

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 15 May 2024 from 9.33 am - 11.53 am

Membership

Present

Councillor Naim Salim (Chair)
Councillor Fozia Mubashar
Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Michael Savage
Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Adele Williams

Absent

Councillor Samuel Gardiner
Councillor Ethan Radford

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard	- Executive Member for Children, Young People, and Education
Ailsa Barr	- Director of Children's Integrated Services
Nick Lee	- Director of Education Services
Paul Lefford	- Nottinghamshire Police
John Matravers	- Service Manager, Safeguarding Partnerships
Kate Morris	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
Sam Morris	- Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement
Damon Stanton	- Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer

38 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Sam Gardiner – Unwell
Councillor Ethan Radford – Council Business

39 Declarations of Interest

In the interests of transparency Councillor Georgia Power highlighted that she worked for the Children's Society. This did not preclude her from speaking on any item.

40 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 March 2024 were confirmed as a true record and were signed by the Chair.

41 Tackling Child Exploitation Strategy

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education attended the meeting to introduce the report presenting the Tackling Child Exploitation Strategy to the Committee. Also in attendance to provide additional detailed information was Ailsa Barr, Director for Children's Integrated Services, John Matravers, Head of Safeguarding, Quality and Assurance and Chief Inspector Paul

Lefford, Nottinghamshire Police. During the presentation the following points were highlighted:

- a) The Child Exploitation Strategy has been developed by the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire Children's Safeguarding Board partners and a range of other stake holders to create a single, whole system response to child exploitation aiming to reduce exploitation, and extra familial harm and protect communities.
- b) The Strategy reflects the need for a cross boarder approach and the language used has been amended to reflect the need to see children as children and to ensure that all children under 18 are treated as children first and foremost. This change in language is important to ensure the victims of exploitation are not made to feel implicit in their exploitation, and to remove possible suggestion of blame on the child. Guidance from the Children's Society has been important in creating this shift in language as has feedback from children.
- c) The Tackling Child Exploitation (TCE) Steering Group is driving the work of the Strategy and meets quarterly. On the group there are representatives from the children's safeguarding partners. The Steering Group regularly considers the work of the Strategy using the reflection tool specifically developed to assess progress on imbedding the 8 principles into local safeguarding practices. The tool also helps the group to identify areas for additional focus and improvement.
- d) Work to implement the Strategy is based on principals from research in practice tackling child exploitation which sets out how to work with children and their families and gives a basis for strategic oversight of practice and planning across the Partnership. The 4 P's, Pursue, Prevent, Protect and Prepare, developed from the Serious and Organised Crime Strategy 2023 have also been adopted and integrated into the work of the strategy supporting the creation of a whole system response.
- e) As awareness of exploitation is increased, partner organisations and the public become more confident in reporting issues and the number of reported cases will increase. This initial increase in numbers is confirmation that awareness is increasing and that the messages from the partnership are being communicated efficiently.
- f) In response to the development of the Strategy, Nottinghamshire Police have restructured teams to better respond to child exploitation issues, with more Police staff embedded into Social Care teams, and an additional Disruption Team created to work with partners proactively around the nighttime economy and target centres of concern. There are improved links into strategic multi-agency meetings and increased representation on multi-agency investigation teams.
- g) Joint training has been developed so that all partners have access to the same training materials, and can benefit from experiences of other organisations and

practitioners when learning. A multi-agency joint training event has been developed to tie in with National Exploitation Awareness Day.

During discussion the following questions were raised and additional information provided:

- h) Committee members asked whether the right resources for relationship and sexual education are available to schools to help keep children safe. Schools are one of the most important partners in ensuring the greatest number of children are reached and have information and resources to help keep themselves and their peers safe. Some awareness sessions are carried out in schools to inform children of how to spot signs of potential exploitation, how to act to avoid it, what to do and how to report it if they have concerns. Schools work with parents and carers to share information with some schools having a wider reach than others. Work has also started with reaching into early years settings. It is not currently possible to say what percentage of the population is being reached through schools, and increasing reach is a key part of the Strategy.
- i) Committee members asked what the Partnership did once exploitation had been identified. When a child comes to the attention of the partnership a multi-agency approach and assessment is launched to ensure that the child and their family have the most appropriate support in place. Each organisation sets out what support they can offer and a unique package is put into place for the child and family.
- j) Committee members questioned why the Strategy document was only 2 pages long given its importance. The Strategy document presented to the Committee in the published papers is the public facing, easy access document, and there are internal operational documents that underpin that. The performance against targets is managed and overseen by the TCE Steering Group with each partner organisation reporting regularly on progress. The Steering group then reports up through the Safeguarding Partnership governance structure with ultimate oversight held by the Nottingham City and Nottinghamshire County Council Safeguarding Children's Board.
- k) Committee members questioned the number of children referred through the national referral mechanism. The information was published by the Home Office and states that the Council had referred just 25 children during 2023. There was a consensus that this was too low for it to be an accurate representation of children in the City suffering from exploitation. It was explained that over the last year 175 multi agency meetings were held to assess cases of exploitation and 69 risk meetings were held. From these only 22 met the thresholds for referral through the national referral scheme. The Partnership is not complacent and recognises that more children are at risk than are identified and work to encourage and empower communities and individuals to report concerns.
- l) Committee members requested more information on what information was available for communities, how awareness was being promoted and what work was being done to involve community organisations in implementing the

Strategy. National Exploitation Day is in its infancy but more work is being done to promote it annually and to bring awareness to the general public. The Partnership is working with the office of the Police and Crime Commissioner to identify funding for activities, and literature and materials will be produced in a range of languages and easy read formats. This campaign is in its infancy, but the Partnership has a strong track record of delivering consistently strong messages. Work is already well underway with the nighttime economy, hotels, taxi drivers and others in a position to notice concerns early.

- m) Committee members asked how the partnership ensured that children not in school were kept safe. Exclusion from education does increase the risk that some children may be more vulnerable to exploitation and an Education Sub-Group has been developed within the Partnership. Given the fractured nature of the education system with numerous different trusts operating in the city it has been difficult to have one education representative that can speak for all trusts, so this Education Sub-Group allows educators from across the city to have a voice that is fed into the rest of the Partnership. All children excluded from education are identified at this sub-group. The Council is notified of all children on school roll and works to develop vulnerable learner pathways to identify additional support needs earlier and allow earlier intervention with those at risk of exploitation. This along with better joined up working with police and social care staff alongside educators is working to reduce the risk.
- n) Committee members asked what was being done to improve the performance around return home interviews for children who had been missing. Since the Ofsted inspection this element of the service has been improved. And those interviews have increased from 40% complete within three calendar days to 82% within three calendar days. There is a challenge with a small team that work Monday to Friday, but improvements have been made and sustained. The diversity of the team has been questioned but again with a small team with specialist skills it can be difficult to find representation for a wide range of communities. A number of different measures are used to assess the effectiveness of the interviews, including repeat missing figures and a quality assurance process that scrutinises how data is presented.
- o) Committee members asked what co-production of resources and service development was taking place. A training package has recently been put together that is delivered through a VR headset and is a series of scenarios shown from the child's perspective. Children and their families were heavily involved in the production of this material and has helped those who have participated to understand situations from a child's perspective. The child's voice is sought at all stages through involvement with them to ensure that the Partnership and its approach is child friendly and child orientated. It remains the case however that some children are not ready to share their experiences until much later in their life.
- p) Committee members asked about unaccompanied asylum seekers and how the Partnership helped to protect them and ensure settled status by the time they reached adulthood. Any child who comes to the country and is placed in Nottingham is taken into care and work is undertaken to ensure that their asylum claim is progressed and that settled status is achieved in childhood.

Where this is not possible the Leaving Care Teams takes up the work and provides support until the person is aged 25.

- q) Committee Members asked to what extent did schools consider the impact of exclusion on risk of a child being exploited when making decisions to exclude. Schools do need to understand the risk, and decisions around exclusion need to be trauma informed. More work needs to be done with schools across the City to develop this understanding and approach to decision making although some schools have started to develop a better understanding. Work is also underway in terms of making Nottingham a Child Friendly City.

Resolved to:

- 1. Request that the Committee receive a list of the Key Performance Indicators and other measurables which the Steering Group will be using to measure success, and to ensure public accountability, that these be reported back to the Committee at a future meeting.**
- 2. Recommend that the Council and partners ensure that they are using the appropriate mechanisms and support available to children identified at risk of exploitation. The Committee's view was that the number of NRM's made by the Council and Police were too low for them to be an accurate representation of the likely number of children suffering from exploitation. These figures are outlined in table 9 of the NRM statistics provided by the Home Office.**
- 3. Request that the Committee receive the meaningful data from the missing from home interviews once they have been reported in July.**
- 4. Request that the Committee receive the waiting times for children who are referred to services as a result of exploitation.**
- 5. Request that the Committee receive further information on how many children in care are leaving without settled status and the reasons why.**
- 6. To request that the Committee receive examples of partnership working with the County Council in respect of services and service delivery.**

The meeting was adjourned at 11:08 to allow a technical issue to be resolved prior to the start of the next item. The meeting reconvened at 11:14.

42 Children's Services Improvement

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education introduced the item updating the Committee on the most recent Ofsted monitoring visit in April 2024 looking at Children in Care services. Ailsa Barr, Director of Children's Integrated Services was also in attendance to give additional detail. Members noted that the letter highlighting the findings of the visit had been published this morning. They highlighted the following points:

- a) Inspectors felt that the improvements seen in other areas within Children's Services inspired confidence that changes within the Children in Care Team workforce would lead to improved practice, once the recent investment had matured.
- b) The most recent monitoring visit found that additional funding, management and social work positions have built on improvements since the last visit and have helped to stabilise the workforce. Staff feel more supported and the frequency and quality of supervision is showing signs of improvement.
- c) There is still some inconsistency in practice, with better quality practice being seen in fieldwork teams. Investment into the Children in Care teams is very recent and the impact of that is yet to flow through to data although there is a good level of confidence that this improvement will be seen.
- d) Changes to social workers and higher work loads in the Children in Care Teams does impact on relationship building between social workers and children. Although visits meet statutory requirements for frequency they are not informed by individual need. The recent investment in the Children in Care team will help to address this.
- e) Creative planning and support around risk management is present throughout the fieldwork teams, with child centred decisions being evident following thorough assessment. More work needs to be done to ensure that routine assessments are updated, within the Children in Care Teams, when a child's situation changes, and that specialist assessments are more routinely undertaken to inform risk management and planning.
- f) There are ongoing challenges around the number of foster carers meaning that children are sometimes moving into residential care rather than a family setting, this is seen nationally and is not unique to Nottingham City. Work is underway with the County Council and other neighbouring authorities to establish a regional fostering network.
- g) Children are positive and encouraged to engage with their education planning meetings. Some children do face moving schools due to placement sufficiency issues meaning it is sometimes not possible to prioritise education placement.
- h) Work by senior leaders with health colleagues has helped develop an improvement in the process around health checks for children coming into care. More work needs to be done to ensure that these changes are consistent.
- i) The next monitoring visit will likely focus on front door services again. 6 monitoring visits is usual for an improvement journey, with a full inspection typically taking place 6 months after the final monitoring visit, however these would depend on other activity being undertaken by Ofsted.

The following points were raised in discussion:

- j) Committee members asked how the impact of the improvements was being measured. The performance dashboard has recently been improved to better allow managers to monitor performance against targets for all aspects of work, including timeliness of assessments and reviews. It can be used to assess overall team performance. The information on the dashboard only provided quantitative data, and does not address the quality of the data, which is why a separate programme of work runs alongside it. This is then sampled by the inspectors as part of the monitoring visits.
- k) Committee members asked for more information about unregistered homes and what additional checks, if any, were carried out to ensure they were suitable for placements. Unregistered homes are homes that are not registered with Ofsted. However, Ofsted still inspect them, and when a child is placed in an unregistered home the Authority perform a number of stringent checks before placement and throughout the placement, and social workers will be in touch with the child more often than those placed in registered homes. As part of the market sufficiency work the Council is currently working with a number of homes to help them qualify for registration.
- l) Committee members asked for additional details about the Health Checks and monitoring done on their timeliness. The timeliness of the health reviews is monitored with health colleagues and the amount of time a review is overdue is also recorded, although the details of this breakdown is not available at committee. This delay in health checks is a national issue, and the Council is working hard to mitigate against delays. Health colleagues are linking in with other Local Authorities to learn what works best in other areas to bring back ideas to be adapted to Nottingham's needs.
- m) Committee members asked what the service was doing to improve the use of the child's voice in the development and improvement of services. Over the next 6 months or so there will be an increased focus on participation of the child. There will be a continued push to include children in planning and reviewing their care. Work will be undertaken to increase the reach of the Child in Care and its work will be promoted more widely.
- n) Committee members asked what support and monitoring was done when a child is placed within a Special Guardianship Order (SGO). When a child leaves care into a SGO the Special Guardian becomes the parent of the child, and there is no legal requirement for ongoing monitoring. Extensive assessments are completed prior to the order being made at Court. There is a requirement to continue to offer support for the SGO, and the team responsible is liaising with other local authorities around examples of best practice that can be adapted for Nottingham City to develop a clear offer and more coherent set of services. Consideration is already taking place around staffing restructure to support the coordination of these services.
- o) Committee members asked if the same level of support and monitoring was in place for children in placements away from Nottingham as those placed within Nottingham. Where a child is placed into an SGO outside of Nottingham some responsibilities transfer to the host authority, and it becomes the responsibility of the SGO family to access those. Some stay with the City, the more

therapeutic based services, for example, and the workers link with services in the host authority and refers into those. The SGO family can ask for a reassessment of needs if necessary. After three years all responsibility transfers to the host authority.

Resolved to request further details and data on child health assessments.

43 Recommendation Tracker

The Chair presented the Recommendation Tracker to the committee highlighting that there had been a number of responses.

The committee noted the update to the Recommendation Tracker.