



Report of Councillor Fiona Baker Cabinet Member for Children Families, Education and Skills.

Thursday 30th June 2022

NORTHAMPTONSHIRE' CHILDRENS TRUST

In NCT, good progress continues to be made on the improvement journey. The senior leadership team remains stable, has strong oversight of practice and is driving forward a culture change that is having a positive impact on practice and the workforce.

Practice

All performance indicators that are considered part of contractual arrangements are at target or within tolerance. Quality assurance shows positive trajectory and focus is on increasing consistency of good practice.

External scrutiny of services - Lincolnshire Partners in Practice completed a follow up to a review of the front door in May and found clear evidence of changes or plans to change systems / processes based on recommendations from January 22 peer review.

Recommendations from People Too review of placements commissioning are being implemented and further work with People Too in progress on process redesign and multi agency funding

Sufficiency of placements remains a challenge nationally and locally- planning permission has been approved for a new emergency children's home in North Northants which will support children from across Northants, and planning application is in progress for a second emergency home in West Northants. Frameworks for residential, fostering and independent supported accommodation have been re-opened to increase range of provision that can meet children's needs. NCT Fostering marketing and recruitment strategy in place to increase number and range of inhouse foster carers to meet needs of our children.

Inspections

Since the last update to Council, there has been a positive Inspection of Arnold House Children's home, the report is yet to be published.

Preparation for a full ILACS inspection with a focus on improving the quality and consistency of practice. Self evaluation is being refreshed in preparation and following feedback from Ofsted and peer review with regional LAs.

Require improvement to be Good would be positive outcome on consideration of inadequate position prior to constitution of the Children's Trust.

HMIP inspection of the YOS is overdue and preparation for this is ongoing.

Leadership

Lead Member and DCS continue to meet regularly with practitioners to hear their views

Vast majority of senior managers are permanent.

Focus on recruitment and retention and achieving stability within the workforce, in particular social worker teams. This is a national challenge. Positive move for social work vacancies at 16.5% better than national average (17%)

Improved relationships and creative efforts to attract and retain staff have seen the partnership between NCT and Opus receive Highly commended award in the Annual PPMA Excellence in People Management 2022 Awards.

EDUCATION

Introduction

This report outlines some key activities in the main statutory duty areas – school admissions, school standards, pupil place planning and school organisation, pupil attendance, special educational needs elective home education and safeguarding.

School admissions

The new head of place planning and admissions, Shazia Umer, took up her post on 20 May. She is now leading the process of disaggregating the school admissions service, which is currently commissioned from North Northants council (NNC).

The disaggregation of the service is on schedule for 1 September 2022. Therefore all 'in-year' admissions (that from term one of the 2022/23 schools year, and planned admissions (that is, all admissions at the beginning of each phase start (year R and year 7, plus year 3 for junior schools) for beginning of the 2023/24 school year will be the direct responsibility of West Northants council.

We are on schedule to put in place the agreed structure for the service by 1 September. Most staff will transfer under TUPE terms in accordance with the inter-authority agreement, but it may be necessary to appoint staff using an open recruitment process.

Pupil place planning and school organisation

As described above, the direct responsibility for place planning and school organisation will fall to the council. It is scheduled for 1 September, aligning with pupil admissions. Shazia Umer has started place planning already, since the head of place planning for NNC resigned on 27 February and the post is still vacant.

The main issues at present are:

- starting the procurement stage for commissioning a new free special school, using the free school presumption process: this went to the cabinet on 14 June
- making the case to the Department for Education for additional secondary school places in the Daventry area – taking forward a free school proposal, which must identify land for the school and provide evidence of basic need; and
- ensuring an appropriate structure is in place to ensure the council's statutory duties relating to planning pupil places and the capital resources required are in place – at present the place planning post is vacant, as is the capital manager post – and recruitment processes are started

School standards

The service is responsible for monitoring the performance of school in our area. It is, crucially, responsible for supporting and challenging 'schools of concern'. These are maintained schools that meet the criteria of 'concern' in the Department for Education's 'school causing concern' statutory guidance.

The main update for this meeting is to inform councillors that the interim director of children services is in the process of restructuring the education service. This will result in all services supporting pupil attendance at school, children missing from / missing out on education and being educated at home (called elective home education). At present these services sit in the education inclusion and specialist support services area.

SEND

The main activity, aside from 'business as usual – assessments, annual reviews and pupil placements, for example, has been the development of a special educational needs and disability (SEND) strategy, co-constructed with partners; and the completion of the consultation for a proposed new free special school and start of the procurement process.

The procurement involves the council inviting bids from multi academy trusts to run the school. The invitation and the application form are attached to this report for information. It is available on the council's website and the DfE portal.

The development of the workforce remains critical to the delivery of the priorities, and key workforce development within the SEND area remain the SEN assessment service, and the educational psychology service. The former has recruited to 11 vacancies, and the principal educational psychologist (PEP).

The nationwide situation with educational psychologists (EPs) is chronic, however, and there is a little chance of fully-staffing the service. Therefore the PEP has made an agreement with Reed, an employment agency, to outsource some of the advices that are a critical part of the SEN assessment process.

Children missing from / missing out on education and elective home education (EHE) and safeguarding

We have accurate and reliable data, and good knowledge of the number of children who are CME, and the length of their time out of education, as reported in the last update.

The council is responsible for ensuring all safeguarding allegations / concerns sent in by Ofsted are appropriately investigated. We are also responsible for the support and challenge of all schools and academies in our area relating to safeguarding. The service is currently commissioned from North Northamptonshire council but is 'disaggregating' with effect from 1 September 2022. This means that the budget for providing the service will be passed to WN council and will be appropriately staffed. There is a head of safeguarding, who will be allocated to a post in line with disaggregation agreements between both councils.

The location in the education service has been considered as a part of the wider restructuring, and from the disaggregation will be managed by the head of school effectiveness. This will bring together support for vulnerable children, and benefit from utilising school effectiveness staff who work closely with our maintained schools and academies on a range of issues.

WNC's safeguarding service is currently hosted by NNC. However, there is an option appraisal being undertaken, after which members of both councils' executives will determine whether WNC should run its own child safeguarding service. At present, it is likely that a decision will be made to do this, with the likely date if it is agreed of 1 September 2022.

The new specialist services area will include both the management of the council's SEN support service, and also act as the commissioner for specialist impairment services, which will be run from North Northamptonshire.

Councillor Fiona Baker

Cabinet Member for Children, Families, Education and Skills