

2 February 2021		ITEM: 8
Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee		
SEND Inspection Outcome - Written Statement of Action Update		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Non Key	
Report of: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education and Skills		
Accountable Assistant Director: Michele Lucas, Assistant Director, Education and Skills		
Accountable Director: Sheila Murphy, Corporate Director of Children's Services		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

This report outlines the progress on the work identified within the Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Written Statement of Action, which was agreed by Ofsted in October 2019. It includes an update against the key areas identified in Appendix One.

The reporting period for this report is 1st December 2020 to Mid-January 2021

Whilst the report will focus on the WSoA, we have reported to the Committee around the wider system approach. Improvement is being undertaken to ensure that we are listening and co-producing with parents/carers and young people in the delivery of SEND services. This reporting period has also seen some of the key benefits around the merging of the SEND systems to ensure we have a single view across Education & Skills thus avoiding some of the challenges that were identified within the WSoA regarding the accuracy of data.

Outlined below are the Ofsted WSoA recommendations:

- Action 1: Inaccurate and incomplete records and ineffective oversight means that leaders did not know the whereabouts of some children and young people and what provision they have.
- Action 2: Quality assurance is not rigorous enough to ensure effective governance and oversight across the provision and services for 0 to 25-year-olds with SEND. Leaders are reliant on working relationships rather than processes. Leaders are over reliant on the limited information given to them by educational providers about the quality of the provision they purchase.

- Action 3, is about the quality of Education and Health Care (EHC) plans and Annual Reviews and is broken down into the following strands:
 - Strand 1: EHC plans and the annual review process are of poor quality. The local authority has no system in place to make sure that relevant professionals and services are notified when EHC plans need reviewing or updating.
 - Strand 2: Professionals are not routinely informed of requests to submit written information within specified timescales.
 - Strand 3: Too often, EHC plans are out of date and do not accurately reflect the needs or views of children and young people, or the views of the families.
 - Strand 4: The information from EHC plans and annual reviews is not used to inform the commissioning of services, particularly, but not exclusively, for young people between the ages of 19 and 25 years.

1. Recommendation(s)

1.1 O&S to scrutinise the work that has been undertaken during the period outlined in the report and offer support and challenge.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 This report builds on the work that has been presented to O&S in previous committee meetings. Detailed progress against the WSoA's action plan is provided in Appendix One.
- 2.2 The SEND Improvement Board, chaired by the Portfolio Holder for Education, is overseeing both the WSoA and the wider issues identified within the inspection outcome letter. The SEND Improvement Board is a multi-agency partnership recognising that this change programme includes both health and social care.
- 2.3 The SEND Operational Group provides regular updates to the SEND Improvement Board, which in turn reports back to Children's Overview & Scrutiny. Feedback provided by both O&S and the SEND Improvement Board is actioned within appendix One. A number of actions in the WSoA continue to be impacted by COVID-19 and a revised timeline plan, with revised dates, was taken to SEND Improvement Board by the SEND Operational Group. The revised dates were agreed by the SEND Improvement Board and are reported on in the WSoA plan in Appendix One.
- 2.4 Ofsted have begun a limited SEND inspection programme between September 2020 and March 2021. These short inspections are focussed on safeguarding and work during COVID in SEND and do not include the full inspection framework. It is not known when we will receive a SEND Inspection

visit to assess the progress we have made against the WSoA. We will ensure that we keep O&S updated when Ofsted restart the full inspection programme.

- 2.5 The Ofsted Regional Lead for SEND will be undertaking a review of the progress against the WSoA in the middle of February 2021 – whilst this review will not be ready for February’s O&S meeting it will be reported in the new municipal year.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 The Council has a statutory duty to support children and young people with additional needs and as such we are working with a range of partners including health, social care and schools/colleges to ensure that we use a whole system approach to ensure smooth transition pathways.
- 3.2 Appendix One gives an update around the key objectives within the WSoA, including the impact of the work and progress against those actions. These have been RAG rated to clearly show our improvement journey.
- 3.3 This report builds on the previous report and identifies areas that have been challenging during COVID 19, revised timescales have been agreed with SEND Improvement Board to mitigate the delays in implementation.
- 3.4 We have reported in previous committee meetings some of the challenges around both parent/carer and young people’s engagement and, as set out previously, we secured some additional capacity to support with this - outlined below is the work that has been undertaken to-date:-
- 3.4.1 As outlined in the December meeting, four engagement events have been held with parent/carers to begin the development of the new parent/carer forum. This work has continued and we have a core group of six parents who are keen to support this development. In the meeting I attended with the Portfolio Holder, we outlined the lack of awareness around the Local Offer. I can confirm to the committee that we have commissioned a new provider to review and update our Local Offer, and this is being undertaken in conjunction with parents/carers and young people and we are aiming for a launch by mid-March 2021. This is an exciting development and builds on the feedback we have received regarding our Local Offer from a range of stakeholders.
- 3.4.2 The service is very keen to make sure that the voice of the child/young person is at the heart of everything we do and provides a sound basis for the development of our provision. With this in mind, a range of focus groups, feedback sessions have been organised as well as the service contacting our SEND learners to hear their views on their provision and their thoughts on our Local Offer. Four exciting videos have now been commissioned and delivered providing an exciting start to our Local Offer.
- 3.4.3 The Annual Review Process – as reported in December 2020 - we have identified additional capacity to address the backlogs and we have seen improvement in this area. We continue to monitor this closely as this has the

potential to be impacted as a result of Covid and how our key partners can engage in the process if they are, for example, redeployed back to other roles due to the pandemic.

- 3.4.4 The quality of EHC plans is an area that we are working hard to address. It is worth noting to the committee that plans have many professionals contributing to them e.g. SENCo's in schools, health and social care and we have been undertaking multi agency training to ensure that we have a consistent approach to the writing and agreeing of plans. The system in place to review plans on a monthly basis is showing a steady increase in the quality of plans and this, coupled with the additional training being undertaken, should allow our improvement around the quality of plans to continue.

4. Reason for Recommendation

- 4.1 Children's Overview and Scrutiny have a clear and accountable governance and responsibility around supporting children with additional needs – the standing agenda item will enable committee members to be reassured of the progress and provide scrutiny in ensuring we are meeting the objectives outlined in the WSOA. We would ask committee members to consider how they would like us report back on progress.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

6. Impact On Corporate Policies, Priorities, Performance And Community Impact

- 6.1 This report contributes to the following corporate priorities:

Create a great place for learning and opportunity.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **David May**
Strategic Lead, Finance

Additional resources have been identified to ensure that we implement the change programme that is being developed to support children and young people with SEND. This will be monitored alongside the Written Statement of Action to ensure that they have been targeted in the appropriate place to see improved outcomes for children and young people.

In addition, the Dedicated Schools Grant has prioritised resources to support the improvement plan and respond to the increased demand in EHC plans.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Judith Knight**
Interim Deputy Head of Legal (Education and Social Care)

The Council is subject to various duties under the Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to children with special educational needs. These duties are set out in more detail in The Special Educational Needs and Disability Regulations 2014 SI 2014/1530. The regulations set out various timescales for particular steps such as decisions to make and review EHC plans.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Becky Lee**
Team Manager – Community Development and Equalities

Supporting our children and young people who have special educational needs and disabilities is a key strategic priority for Thurrock Council. The service continues to promote practice to achieve equality, inclusion and diversity, and will carry out its duties in accordance with the Equality Act 2010 and related Codes of Practice and Anti-discriminatory policy. We have recently redesigned our work around how we engage with children young people and parents/carers who require additional support. To support with this work we have recruited an Inclusion Support Officer who will be working with local stakeholders to enable us to gain feedback on service delivery and how we can ensure it is linked to service transformation.

7.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental

None

8. Appendices to this report:

- Appendix 1 - Written Statement of Action – progress update – 1st December – mid January

Report Author:

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