

**15<sup>th</sup> July, 2021**

### **School improvement and effectiveness**

The Secretary of State set out his vision May 2021 of how to support and manage school improvement. The vision is for all schools to be part of strong Multi Academy Trust (MAT) which will support schools with a history of underperformance. These are school who have been judged by Ofsted as Requires Improvement, or worse, for 3 consecutive inspections. There is no fix trajectory or legislation to support this currently however we have started to discuss this with MAT 's

We have developed a school effectiveness strategy, which we plan to come into effect in September, we are keen to develop collaborative practices and form closer working partnerships with our schools and settings. As such we will be looking at a number of ways to engage with the sector, building on some of the practices established as part of our Covid response.

Included in this strategy is the establishment of an education partnership board, comprising members from a range of settings, the primary function of which is to address issues of finance, accountability, access, people and strategy.

In addition, we will be seeking to develop Leadership forums, sector led groups that meet frequently to enable senior leaders to discuss issues of concern within localities and/or types of setting and identify key actions to address these. By working with Local Authority officers from different departments, we envisage a model of collaboration driven by the needs of the sector. We have begun to engage with Head Teachers and Chief Executives from Multi academy Trusts to begin this work.

### **Virtual School extended duties**

The extended duties of the virtual school are different to the way the Virtual School Head (VSH) promotes the education of Looked After Children (LAC) and is similar to the way they are expected to promote education for Previously looked after children (PLAC).

Some additional grant funding is being provided to VSH's to carry out this duty, (this is confirmed for this financial year only at this stage).

Current guidance is non statutory guidance and will be replaced by March 2022.

The VSH will become the strategic leader who champions the education of children with a Social Worker (SW) by:

- Making visible the disadvantages that children with a SW can experience, enhancing partnerships between education settings and LA's to help all agencies hold high aspirations for these children

- Promoting practice that supports children's engagement in education, recognising that attending an education setting can be an important factor in helping to keep children safe from harm
- Levelling up children's outcomes and narrowing the attainment gap so every child can reach their potential. This will include helping to make sure that children with a SW benefit from support to recover the impact of COVID-19
- Enhancing partnerships between education settings and the local authority so agencies can work together
- Identifying the needs of the children and addressing barriers to poor educational outcomes to ensure pupils make educational progress
- Offering advice and support to key professionals to help children make progress, including through increasing their confidence in using evidence-based interventions.

### **Northamptonshire's Children's Trust**

The governance arrangements between the Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) and the Councils have now been in place for 8 months since 1 November 2021. The contract governance arrangements are working effectively with good discussions and high levels of challenge taking place between the Councils and Trust at the monthly Operational Commissioning Group. This meeting receives detailed reports from NCT on finance, performance and quality assurance as well as updates on any key issues relating to the overall contract. NCT also provide updates to the monthly Operational in relation to Ofsted inspections.

The Strategic Group that provides senior oversight of the contract with NCT meets quarterly and formally considers any issues of escalation from the Operational Commissioning Group. Membership of this group includes the Lead Members for children's services for North Northamptonshire Council and West Northamptonshire Council. To date, there have been no issues that have required escalation.

To date, NCTs overall performance against their contractual requirements continues to have a positive trend.

Areas that are working well include:

- Service capacity is more manageable following additional capacity that has been brought into the service
- Social work vacancies have remained stable with marginal increases in the numbers of agency workers
- Strong engagement and communication with staff and good responses to the latest staff survey
- Improvements in social work activity linked to assessments closing with No Further Action; strong short term placement stability in the face of challenges with regards to placement sufficiency; consistently strong assessment timeliness; strong adoption performance.

Areas that remain challenges:

- Increases in demand and complexity in the DAAT, safeguarding and court teams
- Responses to complaints
- Contacts with No Further Action remain high as well as re-referral rate
- Recruitment of both agency and permanent staff remains a challenge

- Improving the quality and consistency of social work practice continues to be an area of ongoing focus.
- The overall financial out turn position for NCT was an interim underspend of £1.058m; this has been allocated against the savings programme as a mitigating action.

The Trust is reporting a forecast overspend of £0.679m as at period 2 against the overall budget of £123.348m. Mitigations are in place to achieve a balanced year end position. Key actions to address the forecast overspend include a review of all placements and a closer tracking of the staffing budget with a vacancy factor applied across non front-line social care staff and 17% reduction in agency staff spend.

NCT are preparing for the impending Ofsted monitoring visit which will focus on children with child protection plans and children with children in needs plans. There will be two coordinated visits to West Northants and North Northants which will be on site on 28-29 July. The requests for child level data is expected on the 14 July and we are expecting that the data request will be for disaggregated data for the two new councils.

## **SEND**

The sufficiency of placements for children and young people with SEND continues to be a challenge with a forecast overspend of £2.3m. This is due to the increasing number of children needing SEND provision. This is a national issue and there is a government SEND review underway. The SEND service provision and partnership working comes under a regulatory inspection framework. It is anticipated that the next SEND inspection will be early 2022 against a new inspection framework. A SEND Board has been set up to bring all partners together to assess performance and service delivery against the inspection framework to build a self-evaluation and action plan in preparation for the inspection.

**Councillor Fiona Baker**  
**Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education**