

Northamptonshire Children’s Trust governance and reporting arrangements

1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 This report provides a brief overview of current governance and reporting arrangements for Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT).

2.0 Background and Governance Arrangements

- 2.1 Northamptonshire Children’s Trust (NCT) was established in November 2020 by statutory direction from the department for education (DfE) due to significant concerns. This followed a long period of instability and poor children’s services in the County, exacerbated by financial challenges. On 1 April 2021 the District, Borough and County were abolished, and two new unitary authorities were established in April 2021.
- 2.2 A contract was agreed between Northamptonshire County Council and NCT for the provision of children’s social care, targeted early help and youth offending services by NCT for a ten-year period, subject to review at 5 years. The contract sets out the obligations of both parties, the contract governance arrangements, and performance expectations and monitoring, among other matters. The contract was inherited by the two new Unitary authorities when established in 2021. This is a unique situation in the establishment of Children’s Trusts in England in that most current leaders from each current unitary authority were not involved in negotiating the contract and that NCT has two separate LAs to work with, two DCSs, Lead Members and scrutiny committees which over time may develop different needs and priorities. This complex history and structural solution, combined with new senior leadership across all three organisations over the last two years or so, has meant that partnership relationships across the three organisations have taken longer to become established and embedded.
- 2.3 The two Unitary Councils West Northamptonshire and North Northamptonshire remain subject to a statutory direction from the Department for Education which they must follow. The most recent statutory direction was issued in February 2022 and DfE confirmed that this remains in force after the ILACS inspection that moved Children’s Services out of the Ofsted grading of ‘inadequate.’ The former County Council agreed with the DfE to the establishment of NCT to deliver Children’s Services and the successor LAs have inherited this agreement. The revised statutory direction directs them to:
- a. *Engage with the Trust, in joint commissioning arrangements for the Trust, and with the Councils’ partners whose work impacts the delivery of the Councils’ children’s social care functions, in a way likely to facilitate improvement in the exercise of those functions*
 - b. *To comply with any instructions of the Secretary of State or the Improvement Board Chair in relation to the improvement of the exercise of the Councils’ children’s social care functions, and provide such assistance as the Secretary of State or the Improvement Board Chair may require*

- 2.4 It is important to recognise that the Northamptonshire Children’s Trust is the agreed strategic arrangement by which each Council delivers its statutory children’s social care functions, and it is of paramount importance for each Council that this arrangement is successful.
- 2.5 The contract between the Councils and NCT sets out the governance arrangements (Schedule 18). The key meeting at the heart of the governance arrangement is the monthly Operational Group with the remit *‘to provide a joint forum to periodically review each Party’s respective performance of this Agreement (in particular the performance of the Services by the Trust and the performance of the Dependencies by the Council) at an operational level)’*. The terms of reference for the Operational Group were revised in November 2022. The Operational Group reports to the quarterly Strategic Group which *‘provides strategic, political and executive oversight and scrutiny to the Agreement’*.
- 2.6 The contract also sets out (Schedule 6) the Performance Framework and (Schedule 4) the Councils’ responsibilities and dependencies. Oversight, discussion and shared problem-solving of issues from Schedules 6 and 4 are the primary focus of Operational Group, along with financial monitoring and support services and property matters.
- 2.7 Schedule 6 also sets out that the parties should work together ‘in a manner that is conducive to establishing and fostering a successful and cohesive working relationship’, so that performance issues ‘are resolved quickly and amicably.’ There is an emphasis in the statutory guidance to deliver better outcomes for children in the Local Authority area and ensure that sufficient resources and services are in place to do so. This fits well with the statutory direction to both Councils - to engage with the Trust and the Councils’ partners to facilitate improvement.
- 2.8 The paragraphs above summarise the statutory and contractual arrangements in the County between NCT and the two unitary councils for the provision of Children’s Services. The two Councils as ‘system leaders’ have a responsibility to shape partnership working across the County to deliver better outcomes for children. This includes through the work of early help, public health, housing and schools in their area. A governance map can be found in Appendix 2.
- 2.9 Northamptonshire Children’s Trust has a responsibility, alongside the councils, to deliver more effective services for children and families, to support the strategic direction set by the Councils and to help develop a more collaborative children and families partnership. These arrangements are a shared and joint enterprise with these key features:
- Partnership working with each other and across the whole system
 - A strategic focus on improving outcomes for children
 - Working together in a collaborative and solution-focused way

3.0 Northamptonshire Children’s Trust – Governance and Reporting Framework

3.1 Whilst under a statutory direction the DfE retains an interest and role in the governance arrangements for the Trust.

3.2 NCT Board consists of the following members.

Julian Wooster (Chair)

Hilary Daniels (Chair of FRA Committee)

Joshua Imuere (Chair of PPQ Committee/Council appointed NED)

Darren Hickman (Council appointed NED)

Colin Cross (NED)

John O’Brien (NED)

Lou Williams (NED)

Samantha Fitzgerald (NNC)

Rebecca Peck (WNC)

Colin Foster (Chief Executive)

Cornelia Andreut (Director of Social Care)

Andrew Tagg (Director of Finance and Resources)

3.3 There are four governance committees and the reporting overview is in appendix 3;

- a) NCT Board
- b) Practice, performance and quality committee
- c) Finance and resources committee
- d) Audit committee

a) NCT is responsible for;

- Define strategic direction of NCT
- Monitor performance and track progress.
- Improve outcomes for children, young people and families.
- Ensure proportionate reporting to Board, committees, and the councils.
- Fulfil contractual obligations.
- Oversee the activity of the three governance committees
- Meet the requirements of the Equality Act 2010

b) Practice, Performance and Quality Committee is responsible for;

- All key issues relating to the practice, performance and quality of all services provided by the Trust to children, young people and their families in

Northamptonshire including user feedback, formal complaints and Trust support services.

- The performance and quality of Trust contracts, including purchased support services and service level agreements in place to ensure Trust effectiveness.
- Workforce quality and effectiveness including recruitment, retention, learning and development.
- Trust self-assessment and improvement activity.
- Actions following Ofsted and other inspections or visits, agreeing and monitoring relevant plans.
- The effectiveness of engagement with children, young people and families receiving the services of the Trust so that their voice, and their experience, can be clear and influential in shaping the Trust's decision-making and direction.
- The development and evaluation of innovative approaches to practice and service improvement.

c) Finance and Resources Committee is responsible for;

- NCT business plan and transformation activity.
- NCT finances: strategy, efficiencies, monitoring and forward planning.
- Effectiveness of service level agreements.
- Management and resource audits.
- Overview of risk management.
- Workforce establishment control, budgets and salaries, health and safety.
- Employee engagement.
- Ensuring that part B of its meetings fulfils the audit remit.

d) Audit Committee is responsible for;

(i) Reviewing and monitoring:

- The integrity of the financial and narrative statements and other financial
- Information provided to Members;
- NCT system of internal controls and risk management;
- The internal and external audit process and auditors;
- The processes for compliance with laws, regulations and ethical codes of practice; and

(ii) Making recommendations to the Board in relation to the discharge of governance responsibilities in respect of audit, risk and internal control of the Company.

3.4 Members of NCT board also attend the Youth Offending Service (YOS) board and the Corporate parenting board.