

Meeting: Children & Families Select Committee

Date: Monday 14 July 2025 (commencing at 10:30am)

Membership:**County Councillors**

Richard Darrington (Chairman)
Christopher Adegoke (Vice-Chairman)

Teresa Cullen	Hari Om
Jan Goold (Apologies)	Joseph Rich
John Lee (Apologies)	Mrs Sue Saddington
Richard Lowe (Absent)	Jody Stoll
Andy McCormack (Absent)	

Education Representatives

Nigel Frith (**Items 6 – 7 only**) James McGeachie

Substitute Members

Councillor Keith Girling for Councillor John Lee

Other County Councillors in attendance:

Councillor Hana John - Cabinet Member for Education and Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (**Item 7 only**)

Officers and colleagues in attendance:

Amanda Collinson - Service Director – Help, Care and Protection
Martin Elliott - Senior Scrutiny Officer
James Lavender - Democratic Services Officer
Peter McConnochie - Service Director – Education, Learning and Inclusion
Rachel Miller - Service Director – Commissioning and Resources
Colin Pettigrew - Executive Director for Children and Families
Claire Sampson - Head of SEND
Rosa Waddingham - Chief Nurse, NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board

Others in attendance:

Dame Christine Lenehan - Chair of the Nottinghamshire SEND Partnership Improvement Board

1 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

That the appointment of Councillor Richard Darrington as Chairman and Councillor Christopher Adegoke as Vice-Chairman of the Children and Families Select Committee at Full Council on 22 May 2025 be noted.

2 COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP

The Committee noted its membership for the 2025/26 municipal year.

3 MINUTES OF THE LAST MEETING HELD ON 17 MARCH 2025

The minutes of the meeting held on 17 March 2025 were confirmed as correct and signed by the Chairman.

4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Councillor John Lee	-	other reasons
Councillor Jan Goold	-	other reasons

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

In the interest of transparency, Colin Pettigrew, Executive Director for Children and Families, noted that following his retirement from Nottinghamshire County Council, he would be joining the Department for Education (DfE) on a part-time basis.

6 PRESENTATION – INTRODUCTION TO THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES SELECT COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMMING

Colin Pettigrew, Executive Director for Children and Families, introduced the presentation which highlighted the roles and responsibilities of the Council's Children and Families Department as well as potential areas for the Committee to consider for inclusion in the committee's Work Programme for 2025/26 as part of its work programme. The following information was highlighted:

- The Nottinghamshire Approach to children, young people and families was to build strong relationships between them and the Council through listening to their feedback and adapting services accordingly.
- The Statutory Duties of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children and Families under the Children Act 2004.
- All elected members and council staff had responsibility as corporate parents to the 1,800 children in care and care leavers. The Children and Social Work Act 2017 gave corporate parents the responsibility of acting in the best interests of children in care and care leavers, as well as promoting their physical and mental health and wellbeing.
- The Children and Families Select Committee received reports on the performance, finances and risk reporting of the Children and Families

Department.

- The Children and Families Department was subject to two inspection regimes: the Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) by Ofsted and the Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disability Inspection (LA SEND) by Ofsted & the Care Quality Commission (CQC). An LA SEND Inspection was expected in the near future and the Children and Families Department had a target of providing an 'Outstanding' service in time for that inspection.
- Some of the work of the Children and Families department was highlighted, including the Family Hubs, the Families First Partnership Programme, the graduated response to SEND support in mainstream education settings and other multi-disciplinary approaches.
- With regards to children's public health, there were four areas of concern which the Department was aiming to address:
 - Smoking in pregnancy was higher than national average (smoking status at time of delivery was 11.8% vs 7.4% nationally) with variation across Nottinghamshire districts and boroughs.
 - Childhood obesity in Nottinghamshire was high and the trend increasing (year 6 prevalence of obesity including severe obesity (10-11yr olds) was 22.0% locally, 22.1% nationally).
 - Childhood Vaccination rates were dropping across the country, for example, the population coverage of the Measles, Mumps and Rubella (MMR) vaccine, especially the one dose at 2 years old, was 91.1%, but decreasing.
 - Children and Young People (CYP) Mental health was a priority nationally and locally, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic.

Joint Strategic Needs Assessments (JSNAs) provided data to the Children and Families Department who then developed the following responses to these challenges:

- Best Start Strategy - The new strategy for 2025-2030 would continue to support the delivery of Ambition 1 of the Nottinghamshire Joint Health and Wellbeing Strategy (Give every child the best chance of maximising their potential) and was supported by a refreshed 1001 days JSNA and delivery plans.
- CYP Mental Health – System work via transformation plan and a strategic partnership.
- System response – Integrated Care System CYP Board and strategy development, Strategic commissioning for CYP, Maternity and Neonatal Boards, Child Death Overview Panel.
- Public Health commissioned services for CYP and families - Healthy Families Programme, substance use support, Integrated Wellbeing Service, sexual health services and the C-card.

- The Healthy Families Programme that provided support to children and families from the ages of 0-19.
- The following list of potential work programme priorities was presented to the Committee:
 - Children's Social Care Reform (Families First Partnership Programme).
 - Low sufficiency of care places, especially the difficulty in recruiting foster carers.
 - The significant rise in demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
 - High demand for school places, especially in secondary schools.
 - The sustainability of small schools, especially in rural areas.
- The Senior Scrutiny Officer detailed the process of how members could suggest items for inclusion in the Work Programme and the cross-party discussion that would be involved in its creation.

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

- There was a cyclical rise and fall in the children's population of Nottinghamshire over a number of years which affected the number of school places.
- Whilst it was welcome that 98.7% of Nottinghamshire's 16-17 year olds were in employment, education and training, members noted that there were many 16 to 17 year olds who were enrolled at school or college for one to two days a week, but not necessarily attending and were at risk of expulsion.
- Transport provided by the Council for children and young people with SEND was a crucial service.
- Members noted the possibility of looking into support for kinship carers, who were typically grandparents and family members of children in care.
- What items had been left over from the Work Programme of the 2024/25 Children and Families Select Committee?

In relation to the points raised, the Executive Director for Children and Families, the Service Director for Education, Learning and Inclusion, and the Chief Nurse for the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) provided the following responses:

- The cyclical rise and fall in the numbers of pupil places meant that the Council focused on expanding existing schools in a particular area to accompany a local rise in pupil numbers, which was cheaper than building a new school. A briefing for elected members on the Capital Programme would take place soon and it would explain how the Council utilised its

schools and academies within Nottinghamshire to accommodate pupils. During the 2024/25 municipal year, the Children and Families Select Committee had conducted a review into the Council's processes for secondary school pupil place planning. The report produced from this review would be circulated to members of the current Committee.

- A deep dive into the exclusion or truancy rates amongst 16 to 17 year olds could be examined by the Committee. It was an important topic as those children who were at risk of exclusion were more likely to receive poorer outcomes in life and also be at risk of exploitation.
- The 2024/25 Work Programme for the Children and Families Select Committee was published on the Council website. Any outstanding items from the 2024/25 Work Programme could be considered for inclusion in the new Work Programme.

The Chairman thanked the officers from the Council's Children and Families Department for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

7 PARTNERSHIP PROGRESS IN IMPROVING THE EXPERIENCES AND OUTCOMES FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES – UPDATE

Colin Pettigrew, Executive Director for Children and Families, Rosa Waddingham, Chief Nurse for the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board, and Dame Christine Lenehan, Independent Chair of the Nottinghamshire SEND Partnership Improvement Board, attended the meeting to present a report that detailed the progress being made by the Nottinghamshire Local Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Partnership in implementing improvements to the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

The Nottinghamshire Local Area SEND Partnership brought together the organisations from across education, health, care, and the voluntary sector, that provided services to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in Nottinghamshire. The two leading partners were the County Council and the NHS Nottingham and Nottinghamshire Integrated Care Board (ICB). Regular progress reports had been presented to the Select Committee quarterly since October 2023 outlining the progress of the Partnership in delivering improvements in response to the findings of the January / February 2023 Ofsted/Care Quality Commission (CQC) local area SEND inspection

In the meeting the following points were highlighted:

- The report focused on the significant progress that had been made against the two priority areas for improvement which the Ofsted/CQC inspection had identified the Partnership had been failing. The first priority area which needed improvement was the assessment, planning and delivery of EHCPs in a timely manner. The second priority area was reducing the delays and gaps in access to some health services, particularly speech and language

therapy, neurodevelopmental pathways and equipment services. The SEND Partnership Improvement Board was regularly asking representatives from the Council, the ICB, the education sector and other stakeholder organisations about what actions were being undertaken to reduce the waiting times and what support was available to the families of children and young people with SEND whilst they waited for either an EHCP or further health support.

- 5,688 children in Nottinghamshire were in receipt of an EHCP, which was half the national average. However, the number of children in Nottinghamshire in receipt or awaiting a EHCP had grown by 50% during the past two years, which reflected the national picture of rising demand for EHCPs and SEND health services. Previously, the number of EHCP assessments completed by the Partnership to the statutory timescales stood at 4.5%. At present, this number was at 47%. Nationally, the best which was ever seen by a Local Area SEND Partnership was 60% in 2016. The current national average was 46%. The Executive Director noted that whilst this improvement was welcome, the Partnership was not complacent and was still aiming to deliver further improvements to the service that children and families received.
- The Partnership had invested in supporting young people outside of the statutory process through a strong graduated approach, which involved assessing, planning and delivering a support plan for a child with SEND within their classroom. These support plans would be reviewed regularly and if it was felt that further adjustments and support was needed for that child, then the process for acquiring a EHCP would be launched.
- Improvements within the Partnership which had already taken place included more accurate data collection and contacting parents at the earliest opportunity after a referral for support had been made to make sure the information about their child was as accurate as possible in order for that child to receive the right support. There had also been a strengthening and development of the relationship between the Local Authority, the ICB and parents/carers.
- The presentation made to representatives of Ofsted and the CQC ahead of the monitoring inspection currently taking place would be circulated to members of the Children and Families Select Committee as it demonstrated the improvement journey of the Partnership.
- The focus of the Independent Chair of the Board was on how far Nottinghamshire could deliver on its statutory and legal requirements of providing support to children and young people with SEND within the current context of the national SEND system. Secondly, the Chair was clearly focused on what had gone wrong locally with the Partnership in order to make it right.
- The presence of local elected members and representatives from the Department of Health and Social Care and DfE on the Board had been

important in improving oversight of the Nottinghamshire Local Area SEND Partnership. Elected members had been updated, engaged and involved at every step of the improvement journey.

- The Partnership had met with CQC/Ofsted monitoring inspectors as the first part of the wider monitoring visit that had just started. Significant oversight was also provided by the DfE and NHS England through regular stocktake and deep dive exercises every six months. There was six-weekly scrutiny through the SEND Partnership Improvement Board and the Nottinghamshire Partnership Assurance and Improvement Group, the latter of which involved partners from across the SEND system.
- The Partnership aimed to improve its work in localities, with children and families, with education settings from early years through to further education, with health colleagues and in Family Hubs. This would make SEND support more responsive and adaptable to local needs.

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

- What were the timescales for finding out the results of the Ofsted/CQC's monitoring inspection?
- Guarantees were sought that the funding for specialist school education places and transport for children and young people with SEND would continue to be provided by the Council.
- When would the new SEND School in Mansfield be open?
- Members praised the work of officers, elected members and stakeholders in getting the Partnership into a positive place over the past two and a half years. It was also observed that the results from the previous SEND inspection before 2023 and before the change of the inspection framework had been positive.
- Members requested further details about the Government's plans for reforming the national SEND system. Particular concerns had been raised around the possibility of the abolition of EHCPs.
- Why were so many EHCPs were going to tribunals?
- Whilst headteachers and staff in mainstream schools were passionate and dedicated to meeting the needs of pupils with SEND, school budgets were under immense pressure and there was the constant challenge of teachers balancing the needs of pupils with SEND alongside the needs of the rest of their class.
- Members requested further information on the referral process from a mainstream school setting to a specialist school setting, as well as further

information on the catchment areas for specialist provision and how the referral process for an EHCP worked.

In relation to the points raised, the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, representatives of the Nottinghamshire Local Area SEND Partnership and officers provided the following responses:

- After the completion of the Ofsted/CQC monitoring inspection, a letter would be provided to the Council within 30 days. The full report would be published by the next Committee meeting.
- The Council would provide ongoing support to specialist education settings, transport for children and young people with SEND and support for delivering EHCPs. Ravensdale Horizons Academy was due to open in January 2026. The handover to the building to the Diverse Academies Trust would occur towards the end of November and would provide 160 SEND pupil places. A visit to the Ravensdale Horizons Academy for elected members was planned for July/August.
- Members were encouraged to visit St Giles school in Retford or Foxwood Academy in Bramcote to see examples of existing SEND education settings. These schools have been hosting the SEND Partnership Improvement Board meetings to great success. St Giles School had recently been inspected by Ofsted and the result of the inspection would soon be published. It was expected that the results of the inspection would be largely positive.
- The Children and Families Act 2014 enshrined EHCPs in law. The Government, the SEND system and the education sector at the time did not foresee that the number of pupils being diagnosed with a special education need or disability would increase by 40% over the next 10 years. The current SEND system was financially unsustainable for local authorities, so reform was needed to ease those financial pressures. Likewise, the SEND system was not delivering the ideal outcomes wanted for children and young people with SEND. For example, children with SEND aged 16 – 19 were eight times more likely not to be in education, employment or training than those without SEND. The Government was looking at every aspect of reform to the national SEND system including SEND provision in mainstream education settings.
- Nottinghamshire had not only some very good SEND schools such as St Giles' in Reford, but also very good mainstream schools which provided excellent SEND support such as Alderman White School in Bramcote. Some of these mainstream schools had a process of rewriting EHCPs to adapt the support to a child based on their specific needs. Children and young people with SEND would still have their needs met without EHCPs through the graduated approach. The Government's Schools and SEND Reform White Paper would be published in October.

- One of the points raised by the Ofsted/CQC inspectors in 2023 was that the Partnership was not good at keeping data, especially on the number of tribunal cases it was subject to, how many they had won and how many they had lost. Data gathering and analysis had vastly improved over the past two and a half years. The Partnership had a strategy of trying to resolve any issues with the support for a child or young person with SEND at the first available opportunity, as to avoid going to a tribunal. There were no tribunal cases in Nottinghamshire so far this year. Nationally, 97% of tribunal cases were not lost, but were conceded or not challenged by the local authority.
- Members were reminded that SEND and EHCPs were not the same thing. There were 16,000 children in Nottinghamshire with a diagnosed special educational need or disability. 11,500 of those children were having their needs met without the need of an EHCP.
- The Council invested 25% of its High Needs Block funding (HNB) into mainstream schools to help them provide support to children and young people with SEND. Ofsted noted that many mainstream schools in Nottinghamshire had high expectations for children and young people with SEND and identified specific needs accurately with appropriate support being put in place.
- The Partnership recognised that whilst the system was doing a lot better than two and a half years ago, much more needed to be done to support parents and carers whose children were not in receipt of an EHCP. It was hoped that the planned SEND reforms would improve the situation for these parents/carers. The Partnership would continue to listen to the voices of parents/carers and children and young people with SEND in order to improve the level of support offered by the Partnership.
- The catchment areas for SEND schools in Nottinghamshire was county-wide, but the Council would aim to provide local SEND provision so that children and young people with SEND could be educated closer to home. There was an increase in the number of mainstream education settings with specialist SEND provision contained within them.

The Chairman thanked the Cabinet Member for Education and SEND, representatives of the Nottinghamshire Local Area SEND Partnership and officers for attending the meeting and answering members' questions.

RESOLVED 2025/08

- 1) That comments and considerations of the committee on the progress being made by the SEND Partnership to the required improvements around SEND services be noted.
- 2) That a further update on the progress being made on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities improvement activity be received at a future meeting of the Children and Families Select Committee.

- 3) That the following issues raised by the Committee in its consideration of the report be progressed:
- a) That the presentation made to representatives of Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission ahead of the monitoring inspection be circulated to members of the Children and Families Select Committee.
 - b) That the October 2023 scrutiny review around Education, Health and Care Plans be circulated to members of the Children and Families Select Committee.
 - c) That once open, a visit be arranged to the new special educational needs school at Ravensdale, Mansfield for members of the Children and Families Select Committee.
 - d) That visits to special educational needs schools across Nottinghamshire be arranged for members of the Children and Families Select Committee.

The meeting closed at 12:10pm.

CHAIRMAN