

# Nottingham City Council

## Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 25 November 2021 from 10.03 am - 1.12 pm

### Membership

#### Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)  
Councillor Jay Hayes  
Councillor Phil Jackson  
Councillor AJ Matsiko  
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos  
Councillor Ethan Radford

#### Absent

Councillor Maria Joannou  
Councillor Nayab Patel  
Councillor Maria Watson

### Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Liz Anderson	- Djanogly Learning Trust
John Dexter	- Education Director
Jane Garrard	- Constitutional Services
Fiona Gray	-
Sian Hampton	-
Sean Kelly	- Park Vale Academy
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Peter McConnochie	- Head of Access to Learning
Dr Sebrina Turner	- MHST Service Manager
Catherine Underwood	- Corporate Director for People
Janine Walker	-
Helen Watson	- Interim Director of Children's Integrated Service
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

### 57 Apologies for absence

Councillor Maria Joannou – personal reasons  
Councillor Cheryl Barnard  
Lisa Kitto

### 58 Declarations of Interests

None.

### 59 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 30 September 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

### 60 Secondary School Exclusions - discussion with Regional Schools

### **Commissioner and local Academy Trusts**

Peter McConnochie, Head of Access to Learning, delivered a presentation to the Committee:

- (a) Nottingham City's exclusion rate has been higher than most other authorities regionally and nationally for a number of years, with the permanent exclusion rate being twice the England average. Exclusion rates are significantly higher in secondary schools than primary schools;
- (b) the exclusion rate in primary schools has dropped significantly due to the introduction of strategies such as Routes to Inclusion (R2i) and through increased partnership support;
- (c) not all secondary schools are high excluders, with seven of Nottingham's secondary academies not excluding at all for the past five years. 70% of exclusions are by 6 schools. The authority's Inclusion Strategy was set up a number of years ago with the aim to reduce exclusions through partnership working, and in the schools that have signed up this has proven to reduce exclusion rates so work is ongoing to encourage all academies to do so;
- (d) R2i was introduced in 2016 when it was found that good practice was not being shared among primary schools. It provides schools with a systematic graduated approach to identification and intervention. This work is now progressing to secondary schools, but each school requires a tailored approach.

The three Multi Academy Trust (MAT) CEOs present at the meeting introduced themselves and gave an overview of their experiences:

- (e) Djanogly City Academy used to have a high rate of exclusion but this has reduced since it changed to a different Trust and signed up to the authority's Inclusion Strategy. Instead of excluding they have established an internal Alternative Provision (AP) with small nurture groups and an aim to reintroduce all pupils back to mainstream provision;
- (f) Djanogly Sherwood Academy was part of the pilot for R2i and Djanogly City Academy is part of the secondary pilot. This has been a positive experience as schools can share their experience and good practice;
- (g) Archway Learning Trust provides education for just under a third of young people in Nottingham City, covering many deprived areas. They are passionate about inclusion and collaboration but this can be difficult as the current system encourages schools to exclude. Their in-house AP costs around £100,000 a year, the city's AP services have a waiting list and other external AP is variable in quality and difficult to access;
- (h) following a question from a Committee Member on access to the internet for families, the Committee was informed that government provision of laptops and dongles was good during the pandemic. However, some Committee Members reported that they had heard of other schools that did not receive enough. Schools were assessed by their levels of deprivation and some academies topped

up the required funding from their own resources;

- (i) Raleigh Learning Trust has invested significantly in Ambleside Primary to make sure that improvement is long-term and they have opened an enhanced needs centre. Regular assessment of children with special educational needs or identified as at risk of exclusion is important as needs change. Two of the Trust's academies are AP providers, and the proportion of young people in AP that are doing well in English and Maths is actually much higher in Nottingham than nationally, and attendance is also higher.

Carol Gray, Regional Schools Commissioner for the East Midlands, introduced herself and outlined her role as an overseer and deliverer of the academies programme. She monitors and challenges Academy Trusts, and intervenes with under-performing academies including the targeting and commissioning of support for weak schools. She was pleased to hear about the strong and positive partnership between schools, MATs and officers and the positive engagement of MATs in local initiatives allowing the level of exclusions to reduce. She can help to engage with MATS that are not yet part of the Inclusion Strategy.

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

- (j) following a report from one Committee Member that they know of young people who are not motivated as they are not academic and there is so much pressure on them to do well in their GCSEs, the CEO of Archway Learning Trust reported that they work really hard to build self-esteem and resilience with a number of activities, and educating young people about their wider role in the community. However, schools are judged on their academic performance so there will always be a pressure to perform well academically until this changes;
- (k) following an observation that academies used to 'off-roll' young people in lieu of official exclusion, the Committee were told that this now never happens due to stricter oversight and accountability. The school system in Finland was suggested as more effective than the UK, and it was generally agreed that the laws and regulations for schools and academies in the UK change too regularly with changing governments, which is unhelpful;
- (l) following a suggestion that working with parents is important to reduce poor behaviour and exclusions, the MAT representatives were in agreement and stated that the most difficult cases are where parents do not engage with schools. It was also stated that the judgement of AP needs to change as its purpose is different from that of a mainstream setting and caters for young people with unique circumstances;
- (m) one Committee member suggested that the punitive culture in schools around uniforms and minor behaviour should be looked at, and suggested that alternative intervention such as meditation could work instead of punishment. MAT representatives disagreed and said that young people need routine in order to prepare for life.

## **61 Children's Integrated Services financial position, budget proposals and**

### **transformation activity**

Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People, delivered a presentation on budget proposals for consultation as part of the development of the Council's medium term financial plan which relate to Children's Integrated Services, including:

- ending the grant funding of the youth services and NGY base provided by Base 51;
- reduction of the Play and Youth Service to provide targeted youth provision only. All play services would cease and there will be a reduction in staffing, and associated reduction of buildings;
- operation of the Early Help service from only three Children's Centres, rather than the current 9, across the City, with a reduction in staffing and early help offer to families, along with the closure of 6 Children's Centres;
- the Agency Decision Maker for Adoption and Fostering, currently delivered by an external consultant, would be delivered in house within the senior management team;
- a reduction in management capacity within the Strategy and Improvement section, and reductions business support for the Play & Youth and Children's Centre provision;
- a review and reconfiguration of Targeted Family Support and Edge of Care Services to consolidate and target the offer.

In the subsequent discussion the following points were made:

- (a) citizens must be engaged with properly in consultation. Committee members recommended that the Council considers using communication channels that residents engage with on a daily basis in relation to the services affected. For example, messages could be placed on school websites, libraries and children's centres;
- (b) many citizens lack easy digital access, both in terms of appropriate devices and data, for a significant proportion of residents, especially in more deprived areas who may be more greatly affected by some of the proposals. Consultation should be provided in an alternative format such as on paper;
- (c) information about the proposals in the consultation is too generic, with very little information about the nature of what is being proposed and the impact it will have on service provision and individual citizens. This makes it very difficult for citizens to meaningfully engage with, and unless it is clear that a proposal will directly affect them people are unlikely to engage with the consultation process at all. By the time the full detail of the proposal is communicated it is too late to comment on and influence decisions;
- (d) the proposals relating to Children's Integrated Services present a very real risk to the Council's ability to continue its statutory duties in the medium to longer term. The Council is already struggling to meet demand, in terms of numbers and complexity, for Children in Care. These must be appropriately resourced going forward to avoid an impact both on the ability to deliver statutory responsibilities and services and on the Council's overall financial stability in the future, as reducing early intervention is likely to further increase demand for statutory

services, which the Council is already struggling to meet at current levels;

- (e) reducing school exclusion is a priority area within the Strategic Council Plan (SCP) because of the impact that it has on outcomes for a young person who is excluded, and reducing support for young people on the edge of exclusion does not support this aim within the SCP;
- (f) the Council's ability to deliver statutory services and responsibilities as a result of having to support people with no recourse to public funds, who often have high levels of need, could be at risk, and more understanding is required on this;
- (g) once the buildings in which play services and children's centres are currently provided in have been sold it will make it very difficult to ever recommence delivery of similar community-based services should circumstances allow.

## **62 Work Programme**

The agendas for the rest of the municipal year need to be reviewed to ensure a focus on the Council's Recovery and Improvement activity and to ensure a maximum of two substantive items per meeting, as recommended by the CFGS review of scrutiny.

**Resolved for the Chair & Vice-Chair to meet and discuss the January and March agendas prior to the next meeting.**