

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held at Loxley House, Nottingham on 28 September 2023 from 10.04 am - 12.10 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Naim Salim (Chair)
Councillor Samuel Gardiner (Vice Chair)
Councillor Kevin Clarke (substitute)
Councillor Fozia Mubashar
Councillor Michael Savage
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Ethan Radford

Absent

Councillor Maria Watson (sent substitute)
Councillor Adele Williams

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Education
Ailsa Barr	- Director of Children's Integrated Services
Jane Garrard	- Senior Governance Officer
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Damon Stanton	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Catherine Underwood	- Corporate Director for People
Phil Wye	- Governance Officer

1 Committee Membership Change

The Committee noted that Councillor Ethan Radford has been appointed to fill a vacant seat.

2 Appointment of Vice Chair

Resolved to appoint Councillor Sam Gardiner as Vice-Chair of this Committee for this municipal year

3 Apologies for absence

Councillor Adele Williams – work commitments
Councillor Maria Watson – personal reasons

4 Declarations of Interest

In the interests of transparency Councillor Georgia Power stated that she works for the Children's Society.

5 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 30 March 2023 were confirmed as an accurate record and signed by the Chair.

6 Committee Terms of Reference

Resolved to note the Committee Terms of Reference

7 Children's Services Improvement

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children, Young People and Schools, Catherine Underwood, Corporate Director for People, and Ailsa Barr, Director of Children's Integrated Services, presented the report and delivered a presentation updating on progress in improving outcomes for children and young people through delivery of the Children's Integrated Services Improvement Plan. The following information was highlighted:

- (a) in July 2022 the Local Authority (LA) was deemed inadequate by Ofsted following a full inspection. Rather than appointing a commissioner, monitoring visits were recommended as Ofsted believed that the LA understood its weaknesses and strengths. The first visit was in February 2023, and the second in July. The first visit focused on the front door which noted evidence of progression, and the second visit focused on Children in Need and children with a Child Protection Plan;
- (b) as part of the Council's self assessment for the July monitoring visit, it was able to demonstrate working with Newton Europe to deliver on 2 workstreams to improve the experience, intervention and outcomes for children in need of help and protection. These are supporting children to remain with their families, and ensuring ideal outcomes and strong management around plans;
- (c) the Council has changed its approach to recruitment and advertising, with recruitment and advertising campaigns and varied recruitment sources. Use of agency staff will always be needed but the Council is building good and effective relationships with agency providers to obtain value for money;
- (d) all team managers are now enrolled on frontline management training. A case management dashboard has been created for social workers to access data and identify key tasks for their caseload and allow managers to access timely key performance information;
- (e) transformation work is seeing timelier and more focussed intervention, reducing drift and the duration of support through child in need plans with a focus on needs led reviews rather than process driven reviews. Increased capacity in the Missing team which has improved the number and timeliness of return home interviews, and increased management oversight of missing episodes;
- (f) areas for further focus and development include work with partners to improve attendance at strategy meetings convened outside the Multi-Agency Support Hub (MASH), continuing to embed the use of audits and dip samples to shape practice and continuing work to ensure timely and effective step down to early intervention

services;

- (g) feedback from inspectors following the July monitoring visit concluded that there is still a lot to do, but tangible progress is being made. Practice is variable but they found examples of improvements. There is real commitment and positivity from skilled staff, who know their children well and love the direct work tool kit bags. Staff feel supported to do a good job by managers in the service;
- (h) there are no graded judgements for monitoring visits, but a narrative letter was published by Ofsted on 29th August 2023. Findings will further inform the service development plan, and oversight will continue through the Children's Improvement Board. A further monitoring visit is anticipated before the end of the year with a further 3-4 visits during 2024;
- (i) whilst improvements are being progressed, both services are operating with high levels of vulnerability due to high staff turnover and insufficient placements. This is in line with the national picture.

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

- (j) there have been cuts to non-statutory services such as children's centres which can provide early intervention. The new family hub model will soften the impact of this by providing a hub and spoke model. The Local Government Association have called on the government to better fund early help as reduction it will lead to an reduction in demand at a later stage, and the Council seeks external grant funding where available;
- (k) now that the Council has accurate data it knows that the majority of children are having their return home interviews within the required timeframe. There are a variety of reasons why a few may miss these requirements, such as delays over weekends, or where a child refuses to have an interview;
- (l) for Nottingham's Care Leavers that do not live in Nottingham City, there are effective links and reciprocal arrangements with services elsewhere in the country. Care leavers service part of a national group that meets regularly to develop relationships and reciprocal arrangements. The local offer for Care Leavers could be adapted to make sure that it is applicable in other locations;
- (m) Personal Advisors will develop a plan with Care Leavers based on their required skills and needs, which is very bespoke and individual. The Personal Advisor can help directly, or open doors to other places for support;
- (n) some agency staff will remain with the Council for a long time and some will convert to the main staff. The Council has improved the pay offer but this is still a very still competitive area. It is also looking at conditions, required equipment, and the removal of barriers to progression. It also has a 'grow your own' social worker scheme, allowing internal staff to train and become fully qualified as social workers.

Resolved to

(1) assess how the Council can make the Care leaver offer more equitable for those that do not reside in Nottingham;

(2) review how the Council actively encourages agency staff to join us on a permanent basis such as through a formal procedure.

8 Improving Outcomes for Children and Young People with Special Educational Need and/or Disability and their Families

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Portfolio Holder for Children Young People and Schools, and Nick Lee, Director of Education Services, presented the report and delivered a presentation highlighting the following:

- (a) in Nottingham City, 16% of children have identified special needs or disabilities (SEND). Of these, 1411 have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP). 618 of these attend a special school, with the rest educated in mainstream schools. Nottingham has pursued a policy of supporting children with SEND, wherever possible and appropriate, to attend mainstream school provision;
- (b) a new inspection framework came into effect in January 2023 and the first inspections of local areas under the new framework have been undertaken. A key difference in the new framework is that local areas will now receive one of 3 graded judgements that are positive, inconsistent or failing;
- (c) areas of common weakness across inspections include timeliness of issuing of EHCPs and annual reviews of EHCPs, children waiting too long for access to health services in particular speech and language, CAMHs and neurodevelopment pathways, the use of data across partnerships to understand young people's needs and implement a robust joint commissioning approach to services, and the effectiveness of the Local Offer;
- (d) Nottingham's strategic priorities for SEND are:
- Implementation of strengthened governance arrangements for SEND;
 - Widening of co-production and engagement opportunities with parents and young people;
 - Development and implementation of the revised SEND strategy in collaboration with parents, young people and wider stakeholders;
 - Joint work with Nottinghamshire County Council and the ICB on improving timeliness of access to health pathways/services;
 - Digitisation of the EHCP process and EHCP quality assurance processes;
 - Embedding of joint Nottingham/Nottinghamshire/ICB EHCP QA process;
 - Reviewing the Local Offer platform and updating current content;
 - Co-production with parents and young people in development of the revised SEND strategy.
- (e) last year the parents and carers forum approached senior leaders to work towards improved relationships with the Council. New methods of engagement have been sought, for example through schools where groups have been set up. This has enabled the new SEND strategy to be co-produced with parents and carers;

- (f) the transition from primary to secondary school is recognised to be a challenging time for children with SEND. Levelling up funding has been received to run a pilot to support this transition at the Wells Academy and Bulwell Academy along with their feeder schools, working together with Family Support and SEND teams;
- (g) the Council is close to launching a joint quality assurance framework for EHCPs with the county council. Young peoples' voices have been built into this and parents have been involved. In a recent annual review of the EHCP process, parents said that they are now getting better information and the quality of plans has improved.

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

- (h) neurodiverse children are more likely to be excluded from school, particularly secondary school following difficult transitions. The new transition project is aimed at reducing these numbers by supporting transition;
- (i) families whose first language is not English are less likely to come forward for advice and help for SEND children. Some schools in diverse areas are already good at identifying children with need. A project was done with the Roma community with community leaders to improve attendance and awareness of expectations;
- (j) the number of school aged children with complex needs and autism is increasing demand for special school places. Special school places are expensive so the high needs budget must be used effectively, but the Council is in a relatively good position of not having a budget deficit;
- (k) children in secondary schools without EHCPs do not always receive the support they require. The Council is working with secondary schools to build on collective knowledge and develop a peer support system. This can be a challenge due to the autonomous nature of academies.

Resolved to

- (1) investigate how the Council can communicate its services better such as through the use of a newsletter; and**
- (2) review the basic information published so that it is available in different languages.**

9 Work Programme

The work programme was noted.

10 Future Meeting Dates

Resolved to agree to meet on the following Thursdays at 10am:

26 October 2023

30 November 2023

25 January 2024

28 March 2024

25 April 2024