

CHILDREN'S SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE



Report subject	SEND Improvement Update
Meeting date	26 November 2024
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This paper provides an update on the progress to date and work being carried out across the BCP place with regards to the improvements required in the Local Area SEND system. It provides an update of work across the partnership with regards to the SEND Improvement Plan and associated Performance Scorecard.</p> <p>The Performance Scorecard will both identify and evidence the performance areas and improvement metrics that can demonstrate that the partnership is making sustainable improvements.</p> <p>The report also outlines the current funding position for SEND services, for the Council.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>The Committee note the work currently being carried out across the wider partnership within BCP place for its SEND Services.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To ensure that all stakeholders within and across the SEND system are aware of the positive improvements in the SEND system and the future work required regarding the Safety Valve programme and supporting DSG plan.</p>

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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Update

1. Background Detail

1.1 The SEND Improvement journey has been an absolute focus of BCP's Children's Services since the DfE and NHSE review visit in July 2023. The outcome of this visit deemed that the level of progress had been too slow and that the SEND system had not yet made the progress required to ensure a good standard of service delivery for children and their families across the SEND partnership in BCP local area. A resultant Statutory Direction (28 February 2024) was issued to ensure that the right improvement focus, and attention be given to the SEND system to make the essential improvements.

1.2 Against the outcome of the DfE and NHSE visit in July 2023 and subsequent Statutory Direction a new SEND Improvement Plan was co-produced across the partnership, including representation and engagement with Parent Carers Together and Parent Carer Forum organisations within BCP local area (Appendix 1). It reviewed the historic Written Statement of Action Plan and held internal and external meetings to identify the barriers and opportunities for improvement.

1.3 The resulting improvement plan has 8 priority areas. These are focused on ensuring that the systemic faults in the system are addressed individually and moreover, that all actions work in an integrated fashion to ensure the SEND system in the BCP local area is stabilised and ensures a good sustainable future. The priority areas are Leadership Management and Governance, Co-production and Communication, Early Identification and Intervention, Inclusion, Pathway, Sufficiency, Preparation for Adulthood and Managing Resources. Each priority area has actions with agency and service leads being responsible for their delivery.

1.4 Alongside the new SEND Improvement Plan, a new refreshed SEND Improvement Board was established in the Autumn of 2023 and is chaired by John Coughlan, DfE advisor to BCP Council. This Board meets every 6 weeks and reviews the partnership's progress against the identified milestones.

1.5 Working with the Parent Carer Together and Parent Carer Forum a SEND Partnership Scorecard was created (Appendix 2). This scorecard has several qualitative and quantitative measures to assess progress. The scorecard is updated and is subject to external scrutiny at the SEND Improvement Board by the Chair. This mechanism ensures that there is full transparency and accountability in place regarding the measurement of progress and impact of the improvement actions. This scorecard is now available to access on the local offer within 1 week of the SEND Improvement Board meeting.

2. SEND Improvement updates

2.1 The 8 priority areas are currently focussed on 143 actions, and work has continued in earnest since its implementation. Good progress is being made in many areas, the system is improving and at speed. There are some areas within the Improvement Plan which continue to have some slight delay for various reasons. These are managed through risk assessments and mitigating actions, and regular internal monitoring processes which ensure there is consistent visibility. None of the delays experienced so far have had a significant impact in the overall direction of the improvement journey.

2.2 A key feature of the SEND improvement plan is the restructure of the SEND Service, which has been designed in close liaison with Bedford Sector Led Improvement Partner to address areas of weakness in the current system. The restructure has now been completed and officers started in their new posts on 4.11.24. The service remain fragile with several officers new to posts and recruitment to vacant posts still underway, but the right structure is now in place and will allow agency staffing to be phased out and a permanent, stable workforce to be secured. Alongside the restructure, a comprehensive workforce development plan is underway with Bedford SLIP.

2.3 Following the dedication of the SEND Team in addressing the EHC Needs Assessment 20 week timescale, there is no current backlog of EHC Needs Assessments. There have been a very small number of EHC Needs Assessments which have slightly exceeded the 20 week timescale but this has been agreed in a planned and child-centred manner and determined as necessary in collaboration with the family where they have requested additional time to consider the content of the assessment, for example.

2.4 The Annual Review backlog has continued to decrease because of a focussed effort by the Delivering Better Value Team. Their work has now concluded and there has been increased monitoring of Annual Review timeliness due to the backlog starting to increase. A delay in the implementation of the SEND restructure (due to an extended staff consultation period) has impacted the services' ability to achieve annual review timescales as 5 out of 6 key posts created to ensure compliance in this area (the Assistant EHC Officers) are vacant and recruitment is underway. A report was presented at SEND Improvement Board on 28 October which identified immediate and longer-term actions required to address this situation as a priority (see appendix 3)

2.5

	Sep-23	Mar-24	Sep-24	Notes and comparative data
6 wk decision	93.2%	96.4%	100%	
20 wk timeliness inc exceptions	2.6%	67.1%	94.4%	
EHCP waiting over 30 wks	186	105	0	
Education Psychologist timeliness	0.0%	91.8%	78.8%	

Health timeliness	77.9%	91.1%	70.1%	
AR backlog	1383	1030	1038	
% parent/carers requests	44%	22%	54%	
CYP awaiting specialist placement			143	Not previously recorded – first number at start of tracking in Spring 2024 = 270

3. SEND Sufficiency - current status of pupils without specialist place

3.1 As part of the SEND Sufficiency Strategy, the Council identified a shortfall of specialist provision to meet the needs of unplaced children with an EHCP. Approximately half of these require primary school places. Cohort analysis identified that additional primary school places were required for children with Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC) and Social Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH).

3.2 To address short-term need for additional primary places, the Council invited bid proposals from local school headteachers to co-locate bespoke specialist provision on mainstream school sites for the 2024/25 academic year (Round 1). Proposals were received from our local school partners for a total of 70 places and working with our school partners, proposals for four bespoke provisions were approved. Based on the average cost of an independent specialist school place (£49k) and the agreed cost per place at the bespoke provisions (£18k in Year 1) each place generates a cost avoidance of £31k per place.

3.3 The process reveals that there is a willingness of partners to engage and be part of the solution. It is planned to replicate this process to address unplaced secondary school age children and respond to subsequent demand across the age range of children with an EHCP who require specialist provision. The Council will take the learning of Round 1 and use this to improve subsequent rounds. This approach delivers priorities contained in the newly developed SEND Sufficiency Strategy which is a key part of the Council's work to deliver a sustainable and stable system. The strategy focuses on getting local partners and stakeholders working in the best possible way within the current system to ensure that the needs of children and young people are met without escalating costs and supporting delivery of the DSG Recovery Plan.

3.4 Given the scale of our immediate challenge, the Sufficiency Strategy describes the actions we are taking now to respond to pressures in the system over the next two years. However, it is not just about building new provision. A major part of the strategy is the delivery of changes needed to improve our inclusion practices across the system.

3.5 Aligned to regional and national trends, it is imperative that patterns and trends in our system are reflective of an inclusive education across the BCP local area. This is not the

work of the Local Authority alone; it involves Health and schools supporting our SEN learners.

3.6 Key work has been undertaken on our Belonging Strategy which focusses on promoting the concept of belonging and the importance of our schools ensuring that all of their children and young people having that sense of belonging at their school. This strategy, alongside SEND and Sufficiency Strategies is set to be published during this half term. Alongside this strategy element, an Innovation Fund has been developed – a £2.8 million Fund agreed by schools to be top-sliced from their budget to enable BCP to provide additional support and opportunities for inclusive practice in mainstream schools. The final proposals include new Inclusion Consultant roles to support and challenge schools, increased Outreach and training offers, and the opportunities for schools to bid for Innovation Project funding to enable them to support their own cohorts of children more effectively within their own setting. These proposals are set to be considered at Schools Forum on 18.11.24 with implementation due to start after this point pending approval.

3.7 The impact of this work is expected to result in more children and young people with SEND being effectively and appropriately supported to thrive in mainstream without the need for EHCPs and without the need for specialist provision placements for as many pupils. The system is intended to see fewer exclusions and suspensions, and increased levels of attendance for pupils with SEND. This in turn should result in reduced levels of requests for EHCNAs with resulting reduced pressure for specialist placements.

3.8 Alongside the progress to improve inclusive practice above, there has also been continued work on the area of Alternative Provision. Several workshops were held in the Spring and Summer of 2024, resulting in an Alternative Provision Improvement Plan and Oversight Board being created. The focus of this area is on ensuring that Alternative Provision fits appropriately as part of the graduated response to meeting children and young people's needs, and that it delivers on the multi-tiered approach laid out by the DfE in the SEND and AP National Improvement Plan. This will ensure that Alternative Provision plays a key role in supporting inclusion by providing support at earlier stages to enable schools to continue to support their own pupils, by enabling reintegration back into school for many pupils who do access Alternative Provision, and by ensuring that there is a quality provision that results in positive outcomes for children and young people who do access it for both short and medium term periods of time.

3.9 All current Alternative Provision providers have been reviewed to ensure they are compliant with BCP commissioning expectations, and a list of complaint providers is now shared with schools to provide greater assurance to them when arranging their own Alternative Provision of which providers are compliant. A commissioning framework is set to be developed, alongside consideration of the creation of a traded offer for schools to purchase which would result in BCP arranging placements on behalf of schools, giving BCP greater assurance over the provision arrangements and clearer oversight of the pupils attending Alternative Provision.

3.10 There has been a continued focus on co-production and work with Parent Carers Together who have submitted an outline of the work they will do against the funding for next year. This is being reviewed currently.

3.11 In addition, Senior Leaders across the Education and Skills Directorate have hosted a series of Locality Events to which all parent/carers of children and young people with SEND were invited to attend. Events were held in Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole and careful consideration was given to the accessibility of each venue. There was also an online event too. The feedback from each event has been extremely positive and officers have taken key points of discussion away which will inform the SEND improvement plan further. These events will be held every 3 months moving forward.

4. Summary of Financial Implications (in consultation with Finance support)

4.1 Whilst the BCP Local Area SEND system has significantly changed for the better over the last academic year, this improvement work has adversely increased the overspend within the High Needs Block budget.

4.2 The refreshed forecast is for an overspend of £16.5m, which is £0.6m more than indicated in the quarter 1 budget monitoring report. This forecast also means the Council is predicting to spend £44.5m more in 2024/25 than the grant made available by the government. This new forecast includes the cost of all new plans agreed as at July 2024 with a revised profile of projected assessment volume based on the current rate which is driven by local education settings and parents and carers. [Appendix 4 - Cabinet Paper 02-Oct - High Needs Expenditure forecast.](#)

4.3 Numerous mitigations are already in place in relation to the overspend as a system wide approach. Sufficiency work as described in this update is underway to increase specialist placements within the maintained sector, to reduce the reliance upon high-cost independent schools. This includes the future build of the new free school that has been approved by the DfE. Substantial work to increase consistent high quality inclusive practice across all mainstream schools is underway, including the planned use of the £2.8 million Innovation Fund to support and challenge schools. By increasing the capacity to have more pupils supported to thrive appropriately in mainstream schools, this will have a resulting outcome of reducing the requirement and demand for the specialist placements. The funding systems for special schools and mainstream schools are also being renewed in the coming 6 months to ensure efficient, fit for purpose funding models that meet pupils' needs but also offer best value at the same time. These are however, systemic changes that will take a period of time to take effect. In the interim, all current spend on high cost provision is agreed through a Panel process to ensure that all appropriate options have been explored and exhausted for children and young people before a high cost placement is agreed to, to ensure best value for money.

5. Summary of Legal Implications (in consultation with Legal support)

N/A - this report provides an overview of the work of the SEND Improvement Board and Improvement Plan

6. Summary of Human Resources Implications (in consultation with HR support)

N/A - this report provides an overview of the work of the SEND Improvement Board and Improvement Plan

7. Summary of sustainability impact

N/A - this report provides an overview of the work of the SEND Improvement Board and Improvement Plan

8. Summary of public health implications

Public Health colleagues are involved in the work of the SEND Improvement Plan and are therefore appropriately engaged.

9. Summary of equality implications

N/A - this report provides an overview of the work of the SEND Improvement Board and Improvement Plan

10. Summary of risk assessment

N/A - this report provides an overview of the work of the SEND Improvement Board and Improvement Plan

11. Supporting Documentation/Appendices

1. SEND improvement Plan
2. SEND Scorecard for SEND Improvement Board September 2024
3. Annual Review report for SEND Improvement Board 28.10.24
4. High Needs Grant Expenditure Forecast report to cabinet 2.10.24