

Meeting Title	Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee
Report Title	Ofsted monitoring visit
Meeting Date	15 th January 2024

Corporate Director(s)/Director(s):	Sarah Nardone, Interim Corporate Director for Children and Education Services Ailsa Barr, Director for Children’s Integrated Services
Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Cheryl Barnard
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Summary of issues:
This report provides an update of the progress of the Children’s Integrated Services improvement and transformation journey since the inadequate judgement following the Inspection of Local Authority Children’s Services (ILACS) in July 2022.
Recommendation(s):
1. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee consider the findings of the final Ofsted Monitoring Visit in November 2024.
2. Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee note the progress made 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 last full inspection was in July 2022 where the overall assessment was that the service was delivering inadequate services, this resulted in a formal notice of improvement being issued to the council by the Department for Education and an independent improvement advisor being appointed to chair the improvement board which was established to oversee the delivery of the improvement plan.
- 1.2 In addition to the improvement board and work being delivered by the service to support improvement work Ofsted have carried out regular monitoring visits. These are 2 day ‘inspection’ visits focused on different areas of service delivery, these visits are not graded but instead the inspectors prepare a letter which is sent to the Statutory Director of Children’s Services and published on the Ofsted website.
- 1.3 As part of the ongoing monitoring of improvement of Nottingham Children’s Services Ofsted undertook their sixth monitoring visit on 12th and 13th November. Typically, Ofsted only undertake six monitoring visits (although the inspection framework allows for seven visits) and so we anticipate that this will be the final visit prior to a full inspection during the second half of 2025. The monitoring visit was undertaken by 2

inspectors, Margaret Burke, who has been the lead inspector for most of the monitoring visits, and Rachel Griffiths who was part of the full inspection team in 2022. A copy of the letter outlining the details of the visit and findings is attached at appendix 1.

2. Focus and headline findings

2.1 This monitoring visit reviewed the support to children in care, with a focus on care planning and achieving permanence.

2.2 Areas Covered:

- Quality of children's assessments, plans, and reviews.
- Quality of visits and work with children.
- Support for children in care and their carers.
- Management oversight and supervision.
- Stability and sustainability of the workforce.
- Performance and quality assurance oversight.

2.3 Headline Findings:

- **Progress:** Nottingham City Council has made sustained progress despite financial pressures and leadership changes.
- **Leadership:** A new permanent director of children's services has been appointed, and senior management positions are now permanently filled. There was some specific positive feedback about the newly appointed Head of Service for Children in Care and Care Leavers from both the workforce and the inspectors.
- **Children in Care:** Children enter care when necessary, but there are issues with the quality and timeliness of assessments and care plans.
- **Permanence Planning:** Effective for adoption but less so for other forms of permanence. Delays in progressing permanence decisions for children in foster care.
- **Workforce Stability:** Improved stability and reduced caseloads for social workers, leading to better support for children.
- **Quality Assurance:** Comprehensive and well-developed systems in place, the inspectors were complementary about the quality of our audit tools, but we need to do more work to ensure the impact of audit work leads to improvements in children's experiences.

2.4 Challenges:

- **Variable Quality:** Assessments and plans for children in care are inconsistent.
- **Delays:** In progressing permanence plans and discharging care orders.
- **Sufficiency Issues:** Some children are placed in residential homes as opposed to foster homes due to sufficiency of placement options.

2.5 Positive Developments:

- **Adoption:** Effective planning and support for children with adoption plans.
- **Support for Children:** Regular visits by social workers, support for hobbies and activities, and good support from schools.

3. Next steps

- 3.1 Ofsted have indicated that although the inspection framework allows for a seventh monitoring visit, they do not intend to undertake a seventh monitoring visit, instead they plan to progress to full inspection during 2025. We would anticipate this visit from July 2025 onwards.
- 3.2 Since the monitoring visit our Corporate Director, Jill Colbert, has resigned. Sarah Nardone has been seconded into the role of Interim Corporate Director. There is continuity of a permanent Director of Children's Integrated Services with additional leadership capacity from an Interim Director of Children's Integrated Services alongside, to continue to support the improvement work. There is a permanent group of Heads of Service which means that the service can continue to progress essential improvement work whilst permanent recruitment decisions are made regarding the Corporate Director role.
- 3.3 In support of our overall improvement work we continue to work closely with Lincolnshire who are providing sector led improvement work with the service. This work is progressing and enabling effective diagnostic work which is supporting the development and progression of actions to address areas of improvement as well as building on areas of emerging strength.