

Transitions from children's to adult services for children with special educational needs and disability

Final report and recommendations

Healthier communities and older people overview and scrutiny panel

Task group membership

Councillor Anthony Fairclough
Diane Griffin, co-opted member
Councillor Natasha Irons
Councillor Rebecca Lanning (Chair)
Councillor Dickie Wilkinson

Scrutiny support:

Stella Akintan, Scrutiny Officer
For further information relating to the review, please contact:

Stella Akintan
Democracy Services Team
Merton Civic Centre
London Road
Morden
SM4 5DX
stella.akintan@merton.gov.uk

Acknowledgments

The task group would particularly like to thank the parents, voluntary and not-for-profit organisations and council officers who shared their views and experiences with us.

All contributors and are listed in appendix one of this report

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Foreword by the Task Group Chair, Councillor Rebecca Lanning.

Navigating the transition from childhood to adulthood – while often an inspiring and exciting period in one’s life – can be challenging. But not all challenges are equal.

For young people with special educational needs and disability (SEND), the journey to adulthood is more complex. And too often the challenges outweigh, and in some cases, extinguish any initial optimism. These young people, who represent 15% of children in England, are: three times more likely to lack a close friend, seven times more likely to be excluded, twice as likely to experience persistent bullying most days at school and four times more likely to experience mental health problems than their non-SEND peers. By the time they reach adulthood, they are nearly twice as likely to see friends only once a year, twice as likely to be living in poverty, four times as likely to be single^{1,2} and, while far less likely to be employed, if they do have a job, it will likely be part-time and poorly paid³.

This is not the future that we in Merton want for our young people. Indeed, our aspiration for young people with SEND is no different to the aspirations we hold for any of the children and young people across our borough: to lead happy and fulfilled lives. As such, we hope that through our review and recommendations, we will continue to empower young people with SEND to play a central role in determining what they want to achieve. To equip them with the information and skills they need to realise life-transforming outcomes through greater independence, access to employment and community inclusion.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the task group members who committed and contributed to this review of a complex, challenging and critically important area. I would also like to share my gratitude to Stella Akintan, scrutiny officer, who supported each of us in our first task group review as new councillors.

This review wouldn’t have been possible without the time and expertise afforded to us by: Linda Jordan who shared the complex national landscape with us; council officers who explored their local insights and experience; Andrew Whittington, Chief

¹ Special Educational Needs, House of Commons Hansard 20 March 2019, Volume 656

² Why are so Many SEN Children excluded from school: Because we are failing them. The Guardian Online 27 October, 2016.

³ Evidence submitted by Mencap to the Work and Pensions Select committee. The Work Programme, Experience of different user groups. 2012-2013

Executive, Merton Mencap who shared the voluntary sector perspective, and the parents of young people who have experienced transition in Merton – those who we most earnestly hope our recommendations will support.

List of task group's recommendations

Recommendation	Responsible decision-maker(s)	Pages
1. Simplifying the transitions process for young people and their families		
Recommendation one: Continue to embed the Preparing for Adulthood recommendations within the EHCP framework, in collaboration with parents, service users and voluntary organisations	Cabinet Children, Schools and Families Department	Page 16
<p>Recommendation two: Develop a visual pathway for Merton's process for transition to children social care to Adult social care. to inform parents and young people on what they should expect from transition. This should provide clear, comprehensive and accessible information and support advice about the opportunities that are available.</p> <p>Ideally these would be separated into themes that young people and carers can identify with, such as the four pathways suggested by PfA: Employment, Independent Living, Community Inclusion and Health. This could also be represented in an infographic style, as developed by the BMJ (This is based on NICE Guidance NG43: Supporting Young People in their transition to adults services.)</p>	Cabinet Community and Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments	Page 16
Recommendation three: Clarify the role of local authority officers in relation to the London Borough of Merton's statutory functions and ensure clear staff communication on handovers, in the event of different workers working with a family	Cabinet Children, Schools and Families Departments	Pages 16-17
2. Clear, comprehensive and accessible information: The Local Offer		
<p>Recommendation four:</p> <p>a) Conduct a wholesale review of the local offer, in consultation with service users, parents and groups such as Merton's Learning Disability Forum, Kids First and Adults First. This review should improve the quality of information published on the website, and ensure the language used is appropriate, simple and sets out easy-to-</p>	Cabinet Community and Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments	Pages 17-18

<p>navigate information on provision available for children, young people and their families</p> <p>b) Improve the visibility of services available for young people with SEND on the local offer, aligned with the visual pathway above for continuity. Include brief details on eligibility, price, whether there is a waiting list and whether services form part of a universal, targeted or specialist offer</p> <p>c) Include a contact telephone number and / or email address on the local offer website for general information and advice, to aid accessibility and navigation for families</p> <p>d) Improve the comment box on the local offer website to invite young people, parents and carers to provide feedback on the local offer, and create a hyperlink to the homepage to facilitate ease of use. This will not only support the Code of Practice recommendations but also provides an opportunity for continual review, adaptation and improvement of the local offer for families</p> <p>e) Publish a glossary of SEND acronyms and abbreviations on the local offer website, in line with the proposal to publish an FAQs and 'myth buster' page</p> <p>f) Increase the promotion of Merton's Disability Database and M-Card via the local offer website and encourage all local partners, including voluntary groups, schools and the CCG to publish a link to the database and the local offer</p> <p>g) Review and improve signposting opportunities on the local offer, particularly for those who may not meet the national eligibility (Care Act 2014) for adult's social care, to ensure they are able to achieve and maintain independence</p>		
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3. Enabling families to better navigate the transitions process		
Recommendation five: Undertake a pilot project whereby a named social worker or 'transition worker' is appointed to the SEND Team to provide expertise and direction to young people in Year 9 and their parents who have been identified as having substantial needs but unlikely to meet the threshold for adult social care services. This would help families better navigate the planning process from the age of 14 years onwards, describe what can be expected to have happened by key stages in the transition process and plan for the future	Cabinet Children, Schools and Families Department	Page 18
4. Empowering young people and their families through advocacy		
Recommendation six: Invite bids or otherwise explore opportunities to implement an advocacy service with an appropriate provider, akin to Core Assets, to support young people with SEND and their families	Cabinet Children, Schools and Families Department	Page 19
5. Encouraging early planning to assist adult social care		
Recommendation seven: Implement a monitoring and tracking framework for children with SEND with an EHCP who do not meet the national eligibility criteria for adult social care, but are otherwise referred to adult social care between the ages of 14-25 to ensure that no young person does not receive the support they need	Cabinet Community and Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments	Page 21
6. Actively promoting employment and volunteering opportunities		
Recommendation eight: Collaboration with Merton's Learning Disability Forum, Kids First and Adults First to co-develop marketing and promotional tools for adult education and vocational courses within available resources and link to the local offer	Cabinet Community and Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments	Page 22
Recommendation nine: Recognising the value of peer support, explore the expansion of befriending and mentoring opportunities for young people with SEND	Cabinet Children, Schools and Families Department	Page 22
Recommendation ten: Encourage expansion of work placements, apprenticeships and voluntary opportunities available in the borough through outreach to a wide range of local employers, educational establishments and trade bodies.	Cabinet Environment and Regeneration Department	Page 23

<p>The SEND team to liaise with the Merton Partnership Economic Wellbeing sub-group to establish links with local employment and training providers. SEND team to work with the Business Rates team to make contact with key businesses in the borough</p>		
<p>Recommendation eleven: Strengthen the volunteering opportunities available at the end of all adult education courses by launching a pilot volunteering project across Merton libraries to attract more people with SEND. To ensure these opportunities are accessible for those who need more support, request collaboration with Merton Mencap’s job coach to provide training to existing staff and volunteers. This then has potential to evolve into a peer support model, with appropriate safeguards in place</p>	<p>Cabinet Community and Housing Department</p>	<p>Page 23</p>
<p>7. Empowering parents through travel training</p>		
<p>Recommendation twelve: Expand the travel training offer by equipping parents with the tools to provide the accredited training course. As part of Merton Mencap’s travel training programme, introduce a termly initiative whereby travel training is provided to parents, who can become trainers and support their children to travel independently.</p> <p>The ambition of this recommendation is to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Encourage a peer support network for parents; b. Improve resilience for parents and young people; c. Increase the potential for young people to access education, employment and leisure opportunities; and d. Reduce parental fears and anxieties and enable more independent time, for example to continue employment or further study 	<p>Cabinet Community and Housing and Children, Schools and Families Departments</p>	<p>Page 24</p>

Introduction

Purpose

1. In June 2018 the Healthier Communities and Older People Scrutiny Panel commissioned a task group review to consider the experiences of young people transitioning from children's to adult's services. The task group agreed to focus on one service area to ensure the review would be thorough and comprehensive.
2. The task group agreed to focus their attention on young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) as it emerged that this area has undergone significant service change following the Children and Families Act 2014, and associated SEND Code of Practice. The task group also found that demand for SEND services in Merton are increasing, and it is an area of high spend within the council.
3. From the outset of the review, the task group were keen to ensure Merton had adopted the aspirational approach to transitions enshrined in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the associated SEND Code of Practice 2015. This will form the basis of an Ofsted / CQC inspection into SEND provision in Merton over the next two years. At the time of writing 68 inspections have been carried out so far across the country, with serious failings found in just under half⁴.
4. Transition planning is an important step in preparation for adult life. The SEND Code of Practice outlines a good transition as focused on achieving a young person's full potential, based on their desires, skills and abilities. There should be a strong partnership approach between children's, adults, education and health services. The ambition of the young person should be central to all planning.
5. However, the delivery of this aspiration is set within a challenging context of rising demand alongside diminishing resources available to local authorities to implement these duties. The demand for services for children and young people with SEND has increased dramatically in recent years, and this trend is reflected nationally. The number of children or young people with SEND requiring an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) has risen by 35% between 2014 and 2018. As London's school age population continues to grow, this figure is set to rise.⁵
6. The task group members have recognised the challenging financial climate and looked at creative ways to strengthen existing services. It is not an in-depth review of all aspects of the transitions process but looks at the Merton experience for young people and their families.

⁴ High Standards and Highly Inclusive, OFSTED blog, 10 September 2018.

⁵ Have we reached a 'tipping point'? Trends in spending for children and young people with SEND in England. Local Government Association, 2018

7. As a result of discussions with the National Development Team for Inclusion and officers from children's services and the adult social care department, the task group largely focused on transitions support for young people who have an EHCP, although opportunities for those with mild-to-moderate needs were also considered and form part of this review. It was agreed that this approach was important and timely because:
- A SEND inspection is imminent in Merton
 - The SEND service has undergone rapid change to implement new legislation and a scrutiny review could help to identify the strengths and areas for development from this process so far
 - This is an area of high spend within the council so a review could help to improve service provision and could also identify much needed financial savings for the council.
8. The task group's terms of reference were:
- Review the transitions process and make recommendations for improvement
 - Review opportunities to increase volunteering and employment to reduce isolation amongst adults with SEND
 - Review support for those with substantial needs to ensure they are able to maintain independence and not revert to critical care in future
9. Appendix one contains a list of witnesses at each meeting.

10. The national policy context

11. New duties in relation to special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) contained in the Children and Families Act 2014 (part 3) came into force in September 2014 and placed responsibility on local authorities together with health commissioners and providers (early years settings, schools and the post-16 further education sector), to identify and meet the needs of disabled children and young people and those who have special educational needs aged 0 to 25.
12. Changes included a new assessment process resulting in a single Education, Health and Care plan (EHCP) for those whose needs could not be met solely within schools. It also included personal budgets and a 'Local Offer' which could help families engage better in developing a local service provision 'market' that could meet their child's needs. The new system was aimed to be easier to navigate and to give families and young people a greater say over the support they receive.
13. In July 2014 the Government published a new SEND Code of Practice that provided statutory guidance on the responsibilities of local authorities, educational establishments such as early education settings, schools and

academies together with health organisations to those with special educational needs in accordance with the Children and Families Act 2014.

14. SEND area inspections

15. As well as legislation, a SEND Inspection regime – jointly run by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) – is tasked to assess how well local areas support children and young people with SEND.
16. As part of these local area inspections, the council is expected to take a leadership role in providing SEND services. Half of all local areas have been inspected since the inspections came into force four years ago. Local areas are not given a grade as a result of the inspection but if the service is found to be below standard, they are provided with a written statement of action.
17. Many local authorities are still getting to grips with these changes and this is reflected in the relatively high number of councils receiving statements of written action from Ofsted. In October 2018, 68 local areas had been assessed, and inspectors said they had “serious concerns” in 30 cases (44% of those examined), requiring those areas to detail how they would address “significant areas of weakness in the local area’s practice”⁶. Merton has not yet been inspected but it is expected shortly and the neighbouring borough of Sutton had their inspection in January 2018.
18. The task group met with Linda Jordan from the National Development Team for Inclusion which provided the context and helped to set the tone for the review.
19. She explained that the Children and Families Act 2014 represented a monumental cultural change in the delivery of services to children with SEND. Prior to this, it was found that professionals worked in silos with little coherent planning. As a result, families received a poor and disjointed service. These changes seek to ensure key stakeholders work together on commissioning and planning services and take a holistic approach to the needs of the young person.
20. It is important that young people with SEND are integrated within – and feel included in – society from a young age. Early year’s provision within the borough should be integrated with people with a range of abilities to nurture friendships and to ensure that disability is normalised and supported within peer groups. It was suggested that this would help to combat the isolation many people with SEND experience in adulthood.
21. The task group were challenged to remember that all young people – irrespective of need or ability – want to lead fulfilling lives and reach their full potential.

⁶ Young People with Special Educational Needs failed in 44% of areas in England, Guardian online, 24th October 2018.

22. SEND support in Merton – The current picture

23. A child is considered to have a special educational need or disability if they have greater difficulty in learning than those within their age range, or if they are not able to make full use of the educational facilities for pupils of their age. This covers a broad range of need from autistic spectrum disorder to communication and physical disability. More than 1.2 million school pupils (about 15% of all those in England) have SEND⁷, of whom 250,000, or one in five, have either a statement of SEN or an education, health and care plan in place⁸. The percentage of pupils with identified SEN but whose needs are not complex enough to qualify for a statement or EHCP reduced from 18.3% in 2010 to 11.7% in 2018, while the proportion with complex needs remained static⁹.
24. Those with a higher level of need will have their support needs set out in an EHCP. At the time of writing, there were 1796 pupils in Merton with an EHCP. Merton's case load also includes over 3000 children who have been identified as having mild-to-moderate needs, and also receive some support from the Council.
25. The task group were informed that of these figures, approximately 15 to 20 cases per year meet the eligibility criteria under the Care Act for adult social care services.
26. The trends in Merton are similar to the national picture and the borough is facing rising demand in primary age pupils requiring SEND support. The council is aiming to meet this need through expansion of the local special needs' schools which will also reduce reliance on more expensive out of borough placements.

27. Simplifying the transitions process for young people and their families

“Transitions should be embedded into early years and not considered simply a move from children's to adult services” **Linda Jordan, Senior Development Advisor, National Development Team for Inclusion**

28. Planning for individual transitions begins in year nine when a young person is 14 years old¹⁰. There is a multi-agency approach to transitions, involving the council, health, education and disability teams. This planning sets out the aspirations of the young person – preparing them for adulthood – and meetings take place annually until they leave school.
29. The assessment to determine if a young person is eligible to receive adult social care provision begins at age 16, when decisions need to be taken about services the young people will receive post-18.

⁷ Young People with Special Educational Needs failed in 44% of areas in England, Guardian online, 24th October 2018.

⁸ Special Educational Needs, House of Commons Hansard 20 March 2019, Volume 656

⁹ Special Educational Needs, House of Commons Hansard 20 March 2019, Volume 656

¹⁰ Based on discussions with senior officers from the children's and adult's social care department during the task group review

30. Parents shared their varied experiences of transitions and one of the clearest shared concerns centred around communication of the transitions process. As open and adequate communication that supports parents, carers and young people to prepare for adulthood is at the core of the SEND Code of Practice, this was an area that the task group was keen to understand and help address.

31. While parents of service users in Merton spoke highly of the staff they came into contact with, some remarked that the communication from all stakeholders – including the Council – had not sufficiently enabled nor empowered them to take control of their support, limiting their ability to actively participate in the local community. They noted:

- Lack of clarity provided on the transitions portal
- A paucity of information on the local offer
- Challenges in navigating the pathway from year 9 into adult services
- High turnover of case workers and having to start from the beginning each time there was a change in staff

“A good transition is where people understand their choices”
**Departments of Children’s Schools and Families, and Community and Housing,
Merton**

32. This has led to a sense of isolation and, in some cases, despair on the part of some local parents, which appears to have limited the extent to which young people are involved in decisions about their future. Contrary to the aspirations of the Code of Practice, a view was conveyed that some Merton parents feel uncertainty that their child – with the right support – could find employment, be supported to live independently, and participate in their community.

33. The high levels of frustration amongst parents and the feeling they need to ‘fight’ for provision for their child is reflected nationally. The new system rightly encourages parents to get involved in decisions about their child’s care. However, some parents feel they have to advocate strongly for their child’s future and as a result it is the most forceful and articulate parents who obtain the best support.¹¹

34. The task group raised these concerns with the Head of Service for the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Integrated Service (SENDIS) who reassured the group that a wide range of engagement with service users takes place, in addition to working closely with parent’s forums such as Kids First, with whom the task group met. The Head of Service for SENDIS has an important role in listening and implementing changes where possible and managing the

¹¹ Together: Transforming the lives of children and young people with special education needs and disabilities in London. , London Assembly 2018.

expectations of parents and service users as the council adheres to a legislative framework and works within significant budget restraints.

"A more specific checklist for transition from childhood to adulthood, especially around that 18-year-old mark is really key"

Comments from Merton parents with children of transition age

35. The concerns raised by parents did not come as a surprise to the Head of Service for SENDIS who is aware of these issues from her regular meetings with Kids First. While parents expressed a concern about the high turnover of case workers, Merton does have a stable team. The 'turnover' is a result of each case worker having over 250 cases which requires the service to be flexible in the allocation of specific pieces of work to ensure that work is managed in a timely manner. The information on accessing Adult Social Care on the Local Offer is currently being reviewed so it is clearer on the process and what is in place if a young person does not require Adult Social Care services. Nonetheless, there were a number of recommendations identified by task group members to simplify the transition process for young people and their families.

Recommendations

1. Continue to embed the Preparing for Adulthood recommendations within the EHCP framework, in collaboration with parents, service users and voluntary organisations
2. Develop a visual pathway for Merton's process for transition to children social care to Adult social care. to inform parents and young people on what they should expect from transition. This should provide clear, comprehensive and accessible information and support advice about the opportunities that are available.

Ideally these would be separated into themes that young people and carers can identify with, such as the four pathways suggested by [PfA](#): Employment, Independent Living, Community Inclusion and Health. This could also be represented in an infographic style, as developed by the [BMJ](#) (This is based on NICE Guidance NG43: Supporting Young People in their transition to adults services.)

3. Clarify the role of local authority officers in relation to the London Borough of Merton's statutory functions and ensure clear staff communication on handovers, in the event of different workers working with a family

36. Clear, comprehensive and accessible information: The Local Offer¹²

“The answer to everything is ‘it’s on the local offer’ but if you don’t know what you are looking for that doesn’t really help”

Comments from Merton parents with children of transition age

37. Many parents felt that existing information and communication has not enabled nor empowered them to take control of their support, limiting their young people’s ability to actively participate in the local community.
38. Parents told the task group that the Local Offer needs to be clearer, easier to navigate and kept up to date. They felt that there is a limited range of services available in the borough, particularly in regards to daytime activities for older children. This led the task group to consider employment and volunteering opportunities which will be discussed later in the report.
39. Following discussion with parents and the Chief Executive of Merton Mencap, the task group outlined detailed recommendations to improve access to the Local Offer. These suggestions should be taken forward in collaboration with representatives from those who use the service including parents and young people. The Head of Service for SENDIS agreed with this approach and noted that the Local Offer is a fluid resource and is regularly updated in consultation with community groups.

Recommendations

4. Conduct a wholesale review of the local offer, in consultation with service users, parents and groups such as Merton’s Learning Disability Forum, Kids First and Adults First. This review should improve the quality of information published on the website, and ensure the language used is appropriate, simple and sets out easy-to-navigate information on provision available for children, young people and their families

Improve the visibility of services available for young people with SEND on the local offer, aligned with the visual pathway above for continuity. Include brief details on eligibility, price, whether there is a waiting list and whether services form part of a universal, targeted or specialist offer

Include a contact telephone number and / or email address on the local offer website for general information and advice, to aid accessibility and navigation for families

¹² The Local Offer is a web based list of service provision for children and young people with SEND to enable them to access a full range of support including 24 hour respite care within the borough, and is an road map for parents to sign post them to organisations to support them (their need). The Children and Families Act 2014 places a duty on the local authority to produce a Local Offer and stipulates that it must contain information from across education health and social care. The Local Offer is considered as an important tool to give greater choice and control to parents.

Improve the comment box on the local offer website to invite young people, parents and carers to provide feedback on the local offer, and create a hyperlink to the homepage to facilitate ease of use. This will not only support the Code of Practice recommendations but also provides an opportunity for continual review, adaptation and improvement of the local offer for families

Publish a glossary of SEND acronyms and abbreviations on the local offer website, in line with the proposal to publish an FAQs and 'myth buster' page

Increase the promotion of Merton's Disability Database and M-Card via the local offer website and encourage all local partners, including voluntary groups, schools and the CCG to publish a link to the database and the local offer

Review and improve signposting opportunities on the local offer, particularly for those who may not meet the national eligibility (Care Act 2014) for adult's social care, to ensure they are able to achieve and maintain independence

40. **Enabling families to better navigate the transitions process**

"Children's services stop the day before the young person turns 18. [It's] a cliff edge [that] makes turning 18 seem a punishment"

Comments from Merton parents with children of transition age

41. Local parents informed the task group that having the support of a social or 'transitions' worker could make a significant difference in helping to navigate the transitions process, as the easiest transitions are for those with access to a social worker and to adult social care.

42. The Head of Service for SENDIS has identified the need for clear social work assessments to determine whether social care provision is required. A provisional discussion regarding a dedicated social worker in the team has been put forward to the CSF DMT and further discussions are taking place to appoint a fixed term position to develop the assessment systems within CSF and to liaise with the Transitions Team in Adult Social Care. The task group would like to endorse the request for this post.

Recommendations

5. Undertake a pilot project whereby a named social worker or 'transition worker' is appointed to the SEND Team to provide expertise and direction to young people in Year 9 and their parents who have been identified as having substantial needs but unlikely to meet the threshold for adult social care services. This would help families better navigate the planning process from the age of 14 years onwards, describe what can be expected to have happened by key stages in the transition process and plan for the future

43. **Empowering young people and their families through advocacy**

"Parents have great aspirations for their children but poor information and red tape quickly erodes this and undermines what is possible"

44. The task group was informed that when the latest SEND changes were first implemented the Department for Education provided advocacy support through an organisation called Core Assets to support the change from a Statement of Educational Need to an EHCP. It was run by parents whose children had SEND. The parents understood the SEND Code of Practice and were able to assist parents – based on their experiences – to ensure their views fed into the EHCP. They attended meetings with parents, spoke to case workers on their behalf and met with the Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs). Their role was strengthened by the fact they were independent of the school and the council.
45. The task group were told that this organisation made a significant difference to parents as it not only provided support during the process but also enabled parents to access services they would otherwise not have known they were entitled to.
46. The Head of Service for SENDIS said she recognised the benefit of this service however the decision was made by the Department for Education not to continue with this support programme.

Recommendations

6. Invite bids or otherwise explore opportunities to implement an advocacy service with an appropriate provider, akin to Core Assets, to support young people with SEND and their families

47. Support for young people who do not meet the threshold for adult social care

“Children’s services stop the day before the young person turns 18. [It’s] a cliff edge [that] makes turning 18 seem a punishment”

Comments from Merton parents with children of transition age

48. The task group found that young people do not always transition from children’s to adult’s services which can be challenging for young people and their families. To retain eligibility and qualify for adult social care they must have a long-term disability and be assessed as having a critical need. Therefore, a large cohort experience a significant reduction in support from what they received in children’s services.
49. A concern raised by the task group was whether monitoring of those who do not meet the threshold for adult social care is undertaken to ensure young people are sufficiently independent and have the right level of care once leaving children’s services, so that they do not re-enter the social care system at a later date. This is most likely to impact upon those on the autism spectrum for which there has been 214% increase in numbers of young people diagnosed with this condition.

50. The Care Act guidance stipulates that local authorities should identify and track those who are not receiving children’s services but are nevertheless likely to have care and support needs as adults.

51. The task group believes it is important to identify and track children and young people who have low level need as they could be vulnerable in future. The London Borough of Newham has adopted this approach and have developed a project to address this.

Case study

Newham employs a transition service that has a particular focus on 14- to 25-year-olds and has appointed a health care professional to this team to continue the integration agenda. This service meets regularly with special educational needs coordinators (SENCOs) to provide information about the team and the work, including the referral process. Relationships are built through regular visits to schools and via workshops for staff and parents. In addition, data are made available from the education sector on all of those identified as having special educational needs. This is added to a tracking list, which is cross-referenced with social care and health, allowing early identification to be made.

Reference: <https://www.scie.org.uk/care-act-2014/transition-from-childhood-to-adulthood/early-comprehensive-identification/appendix/london-borough-newham.asp>

Recommendations

Review and improve signposting opportunities on the local offer, particularly for those who may not meet the national eligibility (Care Act 2014) for adult’s social care, to ensure they are able to achieve and maintain independence*

**Forms part of the recommendations under the ‘local offer’*

52. Encouraging early planning to assist adult social care

“One area of improvement for adult social care is that can begin the planning and preparation for transition at a much earlier stage”

Department of Community and Housing, Merton

53. There was general consensus from witnesses across task group meetings that adult social care services could plan and prepare for transition at an earlier stage. This would help families to better prepare for the future and potentially reduce pressure on budgets. Meetings with families in Year 9 should cover expectations (particularly related to eligibility for adult social care), and explain differences in service provision from children’s to adult’s social care. It was also suggested that earlier planning could help to reduce pressure on budgets as adult social care services may be able to better forecast.

54. Parents also described transition as particularly stressful and suggested the process outlined in the Code of Practice is rarely followed. As a result of poor communication, it was suggested that the easiest transitions are for those with a social worker and access to adult social care. Difficult transitions exist for those who are not accessing social care, and where parents are supporting their child with SEND without additional support. This often necessitates parents leaving paid employment to become an informal carer for their child(ren). A concern raised by the task group was whether monitoring of those who do not meet the threshold for adult social care is undertaken to ensure young people are sufficiently independent and have the right level of care once leaving children's services, so that they do not re-enter the social care system at a later date.

Recommendations

7. Implement a monitoring and tracking framework for children with SEND with an EHCP who do not meet the national eligibility criteria for adult social care, but are otherwise referred to adult social care between the ages of 14-25 to ensure that no young person does not receive the support they need

55. Actively promoting employment and volunteering opportunities

"People with SEND want friends and to do things that others do"
Linda Jordan, Senior Development Advisor, National Development Team for Inclusion

56. The task group strongly support increasing and promoting opportunities that help young people build the skills for independence and create pathways for voluntary work or employment, where possible. The Code of Practice suggests that 'the vast majority of young people with SEN are capable of sustainable paid employment with the right preparation and support', which the task group believes Merton should continue to encourage. Linda Jordan from the National Development Team for Inclusion said that prior to 2014, many young people were progressing to college but not gaining the skills for paid employment, nor supported to plan for their long-term future. The parents the task group met in late 2018 echoed these concerns for young people transitioning in the borough now.

57. The task group heard firsthand about social isolation amongst young people with SEND. All parents talked about a 'cliff edge' at the end of EHCP at about age 19. A lack of activities in the community and social isolation only gets worse after college. Parents told the task group that they opt to continue education as they feel it is the only form of activity available.

58. The task group found that there are some excellent employment opportunities in Merton which are designed to support people with SEND. However these tend to provide places to a small number of people and are only available for the short term.

59. The task group heard from the Head of Libraries and Heritage Services that a variety of encouraging Learners for Learning Disabilities (LLD) programmes are now available, which focus on life skills. Many of these courses are free of charge. However, it was disappointing that the parents had not heard of these courses. Task group members were pleased that the Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education Services said that there are plans to improve the marketing of these courses in collaboration with interested groups.

"We are keen to promote the courses as they are new and have only been running for two years"

Library, Heritage and Adult Education Services, Merton

60. The Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts overview and scrutiny task group which took place in 2017¹³ seeks to address this issue, as does the Business Skills strategy however the task group are concerned they may not be addressing the needs of those who are furthest from the job market.

Recommendations

8. Collaboration with Merton's Learning Disability Forum, Kids First and Adults First to co-develop marketing and promotional tools for adult education and vocational courses within available resources and link to the local offer
9. Recognising the value of peer support, explore the expansion of befriending and mentoring opportunities for young people with SEND

61. Merton has a nationally recognised volunteering scheme involving over 700 people from the community. The scheme ensures that everyone can contribute including ex- offenders, those with substance misuse issues or seeking a Duke of Edinburgh Award.

62. It was noted that there have also been seven people with SEND who have volunteered with libraries in the last year. The task group would like to build on our excellent track record and provide further opportunities for this group of young people. The Chief Executive of Merton Mencap said they could work with

¹³ Routes into employment for vulnerable cohorts
https://www2.merton.gov.uk/routes_into_employment_for_vulnerable_cohorts_in_merton.pdf

the council to develop this offer and include the use of their 'work place' coach to provide support and expertise for helping to integrate a young person into a volunteering role.

Recommendations

10. Encourage expansion of work placements, apprenticeships and voluntary opportunities available within the council and in the borough through outreach to a wide range of local employers, educational establishments, BIDs and trade bodies.

The SEND team to liaise with the Merton Partnership Economic Wellbeing sub-group to establish links with local employment and training providers. SEND team to work with the Business Rates team to make contact with key businesses in the borough

11. Strengthen the volunteering opportunities available at the end of all adult education courses by launching a pilot volunteering project across Merton libraries to attract more people with SEND. To ensure these opportunities are accessible for those who need more support, request collaboration with Merton Mencap's job coach to provide training to existing staff and volunteers. This then has potential to evolve into a peer support model, with appropriate safeguards in place

63. Empowering parents through travel training

"Travel training is a turning point in their son or daughter's life"

Merton Mencap

64. The Travel Training Programme provides young people with SEN the skills and confidence to make journeys on public transport. Parents and the Chief Executive of Merton MENCAP told us that travel training is an important step in helping a young person gain independence. This provision needs to be expanded and made available to more young people so can access employment and volunteering opportunities. In light of the current financial restraints and challenge with finding more money to expand this service. The task group, parents and Chief Executive of Merton Mencap believe that parents and carers could potentially be trained to provide travel training.

Recommendations

12. Expand the travel training offer by equipping parents with the tools to provide the accredited training course. As part of Merton Mencap's travel training

programme, introduce a termly initiative whereby travel training is provided to parents, who can become trainers and support their children to travel independently.

The ambition of this recommendation is to:

- a. Encourage a peer support network for parents;
- b. Improve resilience for parents and young people;
- c. Increase the potential for young people to access education, employment and leisure opportunities; and
- d. Reduce parental fears and anxieties and enable more independent time, for example to continue employment or further study

Appendix

The Task Group have met with the following witnesses:

Senior Development Advisor, National Development Team for Inclusion
The Head of Service for SENDIS, Merton Council
Interim Head of Older Adults and Disabilities, Merton Council
Head of Library, Heritage and Adult Education Services, Merton Council
Five parents from Kids First, Merton Mencap Parents Forum
Chief Executive, Merton Mencap