

Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee

30 January 2020

Ofsted Inspection of Children's Services

Background

Nottingham City Children's Services were inspected in November 2018 by Ofsted. The inspection period was conducted over a three week period. There were between 4 and 6 inspectors on site in Nottingham for two weeks. Over this period they tracked and sampled cases across all of our services to reach their judgements.

Our inspection found that children's social care services in Nottingham City required improvement to be good (RI). Whilst the inspectors felt that services had improved since our previous formal inspection in 2014 they identified a number of areas for further improvement.

A key under-pinning issue identified by inspectors was that the needs of families in the City are very complex. Given this context, they felt that there was insufficient social work capacity in the system to deliver good services to all children, young people and families. Whilst they were positive about the steps that the Council has taken to 'grow our own' social workers and implement an innovative induction programme for newly qualified social workers they felt that there was more to do. It is important to note that this local challenge should be seen in the context of a national shortage of social workers and challenges for all local authorities to recruit and retain social workers in a very competitive market.

Strengths

1. Clear leadership vision – the inspectors felt that political and officer leadership was evident and that this vision was understood by front-line workers across the Directorate.
2. Effective strategic partnerships were evident – these partnerships enable us to deliver good multi-agency work, challenge and be challenged by an effective partnership and work together to achieve changes to the whole system to benefit children and families.
3. Ongoing investment in early intervention and services at the edge of care – inspectors felt that this was key to families being able to access proportionate support to meet their needs. These services are critical in managing demand for more costly, specialist services.
4. Effective arrangements to identify and assess children at risk through our Children and Families Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (C&FD MASH) – we have an effective team who screen requests of service and referrals to ensure that families get the right help at the right time. Partners being present in this team means that information can be shared in a timely manner to safeguard children.
5. Effective oversight and multi-agency work with vulnerable children and young people at risk of exploitation – Inspectors reviewed arrangements to support young people who had experienced or were at risk of sexual or criminal exploitation. They felt that work was effective to safeguard these young people.
6. Stability of placement for the majority of children in care – we generally have circa 610-620 young people in the care of Nottingham City Council at any time. A key element in delivering improved outcomes for young people is to ensure that they are in secure

placements; where they can form bonds and attachments with their carers, with school and in their wider community.

Areas for Improvement

1. Where children are cared for by someone who is not their parent or close relative this is considered to be a 'private fostering arrangement'. There are requirements of the local authority to oversee and monitor these arrangements. Inspectors felt that there needed to be more oversight of these cases in Nottingham City.
2. Inspectors identified a small number of children living in neglectful situations where they felt action to safeguard them should have been more timely.
3. Plans to address concerns needed to be more accessible for families, clearer about what professionals were worried about and what action needs to be taken, by when and by who.
4. Work to promote and support the educational achievement of our children in care was identified as a priority. This is led by our Virtual School for Children in Care. Whilst they reflected that there had been recent improvements and investment in roles to support this, the inspectors felt that there was more to do.
5. Social Workers manage complex risks on a day to day basis. Supervision and management oversight is critical to ensuring that they have the support and direction they need to manage these risks effectively. Inspectors felt that the quality of supervision needed to improve.
6. Inspectors identified some cohorts of young people and care leavers where appropriate accommodation was not available. This meant that some young people were being left in police custody overnight and we had utilised B&B accommodation for some care leavers.
7. Inspectors felt that there was more to do to ensure that plans to achieve permanence for children were progressed more quickly, particularly plans for children to be adopted.

In response to the inspection, we have been required to provide an Improvement Plan to Ofsted.

We have already started to deliver key elements of our Improvement Plan to take action in relation to the recommendations.

The Improvement Plan is monitored in an annual conversation with Ofsted. We also monitor progress against this plan with the Lead Member in quarterly Children's Continuous Improvement Board meetings, with Councillors in the Children and Young People Scrutiny Committee and with partners at Children's Partnership Board and Corporate Parenting Board.

Given our RI judgement, we are likely to receive an interim focussed inspection or Joint Targeted Area Inspection (JTAI) within 12-18 months. A full re-inspection of our services will be due circa November 2021.

Sophie Russell, Head of Children's Strategy and Improvement

20th May 2019