

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 30 March 2023 from 11.02 am - 12.58 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Carole McCulloch (Chair)
Councillor Maria Joannou (Vice Chair)
Councillor Shuguftah Quddoos
Councillor Phil Jackson
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Cate Woodward
Councillor Samuel Gardiner

Absent

Councillor AJ Matsiko
Councillor Maria Watson

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard -
Ailsa Barr - Director of Children's Integrated Services
Jane Garrard - Constitutional Services
Nicole Harris - Children's Social Care
James Lavender - Governance Officer
John Matravers - Service Manager, Safeguarding Partnerships
Catherine Underwood - Corporate Director for People

35 Apologies for absence

Councillor AJ Matisko – personal reasons
Councillor Maria Watson – unwell

36 Declarations of Interests

None.

37 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 January 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

38 Verbal update from the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools on Children's Integrated Services Improvement

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools presented a verbal update on progress with the implementation of the Children's Integrated Services Improvement Plan. She highlighted the following information:

- a) 34 actions for improvements are complete;
- b) the social work capacity has increased through new internal recruitment and agency workers. A new triage system has been introduced to process the number of referrals made to the service;
- c) the Children's Integrated Services consent training has been undertaken across the Council;
- d) bed capacity has increased to support homeless children and a new advocacy contract being agreed for April;
- e) the Missing Children's Team has created new posts, including a Missing Children's Team Manager and two more Children's Workers;
- f) the care service has recently appointed new senior advisors;
- g) the Commissioning Team and D2N2 are working to increase the number of foster homes;
- h) the Council has received the letter following Ofsted's first monitoring visit to check for factual inaccuracies. The findings are embargoed until the first week of April. Initial indications show that the visit's findings are favourable;

In response to questions from the Committee and during subsequent discussion the following points were made.

- i) there were 10 posts created and recruited to with the Multi-Agency Safeguard Hub (MASH). Some of the posts are currently filled by agency workers to ensure sufficient resourcing within the Team. There are challenges in retaining social workers as there is a high turnover rate within the sector. The Council has links with universities in the area and use them to promote the Council's social worker recruitment through graduate job fairs;
- j) care leavers have access to support when they transition into adults around the 21-25 age bracket;
- k) the Council also offers a social worker apprenticeship programme. Under this programme, an individual does their three year degree and is also employed by the Council to be trained as a social worker. These programmes have been taken up by the Children's Integrated Services and Adult Social Care Services;
- l) a Committee member suggested that case studies from care leavers about how they have engaged with the service would be very beneficial in identifying opportunities for improving the service;

- m) the first monitoring visit following the Inspection took place between 28 February and 1 March 2023. The inspectors met with the Corporate Director for People (Children and Adults) and the Director for Children's Integrated Services on 27 February and also spoke with social work practitioners. They also spoke to children and young people using the service, as well as their families;
- n) a 28 day embargo for Ofsted reports is standard practice. A letter containing the initial findings is sent to the organisation or service being inspected. That organisation or service then has 5 days to respond to any inaccuracies within the report/letter. Any agreed changes are then made by Ofsted and then the final report/ letter is sent and put under the 28 day embargo;
- o) the letter detailing outcomes from the first monitoring visit will not be published by Ofsted, but letters from second and subsequent monitoring visits are published.

Resolved to request that the letter from the recent Ofsted Monitoring Visit is provided to Committee members as soon as it is available.

39 Child Exploitation

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools, John Matravers, Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance, and Nicole Harris, Head of Service for Fieldwork Services presented the report on the actions taken by Nottingham City Council (NCC) and its partners in identifying, safeguarding and supporting children who have gone missing from home and are at risk of exploitation. They highlighted the following information:

- a) exploitation is a form of child abuse which involves coercion and deception to get children to do things that they do not want to do. Examples include sexual, criminal and financial exploitation. Children can be exploited to be involved in criminal activities such as modern slavery and county lines. Multiple types of exploitation can occur alongside one another or as part of other forms of abuse;
- b) one of the key tasks of Children's Integrated Services Team is to train staff at the Council and partner organisations to identify and respond to child exploitation;
- c) the use of language is an effective tool in raising awareness of child exploitation, for example, the legal definition of 'children' is anyone under the age of 18, so even if a 15 or 16 year old consider themselves a young person, they are classed as 'children';
- d) the methods used by perpetrators to draw children into exploitation involve not just tangible things such as giving them money, alcohol or drugs, but appealing to a child's emotions through giving them status, attention and love. They then use these to indebt the child and keep them under their control;

- e) perpetrator groups and individuals can be hard to track down as they tend to move around the country;
- f) children who are being exploited are more likely to be arrested and criminalised than the abusers;
- g) local protocols and national statutory guidance are used by Children's Integrated Services when a child goes missing from home or care;
- h) officers examine the factors about what has kept them away from home and what has attracted them to leave home;
- i) the 2022 Ofsted inspection into the Council's Children's Integrated Services identified improvements needed to the timeliness and effectiveness of Return Home Interviews. The Missing Children's Team has increased resources since January 2023 with the recruitment of a Team Manager in addition to the existing two Children's Workers. Recruitment to two more Children's Worker posts is underway to double the capacity of the team. These workers will be in place by April 2023;
- j) safety planning takes place for children after they have received their Return Home Interview;
- k) a multi-agency response is required when identifying and protecting children from exploitation. Partners include other Local Authority Children's Services, education institutions, the police, community groups and the voluntary sector;
- l) once perpetrators have been identified, it is important to hold them to account;
- m) all referrals go through the MASH team. The staff within MASH gather information and evidence from the children, their families and partner agencies. The outcome of this screening could be signposting for Early Help services or for a detailed Children and Family Assessment to be completed by a qualified social worker. An exploitation toolkit will be completed as part of this process to consider evidence of exploitation and inform risk analysis;
- n) if a child is at a medium or high risk of exploitation, an Exploitation Risk Assessment Meeting (ERAM) is held between the police, health and education colleagues, and the child and their family to identify and rate the risks to the child and any other children who are at risk of exploitation. The meeting is chaired by an independent Child Protection Coordinator. For children identified to be at high risk, the meetings take place every eight weeks minimum. For those at medium risk, they will take place every twelve weeks minimum and for those at low risk, a review meeting can be convened in response to changing risk levels or significant incidents;
- o) the exploitation toolkits and risk ratings are reviewed on a regular basis;
- p) Multi Agency Child Exploitation (MACE) meetings are held monthly to provide clear and consistent identification and assessment of children at risk of exploitation. They involve senior representatives from partners including social

care, the police, health, education, substance misuse services, voluntary sector and mental health services. The purpose of this meeting is to discuss children (or groups of children) identified to be at the highest risk, identify hotspot areas of the city where there is heightened activity increasing the risk of exploitation, and identify targeted action which can be taken to disrupt the exploitation of vulnerable children;

- q) there are many cross-cutting themes regarding exploitation in Nottingham that require close working with Nottinghamshire County Council. Therefore, both Safeguarding Children Partnerships have established the Cross Partnership Contextual Safeguarding Strategic Management Group. Key partners from Health, Police and Education are members of the group. The main areas addressed by the group include:
- problem identification;
 - workforce support;
 - service design;
 - quality assurance;
- r) areas for development as part of the wider child exploitation strategy include partnership training and learning events, the introduction of practical guidance for frontline practitioners, a review of MACE meetings and a review and refresh of exploitation toolkit, as well as the expansion of the Missing Children's Team;

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

- s) MACE meetings have helped identify key areas where children are vulnerable to exploitation. Once these areas have been identified, then the police can patrol the areas to identify perpetrators and take subsequent and appropriate action;
- t) improvements to the reporting and recording of children going missing may show an increase in the number of missing children in Nottingham compared with other cities and local authorities, but the actual number of children being reporting missing in Nottingham has gone down;
- u) the message of "Safeguarding is everyone's responsibility" needs to be communicated throughout the community. Members will be taught this when the Children's Integrated Services undertake their induction sessions after the local elections in May 2023;
- v) preventative work regarding child exploitation takes place in schools with visits from the police and youth services. All schools have a programme of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and child exploitation is covered as a part of that curriculum. The police undertake three preventative programmes a year in areas where there is a high risk of child exploitation. These events have included community barbeques;

- w) a Committee member highlighted the importance of clear communication to children about the dangers of exploitation;
- x) the Council does not own any unregulated children's homes;
- y) there are clear mechanisms for social workers and officers from Children's Integrated Services to meet at risk children twice a week;
- z) there is no current Council strategy specifically for tackling child exploitation, but a strategy is being developed and will be launched in the summer. Partner organisations that are not part of the official multi-agency group will be notified that they can inform the strategy. The strategy will be communicated to Council departments that do not officially work with children, but do come into contact with children;
- aa) mechanisms for recording the exploitation of children from other local authorities who have been sent to live in Nottingham and vice-versa are in place;
- bb) practitioners are confident in using the National Referral Mechanism (NRM) to recognise exploitation and make referrals;
- cc) there are opportunities to work collaboratively across the Council, especially with Community Support Officers and youth workers, to support families who are struggling and with children who are vulnerable to exploitation;
- dd) the data gathered from Home Return Interviews is used to identify measures to reduce the risk of re-referral;
- ee) frontline workers need the confidence to identify exploitation if they believe they see it;
- ff) the target for a completed Return Home Interview is 72 hours after the child has returned home;
- gg) children who are excluded from school are more at risk of exploitation from perpetrators. The Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools will raise this issue in her meeting with the Regional Director for the East Midlands;
- hh) previous prosecutions of perpetrators were brought about through the work of the Council's Head of Children's Services with Nottinghamshire Police;
- ii) a further investigation is needed between the connections between children with certain disabilities who were more likely to be excluded from school and those children who have been exploited;
- jj) youth ambassadors should be involved in the review of the service and recommend improvements.

Resolved to:

- 1. Recommend that the Child Exploitation Strategy is co-produced with partners and that it seeks to embed trauma informed practice and engagement with all frontline workers who may have contact with children and young people;**
- 2. Review implementation of the Child Exploitation Strategy and, when it does so, invite representatives of Nottinghamshire Police to attend;**
- 3. Request that the Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools provides feedback regarding exclusions to the Committee from her forthcoming meeting with the Department of Education's Regional Director for the East Midlands.**