

**SCHOOLS FORUM****19<sup>th</sup> June 2019****Report of the Executive Director for Children's Services****SEND – Derbyshire Strategic Review****1. Purpose of the Report**

To inform the Schools Forum of the key issues and recommendations from the SEND Strategic Review 2018-2019.

**2. Information and Analysis**

In the autumn of 2018, Isos Partnership was commissioned by Derbyshire County Council, working with partners and members of the County's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategic Board, to undertake a strategic review of the support services and provision for children and young people with high needs in Derbyshire. The scope of this work, and the definition of "high needs", included children and young people aged from birth to 25 with SEND, both with statutory education, health and care (EHC) plans and non-statutory SEN support, and those requiring additional inclusion support or alternative provision (AP).

The review had a strategic focus. The purpose of the work was not to judge or evaluate the quality and operation of any specific service, provision or process. Instead, the aim was to provide an objective and evidence-informed perspective on how the current continuum of support, services and provision for young people with high needs in Derbyshire was working and to help to shape an overarching strategy for developing an effective strategic approach to supporting young people with high needs in the future. To do this, the review sought to:

- a. gather evidence and views on the current needs, trends and likely future demand for support, services and provision for children and young people with SEND;
- b. shape options and recommendations for meeting the needs of children, young people and families in Derbyshire in the future; and
- c. work collaboratively, iteratively and in a spirit of co-production with partners and stakeholders to build consensus and agree solutions to meet current and future needs and achieve good outcomes for children and young people in Derbyshire.

The review was undertaken in three distinct phases. The first phase focused on building up the evidence base for how the local system was operating, what were the key strengths and where were the areas that required strengthening. This involved gathering a range of quantitative evidence and qualitative feedback through analysis of published data, online surveys, and workshops with young people, parents and carers, and professionals across education, health and care services. The second phase focused on testing this evidence base and identifying what was needed to build on the strengths and address the challenges the review had identified. The final phase then focused on what was needed to put the review's findings and recommendations into practice. In each phase, Isos worked co-productively with young people, parents, practitioners and partners to share their early findings, shape recommendations and iterate what would become the overall messages from the review.

The bulk of the work to gather evidence and shape recommendations was carried out during the autumn and spring terms of the 2018/19 academic year, through an iterative approach of sharing interim messages, testing these with colleagues and co-producing key findings, recommendations and actions. The review concluded in the spring of 2019.

During the period covered by the current SEND strategy, a number of innovative ideas have been introduced into the Derbyshire system, including:

- implementing a new locality-based structure for the SEN service;
- developing a joint commissioning hub for SEND across education, health and care;
- introducing a process for mainstream schools to be able to access additional high needs funding without having to go through the statutory EHC assessment process – this is known as GRIP (the Graduated Response for Individual Pupils); and
- investing in preventative support to increase the inclusive capacity of the local system.

The importance of many of these initiatives was recognised by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in their report following Derbyshire's local area SEND inspection in November 2016. Several of the principles behind many of the initiatives that have been introduced through the current SEND strategy chime with what would be recognised as effective practices Isos have seen in other local areas through their national research.

Nevertheless, during the review, some strong messages were received about frustrations with the day-to-day operation of the local system and some of its core processes, particularly processes for accessing support (such as GRIP). If these trends are not addressed swiftly, they will increase the pressure on high needs block and other local resources, and on support, services and provision. In turn, this will reduce resources available for pro-active inclusion and preventative work, which will only exacerbate these issues.

The strongest critical messages heard during the review concerned the core systems and processes for accessing support. These were expressed by both parents and professionals, and were consistent across the county. In the main, these related to the GRIP and EHC assessment processes. There were concerns that the process of requesting support was perceived to be adversarial, lacked transparency and consistency, was often slow to respond, and was overly focused on gatekeeping, rather than working with professionals or parents to find support and solutions together. Overall, the strength and widespread nature of these views suggested a lack of trust within the local system. If left unchecked, this could corrode some of the key relationships between strategic leaders, professionals and families that are at the heart of the SEND reforms and essential to an effective local system of support for young people with high needs.

Looking ahead to a new high needs strategy, it is suggested that this is built around three core “building blocks”:

- a. focus on embedding core systems and processes so that they are operating consistently effectively;
- b. focus on developing a clear “strategic blueprint” for high needs support, services and provision across the county that sets out clear how the local system seeks to

- c. support young people with SEND and high needs, the respective roles and specialisms of services and provisions, and how these fit together; and focus on how services can work together seamlessly across the ages and phases of a young person's life to support them in making the transition to a successful and fulfilling adult life.

The strategic review had 6 broad themes which are discussed below.

## **Theme 1 - Strategic partnership working & co-production with parents & young people**

There are strong, co-productive relationships with parents and young people. Parents, through Derbyshire Parent Carer Voice (DPCV), are well-represented on the SEND Strategic Board. Likewise, young people with SEND are well-represented on youth councils at county and district level. Nevertheless, there is both the necessity and opportunities to build on these relationships through new co-productive activities to broaden engagement with parents and young people in order to harness the insights and expertise of parents and young people in addressing some of the strategic challenges facing the system identified in this review.

There are three recommendations under this theme.

**Recommendation 1.1:** Build on existing strong strategic relationships with parents of young people with SEND by broadening strategic engagements and participation. This recommendation concerns the need to foster increased participation of parents and young people with SEND in strategic developments concerning support, services and provision. In particular, it concerned the need to link local groups of parents with DPCV and locality SEND services, and to ensure that parents of children with SEN support as well as those with EHCPs were able to make their voices heard.

**Recommendation 1.2:** Identify and develop some specific co-production projects with parents. This recommendation concerned the opportunity to treat some of the pieces of work that will be taken forward following the strategic review as opportunities to foster broader ownership and to shape solutions through co-productive working with parents.

**Recommendation 1.3:** Develop a formal framework for engaging young people in strategic initiatives and questions facing the local system. This recommendation is about developing a network through which young people with SEN, who may already be part of local groups based around their school, college or community, can be engaged in and involved with shaping strategic developments affecting them and their support.

## **Theme 2 - Partnership working and joint commissioning across education, health and care**

The review found a number of areas where positive developments have been taken forward in relation to joint working across agencies – for example, the offer of support from speech & language therapy services (SaLT) and child & adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) was highly regarded, and the work to define a clear offer of health service input for pupils in special schools was acknowledged. There were, nevertheless, concerns about some of the pathways of support that cut across service boundaries – notably emotional wellbeing and mental health, and specifically a perceived gap

between emotional wellbeing support in mainstream schools and more specialist CAMHS (Isos note the transformation work the local area is taking forward to respond to this under the auspices of Future in Mind), and the review of early help (which was underway at the same time as the high needs strategic review).

Furthermore, the review found that there was consensus about the need to strengthen and re-launch the joint commissioning hub, focused more on its intended core role to act as the driver of strategic, pro-active, intelligence-informed commissioning of services and support across agencies. The re-launched joint commissioning hub would play a key role in mapping out future pathways of support around emotional wellbeing and mental health, and around early help and family support, which were two areas highlighted during the review.

There is also the need continue to ensure consistent understanding of, and messages about, the local SEND system from frontline professionals across all agencies, and to re-articulate how agencies will contribute to EHC assessments and plans.

There are three recommendations under this theme.

**Recommendation 2.1:** Revisit the purpose of the joint commissioning hub to ensure it was focused on taking a system-level view of current and future needs, and how these might be met through more effective joint commissioning across agencies. The review recommended that this was differentiated from processes to enable joint operational day-to-day decisions about, and contributions to, the packages of support for individual young people whose needs cut across education, health and care (children's or adult services).

**Recommendation 2.2:** Identify some specific priorities for joint commissioning. The recommendation is to identify some specific areas of need and test whether there is a clear "pathway" of support, for young people of all ages, in different parts of the county, and with different levels of need, and whether this can be and is described clearly on, for example, the local offer. The major areas highlighted during the review included the pathway for young people with social, emotional & mental health needs (SEMH) and those with communication & interaction (C&I).

**Recommendation 2.3:** Continue to work with frontline professionals to ensure a consistent understanding of the local continuum of services and provision for young people with SEND in Derbyshire. The recommendation recognises the work that has been done to build understanding of the SEND framework and support for young people with SEND in Derbyshire, but also acknowledges some of the feedback gathered that families and providers were still receiving contradictory or misleading information about what their child might benefit from or be entitled to in terms of support, services and provision. To help parents and providers navigate the local system and avoid unnecessary disputes, it is vital that providers and professionals are able to provide consistent messages about the local offer of support. It is also vital that there is a clear and widely understood articulation of how colleagues from health and care, as well as education, ought to be involved with, and contribute to, EHC assessments.

### **Theme 3 - Identification & assessment of needs, information and access to support**

While there are strengths in the local system, there are also some significant challenges in ensuring that core systems and processes – information about and access to support, for example – are working consistently effectively across the county.

Views regarding the quality and accessibility of information about available support and services were mixed. The general message was that the local offer was a valuable source of information if you knew what you were looking for, but needed to be overhauled to provide an overview of the local SEND system, the arrangement of support and services, and pathways of support for specific needs.

There were strong concerns about the processes for accessing support, particularly GRIP (the mechanism for providing high needs top-up funding for pupils without requiring them to have an EHC plan). People highlighted that the process could feel overly adversarial and focused on “gate-keeping” rather than finding solutions together, was too slow and struggling with backlogs of requests, and that communications about decisions were not always clear. People compared the Early Years Inclusion Fund (EYIF) favourably to GRIP, but there were some concerns about timeliness and follow-up dialogue if requests for support were unsuccessful.

Similar views were expressed about the EHC assessment process. There were concerns about the quality of assessments, the specificity of plans and outcomes, the meaningfulness of engagements with young people and families, and the speed and accuracy of keeping plans up to date through annual reviews, as well as the consistency of input from agencies beyond education. The data shows an improving picture, but Derbyshire remains below the national average in terms of the timeliness of completing its EHC assessments and plans. There is support for the locality model of the SEND service, but there would be value in revisiting core systems and processes to ensure there is the capacity to deliver these effectively.

There are three recommendations under this theme.

**Recommendation 3.1:** Update and refine the local offer so that it provides a clear overview, introduction and practical tool for parents, providers and professionals. Build on work that is already underway to update and refine the local offer, and develop this through co-production with parents, professionals and young people. It is vital that this is taken forward as a strategic piece of work, driven by senior leaders and partners across the local system, in order that the local offer provides a clear strategic overview of the local system. The update of the local offer should not be an administrative exercise of individual services simply updating their individual material without any strategic oversight of how the overall “offer” that these services are supposed to make up fits together.

**Recommendation 3.2:** Address the concerns raised about the day-to-day operation of GRIP so that it delivers swift, pupil-centred high needs support for schools consistently effectively. Ensure that new processes address the backlog of requests and are working consistently to deliver effective, timely support across the county. It is recognised work has already been undertaken to address this issue.

**Recommendation 3.3:** Refine core processes related to EHC assessments and plans to address concerns about consistency, quality and specificity of outcomes. Ensure that families are involved in co-producing plans and outcomes. Consider a single referral route and system for calculating top-up funding that is consistent across GRIP and EHC plans.

#### **Theme 4 - Building inclusive capacity in mainstream schools and settings, and providing targeted support for inclusion**

Derbyshire has some of the hallmarks of an inclusive local system. This can be seen, for example, in the high proportion of pupils with EHCPs who are placed in mainstream schools. The review heard examples from parents and providers about effective examples of inclusive practice in mainstream schools and settings.

The evidence suggests, however, that this is not consistent across the county, and that inclusion across Derbyshire is under increasing pressure. This is seen for example, in the higher than average rates of permanent exclusion in Derbyshire, and the fact that pupils with SEN are disproportionately represented amongst those who are permanently excluded or out of school for other reasons, such as those in elective home education. Derbyshire has a broad and comprehensive offer of targeted inclusion support. The continued investment in this tier of support is a vital component of any effective system of supporting young people with SEND and high needs. Nevertheless, there is the need and opportunity to refocus the offer and maximise its value. Feedback gathered during the review suggested that, while on the whole highly regarded, the quality of some support services was variable, there was a lack of coherence and risks of duplication between services, a lack of consistency about how services focused on different needs were arranged and operated, and the need to strengthen the join-up between education inclusion services and support from other agencies (specifically emotional wellbeing and mental health, and family support services involved with early help).

There are two recommendations under this theme.

**Recommendation 4.1:** Continue to develop, support and strengthen inclusive capacity in mainstream education settings. This entails (a) co-developing with school leaders an agreed set of consistent expectations of what mainstream inclusion should look like in Derbyshire schools, (b) matching this with a clear offer of induction, support, supervision, and continuing professional development for SEND leads and whole-school improvement, (c) developing an offer of specific, focused capacity-building around autism, C&I and SEMH needs, and (d) re-establishing an offer of SENCO (SEN co-ordinator) networks as an opportunity for SENCOs to come together in localities, hear about and help to shape county-wide strategic developments, network with colleagues and develop their practices (where some may not be in a position to receive such support from within their local school partnerships).

**Recommendation 4.2:** Refocus the offer of targeted services in a more holistic, strategic way so that they provide a coherent, consistent and responsive offer across the county. This will involve (a) developing a more holistic, whole-child offer (as opposed to single service responses), and (b) developing a single route-of-access to support for cases where a child's needs do not neatly fit a single service. It will also involve fostering greater join-up between education inclusive support services and those focused on, for example, family support and emotional wellbeing and mental health.

## **Theme 5 - Developing responsive, effective local specialist provision**

### **Enhanced resource schools (ERSs)**

The ERSs play a key role within the local SEND system. They have been developed pro-actively to provide support for specific types of needs and in particular localities that ensure that there are opportunities and choices for pupils to be supported in mainstream environments within their communities. This is all the more important in a large county like Derbyshire in order to avoid pupils having to travel large distances to reach suitable provision.

There is now, however, the need and opportunity to revisit and redefine the role of the ERSs. The ERSs have been developed at different times and in response to differing priorities. They have not been arranged according to a single strategic plan. This means that there is not a consistent model of support across the ERSs, or indeed across ERSs supporting pupils with the same needs, nor an equitable offer across all localities in Derbyshire. There is an opportunity to work with providers to develop a more explicitly planned offer and set of pathways for pupils placed in the ERSs, and that this offer is equitable across all localities.

It is also important that the role of the ERSs, and their place in relation to mainstream inclusion and other forms of support, is widely understood. At present, there is a risk that they are seen as “the school for pupils with SEN”, and this is placing the schools that host ERSs under considerable pressure.

### **Special schools**

While the review found no evidence of issues with the quality of special school provision – all special schools in Derbyshire are rated as good or outstanding – like the ERSs, the offer of special schools has developed over time in response to different priorities. In addition, we know that there are pupils with certain types of needs that are having to be educated outside the local area, particularly older pupils with complex combinations of SEMH and communication & interaction needs. As such, there would be value in revisiting what the special school offer in Derbyshire should be in light of current and future needs.

There would also be value in ensuring that special schools, who already work together as a close partnership, are connected to decisions about strategic planning of provision and placements for pupils with the most complex needs who might otherwise require a placement outside local, state-funded provision.

Lastly, there is the need to strengthen some of the core day-to-day processes that relate to special schools, particularly admissions and funding.

### **Alternative Provision**

There is growing pressure on local inclusion services and alternative provision in Derbyshire. A changing profile of need, longer placements, and a lack of formal processes to support the reintegration of pupils into mainstream schools in putting strain on the capacity of local AP, particularly in relation to preventative and turnaround support.

There is the need to consider the pathway for pupils who are excluded or out of school to ensure that they are in formal, full-time education and able to make a swift transition back to mainstream school or an alternative setting where appropriate.

As with other forms of specialist provision, there is the need to revisit and redefine the role of AP in Derbyshire, and the responsibilities of mainstream schools for pupils placed in local AP in the context of the Timpson Review's recommendations about schools being accountable for the outcomes of pupils they exclude and having greater control of funding for AP.

There are three recommendations about specialist SEND provision and AP in Derbyshire.

**Recommendation 5.1:** Rearticulate a clear offer of ERS support based on current and future needs that is equitable across localities and consistent across phases. This will involve (a) setting out some updated core principles and an equitable and needs-led locality offer of ERS provision (including in areas such as the High Peak that feel they are not well served by the current distribution of ERSs), (b) ensuring that the role of the ERSs is clearly articulated and widely understood by professionals, providers (including other mainstream schools) and parents, and (c) develop a cycle through which ERSs are involved in a strategic engagement to reflect on and plan how ERS provision needs to develop in relation to current and anticipated future needs.

**Recommendation 5.2:** Rearticulate the offer of special school provision, ensure the offer and core processes are informed by current and future needs. This will involve (a) working with special schools to rearticulate a clear offer for the special schools individually and collectively, and what this means the offer looks like for each locality and across the county, (b) developing a process for engaging special schools (and potentially ERSs) in decisions about complex placements, including those where an out-of-area placement is being considered, and (c) working with special school leaders to revisit, strengthen and co-develop the core day-to-day processes affecting special schools, specifically admissions and funding.

**Recommendation 5.3:** Work with school and AP leaders to develop responsibility-based models of inclusion support and AP to strengthen pathways, reintegration and the equitable use of local AP. This will be particularly important in light of the recently published recommendations of Edward Timpson's review of exclusions and the Government's commitment to work towards a position where mainstream schools will be responsible for the outcomes of pupils they exclude and will have a greater role in using funding for AP to foster early intervention and inclusion support.

## **Theme 6 - Preparation for adulthood**

Preparing young people for adulthood needs to be an underpinning principle of all support, services and provision, across all ages, within Derbyshire. It should not just be a shorthand expression for the transition young people make at 16, 19 or older from formal education to the next stage of their development.

Achieving this will require arrangements for capturing young people's aspirations, defining long-term outcomes with them, and planning support to be strengthened. At present, while this is happening in some areas, there is not yet a consistent and



systematic approach to capturing young people's aspirations through "realistically ambitious" conversations that feed into their long-term plans (whether statutory or not).

It will also require a more joined-up and jointly owned offer of support for young people moving into adult life across all agencies involved. This will include revisiting and developing a complementary set of pathways into further education and lifelong learning, pro-active engagement of local employers, including the Council itself, to develop employment opportunities for young people with SEND, and a more holistic offer of social care support focused on building resilience and independence.

There are three recommendations under this theme.

**Recommendation 6.1:** Set out a shared vision of the opportunities to be open to all young people with SEND and high needs. Based on the feedback gathered during the review, notably from young people themselves, this should include the principles of having equity of opportunity to pursue their goals and experience growing up as their peers, encouragement and support to become independence, being part of their local community, and have opportunities to move into meaningful, paid work. These may not be directly appropriate to all young people, but the underpinning principle of how support and services are arranged across the county should be to ensure such opportunities are open to all young people, even if not all will be in a position to take up these opportunities in exactly this form.

**Recommendation 6.2:** Develop explicit processes for planning long-term outcomes and pathways for young people, and embed these in young people's plans and the work of all services. This will involve (a) capturing young people's aspirations systematically, (b) effective advice and a systematic set of processes for ensuring that professionals have early "realistically ambitious" conversations about a young person's aspirations and how they can be supported to pursue these, (c) robust, early planning where young people are likely to need a differentiated form of support to make a successful transition to adult life, and (d) a flexible, responsive, person-centred menu of support and pathways from which personalised packages can be developed to support young people to move into adulthood successfully.

**Recommendation 6.3:** Develop a broader and more integrated offer to widen the range of pathways open to young people with SEND and high needs. Ensure that the offer of support is not fragmented, with different agencies only able to advise on the services that they directly deliver or oversee. Instead the offer of support should be widely understood and co-ordinated across agencies, to ensure that planning and support for young people moving into adult life is coherent, holistic, and makes best use of the available expertise, support and provision available across Derbyshire.

### **3. Next Steps**

The SEND Strategic Review has been reported to the SEND Strategic Board and comments made. The agreed next steps are for it to be reported to Elected Members, the Senior Management Team and the Health and Well Being Board. The SEND Strategy will be refreshed and the agreed recommendations formulated into a refreshed and detailed SEND Strategic Plan to enable them to be taken forward and monitored.

#### **4. Other Considerations**

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors have been considered: social value; prevention of crime & disorder, equality of opportunity, finance, human resources, legal & human rights, environmental, health, property and transport considerations.

#### **5. Background Papers**

Held in Children's Services and by the SEND Strategic Board

#### **6. Executive Director's Recommendation**

That the Schools Forum note the recommendations from the SEND Strategic Review.

**JANE PARFREMENT**

**Executive Director for Children's Services**