

## **CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE**

Item under consideration: DRAFT INCLUSION AND ADDITIONAL NEEDS STRATEGY

Date Considered: 15 December 2022

1. The draft Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy being presented to Cabinet for agreement was shared with the Select Committee for scrutiny on 15 December.
2. When asked how the success of the new Strategy would be measured, the Assistant Director for Inclusion and Additional Needs said they hoped to see a reduction in the number of appeals and complaints, following a 22 per cent increase in appeals in Surrey in 2022. The vast majority ruled in line with the family, both in the county and nationally. The Director for Education and Lifelong Learning explained that in general terms, tribunals arise when the Council will not assess for an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or will not offer an independent school placement.
3. A Member asked about staffing of the special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND) teams, which was expected to be complete by the end of October. The Director for Education and Learning shared that 80 per cent of staff were now in place, with vacancies falling unevenly within the teams.
4. In response to a question on timeliness of completion of EHCPs due in July (9% completed within the 20 weeks), the Director explained they had established a recovery plan following a reduced availability of educational psychologists (EPs) and had since recruited eight assistant EPs. In the most recent set of figures, the Council was performing in the high 60s and it was expected timeliness would improve in 2023 when newly qualified EPs begin in the role.

### **Recommendations**

1. In order to transform the lives of Surrey children and young people aged 0 to 25 with additional needs and/or disabilities, the Cabinet Member for Education and Learning is asked to ensure the Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-26 reflects the following recommendations before it is referred to Cabinet for agreement:
  - (a) Use the evaluation criteria listed at paragraphs 50 - 60 of the [Area SEND inspection handbook](#) as a guide to set clear goals, thus benefiting from this document's extensive consultation process involving parents, teachers, children and young people and other stakeholders.

- (b) Goals outlined in (a) should have specified measurable targets that make it easy to identify whether progress is being made. Targets should incorporate the following:
- i. Commitments set out in the Safety Valve Agreement;
  - ii. Learnings from the Home to School Travel Assistance learning review;
  - iii. Action plan resulting from the Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership's self-evaluation;
  - iv. Human Resources action plan to ensure issues such as EHCP timeliness are not affected by staff shortages.
- (c) Present the Strategy in a way that allows any parent or young person to identify measurable targets at a glance.
- (d) Regarding the Governance Structure laid out in the Strategy, aim to avoid any gap in accountability by:
- i. Clarifying the roles and responsibilities of each level of governance and who is accountable to whom;
  - ii. Identifying precisely how each level will work towards achieving recommendations 1 a-c;
  - iii. Explaining how organisations within the same pillar will work together to achieve recommendations 1 a-c, for example the three groups forming 'Joint Commissioning, Sufficiency & Evaluation';
  - iv. Ensuring any parent or young person can identify at a glance where different responsibilities sit within the structure.
- (e) Ensure that the website and other digital platforms are used to good effect by:
- i. Developing the webinar series for families on the statutory assessment process so it is an example of best practice;
  - ii. Developing webinars on assessment criteria for SENCOs to enable them to give well-informed and up-to-date advice.
2. That Cabinet agree the Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-26 subject to the changes recommended in 1.
  3. That until further notice the Director for Education and Lifelong Learning reports, at every formal meeting of the Select Committee, on progress made towards and barriers against achieving recommendations in 1.

## **Rationale for recommendations**

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission have produced a new framework for inspecting local area arrangements for children and young people with SEND, from January 2023. It is the Committee's view that the goals set out in the Council's Strategy should be directed by the watchdogs' handbook's detail on what inspectors will consider. Such goals need to have clear measurements to enable rigorous scrutiny by the Select Committee.

Home to school travel assistance (H2STA) should be included in these metrics, in the same way as the handbook lists home to school transport, under 3.6, among the information to be provided by the local area partnership at the time of inspection. This is especially important in Surrey at this time, as until the Council's sufficiency capital programme has fully taken effect, the needs of young people with an EHCP tend to be met further from home, increasing the prevalence of H2STA eligibility.

It is the Committee's view that staffing has such a significant bearing on performance that metrics in this area must also be included.

How the Council is performing should be presented in a way that is accessible to the people affected by this performance, as should the process for how parents access early support. Improved communication of Ordinarily Available Provision, for example, could mitigate a rising number of appeals.

**Liz Bowes, Chairman - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning Select Committee**

### **Background papers**

[Item 7, Children, Families and Lifelong Learning Select Committee, 15 December 2022](#)

[Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-26](#)

[Area SEND inspection framework and handbook](#)

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