

Update report

1. Introduction

There have been considerable developments in the national SEND agenda since September.

On 6th September, the Department for Education announced a major review into support for children with special educational needs. The new review will look at how the system has evolved since 2014, and how it can be made to work best for all families and ensure the quality of provision is the same across the country. Recognising the importance of joined-up support, it will also explore the role of health care in SEND in collaboration with the Department of Health and Social Care. On the same day the government also announced that Tony McArdle will be the new chair of the SEND System Leadership Board, which brings together sector leaders across Education, Health and Social Care to drive improvements. He will also act as an independent advisor to the review.

On 23rd October, the House of Commons Education Select Committee published its report on SEND. The report follows an 18-month inquiry into Government reforms aimed at placing children and young people at the heart of the SEND system. The Committee heard from more than 70 witnesses and received more than 700 submissions of written evidence. The Committee concludes that while the reforms to the support for children and young people contained in the Children and Families Act 2014 were the right ones, poor implementation has put local authorities under pressure, left schools struggling to cope and, ultimately, thrown families into crisis. The report recommends a series of measures to strengthen inspections, support parents going through the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process and ensure those responsible for SEND provision are held accountable when things go wrong.

The Committee makes the following key recommendations:

- A more rigorous inspection framework for local authorities, with clear consequences for failure. There should be a greater focus on SEND in school inspections.
- A direct line for parents and schools to appeal directly to the Department for Education where local authorities appear not to be complying with the law.
- Powers for the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman to investigate complaints about schools.
- The development of more employment and training opportunities for post-16 young people

Also in October the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman published their report *“Not going to plan? Education, Health and Care Plans two years on”*. The report pointed to strong strategic leadership in the most effective local areas establishing joint working between education, health and care services, but also suggested weak leadership was an issue underpinning many of the problems identified. Issues raised in local areas included:

- local area leaders being unaware of the concerns and frustration of local parents;
- a large proportion of parents lacking confidence in the ability of mainstream schools to meet their child’s needs;
- weaknesses in access to specialist and therapy services;
- under-developed designated Medical Officer (DMO) and designated Clinical Officer (DCO) roles leading to poor joint working, collaborating, commissioning and poor quality EHC plans;
- elected council members not holding local area leaders to account well enough;
- not enough progress in implementing a coordinated 0–25 service for children and young people with SEND;

Over the past two months there have also been various announcements from central government relating to funding increases for schools and also specifically for SEND. The latest is that this new national funding includes £780 million in 2020-21 to help children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to reach their potential.

Kingston's SEND Transformation Plan was due to return in updated form (including alignment to the 5 year Deficit Recovery Plan submitted to the Department for Education in June) to the Children's and Adults' Care and Education Committee and to the Health and Wellbeing Board in November. This will now happen in January.

2. Workstream 1: Co-production, engagement and participation (previously Strategy and Governance)

This workstream has been restructured and renamed following the completion of certain objectives (e.g. establishing the Partnership Board) and the transfer of other actions to separate task and finish groups (e.g. workforce initiatives).

Five members of the Parent Consortium have formed a steering group to establish the official Parent Carer Forum (PCF) for Kingston. They are now working with the national charity Contact to formally launch the Forum in the next few months. The group will be seeking a local voluntary sector partner organisation to provide operational support, funded by a proportion of the £15,000 annual grant available to PCFs from the Department for Education. In the meantime, the Parent Consortium will continue to operate as it has done since May. The SEND Partnership Board benefitted from parent representation for the first time in September, when one member of this steering group joined the meeting. This representation will continue for future meetings.

The workstream continues to meet on a monthly basis with both parents / carers and young people represented. October's meeting included a focus on the ASD strategy lead by AfC's Lead School Improvement Advisor for SEND, and an update on the therapy review from the (new) Designated Clinical Officer. The principal agenda item at November's meeting was the "Transitions Navigator", which when launched will help improve the experience of young people and their families as they move into adulthood.

In early November four Kingston young people joined representatives from the Council, AfC, and Your Healthcare at a workshop in central London to investigate how digital technology could be used to improve engagement with the 4000 Kingston families impacted by SEND. Hosted by one of the large consultancy firms, and co-delivered by a technology company, the session served as a reminder of the huge value in harvesting the voice of young people. A proposal on next steps is expected to be received before the end of the month.

3. Workstream 2: Commercial thinking

A new Director of Commissioning for the CCG is now in post. He will work closely with AfC's new Director of Commissioning and Partnerships, who is expected to be appointed in November. This will result in a more coordinated and systematic process to agreeing placements and commissioning services with tighter ongoing contract management arrangements to give quality and financial benefits.

4. Workstream 3: Local provision

With the new academic year has come another significant increase (49) in the number of local specialist school places for children and young people with SEND. Building on the 35 new special school and specialist resource provision (SRP) places in academic year 2018/9, 2019/20 has seen an additional 23 special school places (16 at St Philips and 7 at Dysart) and 26 SRP places (four at each of Castle Hill, King Athlestan and Tolworth Girls', six at Coombe Girls' and eight at The Hollyfield School). The specialisms of these new places are speech, language, and communication needs, social emotional and mental health needs, hearing impairment, emotional health and complex and moderate learning difficulties. The tender to operate the new free special school specialising in Autistic Spectrum Disorder in Kingston has

now closed and entries are currently being considered jointly by the Council, AfC and the Department for Education. An announcement on the successful party is expected early in 2020.

The review of speech and language, occupational and physiotherapy is ongoing and remains on track for the recommissioning of services from April 2020. Parental consultation concluded on 5th of November, with Schools Forum set to consider some of the financial implications of the growth in need on 19th November. A fuller public report is expected before the end of the calendar year.

5. Workstream 4: Early intervention and planning

A new approach to the Early Intervention Panel has now been adopted, building on the learning from the review of the panel's first twelve months of operation undertaken at the end of the summer term. The intention is to make the panel more relevant and accessible to cases more quickly after need is identified. This reflects feedback from schools and multi agency professionals on the panel that cases being considered would have benefitted from additional intervention before need had escalated as much as it had. It will therefore be early intervention in a truer sense.

Total EHCPs at 4/11/19 stood at 1278. This represents a 12.3% increase in total EHCPs over twelve months (previously 1138). The rate of increase in total plans is also growing. Many recent requests for assessment are for cases with considerable complexity requiring significant social care intervention. Some include needs arising from factors associated with wider family challenges, and demonstrate the need to mobilise a true multi agency approach, much wider than purely education, to provide the support required.

A new early intervention initiative was launched in November. This piece of work will look at services supporting the "first 1000 days" of a child's life. A workshop took place on 6 November with representatives including from the Council, AfC, Your Healthcare, Public Health, Homestart, and Kingston Hospital.

6. Workstream 5: Assessment and planning

96% of all Kingston EHCPs issued since April have been within the 20 week statutory period. This compares favourably to Kingston's performance in 2018/19 which was 76.6% and the England average of 60.1%. The team continue to deliver this strong performance in the context of considerable increase in total EHCPs, and a more rigorous and higher quality approach to the annual review process. From the end of August the quality of EHCPs is being audited via a sampling QA process, and although only 6 out of the 15 plans considered in September were deemed to be good or better, it is significant that this QA work is now being undertaken in a systematic fashion.

7. Workstream 6: Home to school travel

New collection points on some routes were implemented from the start of this academic year. Families and children and young people have been, and will continue to be, supported in this transition and performance is being closely monitored. Despite a high number of late applications, home to school transport has settled well. The new collection points are working well and have good parental support. The new transport provider procurement system is also progressing as planned.

8. Finance update

The High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), is now forecast to overspend by £7.3 million in 2019/20. This will take the cumulative overspend in Kingston's DSG, including the £3 million advance received in 2018/9, to £21 million by the end of this financial year. Note that this forecast assumes an increase in total EHCPs of 120 for the financial year, compared to an actual increase over the twelve months to 4 November 2019 of 140.

In September Government announced a national increase of £700m (later changed to £780m) in 2020/21 for children and young people with the most complex needs. For Kingston this translates to an uplift of about £1.5m for that financial year after adjusting for population uplift.