

Question to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee – 17 January 2022

The Education, Health and Care plan timeliness information provided in response to a question in October 2021 identified that the South West quadrant has performed least well in delivering Education, Health and Care plans on time for the past two years.

- Why is this?
- What actions are being taken to remedy this situation?

Councillor Fiona Davidson

Response

Why is this?

Case officers have the responsibility for drafting Education Health and Care plans under the supervision of Senior Case Managers. The South West team has unfortunately had a number of vacancies and has been operating at reduced capacity.

The SW team is also comprised of a high proportion of new staff. These staff are given a comprehensive and thorough induction, however, it can take between 12-18 months before they are fully operational.

The retention of new staff in the SW has been a particular challenge for the team.

Exit interviews illustrate that COVID has had particularly significant impact upon new staff due to the lack of opportunity for office working where peer to peer support would have been available.

Additionally, there is a delay in advice being provided to the team by partner agencies due to increasing volumes of EHC assessment requests and capacity issues within those teams. This is an issue across the county but compounds the delays within the SW.

What have we done to address these concerns:

There is a robust recovery plan in place.

The number of EHCPs issued and their timeliness is monitored on a daily basis against targets by senior quadrant managers and there is a weekly performance meeting with the Assistant Director for Inclusion and Additional Needs SW to monitor progress against the recovery plan.

The recovery plan includes improved recruitment, support and training for staff, closer liaison with advice givers to minimise the delays in advice given as part of the EHCP process and operational changes to the work of the team.

The recruitment, support and training actions for staff includes:

- The case officer induction process being redesigned to ensure that this is robust and appropriate for remote working.
- Case Officers being provided with more frequent supervision in order to support them manage their cases both on a 1 to 1 and group basis.
- Regular visits into the office so that new members of staff can work closely with their team.
- A buddy system.
- NASEN training to ensure staff develop the required skill set during their first year in post
- A series of staff training webinars and specific training for case officers in strengths based approaches.

The actions to improve the timeliness of partners advice includes

- A revised health pathway which has reduced steps in the advice giving process and therefore ensured health colleagues advice is received quickly
- Liaison with educational psychologists to help them prioritise their work to meet deadlines which has led to a reduction in delayed advice
- Liaison with Learners Single Point of Access (LSPA) to increase the speed of early decision making when assessment requests are received

The operational actions include

- changes to the EHC assessment process to improve efficiency
- careful analysis of the work flow so that a proactive approach is taken to remove barriers to the timely completion of plans where issues are identified

This work has led to an improvement from 7% of plans due for completion in September 2021 being completed on time to 39% in December 2021. Forecasting of the workflow suggest that this percentage increase is likely to reach between 50-60% in January 2022 bringing the team closer to the operational target of 70% by the end of March.

Liz Bowes – Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee