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10 December 2020

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Regional Director – East Midlands

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Sent by email to: [Colin.Pettigrew@nottscc.gov.uk](mailto:Colin.Pettigrew@nottscc.gov.uk)

### **Annual Engagement Meeting 26 November 2020**

Dear Colin

Thank you for meeting with Nick McMullen SHMI, Deirdre Duignan SHMI, Assistant Regional Director, Julie Knight HMI and me to consider your self-evaluation and to discuss developments in children's services and the impact of the pandemic in Nottinghamshire.

#### **Local Authority context**

You confirm that Nottinghamshire has a consistent and stable leadership team and is providing a responsive service to meet children's needs. This includes your commitment to implementing a strength-based approach to support a change of culture across your service and multi-agency partnerships. You noted the full implementation of this approach had been challenging during the pandemic, but progress to date has included external scrutiny and training opportunities for staff. You reported that during the pandemic there has been significant corporate support to develop new ways of working with children and their families, including the use of technology.

As leaders you are positive about staff attendance which has been generally sustained at a difficult time. You are proud of worker's commitment to visiting and contacting children on a weekly basis during the initial lockdown period and throughout the pandemic. Staff have been creative in using technology and partnerships with professionals to be able to monitor and check on children's welfare and how families are managing. You remain focused on the needs of specific vulnerable groups of children including those under the age of four who are not in nursery or seen as often by other professionals, disabled children and also those

children who are missing education. You continue to engage and meet regularly with headteachers to review children's attendance and to discuss the application of public health guidance.

It was helpful to have an update on your progress regarding the recommendations from your last inspection. You report that the additional senior social work capacity deployed across the county to provide mentoring support for staff is also supporting the embedding of your strength-based approach. You described how the development of reflective supervision has included external training on relationship-based practice and this has been positively received by staff. You are further developing and progressing work on understanding social work practice with different diverse family groups.

### **Service Update**

You report that front line staff faced significant challenges at the start of the initial lockdown, including limited access to PPE. Despite this, workers showed real commitment to continuing to visit children when necessary and risk assessments were completed to help decide if children could be seen virtually or face to face. You described the creative ways staff have engaged with children and that risk assessments have been adapted when children's circumstances have changed, for example, when they are attending school and seen regularly.

You advised that the number of initial contacts at the front door has now returned to normal levels following a reduction at the beginning of lockdown in March, and an initial increase in June. You report having a contingency plan to manage a potential 'spike' in referrals. This included retaining agency staff that would have otherwise left the service to help with managing capacity at that time. You are conscious of a recent rise in early help referrals which you are in the process of analysing. Your self-evaluation identifies that audit activity at the beginning of the pandemic identified strengths in practice with more to be done on seeking children and family views. You report that workers have made progress in using direct work tools since this time and plan to re-audit these issues in quarter four next year.

We discussed children who are electively home educated. You have identified these children as a priority given the increase in numbers and the challenges with safeguarding their welfare due to the lack of visibility to agencies of some of these children. You are imminently presenting a report to the children and young people's committee and advise you are taking positive action, with the support of your partners, in engaging families and continue to explore creative ways to manage risk.

You report the number of children in care has risen, driven primarily by increases in very young children and those aged 16 and 17 years old. You have identified that the pandemic has had an impact upon the numbers of children looked after and there

have been challenges with provision and placements during this time. In response you advise that you have been able to support those aged 16 and 17 to self-isolate when necessary in their own accommodation by using a flexible approach to commissioning, for example, utilising available student accommodation. We discussed your success in recruiting and retaining foster carers following the creation of a dedicated team for recruitment and support, an increase in fees and effective, targeted publicity including with church and faith groups. You report the changes in structure and approach have made a significant positive difference.

We discussed children in need of adoption and adoption support. You noted the Regional Adoption Agency are doing well in recruiting adopters. However, there has been delay in completing care proceedings due to delays in court processes. This means some current final hearings will not be heard until the summer 2021 so some children are waiting too long to achieve stability and permanency.

You advised that care leavers were contacted every week during lockdown and the pandemic, and that even if they did not welcome this, they knew that staff were checking on their welfare. You also advise that caseloads for personal advisors have reduced and that this service area has a new model that is working well in supporting progress for most care leavers. You report that during the pandemic care leavers were also provided with an iPad, so they could access the internet and social media to reduce the risk of isolation.

### **Inspection Update**

I confirmed that ILACS assurance visits were currently paused due to the second lockdown and will not resume until January at the earliest. Like other local authorities, Nottinghamshire may receive an assurance visit in the spring or an ILACS focused visit when routine inspection resumes.

Please pass on our thanks to colleagues for their input into the meeting. I look forward to hearing about further developments in Nottinghamshire.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "K. Gueli", enclosed within a large, loopy oval stroke.

**Katrina Gueli HMI**  
Regional Director, East Midlands