

27 January 2020

Agenda Item: 7

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, COMMISSIONING AND RESOURCES

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES - DEPARTMENTAL UPDATE ON IMPROVEMENT AND CHANGE

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of this report is to update the Committee on the approach to service improvement and transformation within the Children and Families department and on progress since the last report in January 2019.

Information

2. Within the Children and Families department there are a number of key drivers for improvement and change. These include:
 - Improving outcomes for children, particularly the most vulnerable
 - Delivery of the Departmental Strategy to support the Council Plan
 - Meeting regulatory standards
 - Maximising value for money and productivity and meeting the challenges of increasing need and reducing resources.

Improving outcomes for children

3. The department has a monthly Continuous Improvement Board through which it coordinates plans to identify and deliver improvement activity. This includes a review of data and performance, complaints and compliments and audits of cases supported by structured visits of senior managers to teams and services.
4. On 18th March 2019 Children and Young People's Committee approved a proposal to embed strengths-based practice as a consistent practice model within Youth, Families and Social Work. Subsequently, this has been adopted as the practice model across the Children and Families department. Strengths-based practice is centred on working with colleagues, partners and children, rather than 'doing to', to assess, plan and manage cases. Across the department there are many examples of the workforce already using a strengths-based approach in their daily practice. Therefore, the ambition of the programme is to build

on this through creating consistency and ensuring that processes, workforce development and the way we work with each other reflects this approach.

5. In order to align daily processes with a strengths-based approach to practice, priority work areas have been identified by a task and finish group. Frontline staff and managers are supported by the Principal Social Worker, Social Work Practice Consultants and the Programmes and Projects team to review existing processes, develop new ways of working which align with restorative and relationship-based strengths-based approaches and embed changes. As a result, the following have been undertaken:
 - group reflective supervision has been implemented across frontline teams within Youth, Families and Social Work, the Fostering teams, Residential Children's Services and within the Independent Chair Service. This allows teams to spend time together reflecting on a case through the eyes of a child, using an informed strengths-based approach. The sessions also support the building of relationships and peer support within teams.
 - the Mansfield district is now using a strengths-based approach to plan assessments. This approach will be implemented across other teams on a phased basis.
 - work is underway to align Personal Education Plans for children who are Looked After with a strengths-based approach.
 - the Independent Chair Service is reviewing its approach to Child Protection Conferences by exploring ways of holding conferences used by other local authorities such as Leeds City Council and Lincolnshire County Council.
 - new intranet pages are being developed which will be a hub for information and tools relating to strengths-based practice, latest policies and guidance.
 - a comprehensive training plan is being developed which incorporates learning for all staff around strengths-based approaches and how these will be embedded across the service, as well as ensuring that there are learning and development opportunities to gain practice knowledge and skills.
6. Nottinghamshire continues to be an active partner in the Association of Directors of Children's Services' East Midlands Regional Improvement Alliance. The annual structured self-assessment has been completed and a "challenge conversation" involving senior members of two other local authorities, Lincolnshire and Leicester City, will take place in January with any recommendations featuring in the department's improvement plan.
7. Consultation on the County Council's draft Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Policy took place across November 2019. The draft policy sets out Nottinghamshire's values and principles together with the required 12 essential outcomes, and necessary next steps to achieve these over the next three years. Successful delivery of the Policy will require the support of all partners across social care, education and health. The final Policy will be considered by Policy Committee in April 2020.

Delivery of the Departmental Strategy to Support the Council Plan

8. The revised Children and Young People's Departmental Strategy for 2019-2021 was approved by Policy Committee on 22 May 2019. Notable areas of progress are described below:

Commitment 1 – Families prosper and achieve their potential

- One of our key success measures is that more children will achieve a good level of development by the end of reception year. Considerable developments are taking place with the Council working with colleagues across health and the education and early years sector. Two Joint Strategic Needs Assessment chapters entitled “Early Years and School Readiness” and “1001 Days - Conception to Age Two” have been approved by the Health and Wellbeing Board. Based on these key documents a “Best Start” strategy is being developed in 2020 with an action plan and delivery board.

Commitment 2 – Children are kept safe from harm

- New arrangements for the Safeguarding Children Partnership commenced in January 2019. The revised meeting structure and Rapid Review process, following significant incidents, is now full embedded.
- The Regional Adoption Agency, led by Nottinghamshire County Council, went live on 3rd April 2019.
- The Troubled Families programme has been extended for a further year and a learning exercise has now taken place to understand which elements of the programme are proving most effective. These will be presented to Children and Young People’s Committee along with recommendations for future provision of early help services over the coming months.

Commitment 3 – Children and Young People go to good schools

- The Strategy for Improving Educational Opportunities for All was considered by Children and Young People’s Committee on 14th October 2019 and recommended for approval by Policy Committee in January 2020. Updates on progress are presented to Committee every six months.

Meeting Regulatory Standards

9. All aspects of children’s services provision are subject to a high level of legislation or statutory guidance. The ratings provided by Ofsted and other inspectorates can have significant implications for the reputation of the Council, for Council spending and for the recruitment of suitably qualified and talented staff to improve service provision.
10. In February 2019 Ofsted published a letter summarising the findings of a focused visit to Nottinghamshire County Council children’s services on 9th January 2019. Inspectors looked at the Local Authority’s arrangements for ‘front door’ responses to contacts and referrals of children potentially at risk or in need of support. They looked at a range of evidence, including case discussions with social workers, multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) officers and meetings with managers and at performance management and quality assurance information and children’s case records. They found that the vast majority of children and their families receive quick and appropriate responses from the MASH when enquiries for early help and support and safeguarding concerns are received. They commented that staff morale is high in the MASH and assessment teams and that senior leaders have responded well to a previous increase in demand for services at the front door, implementing plans to ensure that social workers have manageable workloads and children’s assessments are completed within appropriate timescales to meet their needs.

11. On 19th December 2019 Ofsted published a report on a full Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services in Nottinghamshire following a two week inspection process in October 2019. The overall effectiveness was judged as "Good" with the following sub-judgements:
 - The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - Good
 - The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection – Requires Improvement
 - The experiences and progress of children in care and care leavers – Good.
12. Ofsted commented that political and corporate support has remained a strength for children's services, with continued financial backing and increased commitment from district councils. Some notable achievements have been secured, such as increasing and stabilising the workforce. Strengthened performance management arrangements provide the Local Authority with sound information to help leaders better understand need and ensure that services are targeted to those who require help. An action plan addressing the areas for improvement will be produced in early 2020 with progress reported back to the Children and Young People's Committee.
13. Disabled Children's Support Services provided by Nottinghamshire County Council were inspected by the Care Quality Commission in March 2019. They commented that "children and young people received care and support in line with their assessed needs. Staff were well trained and felt supported to carry out their role effectively". Services were found to be "Good" overall with the following sub-judgments.
 - Safe – Good
 - Effective – Good
 - Caring – Good
 - Responsive – Good
 - Well-led - Good
14. There has been no further inspection activity in respect of Special Educational Needs and Disability or Youth Justice services, although this is expected over the coming year.

Maximising value for money and productivity

15. In common with most local authorities across England the rising demand for children's services is placing a strain on Council finances. The reasons for this are a rise in the number of children in the care of the Local Authority and a shortage of children's social workers, necessitating the procurement of expensive agency staff. The department has an Effectiveness and Efficiency plan, progress against which is reported back to Children and Young People's Committee every quarter, which aims to manage these budgetary pressures.
16. An audit of financial management processes and culture within the department has been commissioned to understand if any changes are required to deliver the optimum oversight of value for money within the department. This is due to report back in early 2020.
17. The department's Digital Development Board, which includes representation from across the Chief Executive's department, has recently approved a digital transformation plan for

the next five years. This is attached as **Appendix 1**. It sets out that digital transformation should be at the centre of shaping departmental service delivery, strategy and culture. In implementing the strategy the department will continue to work with colleagues in ICT services and performance and intelligence to deliver a plan that aligns with corporate developments. This digital transformation will aim to improve service user and business outcomes by utilising digital opportunities to transform:

- the way service users and their families access and engage with our services
- the way individuals work and collaborate
- the way operational processes are executed
- the way the department understands and serves service users.

It is expected that the realisation of these ambitions will:

- deliver savings and efficiencies through digital transformation
- create opportunities for service improvement and
- support the departmental improvement and change portfolio.

18. Nottinghamshire County Council has been working with Nottingham City, Derby City and Derbyshire County Council on a range of collaborative commissioning initiatives. A joint framework for the provision of residential care and independent fostering agencies will commence at the end of January 2020 and a service funded through a Social Impact Bond, using a mixture of private and lottery funding as investment, is scheduled to commence in the spring. Further phases of work, including the provision of short breaks to disabled children and independent special school places, will follow.

Other Options Considered

19. The matters set out in the report are intended to provide proportionate updates to the Sub-Committee of progress against key milestones and on the approach of the Children and Families department to transformation and service improvement.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

20. The Council's Constitution requires each Committee to review performance in relation to the services provided on a regular basis. The terms of reference of the Improvement and Change Sub-Committee include responsibility for monitoring performance of the Council Plan and Departmental Plans are an extension of this, therefore this recommendation seeks to fulfil this requirement.

Statutory and Policy Implications

21. 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

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

RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1) That the Improvement and Change Sub-Committee considers the approach to innovation and change within the Children and Families department and whether any actions are required in relation to the detail in the report.

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Constitutional Comments (AK 02/01/20)

23. The report falls within the remit of Improvement and Change Sub-Committee under its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 30/12/19)

24. 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.

[Improvement, Change and Transformation in the Children and Families Department – report to Improvement & Change Sub-Committee on 7th January 2019](#)

[Youth, Families and Social Work Framework for Practice – report to Children & Young People’s Committee on 18th March 2019](#)

[Departmental Strategies and Council Plan Level Data Set – report to Policy Committee on 22nd May 2019](#)

[Approval of JSNA Chapter – 1001 Days, Conception to Age 2 – report to Health and Wellbeing Board on 4th September 2019](#)

[Approval of JSNA Chapter – Early Years and School Readiness – report to Health and Wellbeing Board on 6th November 2019](#)

[A Strategy for Improving Educational Opportunities for All – report to Children & Young People's Committee on 14th October 2019](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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