

Cllr Julie Iles Cabinet Member of the Month Update

I am pleased to be able to share with you some of the work that we have been doing to support our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and their families throughout the unprecedented circumstances of the pandemic.

For many families of children with SEND these past eight weeks have been particularly testing. Change in daily routines and more restricted access to the community resources they rely on have caused greater stress and anxiety for these children and their families.

Since the lockdown began in March, we have met weekly with Family Voice, our Parent Partnership, to understand the challenges parents are facing and what they need to support them. These meetings have strengthened our work with Family Voice and led to innovative new initiatives.

- We created a dedicated Covid-19 parents' information webpage which has now become the most popular page on the Local Offer site, with over 3600 visits in its first month.
- We have commissioned online mental health and wellbeing support for the parents of children with SEN in Surrey. This provides immediate and stigma free access to professional support, preventing issues from escalating and reaching crisis. QWELL, as it is known, will be in place in June.
- We are creating a series of YouTube videos for parents, in which professionals across a range of areas including Speech and Language and Educational Psychology offer hints and tips on supporting children's development at home, and have worked in partnership with London South Bank University to provide parents of children with ASD with a range of expert advice.

The safety of children with SEND has been our top priority. In the first week of lockdown, our SEND teams identified and risk assessed 800 of our most vulnerable learners. This was an unprecedented exercise, which included bringing together information and decision-making across the council, our education sector and health colleagues. For those children who could stay at home, safety plans were developed with the families, and for those who needed to remain in specialist settings, contingency plans were put in place should the setting need to close.

In week two, our teams risk assessed the remaining 9,200 children with education, health and care plans (EHCPs) in partnership with early years settings and schools. Over four days, our small Graduated Response Advisor team responded to 180 requests for advice from schools, and in the space of five working days our Graduated Response Early Years Advisors spoke to settings for 100 children with EHCPs to talk them through their risk assessments.

Not only has this work strengthened and improved our relationships with our partners across health and education, it has provided a model of collaborative leadership, achieving good outcomes swiftly and effectively.

We are worried about the impact of Covid 19 on our specialist independent, early years and school transport sectors, and significant work has gone into securing their sustainability. We have funded taxi firms who have lost school transport income to carry out deliveries of essential items such as PPE, food and medicine to vulnerable families, and we have found innovative ways to use inclusion funding to help our early years settings to stay open to support our most disadvantaged children.

SEND Transformation activity has not stopped throughout this period. Operational improvements across our Vulnerable Learners teams are underway, and we are continuing

to commission new pathways to employment for young people with SEND. SENCO networks have continued, delivered in partnership with SAfE, our school improvement partnership. This has been successful in bringing SENCOs together to share good practice and build essential relationships between schools and with partner agencies.

The SEND Task Group established by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee made recommendations to Cabinet on 31 March regarding the provision of SEN support services. The recommendations are fully supported by Cabinet and are in line with the improvements the Council has been seeking to deliver through the SEND transformation programme. In these unprecedented times, the Service will endeavour to deliver these recommendations as it is reasonable and practical to do so.

Our focus is now on starting the planning to revive and restore all our lines of activity, building on the improved relationships and better ways of working we have created with partners and families. The next few months will see, among other things, the launch of the Front Door, the delivery of an all-age Autism consultation, development of plans for a new local offer, with SEND Transformation on course to deliver a significantly improved, high quality and efficient SEND support offer to families.

Julie Iles
Cabinet Member for All-Age Learning
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