

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel was held on Monday 13 December 2021.

PRESENT: Councillors D McCabe (Chair), L Mason (Vice-Chair), A Hellaoui, T Mawston, M Nugent, P Storey, G Wilson and B Hubbard (Substitute) (Substitute for M Saunders)

OFFICERS: R Brown, S Butcher, C Cannon, E Cowley, D Johnson, G Moore, T Dunn and K Smith

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: Councillors D Jones and M Saunders

21/32 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

| Name of Member | Type of Interest | Item/Nature of Interest |
|-----------------------|------------------|---|
| Councillor A Hellaoui | Non-Pecuniary | Items 4 and 5, member of three governing bodies |

21/33 MINUTES - CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S LEARNING SCRUTINY PANEL - 8 NOVEMBER 2021

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel held on 8 November 2021 were submitted and approved as a correct record.

21/34 SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) - FURTHER EVIDENCE

The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service and the Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review were in attendance to provide the scrutiny panel with:

- details of how children and young people with SEND and their families were fully involved in discussions and decision-making about the services and the support they received, through meaningful and ongoing co-production; and
- a case study that demonstrated how the views, wishes and feelings of the child/young person and their parents had impacted on the delivery of services and support.

The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that the submitted report contained detailed information on coproduction with families and the work that had been undertaken in partnership with Parents4Change.

It was commented that the report included a website link, which provided access to a video that had been developed with Parents4Change, parents/carers and young people. The video captured the voice of families, sharing their feedback regarding support they had received across education, health and social care. Members heard that a new video would be created with families in 2022, which would be placed on the Local Offer website.

In terms of coproduction and the SEND Code of Practice, it was advised that when carrying out functions in relation SEND, local authorities were required to have regard to a series of core principles:

- the views, wishes and feelings of the child or young person, and the child's parents;
- the importance of the child or young person, and the child's parents, participating as fully as possible in decisions, and being provided with the information and support necessary to enable participation in those decisions
- the need to support the child or young person, and the child's parents, in order to facilitate the development of the child or young person and to help them achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes and preparing them effectively for adulthood.

The scrutiny panel was advised that effective coproduction enabled young people, parents/carers and professionals across multiple agencies and sectors to work together as equal partners to design, plan, deliver and review support and services in order to achieve shared outcomes.

Coproduction recognised children and young people, parent/carers and professionals as assets who all had important contributions to make due to their differing knowledge, skills and experience.

In respect of the approach to coproduction in Middlesbrough, the following points were made:

- To support the implementation of the SEND reforms, services across education, health and social care had worked closely with parents, young people and families to consider how best to implement the reforms across Middlesbrough. Themed working groups had been set up to understand each aspect of the reforms and how to develop and implement them across the local area.
- Initially, the key areas focused on the establishment of systems and processes for assessing needs, the format of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) template and reviewing of EHCPs. Parents4Change, Middlesbrough's local parents' forum, had been actively involved throughout the process.
- The local area SEND Strategy was developed in partnership with Parents4Change. That work had included gathering feedback regarding key priorities and designing the strategy to ensure it was accessible.
- Feedback was requested frequently from families on the Local Offer, services, processes and practices. Families were also regularly consulted on key developments.
- Parents4Change was an advocate of parents/carers/families and the forum's input and work with the Local Authority enabled the local area to identify problems and implement solutions, ensuring families were well supported in Middlesbrough.
- A Parent Partnership Group had recently been established, which involved forums/groups across Middlesbrough working collectively to develop/improve services and practices for families, such as the EHCP process.
- Each year there was a parents' conference, the Local Authority worked in partnership with Parents4Change to plan and design the conference. There had been many areas discussed and feedback sought at those conferences, including the SEND Strategy, High Needs Funding, Short Breaks, the EHCP process, Health Services, the Local Offer and Preparing for Adulthood. It was envisaged that the next conference would take place in March 2022 with an agreed focus on coproduction.
- Focus groups were established and project work was undertaken in respect of key themes, enabling families to review, reshape and improve practices in the local area.
- A group of young people from Priory Woods School had been involved with the Big Takeover, the group's specific project was to encourage more young people to participate in the EHCP process.

In terms of coproduction and the EHCP process, the Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that:

- Often the EHCP process was the first contact that a family would have with statutory-level services.
- Having coproduction at the heart of the EHCP process enabled the development of positive relationships with families.
- Children, young people and parents were included from the very start of the process. By working closely with schools, the Local Authority ensured families were fully informed when a referral for an EHCP was going to be made. Parents were invited to attend a referral planning meeting to discuss the needs of their child with a full range of practitioners.
- Once an assessment had been completed, families were invited to a Summary Assessment Meeting. At the meeting, information was shared about the child, including reports that provided a medical/professional context. The meeting provided parents with an opportunity to fully understand what that information meant. At the meeting, a person-centred planning approach was taken and parents were asked their priorities and what outcomes they would want to see included in their child's EHCP. That information was then used to inform and develop the EHCP.

- Throughout the process, if parents were unable to attend meetings they were given the opportunity to complete 'Views' forms that were circulated at the different stages of the process. The forms ensured parents could submit their views regularly, in writing, if they were unable to attend meetings. Views forms enabled parents to comment on a child's development, experiences and the impact of the child's needs. The information was then utilised to draft the EHCP.
- The draft EHCP was shared with parents for their comments.
- At the end of the process, parents were asked their preferences in respect of educational placements. Information, advice and guidance was provided to parents to enable them to make an informed decision about the most suitable placement for their child. The Local Authority also facilitated visits to the preferred schools.

Members were provided with a case study, which demonstrated how the views, wishes and feelings of the child/young person and their parents had impacted on the delivery of services and support.

The case study focused on the EHCP process. Members were advised that:

- a child had been referred for an EHCP;
- the child's parent was engaged at the start of the process, as part of the initial referral;
- the parent's views were shared as part of the referral paperwork;
- an assessment was completed in partnership with the parent and the young person;
- a Summary Assessment Meeting was held;
- the EHC Assessment information was shared with parent;
- the parent was invited to attend a Summary Assessment Meeting at the child's school;
- the child's needs were discussed with the parent and priorities were agreed, which fed directly into the EHCP
- the draft EHCP was written and shared with the parents and was redrafted several times, based on feedback from parents.
- the parents were asked their school place preferences;
- child centred case work was undertaken to support the family to explore new provision as an option for secondary school;
- issues were discussed and information, advice and support for transition were provided;
- a multi-agency team around the child was established, which included the school and other key professionals;
- the child started at the school, which was the parents first preference, and his parents had reported he was happy and settled;
- the Local Authority continued to review the child's plan and progress in partnership with the child's parents;
- the parents shared regular updates with the team, all of which were included at each annual review;
- a positive relationship with the child's parents, which had been fostered during the assessment process, continued; and
- an open and honest communication dialogue between the multi-agency team and the parents had been established and would continue throughout the child's educational journey.

It was added that the child/young person was actively encouraged to participate in the different stages of the EHCP process. There were views forms for children and young people. The EHCP process was very much centered on seeking the views, wishes and feelings of the child/young person.

In respect of the impact of EHCP coproduction, the Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised:

- Parents4Change had been actively involved in reviewing the EHCP process.
- The process had been reviewed over time with Parents4Change to support on-going improvement and to continue to effectively capture the voice of the child/young person and parents/carers.
- Feedback on the EHCP assessment process had showed consistent 90% satisfaction rates from families.

- Through the ongoing developments of the EHCP process, it was evident from the feedback received from families that they felt fully involved in the process.
- A parent had commented "I have been given the opportunity to give my views and these have been taken in account". Views similar to that were communicated by many families.
- Middlesbrough had a very low tribunal rate, one of the lowest in the country. That was a reflection of the partnership working with families to achieve coproduced EHCPs and placement outcomes.

In terms of the Local Area SEND Inspection, in July 2019 the Ofsted and CQC inspection team revisited the local area to inspect the sustained progress since March 2017. The inspection team had commented that:

- families had greater involvement in discussion and decision-making about their children's needs and how best to support them;
- Summary Assessment Meetings (SAMs), held as part of the EHC assessment process, were valued by families; and
- there was evidence of coproduction of EHC plans.

It was commented that the Summary Assessment Meetings had been specifically introduced by the local area to enhance coproduction with families. It was noted that not all local authorities had implemented that practice.

A Member raised a query about the proportion of children with an EHCP. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that there had been a significant increase in the number of children and young people requiring an EHCP. It was commented that the national figures, and the predicted increase would be circulated to Members.

A Member expressed concern in respect of the demand on professionals, given the significant increase. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that due to the recent increase and the forecasted increase, the capacity within the Local Authority's team had been increased to cope with the demand. The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that since the start of the calendar year, 250 referrals for EHCPs had been received. In comparison, last year that figure had been 180. Therefore, it was evident that the increase in referrals alone was significant. Currently there were 80 referrals that were 'live', however, as the assessment process had a timeframe of 20 weeks, those children would be at different stages in the process, for example - some were new referrals and others would be nearing the end of the process.

To date, the local area had been in a position to maintain good completion rates, however, if referrals continued to rise that could create pressure on services. It was commented that other local authorities were facing the same challenges and the increase in referrals was experienced at a national level. The issue was being regularly monitored and reviewed to establish whether additional staff members and resources were required to manage the increase.

In response to a Member's query about the employment of agency staff, the Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service confirmed that agency staff were not recruited and fixed-term positions were advertised. Employment of additional staff did impact on the Local Authority's high needs budget, however, the budget was monitored. It was also confirmed that the DfE would shortly be revising the High Needs Funding formula.

A Member made reference to a concern raised by Parents4Change in respect of transport and the shortage of drivers. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service commented that issues had been encountered in respect of recruiting drivers and the availability of vehicles and solutions were being examined. The Executive Director for Children's Services advised that Amazon had recruited a high number of drivers, which had resulted in a lower number of drivers being employed by taxi firms. Boro Taxis was currently aiming to recruit approximately 300 drivers. Specifically, arranging transport to enable families to access respite care was proving difficult, for example - short breaks care, particularly at Gleneagles. Regular meetings had been held between directorates to discuss solutions and determine a way forward.

A Member requested an example of the paperwork that families were asked to consider

during the Summary Assessment Meetings, to enable the scrutiny panel to gain an insight into the information provided. The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that the relevant services would be contacted to enquire whether information could be anonymised and shared. It was added that, through quality assurances processes, services worked collectively to ensure that the information provided to families was accessible and comprehensible.

A Member raised a query in respect of the support for International New Arrivals (INA) and those with English as an Additional Language (AL). The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review advised that the Local Authority employed translation services and worked really closely with the Ethnic Minority Achievement Team (EMAT). It was added that there was an International New Arrival Protocol in place for children who arrived in the UK with special and complex additional needs. The importance of urgently assessing the needs of those children and ensuring they had access to an appropriate educational placement was highlighted. There was a need for Education, Health, Social Care and the EMAT to work collectively to develop bespoke packages of support.

A Member raised a query regarding the 90% satisfaction rates. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that the Local Authority was unable to compare those rates with national figures, as it was only EHCP completion rates that were recorded. It was commented that the local area currently had a 98% completion rate (within the 20 week timeframe) and nationally, that figure was just below 60%. The local area's figure demonstrated that Middlesbrough's children and young people were receiving support in a timely manner.

A Member raised a query about academies supporting children and young people with SEND. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that the Local Authority had a good working relationships with Middlesbrough's academies. The Head of Inclusion, Assessment and Review added that some academies had developed additional resource bases and were actively involved in the Local Authority's SEND development work and committed to the local area's priorities.

In terms of Middlesbrough's parent forum group, the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Children and Young People's Learning Scrutiny Panel had met with Parents4Change on 23 November 2021. The Strategic Lead for the Inclusion and Specialist Support Service advised that Parents4Change worked in partnership with the Local Authority and Health. In summary, Parents4Change had been involved with developing and reviewing:

- the Local Offer to produce a directory, improve the accessibility of information and advertise the support and advice available for parents/carers;
- a Parents4Change newsletter aiming to recruit new members to the group, highlight issues raised by parents/carers and provide information on the Local Offer and drop-in sessions;
- supported internships in the local area to assist with getting young people with additional needs into work; and
- the early years service to provide greater support in the community and increase the number of children and young people with SEND being educated in mainstream provision.

At the meeting, it had been explained that a primary concern for parents/carers was transport, due to a shortage of drivers. Although school transport was being provided to enable children to access education, arranging transport to access respite care was proving difficult.

Parents4Change were currently working to recruit new members to the group, to ensure that the group represented the concerns and opinions a wide range of parents/carers from differing backgrounds and areas.

The involvement of Parents4Change in developing/improving services and practices was highly valued and the local area had previously nominated the group for a community award, which had resulted in members of the group attending the Queen's garden party in London.

AGREED

That the information presented at the meeting be considered in the context of the

scrutiny panel's investigation.

21/35

EDUCATION AND COVID-19 RECOVERY

In summary, the Director of Education and Partnerships advised that:

- a meeting had been held with secondary Heads to plan for a peak in Covid-19 rates;
- additional meetings would take place throughout the week, with all school heads, to determine a collective response and way forward;
- disruption of education and the oversight of vulnerable children were a key focus;
- some schools had reported significant staff absences, which had sometimes resulted in partial closures of schools;
- the Local Authority and schools would focus initially on managing disruption until the Christmas break, when it was hoped that, due to school closure, the spread of Covid-19 and the number of cases would decrease;
- a communication had been sent to schools, from the Local Authority (Education and Public Health), which outlined a range of control measures that required implementation in preparation for pupils returning to school in January, for example - more frequent testing, the wearing of masks, bubbles and the cancelling of events that may increase transmission; and
- planning would primarily focus on regular testing and encouraging vaccine uptake in respect of eligible students and staff members.

In response to a Member's query regarding the cancellation of Christmas events and the impact on parents/carers, the Head of Achievement advised that staff absence in some schools had been more significant than others, therefore impacting on the risk assessment process and resulting in the cancellation of events.

NOTED

21/36

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY BOARD - AN UPDATE

The Vice-Chair provided a brief update on the matters that had been previously considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Board on 9 November and 7 December 2021.

NOTED

21/37

ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

A Member acknowledged the cessation of the Governor Development Service. Staff members were commended and thanked for the valuable support they had provided.

NOTED