

4th January 2021

Agenda Item: 4

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

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 2020.

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
3. This report seeks to provide an overview of the improvement and change activity under these five themes. The detail of the activity outlined is scrutinised in Children and Young People's Committee.

Improving outcomes for children

4. The department plans an annual cycle of improvement activity and this is overseen by the department's Senior Leadership Team. 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. In order to strengthen the department's approach to improvement, from 2021, the coordination of service improvement activity will be the responsibility of a single Group Manager reporting directly to the Corporate Director.
5. Despite some restrictions due to the global pandemic, further progress has been made on the Strengths Based Practice programme reported to Committee in the previous report.

Strengths-based practice is centred on working 'with' colleagues, partners and children, rather than 'doing to', to assess, plan and manage work with children and families.

6. In 2020, work has focused on building on our existing strengths-based practice to create consistency and ensure that processes, workforce development and the way we work with each other reflects this approach. This has included the following achievements:
 - group reflective supervision implementation across frontline social care teams, and planning to embed within other youth, families and social work teams. This allows teams to spend time together reflecting on their work through the eyes of a child, using an informed strengths-based approach. The sessions support the building of relationships and peer support within teams to find alternative solutions and progress plans for children
 - beginning the delivery of a comprehensive training plan 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.
 - successful pilot and implementation of Schwartz Rounds, a multi-disciplinary forum which allows workers to come together to reflect upon and discuss the emotional impact of the work they do. This work has been undertaken in partnership with the Point of Care Foundation and Cardiff University
 - engagement with children and workers about the language which we use and the impact of this, and development of a plan to embed preferred language into practice
 - adoption of a strengths-based approach to planning assessments across district child protection teams
 - introduction of revised Personal Education Plans for children who are Looked After which align with a strengths-based approach
 - consultation with teams about the information they require and included this within the launch of new intranet pages which are a hub for information and tools relating to strengths-based practice, latest policies and guidance
 - celebration of the success of our colleagues and the children we work with through Covid-19
 - a full-service strengths-based practice development day held in October 2020 attended by 680 staff via Microsoft Teams. Post-event evaluation reported that 97% of respondents said that strengths-based practice has had a positive impact on their work over the last year.
7. The Department is currently reviewing its portfolio of transformation and improvement activity in line with the corporate transformation developments which were reported to Improvement and Change Sub-Committee in November 2020. This will lead to a refreshed programme of work which will be established in early 2021, which will focus on developing "whole family" approaches to safeguarding. In addition, the Department will take an active

part in the wider cross-council programmes, notably developing integrated prevention and early help interventions and improving residents' access to services.

8. Nottinghamshire continues to be an active partner in the Association of Director 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 will take place prior to April 2021 with any recommendations featuring in the department's improvement plan.
9. The County Council's Special Education Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) Policy was approved by Policy Committee in September 2020. The 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 and will be overseen by the multi-agency SEND Accountability Board.

Delivery of the Departmental Strategy to Support the Council Plan

10. The revised Children and Young People's Departmental Strategy for 2019-2021 was approved by Policy Committee on 22nd May 2019. The pandemic during 2020 has slowed/stalled progress in many areas

Commitment 1 – Families prosper and achieve their potential

- the "Best Start" strategy for 2021-25 was considered in November 2020 by the Children and Young People's Committee and has been recommended to Policy Committee for approval. The Strategy has been developed mainly using two Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNA) focusing on the first 1,001 Days, and Early Years and School Readiness. Both JSNA chapters include a review of research, evidence-based practice, local data and needs as well as mapping service provision.

Commitment 2 – Children are kept safe from harm

- new arrangements for the Safeguarding Children Partnership commenced in January 2019. The first annual report has been published and reported to Children and Young People's Committee
- new cross-cutting corporate transformation priorities will include "developing whole family approaches to safeguarding" which would co-locate practitioners working with adults in respect of substance misuse, domestic violence and mental health problems, children's safeguarding teams and "improving residents' access" which would include a review of the Multi-agency Safeguarding Hub
- a piece of work is also being commissioned to take place in 2021 to review the operating model for children's social care to ensure that it enables strengths-based practice, consistency of relationships between children and their social workers, and promotes retention of experienced social workers.

Commitment 3 – Children and Young People go to good schools

- OFSTED paused its usual inspection programme during the Autumn term 2020 although HMIs have continued to visit schools to review Covid arrangements. Inspections were due to recommence from January 2021 but this has been postponed further until the Summer term. As of 31st October 2020, overall, 85.9% of Nottinghamshire’s primary, secondary and special schools were judged to be good or better, broadly in line with comparable national data (86.1%).

Meeting Regulatory Standards

11. 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.
12. Ofsted has largely paused visits to local authority children’s services (ILACS) during the pandemic and Nottinghamshire has not had a formal visit. An annual conversation took place between Ofsted and the Children and Families Leadership Team as part of the ILACS framework in November 2020, at which the Council’s safeguarding response to Covid was considered, alongside a review of the department’s self-evaluation of practice and progress against the areas for improvement identified during the inspection in October 2019. This was a constructive conversation which recognised the commitment that the Council has displayed to continuing to improve services for vulnerable children and young people.
13. In addition, the local area volunteered to contribute to a thematic review held by Ofsted into the experiences of children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families during the pandemic. The review took the form of a virtual review undertaken by social care, education and Care Quality Commission colleagues. There was no judgement attached to this process and the thematic report which was published in November covers in broad terms the experiences of six local authority areas. The informal feedback from inspectors about practice in Nottinghamshire was largely positive. The findings from the review will be reported to Children and Young People’s Committee in February 2021.

Maximising value for money and productivity

14. 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. The latest report will be presented to Children and Young People’s Committee in January 2021.
15. A small number of elements within the Effectiveness and Efficiency plan have been delayed by the pandemic, although even for many of those areas progress has been caught up over recent months and revised timescales have been agreed to ensure that timely progress can be made. All local authorities face challenges in coming years due to the Covid pandemic in addition to the upwards pressures on children’s department budgets that have existed in

recent years. In order to provide a more stable budget position for future years an exercise to identify budget pressures has been undertaken and these will form the budget proposal to Full Council in February 2021. The department has also looked carefully at where efficiencies can be made without detriment to frontline delivery of services and these are written into the latest version of the plan.

16. The department operates a Commissioning and Contracts Board, including colleagues from finance, procurement and public health, who review all external contracts at least annually including unit costs, outcomes and proposals for new tenders, recommissioning and decommissioning.
17. The department's Digital Development Board has continued to make good progress during this year and has stayed largely on track with system and reporting developments. Information sharing with police colleagues has been enhanced and interoperability with health systems is being actively pursued when appropriate. The use of digital technologies to enable video calling to better engage children and families and to improve participation of professionals in relevant meetings is being evaluated.
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 commenced in January 2020 with a further strand on supported accommodation for those young people transitioning to adulthood commencing in 2021. STARS, a service funded through a Social Impact Bond using a mixture of private and lottery funding as investment, commenced in October 2020 and early signs mean that the financial benefits forecast are likely to be increased.

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 improvement 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 16/12/20)

23. This report falls within the remit of the Improvement and Change Sub-Committee by virtue of its terms of reference.

Financial Comments (SAS 17/12/20)

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.

[Transformation and change programmes and the transformation model and structure – report to Improvement and Change Sub-Committee on 23rd November 2020](#)

[Children and Families – departmental update on improvement and change – report to Improvement and Change Sub-Committee on 27th January 2020](#)

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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