

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 their 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.

Richmond's SEND Futures Plan will be updated in 2020, and will return to this Board after stakeholders have responded with comments on a proposed draft.

A task and finish group, chaired by Ian Dodds, Managing Director of AfC, has been established to consider whole system SEND workforce challenges and agree an action plan to address. The action plan is expected to be finalised by the end of March 2020, with implementation thereafter. This is in addition to the considerable workforce initiatives already underway.

The SEND Futures Conference will be on 30th June 2020. Discussions with stakeholders, including parents and carers, on the format and content are now underway.

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

Richmond's Parent Panel has met three times since the start of the academic year. Considerable progress has been made with the establishment of a Parent Carer Forum, and in October the group advertised for a 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.

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 led 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. Two parents and one young person from Richmond attended that meeting.

In early November one Richmond young person and one representative from the Parent Carer Forum joined representatives from AfC and a health provider at a workshop in central London to investigate how digital technology could be used to improve engagement with the 4000 Richmond 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 has since been received.

Other relevant activities include:

- Schools and Richmond College have piloted the use of surveys to get feedback from children and young people on EHCPs and Annual Review process. The pilot revealed that we need to gain this feedback through face-to-face consultations and not via surveys
- Formal reporting on engagement now occurs quarterly and an action planner to track all agreed actions and decisions is established. Engagement/co-production activities with children, young people and parents/carers are now fully mapped in one place
- Feedback that requires follow up is shared on a weekly basis with SEND QA, who follows up with parents where there are concerns and they are dissatisfied with the process. A tracker has been set up to track the status of these cases.
- Agreement has been reached with Health on the process of how feedback (related to health) will be shared with them and how they will follow up and plan improvements based on this.
- Regarding Early Years parental engagement and early intervention, AfC have been working with Children's Centres to host parent drop in sessions, led by children's centre practitioners and professionals from areas of

SEND (e.g. OT & Physio, SaLT, Portage, EP, Sensory impairment). The first term of delivery is complete - resulting in 100% (22) parents feeling confident in their ability to support their child's needs (up from 72%).

- Sessions are now planned to hold face to face consultations with children and young people receiving SEN Support, to hear their feedback and plan into improvements
- A pre-14 coffee morning is scheduled for 6 December, with a focus on annual reviews
- Conversations about developing an online EHC Hub (which provides transparency for all involved in the process) is ongoing in AfC and is currently dependent on receiving funding to purchase the Firmstep Platform. We have discussed the EHC Hub with Stoke, who have implemented this in their borough. They say the biggest improvements was parental satisfaction with the process.
- We have been successfully awarded money from the LGA digital fund, to develop a Chatbot on Local Offer website. Plans are in place to consult with CYP and parents on how to develop this to meet their needs.

One voluntary sector organisation has suggested that agencies should make greater utilisation of their existing meeting structures, rather than add additional "SEND meetings" to an already busy diary. Subject to wider agreement on this point, agencies will look to adopt this approach more fully from early 2020.

3. Workstream 2: Joint Commissioning

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 has been appointed and is expected to start before the end of Q1 2020. 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. A key priority in this workstream, and particularly for these two new roles, is the agreement of a Joint Commissioning Framework.

4. Workstream 3: Local provision

With the new academic year has come another significant increase (22) in the number of local specialist school places for children and young people with SEND. Building on the 38 new special school and specialist resource provision (SRP) places in academic year 2018/9, 2019/20 has seen an additional 14 special school places (at the new special free school for speech, language and communication needs Capella House) and 8 SRP places (five at Darell Primary School's provision for moderate learning difficulties and three at the new social, emotional and mental health provision at Richmond Park Academy). The tender to operate the new free special school specialising in social emotional and mental health needs in Richmond 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 provision in Richmond (and Kingston) continues. Consultation events finished on 5th November, with an initial consideration of the financial implications of the growth in need for therapies being considered at Schools Forum on 21 November. A fuller public report is expected before the end of the calendar year. This will inform the commissioning of future services from April 2020. The Schools Forum report is available here:

<https://cabnet.richmond.gov.uk/documents/b13195/Schools%20Forum%20Supplementary%20Agenda%20Thursday%2021-Nov-2019%2013.30%20Schools%20Forum.pdf?T=9>

Richmond headteachers are contributing to a working party on the future of Alternative Education Provision the borough for academic year 2020/21.

Considerable work relating to the local offer for young people aged 16 to 25 years, and the preparation for arriving at that stage, is ongoing. Two AfC colleagues visited the Post 16 Maze support group in November to collect feedback on

the development of the post 16 “Navigator” tool. A range of discussions are taking place between AfC and Richmond Council on improvement proposals.

5. Workstream 4: Early intervention and transitions

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 18/11/19 stood at 1483. This represents a 9% increase in total EHCPs over twelve months. 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.

6. Workstream 5: Assessment and planning

Over 97% of all Richmond’s EHCPs issued since April have been within the 20 week statutory period. This compares favourably to performance in 2018/19 and to 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. Since the end of August the quality of EHCPs is being audited via a sampling QA process in a systematic fashion. The Local Government Association SEND Peer Challenge that took place in October included some pleasing feedback on the quality of EHCPs.

The appointment of a Designated Clinical Officer by the CCG is a significant and welcome development. Alison Stewart began work in September and is already having a significant impact. Alison is working closely with the interim SEND QA Lead. Observations on current EHCP quality include an over prevalence of education orientated outcomes (and a need therefore to raise the profile of health and social care outcomes), and the fact that personal budgets, healthcare plans and short break provision feature too seldom in plans where there is evidence of their need or of parents’ desire to explore options. IT systems do not currently permit multi-agency access to information to complete QA activities and so consideration of how processes can be changed to encourage collaborative working is ongoing.

Next steps for the SEND QA process include:

- A continued focus on high quality training for AfC teams around EHC plans, outcomes, the golden thread and holistic plans that address individual needs and aspirations across education, health and social care
- Analysis of joint commissioning processes to explore barriers to delivering health services identified in EHCPs
- Continued joint work to elicit best practice exemplars for health and social care contributions to EHCPs
- Case studies and exemplars of good practice in personal budgets, short break provision and health outcomes to drive improvements
- Securing collective ownership and responsibility from across education, health and social care for actions arising from multi-agency QA activity

For the CCG priorities now include:

- Multiagency QA process for EHCPs with health representation at each meeting.

- Development of QA process for health advice through Health SEND Clinical Reference group (inaugural meeting dec 10th)
- Deep dive of sample of EHCPs by DCO and Service Manager SEND (22.11.19) to look at thread from advice to plan, in particular considering sections C and G.
- Review of local service guidelines for provision of health advice
- Working with CCG to review mechanisms for reporting on timeliness of advice

8. Finance update

The High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG), is now forecast to overspend by £5.5 million in 2019/20. This will take the cumulative overspend in Richmond's DSG to £16 million by the end of this financial year.

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 Richmond this translates to an uplift of about £1.9m for that financial year after adjusting for population uplift.

A Deficit Recovery Plan was submitted to Government at the end of June 2019. Feedback has recently been received and the DfE have requested further information as well as a meeting with the Council.

There is now national recognition that high needs funding is insufficient with 32 Councils required to submit Deficit Recovery Plans last year.