

3 May 2019

Colin Pettigrew
Corporate Director – Children, Young People and Schools
Nottinghamshire County Council
Sent via email to: Colin.Pettigrew@nottscc.gov.uk

Emma Ing HMI
Regional Director
East Midlands

Social Care Annual Conversation 26 April 2019

Dear Colin

Thank you for meeting with Nick McMullen and me to consider your self-evaluation and to discuss developments in children's services in Nottinghamshire. This letter should be read alongside the contents of your self-evaluation which we have considered. We found your self-evaluation covered all the relevant areas and demonstrated the range of active work you are undertaking to further improve your services. It made extensive use of performance data but had less evidence around the quality of social work practice. You have recognised this yourselves and are seeking to address through your new Quality Management Framework (QMF).

Local Authority context

The current political administration is now in its third year and has continued its support of children's social care. The lead member for children's services is long serving and is supported by two deputies, one of whom, Tracy Taylor, leads on children's social care. You feel Cllr Taylor has developed into a strong and effective champion of vulnerable children. Service pressures have continued to rise with a steady increase in MASH referrals and a significant increase in the numbers of looked after children (although for the latter rates remain below that of statutory neighbours). Additional social work and placement capacity has been funded in response to these pressures although sufficiency is an ongoing challenge.

You are particularly pleased that the regional adoption agency (D2N2) has now been launched hosted and led by Nottinghamshire and optimistic that this will lead to improved adoption outcomes. D2N2 is an increasingly coherent model for partnership working and sharing services with work also taking place around placement commissioning.

You also reported that the new Nottinghamshire Safeguarding Children Partnership is now in place, replacing your Safeguarding Children Board and meeting the requirements of Working Together.

Progress since last annual conversation

You were pleased with the outcome of your focused visit examining front door arrangements and felt that it broadly confirmed the positive impact of your front door improvement plan. You feel that good progress has been made in addressing the areas for improvement identified in the focused visit letter. Your previous focused visit of services for care leavers presented a more mixed picture of service performance but did identify recent improvements which you feel have been broadly sustained over the last 12 months.

Recruitment and retention remain a challenge particularly in your District Child Protection teams leading to some caseloads being higher than you would want. You have addressed this in the short term through additional agency capacity while in the longer term continuing to develop a multi-pronged approach to workforce development and stability. This includes further development of social work support officers and a well-regarded ASYE programme.

Your approach to protecting children from sexual exploitation is well established and work has begun aiming to enhance your understanding around local risks of criminal exploitation. Both strategically and operationally this is currently work in progress, but you feel you do have reasonable knowledge of local hotspots.

Overall you feel support for children in care is strong, including securing permanence. Numbers of children being adopted have reduced from a previous national high and you feel this is a natural result of working through a bulge in numbers. There has also been a change in court expectations, favouring children remaining together in established foster homes rather than perhaps being separated to enable adoption. The quality of court and permanence work you judge to remain good overall and you are hopeful that D2N2 will assist this, particularly in finding homes for harder to place children.

Future Plans

Senior leadership is stable and you have invested in service improvement capacity. Central to service improvement is a Remodelling Practice programme with key priorities to:

- Implement a consistent framework for practice based on a strengths and relationship-based approach
- Develop a sustainable staffing model
- Develop and use a wider range of business intelligence tools
- Implement an effective professional and career pathway for social workers
- Implement an infrastructure which best supports social workers to do their work efficiently

Alongside this you are reviewing your QMF to improve its focus on practice quality and experience alongside process and compliance.

Future inspection

Your next inspection activity is likely to be an ILACS judgement inspection. In your case this will be a short inspection unless notified differently. Due to Nottinghamshire's size it is possible a fifth inspector may be added to the inspection team.

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

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Emma Ing". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Emma Ing HMI
Regional Director
East Midlands