

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham on 27 January 2022
from 10.00 am - 12.04 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)
Councillor Jay Hayes
Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Nayab Patel
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Ethan Radford
Councillor Maria Watson

Absent

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People
Ailsa Barr	- Director of Children's Integrated Services
John Dexter	- Education Director
Gary Eves	- Head of Mental Health, Learning Disability & Children's Commissioning, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Michelle Sherlock	- Designated Clinical Officer for SEND, Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group
Catherine Underwood	- Corporate Director for People
Janine Walker	- Head of SEND and Vulnerable Pupils
Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

63 Apologies for absence

None.

64 Declarations of Interests

None.

65 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the minutes of the meeting held on 25 November 2021 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

66 Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Special Educational and/ or Disabilities (SEND) Inspection

Janine Walker, Head of SEND and Vulnerable Pupils, John Dexter, Education Director, Gary Eves, Head of Mental Health, Learning Disability and Children's Commissioning Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Michelle Sherlock, Designated Clinical Officer for SEND Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Clinical Commissioning Group, spoke to the Committee about the findings of the recent Ofsted and Care Quality Commission Special Educational and/or Disabilities (SEND) inspection and the action being taken to respond to those findings. They highlighted the following information:

- (a) The Children and Families Act 2014 included wide-ranging changes to services for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND), including a more holistic approach with contributions from health and social care. This inspection was to assess how Nottingham City has embedded those reforms.
- (b) The number of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) in Nottingham City are below the national average but rising. Deprivation affects a significant number of families in Nottingham City and the more deprived wards have significantly higher levels of children and young people with SEND. There is also a significant cohort of refugee and asylum-seeking families.
- (c) The inspection took place between Monday 8 November and Friday 12 November 2021, and included meetings with children and young people, parents and carers, early years providers, clinical and medical officers, and education settings.
- (d) The inspection outcome is not a graded judgement but a published report letter giving a narrative judgement about how well the SEND reforms have been implemented for children and young people with SEND and their families, and identifying strengths and areas for development.
- (e) The inspection did not identify any significant weaknesses in Nottingham City's SEND provision that would require the inspectorates to issue a Written Statement of Action. For comparison, 80% of inspections during 2021 received a written statement of action, 50% of Nottingham's statistical neighbours received a written statement of action, and 62% of Core Cities received a written statement of action.
- (f) Many strengths were identified during the inspection in the areas of partnership working, leadership, early intervention, personal budgets, social and emotional support, and the Routes to Inclusion initiative.
- (g) A recommendation was made to improve commissioning arrangements. Appropriate plans are in place to develop a joint commissioning strategy in the near future but the current absence of an overall joint commissioning strategy limits the area's ability to use commissioning as a tool for improvement.
- (h) The report letter identified that educational outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Nottingham are improving but are still too low. Leaders are

driving necessary improvements, including training for staff, but some actions have been delayed by the pandemic.

- (i) The strategy for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND is not communicated clearly enough, and a large proportion of parents do not understand or appreciate the strategy. Many do not know where to find information and guidance to improve outcomes for their children.
- (j) The findings of the inspection report will be aligned with future SEND plans, and the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment SEND Chapter will be refreshed to update the current self-evaluation framework and action plan. The SEND strategy and priorities will be reviewed and refreshed via co-production with all stakeholders including children with SEND and their families.
- (k) A local area communication strategy is being developed to improve co-production and engagement and ensure children, young people with SEND and their families have access to clear, up-to-date and relevant information, taking into account the needs of speakers of English as an additional language and the existence of digital poverty in some communities.

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

- (l) There is a lower number of EHCPs in Nottingham City because more resources are available for children who do not have one compared to other local authorities. Pupils are assessed earlier and schools can access funding immediately, avoiding the administrative task of an EHCP.
- (m) The report letter identified that Nottingham does not provide enough short break provision. A 3 bedded unit is being commissioned for the most complex children and families experiencing crisis, and there are a range of short breaks available.
- (n) The proportion of excluded pupils with SEND is lower than the national average. This is in part due to the City's inclusion strategy and alternative provision available at some secondary schools. Based on evidence heard at from previous Committee meetings, some Committee members sought assurance about consistency between schools and supported a focus on getting all schools signed up to the inclusion model.
- (o) Some Committee members raised concern about whether parents understand the services and pathways available and how to access them. The Council and CCG acknowledged that communication of the range of support available for SEND pupils and their families needs to improve, particularly in areas of higher deprivation, for people who speak English as an additional language, or who experience digital poverty. Councillors and schools could both help with ensuring this communication is effective. Nottingham also has a commissioned specialist advice service.

- (p) Representatives of the Council and CCG said that they recognised the need to get a better understanding of what the issues and challenges are for parents so that this can be used to inform decision making about future provision.

The Committee welcomed the largely positive findings of the SEND inspection and the planning taking place to address areas identified for improvement. The Committee felt that communication with parents is particularly important, both in terms of hearing about their issues and challenges and ensuring parents know what services are available and how to access them; and decided to review progress in improving communications.

Resolved to review progress in improving communication with parents about the strategy for identifying, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND; where to find information and guidance to improve outcomes for their children; and the services available for children and young people with SEND.

67 Families with No Recourse to Public Funds

Will Hose introduced the report on services for families with 'No Recourse to Public Funds' (NRPF) who cannot access welfare benefits, homelessness assistance, social housing and, in some cases, employment. The following information was highlighted:

- (a) The Local Authority currently supports 13 eligible families (21 children) under the NRPF framework. The support offered to these families varies depending on their level of need: some are offered subsistence support in the form of weekly payments, whilst others may be offered accommodation and subsistence support.
- (b) The Local Authority receives no specific funding to support children and families with NRPF. The NRPF spend has been reducing year on year since 2017/2018. This is likely to be due to a reduction in families requiring support under the NRPF framework, coupled with improving processes to help progress settled status for families.
- (c) having a dedicated NRPF Specialist Family Support Worker ensures that cases are progressed swiftly and that families receive a consistent, high quality service. Duty Social Workers benefit from specialist advice and there is an agreed pathway to progress NRPF cases to ensure there is a positive outcome for families in a timely manner;

The Committee commented on the importance of this support for families and noted the efficient administration of support by the People Department. Committee members noted the costs of provision of this support to local authorities which, in their view, should be reimbursed by Government; and decided to discuss this with Executive councillors to explore opportunities for raising this matter with Government.

68 Work Programme

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