

13th January 2020**Agenda Item: 12****REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES****NATIONAL CHILDREN AND ADULT SERVICES CONFERENCE: NOVEMBER
2019****Purpose of the Report**

1. The report informs the Committee of the key messages from the National Children and Adult Services (NCAS) Conference which took place in Bournemouth from 20th to 22nd November 2019.

Information

2. The County Council's representatives attending the conference were Councillor Tony Harper, Chairman of the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee; Councillor Tracey Taylor, Vice Chairman of the Children and Young People's Committee; Melanie Brooks, Corporate Director of Adult Social Care and Public Health; Paul Johnson, Service Director, Strategic Commissioning and Integration, Adult Social Care and Health, and Laurence Jones, Service Director, Commissioning & Resources, Children and Families. The report is supported by the presentations which are available on the [conference website](#).
3. This year attendance at the conference and the agenda were subject to late amendments due to Purdah for the General Election which meant that the Government was not represented at the conference. A range of issues and priorities in children's services were reflected in the conference agenda. Major topics covered were: the new safeguarding arrangements, whole systems approaches to domestic abuse, transforming care and responding to increased levels of need, tackling criminal exploitation, supporting children and young people's mental health, improving educational outcomes and Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) support.
4. Key themes this year were the financial impacts of particular national policies (e.g. SEND support), concerns over the use of exclusions and off-rolling and the growth of Independent Fostering Agencies. The Conference opening was undertaken by Councillor James Jamieson, Chairman of the Local Government Association (LGA), Rachel Dickinson, President of the Association of Directors of Children's Services (ADCS) and Julie Ogley, President of the Association of Directors of Adult Social Services (ADASS). Councillor Jamieson highlighted the role of councils as leaders of place, and the positive outcomes in public health delivered through Health and Wellbeing Boards. He spoke of the vital role that councils play in delivering high quality services, citing council maintained schools as an example, and highlighting how the perverse incentives for schools to off-roll students

are impacting on council SEND budgets. A rise in complex needs means that particular placements are impacting budgets for all Looked After Children (LAC) needs. He referenced the national shortage of social work professionals and the value of professional recognition, including career progression and return to work schemes.

5. Rachel Dickinson spoke of delays to Brexit overshadowing other work such as addressing the needs of families and children living in poverty and the need for a sustainable funding review beyond parliamentary cycles. Rachel expressed concerns over education and inclusion, including off-rolling in non-maintained special schools and the growth in electively home educated (EHE) numbers. She also referenced the costs of placements run by Private Equity Firm providers, unregulated placements for Care Leavers and funding shortfalls for Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children (UASC). Rachel was critical of NHS England about shortcomings over children's healthcare provision, especially mental health services. She highlighted the need for a genuine partnership approach to service delivery, citing the Judicial Review with GPs seeking to recover costs from councils for their work undertaken for safeguarding reviews.
6. Julie Ogle spoke of capacity issues with less money, more users and greater needs. She views the Care Act positively but sees the risks of short termism in funding and seeks a long term plan. Julie advocated for stronger links and partnership working and long term changes in funding arrangements. Social care should be seen as more than just personal care and will rely heavily on place based solutions.
7. The sub-plenary sessions attended included:

New Safeguarding Arrangements: Nicky Pace, Independent Scrutineer for Herts SCP spoke of her role as a critical friend, with oversight of delivering responsibilities such as the Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) or Serious Case Reviews (SCRs). She stressed the importance of listening to the voice of the child and the voice of frontline practitioners, and that there should be scrutiny by and involvement of elected members acting as corporate parents. Nicky highlighted particular areas for scrutiny work around exploitation, linking missing children reviews, police teams dealing with missing and gangs, and missing persons charities.

Transforming Children's Social Care: representatives from Hampshire County Council spoke of the challenges of increasing levels of referrals to the MASH, increasing numbers of children coming into care and increasing needs, and the opportunities of working with partners in practice (e.g. police, domestic violence charities) and optimising staffing levels and roles (SWSOs and SWAs). We heard audio testimonies from children in care and social work professionals, including the importance of being heard and the benefits of a Strengths Based Practice approach to engaging with families and securing better outcomes. Systems have been improved meaning less admin and travel and allowing more time with children and families. Improvements include effective ICT kits, one-click tools, simplified processes and more Social Workers and SWAs. Social work teams receive cases during one week of a five week cycle, allowing them to work through caseloads without fresh additions. "Intensive" workers deliver support and interventions which can include funding activities.

Tackling County Lines and Serious Violent Crime: speakers at this session referenced the LGA report "Breaking the Cycle of Youth Violence" and challenged the orthodoxy of 'tick-

list' thinking in favour of an evidence based approach. Child protection systems are designed to protect young children from risk, whilst the risks posed to adolescents are quite different, with many not covered by current legislation (e.g. digital, gangs). The period of adolescence, previously defined as 11-18 is now recognised as 10-24. Dez Holmes, Director of Research in Practice spoke on contextual safeguarding and the value of a whole system approach that includes strengths based practice. Authorities need rapid response learning cycles to counter the changing habits of criminals seeking to exploit young people. (Dez subsequently addressed the Nottinghamshire Violence Reduction Unit hosted conference on Contextual Safeguarding 4 December).

Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) the challenges and the opportunities: this session set out several issues for children's services, and drew attention to the poor educational and employment outcomes for post 16 and post 19 children and adults. There remains a great deal of work required to realise the ambition for Preparing for Adulthood intended in the SEND reforms with the positive ambitions of the 2014 Act being undermined by the unintended consequences (such as the volumes of tribunals arising from the structures and processes). This will be an area for both Children's and Adults Committees to consider further.

The Role of Local Government in Addressing a CYP Mental Health Crisis: speakers contrasted mental health to mental illness, noting the threats posed from circumstances, experiences and environment. There has been a growth in anxiety and depression amongst children and young people, manifesting younger amongst boys and later amongst girls. Online programmes such as KOOTH and PALMS have been well received; first contact, signposting and the right advice at the right time remain critical areas of work.

8. Workshop sessions attended included:

A Whole System Approach to Domestic Abuse, Improving Outcomes for Children: we heard first hand testimony from a survivor of domestic abuse whose child took his own life whilst she was hospitalised. Speakers from SafeLives explained their One Front Door pilot, working with local authorities to embed integrated support between children's services and domestic abuse provision. This is addressing unclear referral routes, failure to link incidents, lack of information sharing and inconsistent risk and need ratings, including by co-locating partners such as Police, Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVAs), Housing and Early Help.

Improving Outcomes for Vulnerable Children: Lambeth Council have workstreams looking at the educational attainment gap at GCSE for children and young people who have had contact with a social worker in the preceding 12 months, addressing unconscious bias and the particular needs of Black and Minority Ethnic students, and locality based plans for Early Help. One Norfolk based academy is working on issues for families that are economically inactive (often multi-generationally), supporting young carers, and lifting expectations so that circumstances do not define or limit their students. They advocate strong pastoral care and have a professional Social Worker on staff, working with several staff safeguarding leads. Lynsey BurrIDGE, Chair of the National Association of Virtual School Heads, spoke of the responsibilities within this statutory role. There is a national conversation amongst children and young people in care about the negative impacts of the language used to describe their circumstances and experiences, with suggestions being made for more positive language: e.g. 'LAC' to be 'cared for', 'contact' to be 'family time'.

This presentation closed focussing on aspiration, positive language and strength in systems.

Ten years on from the Autism Act: local government's role in meeting the needs of autistic adults and children looked at the progress made and best progress examples, whilst examining the further work needed to enable people with autism to live well in their communities. The Autism strategy has been extended to be all-age and there were good examples given in this workshop of what Nottinghamshire can consider in the strategy refresh being undertaken by the Health and Wellbeing Board.

The Troubled Families programme: speakers from Achieving for Children and Richmond Borough Council spoke of their multi-agency model linking mental health specialists, DVA services, employment advisors and family coaches. They referenced that the impact of interventions do not produce cashable savings, so are measured as cost avoidance which can never be exactly defined. Delegates discussed the importance of targeted early help, particularly 'First 1000 Days' programmes which support families through pregnancy, birth and early years.

Re-Imagining Services in a Country that works for All Children and their Families: this was a group interactive session that posed future scenarios of different service delivery systems and the experiences of different groups of service users. Delegates were given the 'Game in a Tin' to use in staff group training or reflective sessions; this may also be of interest to councillors in considering the Corporate Parenting role.

Leaving Care in Suffolk: Harnessing the Power of the Community: Volunteering Matters explained their programme with Suffolk County Council which sits with the Council's leaving care offer. The 'Grandmentor' scheme matches over 50s mentors with over 16s LAC and Care Leavers to help develop work readiness skills and self-confidence. The age difference is specified to provide a relationship dynamic similar to that between children and grandparents and is seen as the particular strength of this mentoring scheme. Speakers stressed the importance of the matching process as key to the longevity and strength of relationships, as opposed to task and finish based matchings.

Improving Social Mobility in the Early Years through the Home Learning Environment and Local Systems of Delivery: The National Literacy Trust and LGA presented developments in relation to programmes and campaigns to improve early years literacy. These included the 'Stoke Speaks' whole city approach and 'Hungry Little Minds' and 'Tiny Happy People' models. Benchmarking tools, already used in Nottinghamshire, were promoted.

Preparing for Liberty Protection Safeguards: this provided an oversight of forthcoming legislation that will change the way that assessment and permissions for restricting those aged 16 and above with limited mental capacity are undertaken. Due to purdah this was a limited insight.

9. A summary of the key learning points for Nottinghamshire are as follows:

- consider best practice examples for co-location and partnership working
- further implement strengths based practice and contextual safeguarding in our service delivery

- consider any opportunities evidenced by pilots and projects elsewhere, such as First 1000 Days and Grandmentoring
- continue to make the case for fully funded services, e.g. SEND working through national bodies and the LGA on common national issues.

Other Options Considered

10. No other options have been considered.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

11. The report provides an opportunity for the Committee to consider the key learning points highlighted from the conference and any further actions arising from the summary contained within the report.

Statutory and Policy Implications

12. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, data protection and information governance finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (public health services), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and adults at risk, service users, smarter working, sustainability and the environment and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

13. There are no financial implications arising from the report.

Implications for Service Users

14. The report highlights opportunities to learn from experiences and models of practice in other councils to improve services and support available to people in Nottinghamshire.

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Committee considers whether there are any further actions it requires in relation to the key messages from the National Children and Adult Services Conference contained in the report.

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Constitutional Comments (EP 17/12/19)

15. The Children and Young People's Committee is the appropriate body to consider the content of the report. If the Committee resolves that any actions are required it must be satisfied that such actions are within the Committee's terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 23/12/19)

16. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

None.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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