

Title of paper:	Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services	
Report to:	Partnership Board	
Date:	27.09.22	
Relevant Director:	Catherine Underwood – Corporate Director of People Ailsa Barr – Director of Children's Integrated Services	Wards affected: All
Contact Officer(s) and contact details:	Ailsa Barr - Director of Children's Integrated Services	
Other officers who have provided input:	Sam Morris – Head of Strategy and Improvement	
Relevant Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP) priority or priorities:		
Safeguarding and supporting children and families: Children, young people and families will benefit from early and effective support and protection to empower them to overcome difficulties and provide a safe environment in which to thrive.		x
Promoting the health and wellbeing of babies, children and young people: From pregnancy and throughout life, babies, children, young people and families will be healthier, more emotionally resilient and better able to make informed decisions about their health and wellbeing.		x
Supporting achievement and academic attainment: All children and young people will leave school with the best skills and qualifications they can achieve and will be ready for independence, work or further learning.		x
Empowering families to be strong and achieve economic wellbeing: More families will be empowered and able to deal with family issues and child poverty will be significantly reduced.		x
Summary of issues (including benefits to customers/service users):		
<p>To brief the Partnership Board on the report published by Ofsted of its Inspection of Nottingham's Children's Services, action taken and to set out next steps in improving our Children's Services.</p> <p>The inspection of Children's Services provides an independent assessment of some of the most important statutory responsibilities of a council. The inspection is a significant benchmark for Nottingham City Council, both in terms of formal grading, but also as a very detailed review of our services which assesses the quality of our Children's Services through the experience and impact for children in Nottingham.</p>		
Recommendations:		
1	The Partnership Board consider the findings of Ofsted's inspection	
2	The Board considers how it can support the ambition for Nottingham Children's Services to be delivering consistently good social care services to children and young people	
3		

1. BACKGROUND AND PROPOSALS

1.1 Children’s services represent some of the most important responsibilities of a council and as such are subject to a very robust regulatory regime. The inspection is a significant benchmark for the council, both in terms of formal grading, but also as a very detailed review of our services which assesses the quality of our children’s services through the experience and impact for children in Nottingham.

1.2 Ofsted’s Inspection of Local Authority children’s services focus on the effectiveness of local authority services and arrangements:

- to help and protect children
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including those children who return home
- the arrangements for permanence for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers

1.3 The inspection also evaluates:

- the effectiveness of leaders and managers
- the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of professional practice

1.4 The Inspection is unannounced and takes place over three weeks. The first week takes place off site where Ofsted review a suite of very detailed information about the service, our self-assessment and performance data. Weeks two and three involved 6 inspectors working on site, understanding in detail our work with children and families.

1.5 Judgement gradings are inadequate, requires improvement, good and outstanding. Overall effectiveness will be limited to inadequate where the experiences of children who need help and protection are judged to be inadequate.

1.6 Nottingham’s Inspection of children’s services took place between 4th – 22nd July 2022. The outcome of the inspection was:

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Requires improvement to be good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Inadequate
The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Inadequate (limited by the grading within the domain of children in need of help and protection).

1.7 The Ofsted inspection of children’s services provided a full assessment of the current quality of service delivery and clarity regarding the areas where services need to improve to ensure the provision of consistently good services for children and young people in Nottingham City. The full

Ofsted inspection report was published on 5th September 2022. A copy of the inspection report can be found at [Ofsted | Nottingham City Council](#)

1.8 The report is clear that whilst some progress has been made against previous priority actions, this progress has been too slow, and some other areas have deteriorated. This means that children in Nottingham City do not yet receive a consistently good service and for some children at risk of harm this is not recognised quickly enough. The majority of children wait too long for decisions to be made regarding next steps when information is received in the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH), this means that some children who have met threshold for social care intervention wait up to six weeks to be seen by a social worker.

1.9 The inspection identified 8 specific areas for improvement:

- Effectiveness and timeliness of responses to children's needs when first presented to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH).
- Management oversight and direction of front-line work and the local authority designated officer (LADO).
- Social work capacity so that social workers and first-line managers can respond effectively to children in need of help and protection, and that children in care have greater consistency of social worker.
- Placement sufficiency for children in care and those with complex needs.
- The service response to care leavers aged 21 and over.
- The service response to young people who are aged 16/17 years who present as homeless.
- The quality and timeliness of return home interviews.
- Oversight of children missing from education and those who are electively home educated.

1.10 The report provides clarity regarding specific areas for improvement in the service, as well as areas where inspectors saw progress or areas of strength since their last focussed visit. The feedback demonstrates that Nottingham is capable of delivering tangible improvements which make a difference for children; however, it is explicit that the pace of change has been too slow. It is now essential that the improvement work quickens to ensure sustainable progress across service delivery as it is this that will bring meaningful improvement which will make a positive difference for children. This in turn will mean that the council can be assured that its statutory duties in respect of children's services are not only met but are being delivered confidently with a focus on good outcomes.

1.11 The inspection feedback identified that the new leadership team is beginning to have a greater impact on practice through clarity on the expectations of all staff, and a developing culture that promotes good practice through high support and high challenge.

1.12 The inspection outcome and findings are of relevance to the wider Children's Partnership and Safeguarding Children's Partnership. Whilst inspectors noted that partnership working at a strategic and operational level is positive and seeks to provide the best outcomes for children and young people, there were also some clear areas for improvement identified, such as:

- obtaining parental consent,
- children at risk of homelessness,
- ensuring full partnership representation at the domestic abuse triage meeting
- a greater commitment from partnership for children in care and care leavers.

The Partnership is key to ensuring effective and robust multi-agency safeguarding arrangements and so will be integral to contributing to and supporting the improvements that are needed.

1.13 It is clear that our ambition must be that at the next full inspection we will demonstrate that Nottingham's children's services are unequivocally 'good' and we will also want to be confidently demonstrating some outstanding elements of practice.

1.14 The Council's self-assessment reflected clarity about the need to continue to improve Children's Services. Actions were in train prior to inspection and further action has been taken following the inspection.

- Revising the Children's Services improvement plan to strengthen activity to address the areas of improvement.
- The Children at the Heart Improvement Board will be chaired by an Independent Chair commissioned through the Department for Education to provide a level of independence and challenge to the delivery of the improvement plan.
- As noted in the inspection report, the service has accelerated its change and improvement work within the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH). Front line worker capacity has been increased and additional resources have been secured to increase service manager capacity to drive and oversee the work of the team and ensure consistency in application of thresholds and decision making.
- Secured additional resources for the Missing from Home team to enable timely return home interviews and quality assessments that feed into a robust safety plan.
- Commenced a review of the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) arrangements.
- A recruitment and retention package has been agreed to stabilise the workforce, reduce reliance on agency social workers and reduce workloads.
- Secured places for all social work Team Managers to complete the Pathways leadership programme. This will be delivered by Frontline who have been awarded a delivery contract by the DfE to support social work leadership programmes. The programme will empower leaders to model and develop excellent social work practice and leadership in others and is centred on developing knowledge, skills and expertise against the 4C leadership capability framework (expanding capacity, maintaining curiosity, providing clarity, managing complexity).
- A training package for the newly formed Head of Service group and action learning sets for service managers will be delivered over the Autumn through money secured from the Department for Education. These will focus on how to improve quality and performance in a social work environment.

Next steps

1.15 The Council is required to submit an Improvement Plan to Ofsted within 70 working days of the publication of the report.

1.16 Ofsted will undertake Monitoring Visits – short inspection activity focused on a specific area – between now and the next inspection. We can expect 3 or 4 each year.

1.17 Two inspectors will usually carry out each monitoring visit, which will last for 2 days. The focus of the visits will be upon areas where improvement is most needed, but Inspectors will also check that performance in other areas has not deteriorated. The on-site activity will usually focus upon the experience of up to 6 children and young people within the area being inspected. A summary of the inspection findings will be given at the end of each visit.

1.18 Ofsted will alert the Department for Education (DfE), as the improvement agency, of the outcome of the inspection outcome, which will determine the approach to improvement assurance which it will require. Prior to the inspection, the Council worked with the DfE to secure an Improvement Adviser to act as an independent chair of the Improvement Board and to provide support and challenge.