

Nottingham City Council

Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of the meeting held in the Ground Floor Committee Room - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 13 November 2024 from 9.31 am to 12.03 pm

Membership

Present

Councillor Georgia Power
Councillor Fozia Mubashar
Councillor Michael Savage (Chair)
Councillor Adele Williams
Councillor Maria Joannou
Councillor David Mellen

Absent

Councillor Maria Watson
Councillor Naim Salim

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor Cheryl Barnard - Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
Elizabeth Browne - Executive Principal for Alternative Education, Raleigh Education Trust
Steve Edwards - Independent Scrutineer
Jennifer Hardy - Project Manager
Neil Langham - Inclusion Manager
Nick Lee - Director of Education Services
Adrian Mann - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer
John Matravers - Head of Safeguarding and Partnerships
Ben Osifo - Business Manager, Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership
Damon Stanton - Scrutiny and Audit Support Officer

- As the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Naim Salim, was absent, the Vice Chair, Councillor Michael Savage, chaired the meeting.

20 Apologies for Absence

Councillor Naim Salim - unwell
Councillor Maria Watson - personal reasons
Ailsa Barr - Director of Children's Integrated Services
Jill Colbert - Corporate Director for Children and Education Services
Robert Griffin - Assistant Chief Constable, Nottinghamshire Police
Rosa Waddingham - Chief Nurse, NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board

21 Declarations of Interest

None

22 Minutes

The Committee confirmed the Minutes of the meeting held on 11 September 2024 as a correct record and they were signed by the Chair.

23 Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership Annual Report 2023/24

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education; John Matravers, Head of Safeguarding and Partnerships; Ben Osifo, Business Manager at the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP); and Steve Edwards, Independent Scrutineer, presented the NCSCP's Annual Report for 2023/24. The following points were raised:

- a) The NCSCP is a statutory partnership between the Council, Nottinghamshire Police and the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) to provide the safeguarding arrangements under which partners and agencies work together to co-ordinate their safeguarding services; identify and respond to the needs of children in the City; commission and publish local child safeguarding practice reviews; and provide scrutiny to ensure the effectiveness of these arrangements. The Council and the ICB provide 42% of the SCP's overall funding each, with the remainder contributed by the Police. The SCP is supported by an Independent Scrutineer.
- b) A great deal of work has been done to ensure that the Annual Report is as accessible to children as possible, so they know about the structures that are in place to safeguard them. The NCSCP's priorities have been developed on the basis of direct engagement with and listening to children and their families, working with local communities to provide the services that they need. Although the Council, the Police and the ICB are the statutory partners, the NCSCP emphasises that child safeguarding is everyone's responsibility and works with a wide range of stakeholders and community groups to establish this message. The NCSCP's website has been updated to provide effective and easily accessible safeguarding resources for children, parents and carers.
- c) Overall, there are around 66,000 children in the City, with 34% living with some level of deprivation. The NCSCP's 'Working Together' policy has been updated to ensure that there is a strong layer of leadership across the Partnership to drive the safeguarding agenda, and there is also close engagement with the County Council. A quarterly newsletter is circulated on the development of the Partnership, which provides a helpful overview and enables effective messaging to take place on what the safeguarding outcomes for children have been.
- d) Currently, there is a high number of children who have been excluded from school (189, which represents an increase on previous years) or who are being home-schooled, and there are also increasing numbers within the Youth Justice system, which presents some significant safeguarding challenges. However, the number of children with Child Protection Plans in place has decreased. Ultimately, it is vital that support is delivered to the most vulnerable children as soon as possible, to prevent their reaching a point of crisis. As a result, a substantial level of activity

is carried out with a wide range of partners to identify potential safeguarding issues at an early stage.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- e) The Committee noted that it was extremely disappointed that all members of the Partnership's Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) could not attend and had been unable to send representatives to the meeting to participate in what should have been a full partnership discussion. The Committee also expressed concern regarding the apparent imbalance in the funding of the NCSCP amongst the three statutory partners.
- f) The Committee asked how the NCSCP operated so that it could be easily related to and contacted by a given vulnerable child. It was reported that the NCSCP is developing its service offer in direct consultation with Nottingham children, and that contacts and phone numbers will be made easily available – with close co-production taking place with school partners, as they play a significant role in the delivery of support. The Partnership is taking action to understand the exact needs of children and identify any barriers to access, so that children and their families can feel confident in engaging with formal services.
- g) The Committee noted that, to be most accessible, the NCSCP must have a presence on the social media platforms that the majority of children now use – and that it should also consider the different communications methodologies that may be required to reach both older and younger groups of children.
- h) The Committee was concerned that a substantial number of children in Nottingham appeared to have had some degree of contact with the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Children Hub (MASH). It was explained that the statistics provided represented the overall number of contacts with the MASH – rather than the number of individual children. A needs-led, 'children at the heart' approach is being taken to the establishment of Child Protection Plans, working directly with families to ensure that Social Services provision can focus on the children most in need.
- i) The Committee considered that as much work as possible should be carried out with families to ensure that they are prepared and able to engage with services before a point of crisis is reached.
- j) The Committee asked what the current levels of risk were in terms of child exploitation. It was set out that the Police have a specialist unit in place to tackle this issue, and a concerted level of engagement is underway with individual communities. Activity is being carried out to increase the front-line targeting of perpetrators. Currently, around 65 children are in an exploitation risk management process. An online tool is in place to monitor the potential exploitation risks and the action to be taken. Work is underway to support the recognition of the full range of exploitation and a significant campaign on recognising the signs of exploitation will be launched in March next year. Activity is also being carried out with schools to seek to mitigate against exploitation impacting on children in the process of seeking a school place.

- k) The Committee asked how the Partnership ensured effective safeguarding links and oversight with all partners, particularly schools, religious organisations, community centres and voluntary groups. It was explained that the NCSCP had been carrying out specific outreach with faith groups and their safeguarding leads. The Partnership also engages closely with the Early Years sector, the Nottingham Community and Voluntary Service and other Local Authorities, including the County Council. However, many partner organisations have their own governance structures for safeguarding – though the NCSCP aims to be as open and approachable as possible to support the wider application of best practice.
- l) The Committee asked how many children required close support from services, and what measures the Partnership used to assess the effectiveness of the safeguarding outcomes for children. It was reported that the NCSCP has identified the current primary safeguarding challenges and appropriate datasets are being delivered on measurable outcomes. Around 414 children in Nottingham have a Child Protection Plan, which represents a reduced number on previous years – and this has not led to an increase in the number of Child in Need Plans. It has been possible to reduce the overall level of cases for social workers, so that they are able to focus more closely on the children who are most vulnerable.
- m) The Committee noted that it was vital for the NCSCP to work closely with the Nottingham City Safeguarding Adults Board to ensure that there is an effective safeguarding process around vulnerable young people transitioning into adult's services.

The Chair thanked the representatives from the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership and Nottingham City Council for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that further information, including statistics, is provided on the current position in relation to child exploitation within the city.**
- 2) To request copies of the audits on Exploitation and Mental Health carried out through joint authority, multi-agency working during 2023/24.**
- 3) To request that the Committee receives a copy of the newsletter informing agencies of the work that the Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Partnership (SCP) does.**
- 4) To write to the NCSCP's Strategic Leadership Group (SLG) to express the Committee's dissatisfaction that they were not able to send representatives to attend the meeting.**
- 5) To write to the Chief Executive of Nottinghamshire Police to urge their organisation to make more of an equitable contribution towards the funding of the vital work of the NCSCP.**

24 Alternative Education Provisions for Permanently Excluded Children

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education; Nick Lee, Director of Education Services; Neil Langham, Inclusion Manager; Jennifer Hardy, Project Manager; and Elizabeth Browne, Executive Principal for Alternative Education at the Raleigh Education Trust, presented a report on the alternative education provision available for children who have been permanently excluded from their school. The following points were raised:

- a) There is a historically high level of permanent exclusion in Nottingham, with averages often 50% higher than the national figure – and the current local levels of exclusion are higher than in recent years. There are 19 Alternative Education Provision settings in the city, with five specialist schools and three Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) – though there is no Key Stage 1 provision for permanently excluded children and the PRUs are experiencing capacity issues. As capacity within the available Alternative Provision is so limited, the Department for Education has approved plans for a new Free School – but this will take time to build and staff. A great deal of work is also being done to identify children at risk of exclusion to provide support at as early a stage as possible.
- b) The Council commissions the Raleigh Education Trust to manage the Alternative Provision and PRU process. An Alternative Provision providers network is in place and it works both to try and slow the rate of exclusions and to provide the best support possible to children in PRUs. Alternative Provision seeks to deliver the full National Curriculum with children on site wherever possible (though there is also Virtual School provision), while working to find appropriate permanent school places. A great deal of work is done to assess individual need and to seek to reduce barriers to learning.
- c) When a child is excluded, Alternative Provision works with the child and their family on a pathway to bring them back into permanent education. Engagement is carried out with the school to learn what needs the child has and the barriers they experienced, to both help identify an appropriate new permanent place and ensure that the right support is provided in the meantime. Oversight structures are in place and reviews are carried out regularly to ensure the quality of provision and that vulnerable children are safe. Teams have been established to support the families of excluded children with the admissions process and work to try and prevent new placement breakdown. Given that many children who are excluded have a high level of need, Safety and Welfare officers are available, alongside Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) provision.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- d) The Committee asked what strategies were in place to seek to reduce the current rates of school exclusion and ensure that SEND needs were addressed properly. It was reported that work is carried out with schools to ensure that the needs of as many children as possible can be met within mainstream education, and that investment is being made into identifying those needs as early as possible and removing barriers. It is vital that children are found the right placement in the right setting and that the success rate for children returning to mainstream schools is improved. It is important that appropriate additional support for children is maintained with mainstream schooling and that work is done to remove the potential stigma attached to having been within Alternative Provision.

- e) The Committee asked whether there was any significant variation in the number of children being excluded from individual schools across the City. It was explained that the majority of the total exclusions were made by a small number of schools – where the children excluded often had complex needs. A great deal of work is being done to work with schools to try and reduce the number of exclusions. There is a particular focus on the Academy Trusts with the highest exclusion rates, but some choose to not engage with the Council. The overall number of exclusions from secondary schools has decreased slightly, but the number of exclusions from primary schools is now increasing.
- f) The Committee asked how many staff working within Alternative Provision were qualified teachers and how much educational time was provided to children in these settings. It was set out that there are no statutory requirements on the number of qualified teachers in an Alternative Provision setting – but qualified teaching staff are in place to support the children at GCSE level. However, there is a rising trend of exclusions at Year 11 and these children can be very difficult to then place – with limited Alternative Provision for Key Stage 4. Alternative Provision does aim to provide the whole National Curriculum, in addition to delivering additional enrichment activities – with the guidance being for children to have at least 25 hours of teaching per week. A number of children come into Alternative Provision as a result of very limited attendance at school, so close work is carried out with them to bring them up to full-time attendance as quickly as possible.
- g) The Committee asked whether there were Alternative Provision units within mainstream schools and how early intervention was delivered effectively. It was explained that some Alternative Provision was delivered within mainstream schools. The needs of children at risk of exclusion are considered on an individual basis and support can be provided through one-to-one tutoring – though this can be difficult to source. A joint commissioning process is being carried out with the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board to deliver additional support to neurodiverse children and children with mental health conditions, and a great deal of activity is being done to better understand these issues to inform an effective Joint Commissioning Strategy.
- h) The Committee asked how teachers in mainstream schools were trained to deliver an inclusive environment for children with additional needs. It was reported that an Inclusion Manager has been appointed to develop a full Inclusion Strategy, which will have a strong training and continuous professional development element. There is a current focus on seeking to grow training in therapeutic activity in schools, and work is being carried out to assess the future workplace requirements across the city on the basis of a better understanding of children's needs.
- i) The Committee asked how the most vulnerable children (such as those in mental health crisis, those on the edge of a social care intervention and those in care but placed outside Nottingham) were supported. It was set out that there is Virtual School provision for children in care placed outside the city. The Early Help offer for children is under review and a great deal work has been undertaken to ensure

a wide range of representation at the multi-agency panels to ensure that vulnerable children are known to services as quickly as possible.

The Chair thanked the representatives from the Raleigh Education Trust and Nottingham City Council for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that a report is provided on what the Council is doing to prevent permanent exclusions from school, and for the comparative figures (including trends between the schools within the city and nationally) to be provided.**
- 2) To request that a report is provided on what work is being done to ensure that Alternative Education Provisions within the city are of a good standard.**
- 3) To invite the Chief Executives of the major Multi-Academy Trusts within the city to a future meeting to discuss the Committee's concerns in relation to permanent exclusions.**

25 Provisions for Children Without a School Place / Fair Access

Councillor Cheryl Barnard, Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education; Nick Lee, Director of Education Services; Neil Langham, Inclusion Manager; and Jennifer Hardy, Project Manager, presented a report on the education access arrangements for children without a school place. The following points were raised:

- a) There is a significant need for in-year school places due to families frequently moving into the Nottingham area, or because of a child needing to move from one school to another. However, most schools are now oversubscribed, so the Council works closely with broad panels of schools to ensure that children admitted in-year are placed in a range of schools across the city. Ultimately, all Local Authorities must then have a Fair Access Protocol in place for children who have been unable to secure a school through the normal admissions process, or who are deemed as 'hard to place'.

The Committee raised the following points in discussion:

- b) The Committee asked what the main drivers were behind the growing number of Fair Access cases, and whether the current upward trend was likely to continue. It was reported that the upward trend in Fair Access cases seems likely to continue, across all school years. Work is underway to expand secondary provision and a strategic approach is being taken to meet the increasing demand for future school places. Predicting the likely level of in-year changes is extremely difficult, but the Council works as closely as possible with schools and the Department for Education (DfE) to seek to ensure that school places are available.
- c) The Committee asked why a large number of children were moving from one city school to another, and queried to what degree changing a school place resulted in

better outcomes for the child. It was explained that around 40% of supported transfers to a new school were considered as being successful – while the outcome of an unsuccessful transfer is often permanent exclusion.

- d) The Committee asked to what degree health and wellbeing needs were being taken into account within the Fair Access Protocol. It was set out there are triggers in place within the Protocol in relation to a child's eligibility to transfer school, and the assessment panels must consider the overall best interests of a child when making supported transfers. The Protocol is being developed to make specific reference to complex and mental health needs, so there is potential for health and wellbeing to also be included. Some children have been excluded from school because of non-attendance arising from a mental health condition, so work is being done to invest in further mental health support and prevention, and reducing the barriers to attendance for children suffering from poor mental health.
- e) The Committee asked how school needs were forecast for individual communities in the City. It was reported that there is a national set formula that must be used to calculate the overall school places requirement for the city area. However, local knowledge is collected and taken into account for assessing school place need at the community level, and is factored into informing decision-making.

The Chair thanked the Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education, the Director of Education Services, the Inclusion Manager and the Project Manager for attending the meeting to present the report and answer the Committee's questions.

Resolved:

- 1) To request that further information is provided on the formula used to determine the provision for school places within the city.**
- 2) To recommend that provision for wellbeing is included in the revised Fair Access Protocol.**

26 Work Programme

The Chair presented the Committee's current Work Programme for the 2024/25 municipal year.

The Committee noted the Work Programme.