

SEND FUTURES CONFERENCE – 3 JULY 2018

Q&A session

Q&A Panel Members:

Elizabeth Brandill-Pepper, Lead Commissioner for Children's Services and Adult Learning Disabilities (Kingston) and Clinical Commissioning Group (Kingston and Richmond)

Councillor Penelope Frost, Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools, London Borough of Richmond upon Thames

Robert Henderson, Director of Children's Services, Kingston and Richmond, Achieving for Children

André Imich, SEN and Disability Professional Adviser, Department for Education

Charis Penfold, Director for Education Services, Kingston and Richmond, Achieving for Children

John Prior, Executive Headteacher and Deputy CEO, Orchard Hill & College Academy Trust

Q1: Whilst we understand the financial constraints, is there anyone at all in AfC arguing the case with the Councils for more money?

Robert Henderson: Obviously we are conscious of the statutory duties to children. I hope that you have heard from professionals that we genuinely really do care about children. Money is tight across the council, they have a whole range of statutory duties to a number of vulnerable people. My role is obviously to advocate for children in a responsible way. We have been to Department for Education three times putting the case that the money envelope is very tight for us and that we need more money in our local areas. This is the situation across the country. We have new administrations and we have already outlined the challenges to Cllr Frost and other senior officers in the councils. Cllr Frost and Cllr White (in Kingston) are real champions for children, they really care about children and want to do the right things. Together we will put our case in investing early. For example, we know that 50% of adult mental health issues actually start by the age of 14, 75% by age of 18, but children's mental health get just 7% of all mental health money. Our role is to put the case for children that we need more money, but there is a reality check that across the piece there is lack of money.

Cllr Frost: It is important that we actually get proper funding through from central government, right across the whole country we are in the situation where we cannot meet our statutory obligations to children. We want to put in place all the things we need to get the best outcomes for children. We cannot do it. Achieving for Children is very much on our backs all the time.

Q2. In Kingston and Richmond we are very aware of acute lack of funding for SEN, how does this compare with the national picture, is our black hole bigger or smaller?

André Imich: I'm not a scientist and I don't know anything about the science of black holes, but it seems to me that a black hole is a bad thing, no matter the size. The issues you've heard about are issues that we've heard up and down the country - pressures on High Needs Block and on Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) budgets in general. The Department for Education is certainly hearing about this. The Select Committee started taking oral contributions today and will continue its work. It will report and there will be messages coming from that. There is also going to be a spending review over the next couple of years.

The messages we are getting from local authorities on high needs funding will certainly be fed into that. We are likely to be going to the Chancellor with these messages.

John Prior: Achieving for Children is our best commissioning partner. Some are in genuine crisis and we are having to constantly negotiate on behalf of children and their families to get the right resources we need to support them. The discussions with AfC are relatively positive, they are good funders and enable us to put the right level of resource around the children. Comparatively, they are doing pretty well but it is a difficult picture nationally. There are examples where you've got the same profile of need but being funded sometimes up to £20k less in different authorities.

Q3. It is exciting that there are more places for SEND opening up locally, how are therapies being commissioned to support this?

Elizabeth Brandill-Pepper: Current commissioning arrangements across Kingston and Richmond are different. One ambition should be that there is a consistent offer across the two so there is a joint health and education focus on getting the best possible allocation of resources. We need an honest debate on where therapy is effective. The term "therapy" captures a lot of interventions. We know from research that they are not all the most effective.

Robert Henderson: We are doing a review of our therapies. Developing an evidence base is important to that but I also believe we need to try to get some of the funding that we are using on very high cost out of borough placements back into our local system so we can get a much better, richer local option. We will have a team that we can deploy through our early intervention panel to go in very early with the right level of expertise. If we can meet children's needs, preventing costs from escalating, we can keep investing in the services they need.

John Prior: We know that therapies work best when they are embedded and blended with the overall curriculum so kids aren't taken out, "theraped", and then put back in their class. We often find that we are constantly having to go back and renegotiate the level of top ups for SEMH placements as it is very piecemeal. We did an audit of this and developed a more joined up approach that enabled us to go back to the commissioner and say we think that we can deliver for "x", we won't come back and ask for any more, and we will deliver within that allocation - this way we can plan ahead, build a therapy team that is consistent and stable.

Q4. Given the funding challenges, how can we best support those children on SEN support and how can we ensure an even distribution of special educational needs in local schools?

Charis Penfold: Good SEND teaching is good teaching for every child. Having upskilled teachers in your school will benefit everyone. Feeling more confident to support children at the earliest opportunity will make a big difference with them. This is not always about huge resources - it is about skilled adults who know what they are doing as well as some highly effective short intervention packages that make a big difference, like our SCIP packages in Early Years in Kingston - those children access mainstream very quickly. Children when they start at Reception go to their local school. We can't influence how many of those have SEN. We can be more robust about in-year admissions through our fairer share panel, but this is really challenging. I ring so many schools that say they are not the place to take that child at that time.

This happens too often, I am now more robust about going back, and asking what can we do to support you? What do you need from us to do it? Tracey Coton is working in a creative, solution focused way having said yes. But Heads need to challenge each other, if they know this is happening, raise it with their peers.

Q5. What is the Government going to do make schools be more inclusive?

André Imich: Government have created a national framework - the law - that requires mainstream schools to admit children when named on plans. If they refuse, we will take action with schools when we know this happens. We need to make sure we have a performance system that recognises the achievements for all and so that all schools want to admit children equally. Schools are not all equally pulling their weight and there is a real challenge in taking this on. We all need to act as champions of children and young people and challenge back. Schools that take more than their fair share are doing it because other schools aren't pulling their weight.

John Prior: Ofsted identified 300 high performing secondary mainstream schools that have had significant fall in roll between years 10 and 11 and will be looking at that more closely. Local authorities get a hard time for the lack of universal services available to families now. But universal services shouldn't just mean local authority commissioned universal services, it is your local shop, swimming pool and school that have that mindset about SEN and disability. Somehow we need to develop the idea that universal services means what we all do, not just what the local authority does.

Charis Penfold: There is a real difficulty when some of our schools are not full, that's where the spaces are, but then it quickly becomes a very unfair share.

Q6. What will Richmond Council be doing to improve SEND awareness and improve SEND awareness in schools?

Cllr Frost: This is a direct challenge to the new administration. We're going to have to really think about how we do improve SEND awareness. I thought I was relatively *au fait* with SEND issues but it has been a bit of a whirlwind for me over the last couple of months. Meeting up with people in the voluntary sector, I have learnt about things I just didn't know about and it has been an eye opener for me. We must make sure we champion those groups that do such incredibly hard work.

Q7: Mental health services are key to implementing SEND reforms effectively particularly for children with complex needs. How will these needs be met in Health, Schools and Social Care?

Elizabeth Brandill-Pepper: Government has invested more in CAMHS services and a Green Paper has been published setting out ideas to roll out and improve access to mental health support embedded into schools. If I'm honest from clinical perspective, we actually don't know what to do, particularly in the Early Years phase, to prevent emerging mental health issues. This will be a test it and see situation. There is lots of activity around it. In terms of investment, the additional has all gone back into existing services. We have been pushing back to Government for more money in this area so that the mental health offer is consistent for all children.

Q8: ADHD Richmond: Congratulations to AfC for arranging this open forum and thank you for inviting us to be here with our stand and promote what we're doing. We have a 2020 vision that every teacher and teaching assistant is trained in ADHD. A lot of teachers and Heads here will probably agree that ADHD is probably the most challenging of needs. We have a training offer where our own teachers will come into school and will train you. We don't charge, we're not even a charity, we're just a bunch of volunteers. Do you agree that every teacher should be taught about ADHD?

Charis Penfold: Yes. If we are saying that you want every member of staff to be confident and competent to understand behaviours we need to provide training. I would say we need this training for all the main presenting needs in our boroughs.

Cllr Frost: We are very impressed with your offer and we are very much going to get behind your offer. We would love to see this training in all schools, thank you for the offer.

Q9: We constantly see teachers coming through Initial Teacher Training (ITT) having had just an afternoon or couple of sessions on SEN only. What is the Government doing to ensure trainers tackle SEN more thoroughly?

André Imich: Teacher training is a limited time and there's an awful lot to get through. This is not just an issue about ITT, it is an issue about ongoing CPD as well once teachers get into the classroom, as well as how they are supported after that. There are or can be wider opportunities for teacher training beyond ITT. Government is certainly trying to get more opportunities for teachers in training for those who know they want to teach in a special school. But it is a challenge to get the level of detail in generalist teacher training. The role of SENCO very important in training teachers.

John Prior: We wanted to become a teaching school but we didn't meet criteria. We are thinking about trying to become the first national SEND SCITT. We 'grow our own' staff because the half day training on ITT is not sufficient. We are employing really good people but they don't have the specialist and theoretical knowledge to put that pedagogy in place.

Q10. There's a lot of emphasis on more and more paperwork. What about assessment of impact? What about cutting the paperwork so that we can do the doing?

Charis Penfold: Much of our paperwork is bound by statutory requirements, but we're looking into how to streamline and have less paper. I am frequently asked why the SEN team do more photocopying than other teams. Portal (a case management system) is a good system. Secure information sharing has always been the issue with electronic systems.

Robert Henderson: If you've got really good ideas on how we can reduce paperwork and what bits of paperwork don't improve outcomes, email Charis.

André Imich: If you can tell us which pages of the SEND Code of Conduct we can remove, please do. We started with 130 pages, went to consultation and people asked for more guidance so we had to add in more.

Q11. What percentage of Richmond children with an EHCP receive Pupil Premium Grant? What are we doing to help disadvantaged parents that have children with SEN?

Robert Henderson: We have tried to get our family support teams and our social workers inducted into SEN. They are a real conduit for parents who are struggling who have social and economic issues and problems. The SEN team have been delivering training and awareness to our family support and social work teams. We also have a rolling programme of joint sessions between SEN and Social Care. There is a cultural shift in Social Care beginning to understand that SEN is about vulnerable children and getting social workers to be skilled in looking at vulnerable children with SEN, as well as making them aware of children's rights and everyone's responsibilities.

Q12. Can we have more information about the Early Help panel that you mentioned at another meeting?

Charis Penfold: This is the early intervention panel that I mentioned, there will be three panels, an Early Years panel, a primary panel and a secondary panel. Each panel will meet once every half term. We will be sending out further details early in the Autumn term.

There was no time for the following question during the Q&A session but a response was sought from André Imich following the event.

Q13. AfC excuses unlawful statement transfer processes by saying the DfE told them the priority was meeting the 1/4/18 deadline? Can André Imich confirm whether that is correct? What will be done to rectify poor statement transfer EHCPs urgently and to prevent this in the future?

André Imich confirmed that the DfE has given all local authorities a consistent message - that statements will no longer have legal status from 1st April 2018, and therefore all transfer reviews of statements needed to be completed by 31 March 2018. Advice to individual local authorities such as Richmond and Kingston where there was a backlog in completion has been to complete wherever possible but to ensure that a quality process and plan was delivered, and to keep families fully informed about progress. The DfE are now giving very clear messages to all local authorities that, where the transfer process may not have been completed in line with the requirements, they prioritise these for early annual reviews, and work closely with parents and carers to ensure that families are satisfied with their child's EHC plan.