

NOTTINGHAM CITY COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held at LB 31 - Loxley House, Station Street, Nottingham, NG2 3NG on 16 February 2016 from 10.00 - 11.53

Membership

Present

Councillor Brian Parbutt (Chair)
Councillor Glynn Jenkins (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Josh Cook
(minutes 19 -21 inclusive)
Councillor Neghat Nawaz Khan
Councillor Patience Uloma Ifediora

Absent

Councillor Azad Choudhry
Councillor Georgina Culley
Councillor Mohammed Ibrahim
Councillor Chris Tansley

Colleagues, partners and others in attendance:

Councillor David Mellen - Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years
Councillor Sam Webster - Portfolio Holder for Schools
Helen Blackman - Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Social Care
Clive Chambers - Head of Safeguarding and Quality
Nick Lee - Head of Access and Learning
Jon Rea - Engagement and Participation Officer
Jane Garrard - Senior Governance Officer
Catherine Ziane-Pryor - Governance Officer

16 APOLOGIES

Councillor Chris Tansley – unwell
Councillor Azad Choudhury – leave
Councillor Georgina Culley – unwell
Chris Cook (Chair of Nottingham City Safeguarding Children Board)
Alison Michalska (Corporate Director for Children and Adults)

17 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

None.

18 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 22 December 2015 were confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

19 ENGAGING WITH YOUNG PEOPLE IN NOTTINGHAM

Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years, and Jon Rea, Engagement and Participation Officer, presented the Children and Young People's Participation Strategy and delivered a presentation, highlighting the following points:

- (a) it's important to hear the voices of young people in different circumstances and for them to have a say in the decisions that affect their lives. The Participation Strategy empowers children and young people and ensures that the wider reaching decisions made do reflect the needs of children and young people in Nottingham;
- (b) Councillor Mellen and Councillor Webster (Portfolio Holder for Schools) visit and speak with young people at schools, youth clubs and children's homes as it is essential to get young people's views of their experiences, expectations, concerns and hopes. As a result of this approach, it has been possible to support some of these young people, not just on the broader policy issues raised, but also individually;
- (c) There are a variety of ways for young people to engage with the City Council, for example, the Youth Council are regularly involved in commissioning decisions, consultation exercises and have been involved in the recruitment of senior Council officers.. A range of statutory partners have also welcomed the involvement of young people in helping to formulate and then take part in consultation exercises;
- (d) the Children in Care Council provides a valuable forum to ensure that the needs, expectations, and aspirations of children in care are recognised, beyond the statutory duty to consult on an individual basis;
- (e) Nottingham City Council's Participation Strategy includes the following three types of participation: Individual Participation – where citizens are involved in the planning and design of their own service plan or pathway plan; Social Participation – which includes engagement through specific social action projects; and Public Participation – which includes participation through forums, surveys and consultation exercises;

Members of the Committee welcomed the report and strategy and commended Jon Rea for his achievements and on-going work to embed youth engagement and consultation within the culture of the City Council where policy and decision-making may affect them.

Questions were responded to as follows:

- (f) engagement and participation is available to young people across the City although specific focus groups or consultations may take place in specific areas at different times. For instance, members of the Bulwell Youth Club are currently working on a European funded project to help define future youth provision within the area. The Children in Care Council is strongly connected to the National Citizenship Service and participates in 'Bite the Ballot' and voter registration activities. Young people are able to choose which issues in consultations they wish to be involved with;
- (g) research shows that, through meaningful engagement, young people feel empowered and this helps to strengthen their confidence for moving towards leadership roles;
- (h) school children from across the City are regularly involved in Primary Parliament, a twice-termly convention of year 5 and 6 children from city primary schools and historically the City Council has taken part in the 'Takeover Day' where children and young people have shared the roles and work beside/shadow officers of the Local Authority. In 2009, following a similar event, that the Children in Care Council was formed;

- (i) when conducting shadowing opportunities, Councillor Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years, reported that young people participated by choosing which pavements were resurfaced. The young person carefully considered the information available and made a decision based on the number of elderly people living on a particular street who would benefit most. Their decision was then acted upon;
- (j) with limited youth worker availability, it can be a challenge to ensure that all youth work sessions proceed as scheduled if workers are off sick or on leave. However, by empowering some of the more senior young people within each youth group to take leadership roles, it can be possible for some sessions to proceed under their guidance which supports the events schedule in the long-term. Wherever possible, planned youth worker absences, such as for training, are scheduled for periods when historically there has been low attendance i.e. the first few weeks of the new academic year. When cover or youth leadership is not available, sessions are closed which is regrettable but as Service's budgets are cut, capacity is reduced. Ward councillors are kept informed where sessions are cancelled;
- (k) to promote empowerment and leadership and to provide further opportunities to engage and participate, members of the Committee suggested that for one day a year, a Youth Mayor could be appointed;
- (l) it is noted that activities for young people within the City will be held during the Easter holidays at Forest Fields, to consider this term's chosen theme of 'safer lives and positive communities'. Young people will be able to showcase the work they have achieved during the past term;
- (m) Committee members would benefit from attendance at youth events, to meet and speak with young people and to better understand of what engagement is currently taking place in the City;
- (n) it is proposed that a schedule be produced by the Senior Governance Officer for Committee members to attend youth events.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank the contributors for the report and information provided;**
- (2) engage with children and young people about their experiences, perspectives and concerns through existing mechanisms, such as the Youth Parliament, and for the Senior Governance Officer to co-ordinate attendance of Committee members at events in the Children and Young People Participation in Governance Calendar.**

20 CHILDREN WITHOUT SCHOOL PLACES IN NOTTINGHAM

Nick Lee, Head of Access and Learning, delivered a presentation which outlines the numbers of and the reasons why children aged 5 to 16 years old are without a school place within the City. Councillor Sam Webster, Portfolio Holder for Schools was also in attendance and responded to questions.

The following points were highlighted:

- (a) whilst the Local Authority has a responsibility to ensure that children are placed in school, parents also have a responsibility to ensure that their children receive an appropriate education. The Local Authority can be fined approximately £2,000 by the Schools Adjudication Service if it is found not have provided a school place for a child. This fine is usually paid by means of compensation to the parents/family who raise the complaint. However, the Local Authority this is very rarely found to be a fault. Where parents are found not to be ensuring appropriate education for their children, fines can vary from £1,000-£25,000 and three months in prison;
- (b) the issue of school places availability has been a national problem brought about by an unexpected increase in population; whilst there had been a shortage of school places within the City, the Local Authority responded by expanding school place provision by 4,000 additional school places by 2017 at a cost of £33 million;
- (c) parents have to express preferences as to which schools their child should be considered for and if the preference can be met then a place is offered. For first admission (Reception and Year 1), if none of the parental school preferences can be met, the Local Authority will make a mandatory offer of a school place, therefore fulfilling its duty. However, if parents decline the mandatory offer and the child does not attend that school, the child is then classed as being without a school place;
- (d) movement into, out of, and within the City (in year transfers) during the academic year can sometimes result in there being no local school places available for the children concerned. This is a particular issue with mature students attending and living locally to the universities without considering the availability of school places in the area;
- (e) there is a legal infant class size limit of 30 pupils per class for the lower age groups. Exceptions can only be made in very specific circumstances or if the parents appeal and the independent appeal panel decides that the child should attend that school;
- (f) where siblings are unable to access the same school, families may end up with several children at different schools. Some parents decide not to send one or more of their children to alternative schools and wait for places to become available at their preferred schools, sometimes in the mistaken belief that they will be considered as a higher priority;
- (g) after careful consideration of family data across the City, Nottingham City Council has decided to retain 'sibling connection' as an admission priority for Local Authority maintained schools, while other authorities, including the County Council, have withdrawn this as of September 2016. It is not yet known what the impact of this will be;
- (h) domestic violence and family circumstances where children and families have had to move home, is a common reason for children being without school place;
- (i) in some cases, a parent/carer might decide that the school place does not meet the child's special educational needs and decline the school place;

- (j) new and emerging communities have different expectations of the education system, especially as many cultures do not send their children to school until a later age, or find it acceptable to take their children abroad for long periods. Colleagues are working hard to help these communities better understand the requirements and expectations of the British education system;
- (k) consideration is being given to ensure that an adequate number of secondary school places will be available as children currently in primary schools progress to secondary;
- (l) the dedicated post of a 'Children 'Without A School Place' (WASP) Manager' has been created to focus on finding school places for children and has significantly reduced the figures by working on an individual case basis with families, sometimes with the involvement of the Education Welfare Officers;
- (m) whilst some local authorities provide only an electronic service, Nottingham City continues to provide a face-to-face advice service for parents and carers wishing to meet and discuss school places. It has been valuable that several colleagues are fluent in other languages;
- (n) there is a robust approach towards penalties where parents do not send their children to school. This is managed through support to the family and enforcement where necessary;
- (o) as of January 2015 there were 37,887 5-16 year-old children and young people within the City. There were 3,877 first admission primary school applications. 84.8% of applicants received their first preference school place, and 94.5% were offered one of their four preferred schools. 235 children received a mandatory offer of a school place;
- (p) for first admission to secondary school, 84.4% received an offer of a place at their preferred school, 96% received an offer of a place at one of their four preferred schools, and there were 139 mandatory school places offered;
- (q) as of 20 April 2015, 4,800 in-year transfer/entry applications were received;
- (r) and as of 12 February 2016, there were 80 children and young people without a school place. Of this number, 14 children are without a school place in the Reception Year, 19 in Year 1, 10 in Year 2 and 18 in Year 3;
- (s) there are sufficient school places available within the City but there may be complex factors as to why the parents of children without school places have refused or declined to send their children to the schools where places are available;
- (t) the 'Ideal' service has been established to help pupils entering school where English is spoken as an additional language. The Service provides intensive tutoring in English for pupils who may otherwise struggle to engage in education;
- (u) the Fair Access Panel ensures that where young people are wanting to enter schools during the higher year groups, these young people are placed across City schools and not bunched within just a few schools.

Questions from the Committee were responded to as follows:

- (v) where siblings are placed at different schools, the Admissions Team ensure that they are all on school place waiting lists in case places become available. Some parents keep their children at home in the belief that this will get them into their chosen school much faster this is not the case, however where siblings are identified, the child's name will be placed on the waiting list and be considered alongside other applications on the waiting list;
- (w) when applying for school, some parents believe that by only putting one preferred school, the preference is more likely to be met than if they express several preferences. Again this is not the case and only limits the options available to parents;
- (x) when a child is not attending school, Education Welfare Officers can help support the family to help educate the child at home, although help with transport costs is available if the Local Authority cannot provide a place within a reasonable distance. In addition, some schools offer flexibility with arrival and home times where siblings may be attending other schools with the same start and finish times;
- (y) Academies are their own admission authority and the Local Authority cannot tell them what to do and how many pupils to accept;
- (z) currently primary school places are available in Bulwell, Dunkirk, Forest Fields, Bilborough, Basford, Top Valley and Clifton, whilst areas such as Aspley, Wollaton and Sneinton are under a high pressure for places, although plans are in place to address this;
- (aa) for secondary schools, Bluecoat Academy, Fernwood Academy, and Trinity School do not have any capacity, but all others within the City have places available, some in most year groups.

RESOLVED to thank the Head of Access and Learning for his detailed and thorough presentation.

21 MISSING CHILDREN

Clive Chambers, Head of Safeguarding and Quality, Councillor David Mellen, Portfolio Holder for Early Intervention and Early Years, and Helen Blackman, Director of Children's Social Care, informed the Committee of the work taking place to support children who go missing from home and care, highlighting the following points:

- (a) the term 'missing' can refer to children and young people who are absent from where they should be and therefore attract the attention of professionals, such as the Police, due to the potential safeguarding concerns;
- (b) for some young people there is a 'push factor' involved which is pushing them away from their family/carers and home. This may be that they are not getting on with family members, having problems at school or socially. For other absent or missing young people there is a 'pull factor' where circumstances and persuasion is pulling them away from their home;

- (c) the City Council's OFSTED inspection in 2014, reported that the City Council is adequate in providing information to identifying potential runaways and supporting young people who are found or return home. However, OFSTED commented that processes need to be further strengthened;
- (d) there is a nominated Police Officer for Children in Care, who has built a good relationship with many young people in care and acts as the Police contact when potential Police issues occur and young people go missing. The majority of children and young people more likely to become victims of crime rather than perpetrators;
- (e) particularly vulnerable young people are always classed as missing as this raises the Police urgency level;
- (f) when a child or young person returns home, the family are sent a letter from the Police. If the young person is considered vulnerable, the Police are keen to undertake a 'return' interview to identify the push/pull factors which may have led to the young person running away. This helps to determine if/what additional help and support is needed by the child or family. The interview is not a statutory requirement and parents can decline the interview;
- (g) monthly 'Missing Children Team' meetings between the Local Authority, partners and the Police, take place to consider and identify missing hotspots'. The circumstances of children which are reported missing on more than one occasion are also considered;
- (h) having already informed the Police, when a child or young person is missing for longer than 24 hours, searches are broadened. Social media appeals have been found to be very successful in finding young people as they don't generally want to be seen as missing.

Questions from the Committee were responded to as follows:

- (i) OFSTED had provided good feedback with regard to actions taken to protect against child sexual exploitation but the City Council was challenged to improve and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of their plans, in addition to the capacity of Social Workers. Since OFSTED's report in May 2014, the Social Work Team has been expanded. Some areas were identified where the Police could strengthen their approach to responding and make better use of the information collected from the return interviews;
- (j) the City Council and Nottinghamshire County Council's Children in Care Sections works jointly to find missing young people and proactively work with them to address the issues which may have led to their running away;
- (k) when a young person goes missing on multiple occasions, they don't necessarily see that they are making themselves very vulnerable so work is undertaken with the young people directly, but also with their school /college, family and the Police to try and ensure their safety. This can take the form of direct communication or can be via plays performed in schools to raise general awareness;

- (l) young people are often reluctant to say that they are being abused but may display signals of this in other ways. Care home workers and foster carers receive training to try and identify some of these possible signals;
- (m) It is acknowledged that there are still challenges regarding the recruitment and retention of Social Workers, but this is not a position particular to Nottingham.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank the contributors for the report and information provided;**
- (2) consider reviewing the difference in outcomes for missing children since the 2014 OFSTED inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers as part of the Committee's future work programme.**

22 WORK PROGRAMME

RESOLVED to add the following topics to the Committee's future work programme:

- (i) whether outcomes for children and young people have improved since the 2014 OFSTED inspection of services for children in need of help and protection, children looked after and care leavers; and the review of the effectiveness of the local safeguarding children board;**
- (ii) meeting with the new Child Sexual Exploitation Officer and an update on work to tackle child sexual exploitation;**
- (iii) youth homelessness, with a focus on young people leaving care as this is one of the main pathways into youth homelessness;**
- (iv) refugee children in the City, including input from the Corporate Director for Commercial and Operations on current work to support vulnerable families with vulnerable children located in Nottingham as part of the Syrian Resettlement Programme.**