



Meeting Title	Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Children's Services Improvement
Meeting Date	11 th September 2024

Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Ailsa Barr, Corporate Interim Director Children's and Education Sarah Nardone, Interim Director for Children's Integrated Services
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Cheryl Barnard
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Summary of issues:

In July 2022 Nottingham City Children's Services received its full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS), which led to an inadequate judgement. As a result, Children's Services have now entered a monitoring visit regime.

On 31st July and 1st August 2024, a fifth monitoring visit with a focus on the Front Door (Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH), Duty and Emergency Duty Team (EDT)) took place. This report provides some context to the monitoring visit regime and presents the findings of the narrative letter published by Ofsted of its fifth monitoring visit of Nottingham's Children's Services.

- Recommendation(s):**
1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the findings of the Ofsted's 5th Monitoring Visits of Children's Services.
 2. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the progress made and further areas for focus since the full inspection and the next steps
 3. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee confirm its commitment to improving Children's Services and its ambition for Nottingham Children's Services to be delivering consistently good social care services to children and young people

1. Background

- 1.1 Committee will be aware that Nottingham City Children's Services received an Ofsted ILACS inspection in July 2022, at which it received an inadequate judgement with the report being published in September 2022.
- 1.2 As a result of the inadequate judgement the Local Authority entered a period of Monitoring Visits. These are 2 day on site visits focused upon a specific area of practice. Judgements are not provided, but a narrative letter of findings is produced. The first letter is not published, but all subsequent letters have been published on the Ofsted Website. To date the service has received 5 Monitoring Visits:
 - The Front Door (MASH, Duty and EDT) – February 2023.

- Children in Need and Children with a Child Protection Plan – July 2023
- Care Leavers aged 18+ - November 2023
- Children in Care – April 2024
- The Front Door (MASH Duty and EDT) – July 2024

1.3 A full report detailing the progress the service is making in its improvement and transformation journey was presented to Scrutiny Committee in January 2024. The information below will detail the key themes from the previous 4 monitoring visits before detailing the findings of the current visit.

2. Themes from previous monitoring visits

2.1 Inspectors have noted that there has continued to be evidence of progress being made at each of the monitoring visits and can see evidence of improvements to the services offered to children and families. They have reflected that despite the significant challenges facing the Local Authority and partnership, there is a clear commitment from elected members and the senior leadership team to invest in children's services. Inspectors have consistently fed back that senior leaders know the service well and are driving improvements at pace. They have reflected the commitment and tenacity of the front line workforce in their work with children and families to secure good outcomes.

2.2 There have been some common themes of progress made across the previous four visits:

- Evidence of tangible improvements being made.
- Investment in posts to increase front line and management capacity, which has helped manage workload and demand, increase management oversight, reduce caseloads and improve staff morale.
- The workforce feels supported by managers and can feel the positive impact that reduced caseloads are having, this is resulting in better practice being more consistently delivered.
- Staff develop strong and meaningful relationships with their children and young people, know them well and act as good parents. This enables them to assess children and young people's needs to offer good support, particularly to our more vulnerable children and care leavers (such as disabled children, care leavers with additional needs and 16- and 17-year olds who present as homeless). Processes (such as child in need review meetings, visits etc) often take place sooner than the statutory minimum to meet the needs of the child, young person or family, meaning that children and young people are seen or have their circumstances reviewed in timescales appropriate to them.
- There is a committed senior leadership team who have clear oversight and knowledge of performance within service areas, and recently developed dashboards are enabling managers and front line staff understand performance and prioritise tasks that need to be completed, leading to timelier responses for children and families.
- The quality assurance framework has been strengthened and is being embedded. This is correctly identifying areas for improvement and development to help further strengthen practice and learning.

2.2 Inspectors noted that there were further common areas for development, which aligned with the service's self-evaluation of practice:

- Inconsistency in quality of assessments or plans.
- Inconsistency in the frequency and quality of supervision to help progress outcomes for children in a timely way.
- Some children and young people experience too many changes of social worker – due to difficulties around recruitment and retention of staff – an issue being experienced not only in Nottingham but nationally.
- Further work with partners needed to reduce delays in assessment and intervention which some children and families continue to experience.

3. Summary of findings from the 5th Monitoring Visit

- 3.1 As with all Monitoring Visits no grading is given but findings are presented in a narrative report. This was published on 2nd September 2024 and is attached at appendix 1.
- 3.2 Inspectors reported that they have seen a continued strengthening of the Front Door since previous visits, with evidence of stability and maturation leading to increased consistency of work with children and families.
- 3.3 Inspectors noted that despite the financial challenges and changes to the senior leadership team structure, they could see that elected members and senior leaders were committed to improving children's services. They felt that the changes to the senior leadership team have been well managed and served to ensure consistency so that improvements continue to progress at pace. They felt that leaders knew the services well and understood the areas of strength and the areas for further development.
- 3.4 Inspectors saw that decision making was appropriate and timely and ensure that children received support when they needed it. Strategy meetings were timely and attended by relevant partners with appropriate sharing of information. Assessments and plans are timely and proportionate to children's needs.
- 3.5 The out of hours response had been strengthened and was appropriate and timely. Police use of powers of protection was also appropriate and there was evidence of joint working to keep children safe.
- 3.6 Seeking of consent has improved, although inspectors noted that there was some further work to do to ensure that children received appropriate support when parental consent was refused.
- 3.7 Further work is needed to ensure that there is a well-coordinated and consistent early help offer for families not meeting statutory thresholds or stepping down from statutory services. Inspectors noted that work is actively underway to progress this area of work.

4. Next steps

- 4.1 As noted in the inspection letter, work is underway to streamline and strengthen the system wide early help offer to ensure that families can access services appropriate to

their needs when they need it. This will build upon the Early Help strategy and website that was launched in Autumn 2023.

- 4.2 The findings will be incorporated into the service improvement plans with clear actions and timelines for completion set.
- 4.3 The Children's Improvement Board will continue to meet monthly and will review progress made across the service.
- 4.4 One further monitoring visit is anticipated to take place by the end of the year which we expect will be a re-visit the Children in Care Service. It is anticipated that the next full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Service (ILACS) will take place at some point during 2025.