

Committee: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel

Date: 13th February 2019

Wards: All wards

Subject: Survey work with parents/carers involved in the EHCP process

Lead officer: Rachael Wardell, Director of Children Schools and Families

Lead members: Cllr Kelly Braund, Cabinet Member for Children Services

Cllr Caroline Cooper-Marbiah, Cabinet Member for Education

Contact officer: Karla Finikin, Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Integrated Service

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report.

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1. The report provides members of the panel with information on the ways in which parents/carers provide feedback and recommendations to the Local Authority regarding the Education, Health and Care needs assessment the Final Plan and the Annual Review process.

2 DETAILS

2.1. Merton SENDIS currently maintains 1768 Education, Health and Care Plans and is in the process of undertaking 134 new Education, Health and Care needs assessments as of the 29th January 2019. There are 13 full time equivalent staffing within the SEN team. There are three staff undertaking new assessments, six staff working 0-14years and four staff working with pupils aged 15-25years. The average caseload for staff within the casework teams is 176 pupils per staff member.

The views of parents and carers are gained in multiple ways. As part of the continuous improvement agenda within SENDIS we have parental and carer representation on the following:

- SEND Implementation Focus Groups x 7
- Kids First SEND Implementation Group
- Patient Engagement Group (CCG)
- Merton Information Advice and Support Steering Group

- Transport Assistance Working Group
- EHCP Quality Assurance Working Group
- Autism Strategy Steering Group
- Preparation for Adulthood Board

2.2. In addition to seeking the views of parents/carers from the above groups, the Head of SENDIS attends regular sessions with Kids First Parent Forum to answer specific questions raised by parents and to hear feedback on areas for development across the SEN process. Although Merton has low Tribunal rates (four Tribunals lodged with the Tier 1 Tribunal in 2018 academic year), we take the lessons learnt from this to amend our practice.

2.3. Positive feedback from parent/carers included that Merton SEND was reported to be accessible and available to parents if they had questions or concerns pre or post EHCP process. Specific case officers were supportive and explained the EHC needs assessment and Annual Review processes well, and were knowledgeable regarding local resources available to parents. There was evidence of collaborative working during the EHC needs assessment including health and education professionals. The referral process was clear and the decision about whether the LA would take an EHC needs assessment were made in a timely manner. There is also evidence of clear communication between allocated workers within SEN and parent's/carers

2.4. The areas for development include the timeliness of undertaking an EHC needs assessment and issuing a Final Plan within the 20-week timescale, which is currently at 56%. The capacity of partner agencies to meet their 6-week deadline for providing professional advice is impacting on the timescales which parents are understandably concerned about. This is particularly in relation to Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) and Occupational Therapy (OT). There is an active recruitment drive to employ qualified SALT and OT to meet the demand for assessment and provision delivery. Parents/Carers have understood the delays and some have chosen to wait to receive the professional advice rather than issuing a plan within 20 weeks that does not clearly outline the necessary outcomes and provision.

Parents reported that there was variable advice from Social Care and Health colleagues and identified the need for outcomes training as part of workforce development, particularly in relation to specificity of provision and Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) outcomes. Some Social Care and Health teams require additional training and support in understanding their role in co-producing EHCP's and in providing clear outcomes and provision for their relevant sections of the Plan.

2.5. Parents/carers stated that the S.19 principle "supporting and involving children and young people" required further development. Children and young people should be contributing at the point of referral for an EHC needs assessment and during the assessment process and any subsequent

reviews of the plan. Contribution from parents is stronger than contribution from young people at this time.

2.6. Parents/Carers expressed some concerns about the Annual Review process and stated they would like to support the development of Annual Review Guidance and a review of the current Merton Annual Review documentation to ensure that schools and parents/carers understand the purpose of the meeting and the statutory timescales for the Annual Review. Parents/Carers would like to see further embedding of the person-centred approach to Annual Reviews. The EHCP Quality Assurance group which is being established and will include parental/carer representation, will undertake this development work in the coming term.

2.7. A few parents identified the need for a Q&A handout and guidance for parents regarding the EHCP process. Initial work has already begun on this and will be published on the Local Offer. Identification from parents/carers of need for training in relation to the EHCP processes.

2.8. In line with parental/carer feedback it has been agreed that the LA needs to implement a consistent and robust process for gathering the views of parents/carers and young people going through the assessment process and at annual reviews. The LA commenced using the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool in January 2019. POET has been designed to capture the views of children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners so that results can be triangulated to establish the key process conditions associated with positive outcomes. Testing has already demonstrated that POET has the potential to provide a straightforward and powerful way of finding out about the experience of obtaining an EHCP and in some cases a personal budget and related outcomes.

The Children and Young People's POET has been developed by In Control and the Centre for Disability Research at Lancaster University with funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Children and young people, parents/carers and practitioners from six local authority areas volunteered to work on the development of the tool. Please find included in this report the POET parent/carer questionnaire.

2.9. Parents were surveyed as part of the Higher Needs Funding Review and were concerned about the amount of local specialist provision which resulted in pupils accessing schools out of Borough. Perseid school has recently been expanded and a successful capital bid will mean that the LA will be expanding Cricket Green School in addition to adding numbers to the Additionally Resourced Provisions in local schools.

2.10. In response to the feedback from parents that the LA has received over the last year a number of actions have been taken which include:

- Training programme implemented for SCO's regarding annual review processes and requirements
- The Designated Medical Officer has developed a standardised template for professional advice from paediatricians to improve health input to EHCP's

- Established working group with SENCO's to develop outcome tracking tool
- Introduction of the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool to ensure regular views are sought from parents/carers/young people and professionals.
- Established regular working group to review Parent/Carer involvement
- Parent/carer membership of the Preparation for Adulthood Board
- Capital bid for expansion of local provisions. Including expansion of Cricket Green and a new Additionally resourced provision

- 2.11. Future developments directly resulting from parental feedback include the review of EHC documentation (referral, EHC Needs assessment, EHC Plan and Annual Review documentation) as part of the implementation of the EHC Hub. In addition a training program will be developed and delivered to health and social care colleagues to ensure compliance with statutory requirements and to ensure that the provision outlined in the professional advice are clear and specific.

The LA will work with schools on a robust planned phase transfer process for nursery to reception, primary to secondary and post 16+ to ensure that all pupils have a named placement by the Feb 15/31 March deadline. The timetable will be communicated to the parent carer forum and circulated to all parent/s/carers and young people in phase transfer cohorts in October/November 2019 to ensure that the LA has parental and young person preferences by December 2019 for consultation.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. No specific implications for this report

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. No specific implications for this report.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. No specific implications for this report.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. None

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. None

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. None

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

10.1. None

**11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE
PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT**

ANNEXE – POET SURVEY

12 BACKGROUND PAPERS

12.1. None

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