

Meeting: Children and Families Select Committee

Date: Monday 05 February 2024 (commencing at 10:30am)

Membership:**County Councillors**

Mike Introna (Chairman)
Francis Purdue-Horan (Vice Chairman) (**Apologies**)

John Cottee	Johno Lee
Anne Callaghan BEM	Mike Quigley MBE
Robert Corden (Absent)	Nigel Turner (Apologies)
Debbie Darby (Apologies)	Michelle Welsh (Apologies)
Errol Henry JP (Apologies)	

Education Representatives

Nigel Frith (**Absent**) James McGeachie

Substitute Members

Jim Creamer for Errol Henry JP
Eric Kerry for Nigel Turner
Mike Pringle for Michelle Welsh
John Wilmott for Debbie Darby

Other County Councillors in attendance:

Sinead Anderson - Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Families
Nigel Moxon - Deputy Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
Sam Smith - Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
Tracey Taylor - Deputy Cabinet Member for Children and Families

Officers and colleagues in attendance:

Amanda Collinson - Service Director for Help, Care and Protection
Martin Elliott - Senior Scrutiny Officer
Irene Kakoullis - Group Manager, Early Childhood Services
James Lavender - Democratic Services Officer
Peter McConnochie - Service Director for Education, Learning and Inclusion
Rachel Miller - Interim Service Director for Commissioning and Resources

- Lucy Peel - Service Director for Transformation and Improvement
- Mandy Stratford - Early Years Strategic Manager
- Jenny Whiston - Service Manager, Commissioning and Placements

Others in attendance

- John Bennett - Chair of Parent/Carer Forum Trustees

1 TO NOTE THE APPOINTMENT AT FULL COUNCIL ON 7 DECEMBER 2023 OF COUNCILLOR MIKE INTRONA AS CHAIRMAN OF THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2023/24 MUNICIPAL YEAR

RESOLVED (2024/001)

That the appointment of Councillor Mike Introna as Chairman of the Children and Families Select Committee for the remainder of the 2023/24 municipal year, be noted.

2 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

- Councillor Debbie Darby - other reasons
- Councillor Errol Henry JP - other reasons
- Councillor Francis Purdue-Horan - other reasons
- Councillor Nigel Turner - other reasons
- Councillor Michelle Welsh - other council business

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING

The minutes of the last meeting held on 16 October 2023, having been circulated to all Members, were taken as read and were confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

4 DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Councillor Mike Quigley MBE declared an interest in Agenda Item 5, Partnership progress in improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, in that he was the Chair of the Diverse Academies Trust, which included two special schools both based in Mansfield.

5 PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS IN IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCE AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES

Peter McConnochie, Service Director for Education, Learning and Inclusion, presented a report that detailed the progress being made by the Nottinghamshire Local Area Partnership to deliver the joint SEND Improvement Plan that had been developed in response to the findings of the Ofsted/CQC local area SEND inspection that had taken place in January/February 2023. It was noted that the Local Area Partnership was committed to improving the experiences and

outcomes of children and young people with SEND and would continue to focus on implementing the improvement plan and wider improvement arrangements moving forwards. The report provided information on work that had been carried out in delivering the SEND Improvement Plan since the last progress report had been received at the October 2023 meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee. Councillor Sam Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities, and Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families were also in attendance for this item.

In the discussion that followed, members raised the following points and questions:

- Members sought further information on the work being carried out to ensure that children and young people who had additional needs, but who did not have an EHC Plan, had their needs identified, met, and monitored effectively.
- When would the funding streams to deliver the jointly commissioned sensory therapy service funding be confirmed?
- The long waiting lists for children and families to access dyslexia referrals and mental health referrals through the Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), as well as ADHD assessments were of a concern.
- Members considered whether the Council should focus on support in areas of SEND which they currently do not do, such as ADHD assessments, to alleviate the waiting times in those areas.
- What were the outcomes of the recent meeting, between the Council, the Department for Education and NHS England that had been carried out to as part of routine assurance and oversight processes.
- What staff support was provided to children with SEND, both with and without an EHC Plan, within schools?
- That the number of responses that had been received to a survey families in order to obtain feedback about EHC Plan provision in place was slightly disappointing at 139 responses.
- Members sought further information about the Council's recruitment of Educational Psychologists and the challenges of recruitment of the specialist staff that would be required to deliver improvements in performance around the delivery of EHC Plans.

In relation to the points raised by the Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, and Officers provided the following responses:

- The identification and monitoring of children and young people with SEND within a mainstream education setting was currently underway as a pilot

scheme, with the aim of full implementation in September 2024. The results of the pilot scheme would be provided to the Committee in September.

- The information on the funding streams for the jointly commissioned sensory therapy service sat with the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB). Officers stated that this information would be circulated to members outside of the meeting.
- The number of children and young people receiving their EHC Plan within the required 20-week timeframe had increased from 4.5% in 2022 to 28.3% in 2023.
- The recent meeting that had been held between the Council, the Department for Education and NHS England meeting had been largely positive. Once the data from had been collated, the feedback from the meeting would be provided to the Corporate Director for Children and Families and the SEND Improvement Board.
- All schools employed a SENCO. The level of support that a SENCO could deliver was related to each schools' budget, there was additional funding within the High Needs Block to support SENCOs. Educational Psychologists provided direct support and training for teachers in identifying and supporting children with SEND.
- The Children and Families Department ran many surveys, and families with children in receipt of a EHC Plan would have already had an annual review process where they had been able to provide feedback. The objective of the survey had been to hear from people who have a EHC Plan for their children, but do not provide regular feedback.
- The Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group included parent and carer representatives, educational settings, health care providers and other leaders within the system. Since its establishment, the group had met twice and had already commissioned a survey of all parents in Nottinghamshire around SEND, the results of which would be shared with the Committee.
- There were three full-time trainee Educational Psychologists within the Children and Families Department who would soon be fully qualified. Nine additional full-time Educational Psychologists were also planned to be recruited. The Council made use of agency Educational Psychologists to write the EHC Plans, and this had contributed to the increase in the number of EHC Plans processed this year.
- There were challenges in allocating funding to children who were identified as having SEND or additional needs in a nursery setting but have then moved into a primary setting by the time the funding was made available. The Council sought to change the policy to ensure that when a child with SEND or additional needs moved into a different educational setting, the funding would go with the child to that setting.

- There were several pathways to recruiting Educational Psychologists into the Council. It was expected that the trainee Educational Psychologists would obtain their degree and then undertake 'on-the-job' training. Whilst it was hoped that once qualified that the Educational Psychologists would stay with the Council, this could not be guaranteed.

The Chairman thanked Peter McConnochie - Service Director for Education, Learning and Inclusion, Councillor Sam Smith - Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Councillor Tracey Taylor - Cabinet Member for Children and Families for attending the meeting and answering member questions.

RESOLVED (2024/002):

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That further progress reports on Partnership progress in improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities be received at the April and July 2024 meetings of the Children and Families Select Committee.
- 3) That the following issues raised by the Committee in its consideration of the report on Partnership progress in improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities be progressed:
 - a) That further information on the jointly commissioned sensory therapy service be circulated to members of the Children and Families Select Committee.

6 THE EARLY YEARS AND CHILDCARE SECTOR IN NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Irene Kakoullis - Group Manager, Early Childhood Services and Mandy Stratford - Strategic Early Years Manager attended the meeting to present a report that provided information on the new Government childcare reforms and the Council's plans for their roll out across Nottinghamshire. The report also provided information on the findings and recommendations of the 2023 Nottinghamshire Childcare Sufficiency Assessment and how this informed activity around the implementation of the reforms.

In the discussion that followed, members raised the following points and questions:

- Members highlighted that there would be a varied level of coverage of accessible childcare across Nottinghamshire, particularly in Mansfield. This was due to the closure of nurseries, the struggles of private providers to meet staffing requirements, and the inability of parents to fund the wraparound care in schools.

- Were the Council and childcare providers confident that providers could meet the demands of the new entitlements to childcare that were being introduced?
- Was an alternative funding arrangement being considered in the event that the Government funding that had been provided was insufficient.
- Members considered if there would be an additional burden on the County Council's childcare provision if childcare services within Nottingham City Council were reduced.

In relation to the points raised by the Committee, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, and Officers provided the following responses:

- The wraparound care in schools was not funded care. In schools and that offered breakfast and afterschool clubs, parents paid for the service as the numbers of children accessing the services could vary day-to-day.
- The work that had been carried out to assess sufficiency of childcare access across Nottinghamshire had identified eight areas where less than 10% of childcare places were empty. Within Mansfield, a number of childcare providers were operating out of council-owned children's centres, to support vulnerable children in deprived areas, however the take-up from families had been less than had been hoped and as such was impacting on the sustainability of these services. A balance needed to be struck between providing childcare places, but not setting up childcare services that were not sustainable.
- When the Government announced the provision of a service, local authorities were required to shape and implement the plans towards that service. The Government used short-term funding streams to get that service established but depending on what services the Government decided to fund, it might be that the local authority would have to fund the service without ongoing Government support.
- The aim of the County Council's childcare service was to provide sufficient childcare based on the County's population. However, parents from other local authorities used the County Council's childcare provision for a number of reasons, such as closeness of the childcare provider to the parents' place of work. Likewise, parents in the County used other local authorities' childcare provision for the same reasons.
- There was no obvious correlation between a cut in the childcare provision at Nottingham City Council and any increase in the numbers of families using the County Council's childcare provision. Nottingham City Council funded their Early Years Team through the Dedicated Schools Grant, so their funding would continue. The only County Council-led provision was through maintained primary schools who have nurseries, the funding of which would continue.

The Chairman thanked Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Irene Kakoullis - Group Manager, Early Childhood Services and

Mandy Stratford - Strategic Early Years Manager for attending the meeting and answering member's questions.

RESOLVED (2024/003):

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That the following issues raised by the Committee in its consideration of the report on the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Nottinghamshire be progressed:
 - a) That a progress report be circulated to members of the Children and Families Select Committee after the introduction of Early Years funded childcare places for 15 hours for the two-year-olds of working parents.
 - b) That a further report on the Early Years and Childcare Sector in Nottinghamshire be received at the January 2025 meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee.

7 STANDING ADVISORY COUNCIL ON RELIGIOUS EDUCATION (SACRE)

Peter McConnochie, Service Director for Education, Learning and Inclusion, presented the SACRE Annual Reports for 2021/22 and 2022/23. The reports detailed SACRE's activity in fulfilling its role in advising the local authority on matters relating to religious education.

RESOLVED (2024/004):

- 1) That the SACRE Annual Reports for 2021/22 and 2022/23 be noted.
- 2) That the SACRE Annual Report for 2022/23 be received at the January 2025 meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee.
- 3) That the following issues raised by the Committee in its consideration of the SACRE Annual Reports for 2021/22 and 2022/23 be progressed:
 - a) That further work be carried out through SACRE with the Multi-Academy Trusts regarding their delivery and provision of Religious Education.

8 CHILDREN AND FAMILIES DEPARTMENT PERFORMANCE, RISKS AND FINANCIAL POSITION – QUARTER 2 2023/24

Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families and Councillor Sam Smith, Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, introduced a report that detailed the financial position of the Children and Families department, its performance against the ambitions of the Annual Delivery Plan, and a summary of the department's key risks to performance and delivery, covering the Quarter Two period of 2023/24.

In the discussion that followed, members of the raised the following points and questions:

- How was the activity progressing to improve the number of EHC Plans that were completed within the required 20-week timeframe. Members also asked how many families had approached the Ombudsman due to concerns about around the production of EHC Plan
- Members noted that the number of care leavers in Nottinghamshire aged 19 – 21 who were in education, employment or training was 50.9%, compared to the national average of 56%, and asked what more could be done to increase this number.
- That of the recent Ombudsman cases that had been noted at Governance and Ethics Committee, there had been no cases that had ruled against the County Council for not meeting the requirements of an individual EHC Plan.
- Further clarification and information and clarification around:
 - The number of child protection cases reviewed within the appropriate timescale.
 - The number of children looked after in kinship placements.
 - The attainment gap at age 16 between pupils in receipt of free school meals and those who weren't.
- Members observed the overspend of £2.5 million within the Children and Families Department and how this had been impacted by the high cost of some residential placements.
- The levels of persistent absenteeism from schools and how in Nottinghamshire, like the rest of the country were concerningly high and had been since the pandemic.
- What would be the impact on the assessment of the needs of children with SEND within the statutory timescales if the Council continued to face workforce recruitment and retention difficulties.

In relation to the points raised, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, and Officers provided the following responses:

- The number of EHC plans completed within the 20-week timeframe had increased. Activity was being carried across the SEND Local Area Partnership to increase this further by recruiting more Educational Psychologists, working with SENCOs in schools and academies, and working with Early Years settings to improve the support for children with SEND. The partnership is also building on relationships with the ICB and other healthcare partners.

- Annual reviews of the EHC Plans were undertaken by the education setting through their SENCOs and Council caseworkers.
- The Council had established a £40 million programme to deliver more SEND schools in Nottinghamshire, with an academy trust recently appointed to run a 160-place SEND school in Mansfield that was due to open in September 2025. Whilst there was a rise in the demand for SEND support services, mainstream schools and academies within Nottinghamshire were good at catering for children with additional needs until they found a SEND school place.
- 12.4% of children in care for at least 12 months achieved the same 9-5 grades in English and Maths as children not in care, which was above the national average of 11%. Further work would be carried out with educational settings to support the education of children in care.
- Looked after children were supported by Council Achievement Advisors who helped them with their education and career aspirations. Taster days were organised by the Council with various employers that enabled young people to learn more about different careers. Care leavers were supported by an advisor until the age of 21 to help them achieve their aspirations.
- There were a number of Child Protection Coordinator staff absences, as such some child protection review meetings had been delayed. Within the Child Protection Team, there had also been a shift in approach to focus on needs rather than process, for example it was preferable to have more impactful meetings that were not necessarily within the timescale rather than having a less impactful meeting to within timescale.
- With regards to kinship care, there might not be the extended family network for a child to be taken on in a kinship setting, and therefore need a formal placement. The target of having 12% of children in care with a kinship carer was ambitious. Wider family was always considered as the first option for a child's care.
- Whilst the attainment gap at age 16 between pupils in receipt of free school meals and other children had narrowed, it was still greater than the national average. The Council hoped to further address poor attendance by reviewing the Council's Improving Education for All Strategy and focusing on improving attendance.
- Some children had very complex needs. Whilst action was needed at national level to support local authorities with the cost of high needs placements, the Council sought to build an internal specialist support service which would mean that children with complex needs could be fully supported by the Council within their own facilities.
- Good attendance at schools was vital for a child's education. The Improving Education for All Strategy would be reviewed to make attendance a Key Performance Indicator (KPI).

- Workforce supply was a challenge, as it was for local authorities across the country. The long-term strategy was to train and maintain in employment the Council's own Educational Psychologists, however, to address the interim capacity issues, Educational Psychologists had been hired through agencies. The Children and Families Department had to find a balance between providing capacity in the short-term and providing a long-term sustainable recruitment process.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, as well as officers, for presenting the report and for answering members questions.

RESOLVED (2024/005):

- 1) That the report be noted.
- 2) That an externally facilitated workshop be arranged for the members of the Children and Families Select Committee with the Cabinet Members for Children and Families and for Education and SEND in order to further develop members understanding around performance indicators relating to children and families.
- 3) That further reports on the Children and Families Department's performance, risks and financial position be received on a quarterly basis by the Children and Families Select Committee.

9 PROVISION OF SUPPORT TO LOOKED AFTER CHILDREN TRANSITIONING OUT OF THE CARE SYSTEM

Councillor Tracey Taylor, Cabinet Member for Children and Families, presented a report that a provided a response to recommendations that had been made at the 19 June 2023 meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee.

- a) That further information and case studies that illustrate the success and achievements of young people who have transitioned out of the care of the Council be shared with members of the Committee.*
- b) That the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, in consultation with Officers, gives further consideration to how more young people could be encouraged to remain with their foster family after turning 18, and also to the activity that would also be required to ensure that a sufficient number of foster family placements were still maintained and available for children and young people who are under 18.*
- c) That further information be circulated to members of the Committee on the work being carried out with both residential homes and foster carers to support them in ensuring that the children in their care are not potentially criminalised through being referred to the Police unnecessarily in relation to their behaviour."*

The full responses to the recommendations were detailed in the Cabinet Member's report.

In the discussion that followed, members of the raised the following points and questions:

- What support was available to looked after children after the age of 21.
- How many of the 138 care leavers who had attended the Council's Employability Briefings had then gone on to secure employment.
- Whether the refreshed Local Offer for Care Leavers had yet been published.
- Members noted how there were strong support measures in place for care leavers within their divisions.

In relation to the points raised, the Cabinet Member for Children and Families, and Officers provided the following responses:

- The Council provided support to care leavers up to the age of 25, after which support ended. As part of the work to support care leavers transitioning out of the care system there was always the objective to find an adult within the young person's wider family or support network who could act as a supportive adult and role model.
- The Employability Briefings were not meant to guarantee jobs to care leavers; but to motivate care leavers to learn about different careers and to undertake workshops and other activities to increase their employability skills and job readiness.
- The Local Offer for Care Leavers was ready to be published and would be published shortly.
- The district and borough councils provided support measures that care leavers could access such as council tax exemptions and free leisure passes.
- The work that was currently being carried out to for increase the number of foster carers within Nottinghamshire was a priority area of activity for the Council.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Children and Families for presenting the report and for answering members questions.

RESOLVED (2024/006):

That the report be noted.

10 OUTCOMES OF THE REVIEW OF THE REVISED ELECTIVE HOME EDUCATION POLICY

The Chairman introduced a report that detailed the outcomes of the Scrutiny Task and Finish review that had been carried out around the draft revised Elective Home Education Policy.

RESOLVED (2024/007):

That the Cabinet Member for Education and Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) considers and takes into consideration the findings of the scrutiny carried out by the Children and Families Select Committee when making their decision on the draft Nottinghamshire Election Home Education Policy 2023.

11 WORK PROGRAMME

The Senior Scrutiny Officer presented the Committee's current work programme.

RESOLVED (2024/008):

- 1) That the Work Programme be noted.
- 2) That the Chairman and Vice-Chairman, in consultation with officers and the Chairman of the Overview Committee, give consideration to adding the following items to the Children and Families Select Committee Work Programme:
 - a) Fostering recruitment
 - b) Access to Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- 3) That the pending item on "Children's Transformation - Front Door/Family Hubs" be scheduled for a future meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee.

The meeting closed at 1:18pm.

CHAIRMAN