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Alison Michalska
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Nottingham City Council

Emma Ing HMI
Regional Director, East Midlands

Sent by email to: [redacted] DPA

Dear Alison

Social Care Annual Conversation – 20 March 2018

Thank you for meeting with Nick McMullen and myself to consider your self-evaluation and to discuss developments in children's services in Nottingham. We found your self-evaluation provides a good overview of services for children and highlights strengths as well as some areas for improvement. There is evidence of innovation and services at the cutting edge of developing practice but also of some challenges in ensuring the basics of good practice are consistently in place. Overall, the sense is of a strong authority continuing to manage well in a difficult environment.

Local Authority Context

Nottingham has become the fourth most deprived area in the country for children (IDACI, 2015). This along with high levels of worklessness, has attributed to 38.23% of children living in poverty. The city is currently growing at pace with an increase of over five thousand primary school places between 2013 and 2017. These characteristics of an increasing population and high levels of deprivation are creating budgeting concerns following changes in the local authority funding model. The leadership in Nottingham is stable and receives political support for children's services. You have a commitment to an early help offer but recognise that there are challenges in an environment of diminishing resources.

Progress since last inspection

In your SIF inspection in March 2014 you were judged to require improvement to be good but an ILACS pilot inspection in January 2017 indicated you had made significant progress and may now be reaching the standard of good in most areas. Since then you have been working on consistency of practice along with the quality of your audits, to ensure you have a better understanding of your services. You commented that this has been supported by



the positive experience of the pilot which energised colleagues to continue on your improvement journey.

A strong culture of partnership working has been established within the authority. A recent inspection by HMIC gave you some positive feedback on the collaborative working identified in your MASH. Contacts into your front door have increased but referrals rates remained constant.

You have been working with Nottinghamshire on your placement commissioning. You have identified the need to keep children local in order to understand the networks they are involved with. There can be difficulties in securing effective CAMHS for children and young people placed out of authority and obtaining secure provision, when needed, remains a challenge. You have successfully delivered increases in the number of your in-house fostering placements.

You have identified the following as some of your particular service strengths:

- Multi agency arrangements to reduce child sexual exploitation
- Front door safeguarding arrangements
- Early help/hub arrangements
- Internal residential care
- Quality assurance of external placements
- Workforce development
- Effective edge of care provision
- Decriminalisation of children looked after

You have worked to improve your care leaver service, this has been monitored through a number of audits. Performance indicators now put you in the top quartile and are particularly strong in the area of accessing education, employment or training. An apprenticeship offer has been created with a keen driver of the local authority to ensure the majority of workforce is recruited from the local area. You recognise that your personal education plans can be improved and recording issues remain in terms of your IT system.

Future plans

Your priorities for the forthcoming year include:

- Continue to stabilise and develop social work workforce. Reducing agency usage, improving retention and managing turnover
- Finalising the reporting functionality in your electronic recording systems
- Further strengthening of audit and performance management
- Consolidating and further improving leaving care service

Future Inspection

We discussed the future of local authority inspection and advised that your next activity will likely be a standard ILACS inspection.

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

Yours sincerely



DPA

Emma Ing HMI
Regional Director
East Midlands