



Nottingham City Council Early Years (Speech, Language and Communication) Peer Challenge

Date from 15th – 18th October 2019

Feedback Report

1. Executive Summary

Nottingham City Council has a very strong and well informed political leadership and management who are championing the early years agenda for the city. Their recent appointment of a councillor to lead on their Child Friendly Nottingham vision is one example of their commitment to children and families. As a result, they have been highly successful in attracting new initiatives and funding, for example the National Lottery Community Fund, 'A Better Start', Read on Nottingham Literacy Hub and more recently the Early Outcomes Fund. This additional funding has enabled the city to deliver a large number of speech and language focused initiatives.

There is a committed workforce across the Council, partners and the private, voluntary and independent childcare sector. This has enabled the successful delivery of the new programmes over recent years, including the Small Steps Big Changes 'A Better Start' programme in four wards in the city – Aspley, Bulwell, Berridge and Arboretum. The exemplary work within this programme is empowering parents to take on leadership roles and effect further changes for local families.

There is clear evidence of integration across the city, however there are opportunities for providers and commissioners to further develop this work.

The Parents' journey is not always clear for families or professionals to navigate. The city would benefit from a clear pathway for families to travel from maternity services to school.

The leadership acknowledge the need for a city-wide speech, language and communication strategy and recognise that this would provide greater clarity on pathways for families, appropriate referrals to services and more timely interventions.

Given the exceptionally strong political commitment there is a real opportunity for the Council and partners to be more ambitious in their planning and develop a 0 – 5 integrated Early Years strategy.

2. Key recommendations

There are a range of suggestions and observations within the main section of the report that will inform some 'quick wins' and practical actions, in addition to the conversations onsite, many of which provided ideas and examples of practice from other organisations. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the Council:

- **Develop an area wide 0 – 5 Early Years Strategy with a particular focus on speech, language and communication including a shared outcomes framework and data dashboard and a clear offer from children's centres**
With so many initiatives it is difficult for partners to understand where their contribution to the system fits. A collaboratively produced, city wide, early years strategy, that is disseminated to the whole workforce, will support the vision of the Council and enable better evaluation and embedding of initiatives that are having a positive impact.

- **Co-produce a parenting journey from a child's conception through to school**
 This will require co-design and production from the whole Early Year's system including parents. It needs to be linked to an integrated outreach strategy to increase the take up of 2, 3 and 4 year old funded places.
- **Review the Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) offer to include group sessions ('Chatterbox' or 'Home Talk') with the aim of supporting triage, upskilling wider workforce, avoiding unnecessary assessments and providing input whilst awaiting specialist assessment**
 Many referrals into the speech and language service are inappropriate. This will reduce the number of referrals into the service and there can be a greater focus on intervention for those in need.
- **Review the use of children's centres as venues for childminder groups, voluntary sector, peer led groups, other partners and more universal provision**
 The team spoke to several childminders who explained that since childminder groups are no longer delivered by the council they have developed their own support groups and are self-funding venues to meet across the City. Hosting them within the children's centres will provide them with greater support from Centre staff and partners.
- **Accelerate the integrated approach for the 2 ½ year checks – pilot with nurseries and CityCare the joint completion of the check**
 This will provide more robust checks for the children and help to develop better partnerships between the childcare providers and the health visitor service.
- **Increase the take up of 2, 3 and 4 year old funding, working with partner agencies to identify eligible children and parent champions to engage families**
 Increasing the percentage of children in funded places to, or above, the national average will support earlier identification of children in need of interventions or support with their speech, language and communication if the provision is good.
- **Review the approach to identifying and addressing needs of targeted cohorts not reaching GLD through effective data analysis**
 This will need to include Free School Meal children, boys and children with SEND and will further improve performance on GLD.
- **Consider developing a local authority cohort tracker for the return of summative EYFS data to evidence progress and inform intervention**
 This will require work with the private voluntary and independent (PVI) sector to capture their summative data at key points within the child's journey through the EYFS. Analysis of this data will enable early identification of cohorts needing interventions and can be used to develop appropriate workforce training packages.

- **Ensure that speech, language and communication needs inform Integrated Care System (ICS) long term planning to improve children’s outcomes and reduce inequalities**
The ICS implementation plan for the NHS Long Term Plan currently includes priorities around childhood obesity. Influencing the plan to include Early Years development will establish a shared ambition and action plan going forward.
- **Creation of moderation hubs across the city**
These would provide support to schools and the PVI providers to ensure that children are being effectively supported for their attainment throughout the EYFS.
- **Use the documents that were provided for this peer challenge as the basis for a resource for your own workforce**
With 100 plus documents now available on the Knowledge Hub you have an excellent resource to support your continued journey of improvement and change.

3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

Independent external evaluation and feedback from the sector has endorsed peer challenge as an approach that promotes learning from a sector-led improvement perspective. All local authorities and their partners are constantly striving to improve outcomes for children but an external and independent view can help to accelerate or consolidate progress.

On the 12th December 2017, the Department for Education (DfE) launched *Unlocking Talent, Fulfilling Potential: A plan for improving social mobility through education*. A key strand within the DfE social mobility action plan is a focus on sector led improvement across Early Years provision, driven through peer challenge and support.

The DfE has worked with the Local Government Association (LGA) and the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF) to develop this sector led improvement offer.

The peer challenge team was sourced specifically to address the four primary areas of focus highlighted by Nottingham City Council. The team consisted of senior colleagues with significant experience of leading and managing Early Years services within local government, health and education, supported by an experienced LGA challenge manager.

The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced officer peers. Peers were selected on the basis of their relevant experience and expertise and their participation was agreed with you. The peers who delivered the peer challenge were:

- **Dr Andrew Furber**, Lead Peer and Centre Director, Public Health England

- **Carol Fenlon**, Head of Service, Early Years, Wirral
- **Nicola Brownjohn**, Independent Health Consultant
- **Stacey Henderson**, Early Years Advisory Teacher, Wolverhampton
- **Wendy Meredith**, Independent Public Health Consultant and Associate with the Early Intervention Foundation
- **Liz Hodgman**, Peer Challenge Manager, LGA

The process

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the Council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 4 days onsite at Nottingham City Council, during which they:

- Spoke to more than 168 people including a range of council staff together with councillors and external partners and stakeholders.
- Gathered information and views from more than 32 meetings, visits to key sites in the area and additional research and reading.
- Collectively spent more than 225 hours to determine their findings – the equivalent of one person spending more than 6 weeks in Nottingham City.

This report provides a summary of the peer team’s findings. It builds on the feedback presentation provided by the peer team at the end of their on-site visit. By its nature, the peer challenge is a snapshot in time. We appreciate that some of the feedback may be about things you are already addressing and progressing.

4. Scope and Focus

You identified four primary areas of focus for the peer challenge that were agreed at the beginning of the scoping process and through the self-assessment using the Early Years, Speech, Language and Communication Maturity Matrix:

Do senior leaders and frontline staff clearly understand the pathways of support available to improve speech, language and communication? And are they implemented across all services? **(Pathways)**

How effective are we in commissioning services for improving speech and language outcomes, effectively targeting resources to our families with the greatest need? **(Commissioning)**

Is there a clear early years offer, incorporating parent/carer and child voice, to support all children, including disadvantaged families, to be school ready? And is it widely communicated to the wider workforce? **(School Readiness)**

How are we sharing good practice, learning and resources across the Early Years system so all children benefit from ‘Best start’? **(Sharing Good Practice)**

5. Main Findings

KLOE 1. Do senior leaders and frontline staff clearly understand the pathways of support available to improve speech, language and communication? And are they implemented across all services? **(Pathways)**

There is a clear and strong commitment from the leadership at all levels within Nottingham, political, managerial and staff, to improve outcomes for children aged 0-5 years within the City.

There is a clear acknowledgement of the need for a city-wide speech, language and communication strategy that supports the workforce and is accessible to parents and carers. This was identified in the self-assessment and through the completion of the maturity matrix. The Small Steps, Big Changes 0-4 Communication Language Journey provides a visual tool for practitioners to share with parents and this needs to be extended across the whole of the City.

Professionals and providers commented on the quality of support from the autism team and the pathway is clear and well received and understood. The peer team felt that the 'Routes to Inclusion' system will provide clarity on pathways of support when rolled out to all Early Years settings.

The work of a speech and language therapist within the youth justice system provides a broader pathway to support early year's language development. Many of these young offenders have been identified as having poor language and literacy skills. By providing support to them at this stage they will be better equipped when they become parents themselves.

You have mapped Care Delivery Groups (CDGs) onto the new Primary Care Network (PCN) footprints and ensured that all GPs have links to multidisciplinary teams. Relationships have been established with the PCN clinical directors as well as city wide primary care clinical leadership.

The appointment of a Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL), assigned to the Early Years Team, was highlighted positively by both the EY's team and childcare practitioners in the support of early identification of vulnerable children, referrals to Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO), improved workforce awareness of safeguarding procedures and appropriate signposting to other agencies.

There is currently a review underway of the parenting programmes that are being delivered across the City. This will enable a robust evaluation of the effectiveness of programmes and enable commissioning to be concentrated on programmes with best evidence base and decommissioning of less effective programmes.

Midwives are developing pilots for the continuity of care in Small Steps Big Changes wards. This presents an opportunity to strengthen delivery and improve outcomes through different initiatives working in harmony.

Action - The Early Years sector would benefit from greater clarity of the whole offer from children's centres, including the speech and language development programmes. There have been significant changes to the delivery model for the children's centres over the last few years and the Small Steps, Big Change areas providing an enhanced offer to their ward areas has added some confusion to practitioners as to what is available and where.

Integration of services has progressed well within the Council and at provider level. Now would seem a good time to consider joint commissioning arrangements with the CCG in the context of the current changes within the NHS. The next phase of development of integrated commissioning and delivery of services in the city needs to be guided by a clear vision/ambition.

Action - Developing a system wide early years strategy in collaboration with partners and parents will ensure a multi- agency response to planning and delivery of early year's services, including speech, language and communication. This will need to be supported with a shared outcome framework and data dashboard that includes data from all agencies within the early years system. This will ensure a greater collective responsibility for outcomes.

Action - The parents' journey was not always visible or clear and parents and practitioners were not always able to articulate the stages from maternity to starting school. Developing a parenting journey as part of the early years strategy will involve a multi-agency approach to identify the key steps on the journey. Wirral and Cheshire East have examples of Parent Pathways. The Small Steps, Big Changes 0-4 Communication Language Journey is a good visual aide for professionals to use with parents, however this is only being used within the SSBC areas and it would be a useful tool to share city wide.

Action - There are two versions of the Personal Child Health Record (Red Books) for the city and county and this does present some challenges for the midwives and health visitors. Parents commented there were missed opportunities to enhance parents' knowledge of child development as professionals were inconsistent in the engagement of references in this resource, therefore review content and purpose of the Red Book with CityCare

The children would benefit from better transition arrangements between the PVI's and schools. This could be enhanced with some joint training events as currently there are two different training manuals for the sector.

KLOE 2 - How effective are we in commissioning services for improving speech and language outcomes, effectively targeting resources to our families with the greatest need? **(Commissioning)**

Partners across Nottingham clearly recognise the need to treat local early years services and assets as part of a joined-up system and have developed a set of partnership governance arrangements to drive this forward.

The recommissioning of the 0-19 service in 2018 which has been co-produced with the provider trust – Nottingham City Care - provides a strong foundation upon which to build, with work underway to integrate early education pathways with assessments and targeted interventions set out in the Healthy Child Programme.

The model of 0-19 services in Nottingham recognises the importance of so-called “wider determinants of health” on a child’s development and has designed in addition support to families for issues such as housing and employment.

Nottingham City Council is developing an Integrated Care Partnership with the NHS which will be led by the Chief Executive of the Council. This arrangement should provide an opportunity for further joint commissioning arrangements to drive better outcomes for children particularly in relation to maternity services, perinatal mental and speech and language therapy.

The Literacy Hubs, which are being delivered by the National Literacy Trust, are operating well in SSBC areas. This is as a result of effective governance and community engagement.

Action - The peer challenge team noted that the city was in the process of developing an early years outcomes framework. An early years outcomes framework which explicitly references speech, language and communication, designed around the priorities in the early years strategy and embedded across the wider partnership, is needed to ensure the continuous improvement of commissioned services.

Action - The Council clearly recognises that speech and language is an essential building block for a range of cognitive and emotional skills. The team heard about difficulties with access times for specialist support and the appropriateness of referrals. Commissioners are also considering the need to introduce additional support into these referral pathways. There is an opportunity therefore, to review the model of speech and language support provided and the commissioning arrangements for SALT as part of the integrated early years model which is under development.

Action - Areas for consideration include the sensitivity of the Ages and Stages Questionnaire 3 (ASQ-3) assessment in detecting children who may need additional support and for children with a “grey” or “black” scores. The systematic use of an additional tool such as a Wellcomm assessment could be used to ensure that the children with the highest levels of need are referred to specialist services. This could also free up speech and language therapists to provide more training for front line staff in settings, depending on the capacity in the service. The team were not in a position to form an opinion on speech and language therapy capacity.

Action - The new strategies and pathways need to ensure more timely interventions for children through a more flexible approach. Key to this is the upskilling of the Children Centre workforce in speech, language and communication. For example, a speech and language therapist delivering 'Chatterbox' sessions in a children's centre with support from the centre team. These sessions would enable early triage of children, reduce the number of inappropriate referrals received by the service, and provide parents and practitioners with simple interventions whilst waiting a more formal assessment. Centre staff would be able to develop their knowledge and skills by working directly alongside the speech and language therapist.

KLOE 3 - Is there a clear early years offer, incorporating parent/carer and child voice, to support all children, including disadvantaged families, to be school ready? And is it widely communicated to the wider workforce? **(School Readiness)**

The passion and commitment of the Council's Early Years team to school readiness and providing support across settings was shared by many providers through focus meetings and telephone calls. One practitioner said they 'go the extra mile'. This was also evident within the City Care team and the work they are delivering in partnership with the Council's early years team.

There is a clear recognition of the hard work that is put in to maintain the high (97%) percentage of 'Good' and 'Outstanding' early years provision across the Nottingham. The early years PVI workforce also value the support they receive from the early years team and how they tailor this to meet the individual needs of the provision, for example through the annual visits. Support is provided by the early years team on wider issues, for example funding, implementing the 30 hours and SEND support.

The delivery of the Dolly Parton Imagination Library (DPIL) has now been increased to other areas outside of the SSBC wards. The funding of this programme is innovative and the Council have identified that the gifting of books alone will not be a robust intervention. The role modelling of sharing books and the engagement of staff is supporting this programme along with the DPIL champions. Providing regular forums for the champions to share good practice will ensure the learning from the programme is shared wider.

The SEND strategy has been co-produced with parents and the team are rightly proud of their work and inclusive approach. Particular recognition was given to the autism team who provide support in schools, home and PVI settings. The retention of dedicated time of early years Educational Psychologists was also welcomed by the sector.

The Council's 'ASKLiON' website provides helpful information, is easily accessible to parents and is well signposted to around the city. There is good use of role modelling engagement with children across the city to support the development of the Home Learning Environment and the city's communication campaign 'Big Little Moments' is one example.

The city is very diverse and families speak a variety of languages. This does provide challenges to the early years workforce, however the peer team observed some excellent practice in both a private and school based nursery class. The use of musical interaction workshops repeated twice a week was supporting children who had little or no English to learn simple vocabulary and develop their language skills through songs and activities.

There is exemplary work within SSBC to empower parents in communities to take on leadership roles and effect change. The peer team were informed of the SSBC governance links with the community parent ambassadors "Parents Obsession Group" (POG), who on being informed of public health statistics for one SSBC area felt empowered to deliver key child development initiatives. For example one parent highlighted that after reviewing the statistics of tooth extractions in one SSBC area and coupled with the knowledge that around 52% of children were without a toothbrush, how the "Parent Ambassadors" embarked on "Tooth Fairy" training across the community to improve tooth brushing practices.

Action - The peer team observed some excellent examples of childcare providers using the Early Years Pupil Premium to good effect. For example, employing additional staff to provide one to one and small group work to enhance the children's speech, language and communication. Adding additional case studies of this use to the online resource library would share the good practice.

The uptake of 2, 3 and 4 year old funded childcare is below the national average. In order to increase uptake, consideration should be given to using a multi-agency outreach approach to engage families. The use of parent champions for parental engagement has been used successfully around the country.

Action - The delivery of 3 ½ year school readiness reviews are a positive move, however it could be enhanced through inclusion of a language development tool, for example WellComm, and linking to the new speech, language and communication pathway and strategy.

Action - The 2019 Good Level of Development (GLD) data has dropped slightly following a recent upwards trend. The boys levels have dipped and this has resulted in the widening the achievement gap further with the girls. This provides an opportunity for the city to review the approach to narrowing the gap and an opportunity to review the curriculum offer. Providing training to practitioners on working with boys would be a useful intervention. There needs to be a systematic approach to identifying and addressing the needs of those children not reaching GLD.

Action - Childcare providers outside of SSBC areas expressed that they were unclear of children's centre school readiness offer to signpost families to.

Action - The Talking Twos programme was ceased when new programmes were introduced. The staff within early years provision who had undertaken the training and

successfully delivered the programme expressed that they are now unable to deliver it as the e-resources are no longer available. Consideration needs to be given in how staff are taken on the journey of change when new programmes are introduced and others are withdrawn.

Action - Childcare providers, inclusive of childminders, reported that their links with the health visiting teams were not as strong as in previous times. They added that in some instances it has brought about delay in the referral pathways for children needing SALT support, due to the requirement for health visitor sign off. Consideration in having a named health visitor for a number of providers, as a point of contact, would provide an opportunity for improved relationships and further enhance robust pathways, not only for Speech, Language and Communication Needs (SLCN) but also for the integrated 2 year check model.

There is an 'Integrated Review at 2 Years' document produced in partnership with CityCare. However, the checks are being carried out independently and the pathway is more a description of how this information is then shared between the health visitors and childcare providers rather than an integrated process.. There is an opportunity to make this more integrated between the health visitors and the childcare providers with the piloting of some joint checks. This would provide more robust checks and help to develop links between providers and the health visiting team.

Currently the early years team produce separate training brochures and deliver separate training for PVI's and schools. There is a real opportunity to bring the two sectors together and deliver joint training and this will improve transition for the children through the greater integration of services. Some practitioners highlighted that the cost of training was a barrier to attendance. There are opportunities for the city to reduce costs using a 'grow your own trainer' model, utilising the skills and knowledge within the workforce.

Action - There needs to be a consistency of assessment terminology between settings (children centres and PVI's). It is recommended that the DfE terminology of emerging, expected and exceeding is used. Although there has been significant staff training on moderation, a 'churn' in the workforce has resulted in concerns that children may not be being judged consistently in the right category. Cross-setting moderation, including schools and PVI's, and the introduction of moderation hubs would help to ensure a more consistent approach across the whole of the EYFS and support early identification of children less likely to achieve their GLD.

Action - The Council have had a significantly high number of new Councillors following the most recent elections. Providing opportunities for new Councillors to shadow/visit exemplary practice within the city would ensure that the focus on early years remains a priority. This could be further supported by providing the opportunity for Scrutiny to look at relevant cross cutting issues such as school readiness.

It is important that the Council and partners regularly review the balance of being realistic in their expectations and being aspirational for their outcomes for children across the SSBC and the city as a whole.

KLOE 4 How are we sharing good practice, learning and resources across the Early Years system so all children benefit from 'Best start'? **(Sharing Good Practice)**

There is good partnership work with both universities in Nottingham, for example through the evaluation of programmes. They are a real asset to the City.

The use of parent champions and parent ambassadors within SSBC wards are effective in sharing information with local families, particularly those that are 'hard to reach'. The family mentors are greatly valued by families, one saying, 'they're on your doorstep when you need them' and another 'the skills we learn from the family mentors are building our children's independence'.

The Early Years team run a range of support networks for practitioners and these are valued. For example the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO) network for PVI's.

The proposed quarterly forums for Dolly Parton Imagination Library champions will enable the sharing of good and innovative practice across the SSBC and the extended area.

Nottingham has a high literacy profile. This includes the books and benches which can be found in public areas to ensure 'every moment counts'. The libraries extended work, the UNESCO City of Literature and the National Literacy Trust partnership.

The model of distributed leadership for early years is strong and this is evidenced in the recent appointment of Cllr Chantal Lee as the lead for Child-Friendly Nottingham. She is keen to build on the Books and Benches initiative.

SSBC is doing some great work around parental engagement. The Big Little Moments campaign enabled integration particularly with health visitors and support programmes such as FRED (Fathers Reading Every Day).

The library service are working with HMP Nottingham to promote reading and especially with fathers. This innovative piece of work engages fathers in reading books with their young children whilst they are in prison. Recordings are made of fathers reading books which can be taken home by their children to listen to in their absence.

The city has a strategy of developing its own workforce to deliver training to the sector. This helps to reduce the cost of providing training and increases engagement with the providers. This 'grow your own' model could be extended to the wider sector. Senior practitioners within the PVI providers have lots of experience and knowledge to share. Consideration also needs to be given to how good practice can be shared between the PVI's and schools. With some children starting school well below age related, school staff would benefit from the knowledge and experience from nursery and pre-school staff. School staff would also be able to share their expectations of school readiness. Developing opportunities for peer to peer observation will also promote good professional practice and support a more integrated workforce. A workforce analysis and training needs assessment outside of the four SSBC areas may provide a potential opportunity to rationalise the training offer further.

More pace may be required in delivering the Small Steps Big Changes objectives and developing sustainable spread beyond SSBC areas across the City.

6. Case Studies

We identified a number of areas of good or innovative practice that will make excellent case studies to share the learning wider. These included:

- Benches and Books as a way of using every moment
- Use of SALT within Youth Justice Service
- Use of EY Pupil Premium and approach to English as an Additional Language (EAL) within Greenfield Day Nursery
- Parental engagement work within SSBC
- Library service work with HMP Nottingham to promote reading especially with fathers

7. Next Steps

We hope that you will find the above findings to be a considered and true reflection of the discussions we had with you, your staff, your partners and families in Nottingham. I'm sure that you and your colleagues will now want to consider how you can incorporate the team's findings into your ongoing planning. Relevant details are included below should you wish to access further support either via the LGA or your own regional networks.

For further improvement support you can contact the LGA's Principal Advisor
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or the LGA's Children's Improvement Advisor
Andrew Bunyan
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We look forward to working with you again in 12 months' time for a follow up peer challenge to review the progress you have made on your improvement journey. We are also available to offer peer training to some of the Council and Partners staff teams in order to engage with wider sector lead improvement.

Once again, thank you for participating in this review and please pass on our gratitude to everyone involved, particularly Jen for her preparation work for the challenge.