



Education and Skills Board

Wednesday 8 March 2017

SEND Task and Finish Group Update

Purpose of report:

To update the Board on the work of the Joint SEND Task and Finish Group

Introduction:

1. The total budget for the Council's Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in 2015/16 was approximately £220m. Reduced funding and rising demand in the county has led to significant pressure on the Council in carrying out its statutory responsibilities for these children and young people.
2. With many developments in this service over 2016, the Council's scrutiny boards received eight reports that linked to the topic of SEND. These reports covered: the work of the Transition Team and the Learning Disabilities Commissioning Strategy; the Children's Improvement Plan; how the SEND team engages with its stakeholders, families and young people with SEND; contract procurement; SEND Transport; finances and the SEND 2020 Development plan.
3. It was suggested that a more efficient means of scrutiny of this service could be achieved through a Joint Task and Finish Group comprising of Members from the relevant scrutiny boards. A joint approach for 2016/17 and beyond would have the benefit of:
 - a) improved oversight and assurance on the progress made within SEND services;
 - b) a greater emphasis on how developments would support children, young people and their families, rather than how isolated elements work; and
 - c) reduced risk of duplication in reporting to Scrutiny and added value from multiple perspectives.
4. It was agreed to use the SEND 2020 Development Plan as a context for following developments around SEND Services. A draft terms of reference was prepared and then approved by Council Overview Board in September 2016.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission Joint Inspection

5. Following the formation of the Task Group, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) carried out a Surrey area joint inspection. The full results of the inspection can be found attached as **Annex A** to this report.
6. The inspection had highlighted five key areas of weakness for the council and its partners:
 - 6.1 "The timeliness, suitability and quality of statutory assessments and plans, including when statements are transferred to education, health and care plans.
 - 6.2 The under-developed and often limited involvement of parents and carers, and the narrow range of those included, in planning, monitoring and evaluating services. The ineffective promotion of the local offer, and the incomplete statutory transition plan.

- 6.3 The inefficient management and coordination of area information, in administrative processes, to inform evaluation of services and outcomes, and to hold leaders and staff at all levels to account for rapid improvement.
 - 6.4 The relatively low identification of need at school support level, indicating inefficiencies in the early identification of special educational needs and/or disabilities.
 - 6.5 The increasing rates of absence and exclusion experienced by children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities in mainstream schools.”
- 7. As a local area inspection by Ofsted and CQC, the key findings from the report apply to both the Council and the CCG as commissioners of SEND services. Both have accepted the inspectors’ findings. It is to be noted that, in addition to the areas of weakness, elements of good practice were also raised in the report. There is scope for existing good practice to be developed and shared further in the County, and rolled out across the wider service. The inspection also noted some good outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Surrey.
 - 8. As the inspection raised “significant concerns about the effectiveness of the local area”, the Council and the CCG are required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action, explaining how the local area will tackle the significant areas of weakness (as outlined in paragraphs 6.1 to 6.5). The Written Statement of Action is due to be submitted to Ofsted and CQC by Monday 13 March 2017.

Task Group Findings & Discussions
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- 9. In light of the joint Ofsted/CQC inspection, the Task Group agreed that a priority action was to support Officers in preparations for the Written Statement of Action.
- 10. In discussion with SEND Officers it was noted that:
 - 10.1 The Council needs to improve awareness and scrutiny of impacts on children and young people with SEND.
 - 10.2 The inspection highlighted required improvements in accountability and responsibility, citing poor data management as a major hindrance to SEND Services.
 - 10.3 That the Written Statement of Action needed approval from the Director of Children’s, Schools and Families, the responsible Cabinet Member(s), Ofsted and the CQC.
 - 10.4 After the submission of the Written Statement of Action, DfE officials would review progress by the end of 2017.
- 11. The five points of weakness noted in the Ofsted/CQC inspection were, in part, already being addressed under the SEND 2020 Development Plan, and that actions in these areas will be closely aligned with this Plan.
- 12. One area where improvements were being made related to the quality of outcomes for children captured within Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) which limited the effectiveness of plans. It was noted that steps were already being taken by the Service to target these issues in order to improve their effectiveness in response to the Ofsted recommendations.
- 13. The Task Group and Officers agreed that the Local Offer needed to be made clearer, better promoted and easier to access for parents. During discussions, Officers

explained that this was a clear line of work for the Service to undertake.

14. The Task Group was informed that several key actions were being undertaken to resolve issues highlighted in the Ofsted/CQC report, including:
 - a) An increase in front-line staff has realised an improvement in delivery of EHCPs in terms of speed and efficiency.
 - b) Work had been undertaken to improve the accessibility of data available to the Service from the Education Management System; Officers need to work to improve on the utilisation of this data, as there is an inconsistent approach towards data management across the county's quadrant system.
 - c) Officers are implementing the Safer Surrey practice to introduce a consistent person-centred approach across the Service which will embed strength based practice with families and children.
15. The Group stressed to Officers in their discussions that the Service would need to consider the cost implications of their response to the actions outlined in the Ofsted/CQC inspection as the actions need to be deliverable both practically and financially.

Rapid Improvement Workshop

16. Members of the Task Group were invited to attend the feedback session of a SEND Rapid Improvement Event Thursday 26 January 2017. The two day event was a collaborative workshop to co-design improvements in the EHCP process. It involved: parents of children with SEND, representatives from Family Voice, specialist SEND staff from schools and colleges, Surrey County Council Officers, Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCO) and Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) staff, as a means of gaining first-hand insights into the issues highlighted in the Ofsted/CQC inspection of the planning and assessment processes within SEND services.
17. Some of the key themes highlighted at the workshop were:
 - a) Processes (IT support, local offer)
 - b) Supportive training opportunities (for staff and for parents)
 - c) Early Help and earlier support
 - d) Building on the "relational" process
 - e) Improving the transparency of programmes
18. The actions and themes were recorded by facilitating Officers at the end of the workshop, and have been reflected in the Written Statement of Action to improve the experience of families and children. It was pointed out that the service was monitoring progress on this and that they wanted strong involvement from parents and partners going forward.

What Can We Expect?

19. The Written Statement of Action will address: assessments; parents and carers; area information; early identification; exclusions and absences; as well as other related findings from the inspection. There will follow a refresh of the SEND Development Plan in order to bring the actions within the Written Statement of Action in line with other developments in the SEND Service.

20. The Written Statement of Action will aim to:
- a) set out a **person-centred approach** across the assessment and planning process for children and families, putting families back at the centre of the SEND system, and building confidence in local area leaders and services;
 - b) create and maintain a **strong performance culture** of improvement and best practice, with an injection of greater pace, scale and consistency;
 - c) further embed a practice of **collaboration with families**, making sure every contact with parents and carers counts;
 - d) grow the **capacity of schools to support each other** to meet the needs of children and families closer to home and within their local communities;
 - e) develop integrated services to provide **early identification and support** for children with SEND earlier to ensure better outcomes for them.

Next Steps for the Task Group

21. Members and Officers have identified a role for the Task Group. This will include monitoring the Service's progress against the required improvements identified in the inspection; following the delivery of the objectives set by the Service to drive improvements, and monitoring the Service's performance improvements.
22. As the SEND Service faces a lot of change throughout 2017, the original Terms of Reference for the Task Group will become out of date. A refresh of the Terms of Reference will be required to align the work of the Task Group with the various workstreams set out within the Written Statement of Action.

Conclusions:

23. The Task Group has played a part in supporting the preparation of the Written Statement of Action in response to the Ofsted/CQC joint area inspection and understands the journey that Surrey's SEND Services needs to take during 2017 and beyond.

Recommendations:

24. That the Education & Skills Board notes the progress made by the Joint SEND Task and Finish Group.
25. Democratic Services Officers prepare a new Terms of Reference for the SEND Task Group for the new Council term, and for Members to provide comment and recommendations on its planned work programme.
26. That, following the local elections in May 2017, the SEND Task Group should be reconvened with representation from each of the appropriate scrutiny boards, to continue its work with refreshed Terms of Reference.

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Annexes

Annex A – Ofsted & CQC Joint Local Area SEND Inspection in Surrey

Sources/background papers

[SEND Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference](#) (Council Overview Board, Wednesday 21 September 2016, Scrutiny Board Task Group Scoping Documents – Item 7)

[SEND 2020 Development Plan](#)

[Safer Surrey Practice Guide](#)

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