaints Team will offer them help throughout the process. Due to the lengthy process involved in making a complaint, individuals are made aware of alternative resolutions; options are considered to avoid the process allowing the individual to have control over the process and to what happens.

Responding to questions asked by the Committee, the following points were highlighted:

- e) With each complaint made, an advocate was offered regardless of whether the complaint was raised through their social worker or directly to the service. They are also formally written to, the details of which included the advocacy service.
- f) The vast majority of complaints which are made and resolved within 24 hours and are not logged as complaints which is in line with national guidance. Signposting to other services or routes also provide alternative options for complainants when the initial complaint they make does not fall under Social Care complaints.
- g) Members voiced some concerns about the majority of complaints not being upheld and questioned whether there was a theme to the complaints submitted. It was explained that previous Service reports had included higher numbers of complaints having been upheld, but that for the period covered in the report, there had been fewer.

- h) Members requested that more information and context be provided in future reports; the opinion and feedback of children in care who have raised complaints should be considered to ensure that the report is an accurate account and to gather a full understanding of the children's experiences of the service.
- i) Children and young people who had submitted a complaint were given the opportunity to feedback about the process and how they felt with regards to the outcome of their complaint. Any feedback received through the complaints process was reported back to the team in order to provide training opportunities for staff.

Resolved:

- i) that the contents of the report be noted;**
- ii) that a more detailed information about complaints be provided in the next Complaints Service Report;**
- iii) that Children in Care who have experienced the complaints service be invited to feedback at a future Board meeting.**

36 Independent Reviewing Officer Service Annual Report

John Matravers, Strategic Lead for Safeguarding Partnerships updated the Board on the Annual report and the following points were highlighted;

- a) Independent Reviewing Officers continue to 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.
- b) Additional emphasis needs to be placed on the language that is used when engaging with children and young people. Often the language that it used is not age appropriate or easily understandable to a child and this is an area that needs to be challenged.
- c) Many of the processes have been delivered from a Government-lead perspective and as such it was necessary for people to be mindful of the way that the information is discussed and delivered. It was considered essential that Independent Reviewing Officers are raising the correct questions and that they were framed in an appropriate manner, to ensure a more child-centric and less process driven dialogue.
- d) Children are reassured in between reviews or before the review starts, which would facilitate them feeling more confident and equipped to participate fully in their own review.
- e) During the reporting period between 2020-2021, 64% of Young People/Children had remained in the same placement for at least 2 years or more. This provided stability for children and young people in both care and education.

37 Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy

Treza Mann, Interim Service Manager for CIC and LCS elaborated on the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy, and outlined how the Council would work together to deliver good support and services for this cohort of vulnerable children and young people. The following points were highlighted:

- a) During the Covid19 Pandemic and resulting lockdowns Nottingham City Council has followed Government guidance to ensure the safety of our children and young people. Since the easing of restrictions the workforce is now continuing a hybrid model of working which means colleagues are coming into the office once or twice a week.
- b) 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'.
- c) The Have Your Say survey previously identified three specific areas for further focus through Children in Care Council meetings which was used in shaping the strategy:
 - i) changing the culture of care;
 - ii) improving opportunities for children in care and care leavers to prepare for independent living and successful adulthood; and
 - iii) supporting the Have Your Say survey.
- d) Nottingham City is currently also using the 'Mind of My Own' app which was designed to help further capture children and young people's voice in a digital forum. However, there has been a low uptake of the app and further work is being undertaken to examine if there are any barriers preventing people from using the app.
- e) There was continued partnership-working with CAMHS with the CAMHS Children in Care team providing a specialist service and training to support and maintain the emotional and mental health needs of young people.
- f) A number of care leavers had, with support from the Leaving Care Service, enrolled and started University. Nottinghamshire Police and Nottingham City Council continue to jointly fund two Children in Care Police Officers (CICPO) posts which were created to reduce the criminalisation of children in care and care leavers.

In response to questions raised, the following information was noted:

- g) The draft strategy would be submitted and discussed at a future Children and Youth Council and any comments made will be incorporated into the strategy.
- h) The importance of ascertaining the views and thoughts of all looked after children was paramount in order to truly engage and shape future services.

There was a need for children and young people to feed into issues affecting their futures.

Resolved to note the outline of the Children in Care and Care Leaver Strategy.

38 2021/22 - Q2 Performance Report

Tajinder Madahar, Head of Service Children's Duty, Children in Care, Leaving Care and Housing Aid, update the Board and gave information about the 2021/2022 Quarter 2 Performance Report Children in Care and Leaving Care Period covered from the 1 July 2021 to the 30 September 2021. The following points were highlighted:

- a) Since the previous quarter, the number of statutory visits had increased from 80 to 83%, with a target of 95%. Despite the improvement there was a need to continue to improve on this, although there had been a number of issues with visits not being able to take place in the necessary timescales due to Covid and the requirement to self-isolate.
- b) A target of 90% was set for Health and Dental performance although for Quarter 2, this had fallen short and was recorded at 83%, requiring further improvements. The Service Manager from the children's duty service is currently working to address the delay in initiation of initial health assessments when children and young people first come into care. There were no delays in young people receiving medical attention when it was required.
- c) With regards to dental checks- the target is set at 90%. However, this had not been met and had fallen as low as 49%. This was in part, due to dentists being shut during the various lockdowns and restrictions that had remained in place. As restrictions have lifted, there has been a marked improvement in the figures and it is expected that the improvement would continue.
- d) The PEP (Personal Education Plans (PEPs)) reporting had continued to show improvement; the latest performance for PEPs in August 2021 was at 88%, this being a marked improvement from the status of compliance in PEPs prior to them being electronic updates. Work with the Virtual Schools would continue to ensure any changes to the PEP for non-statutory school age children would be strengthened in line with the recommendations of the Peer Review.

Resolved:

To Note and challenge the performance data regarding performance relating to the Authority's work with children in care and leaving care.

Social Care would continue to monitor performance regarding dental checks to ensure this improves as Pandemic restrictions reduce, and to address any barriers.

Head of Service to work with the Virtual School to ensure any changes to the PEP for non-statutory school age children are strengthened in line with the Peer Review recommendations – a draft plan having been prepared.

39 Children in Care Update

John Rea, Engagement and Participation Lead Officer, gave a verbal update alongside a number of children in care.

40 Feedback from Themed Discussion with CiC Council – Homes and Housing

John Rea, Engagement and Participation Lead Officer gave a verbal update alongside a number of children in care. Board Members participated in discussion with the children.

41 Work Plan

The Board agreed that the work plan be updated to reflect the inclusion of the Advocacy Service Report to be considered at the next meeting of the Corporate Parenting Board on the 17 January 2022.

42 Date of Next Meeting

The next Board meeting will be held on 17 January 2022.