

Divisions Affected - All

13th November 2023

Local Area Partnership SEND Report by the Cabinet Member for SEND

Executive Summary

1. Oxfordshire County Council is jointly responsible with the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB) for the planning and commissioning of services for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire.
2. There was an Area inspection by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) and the Office for Standards in Education (Ofsted) between 13 July 2023 and 21 July 2023. The report was published on 15 September 2023.
3. The inspection's outcome was that "There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), which the local area partnership must address urgently".
4. The Council and Partnership has unequivocally accepted the report.
5. Following publication of the report, the local area partnership prepared and submitted a draft Priority Action Plan (PAP) to the Department for Education (DfE) and CQC on 27th October 2023.
6. The draft Priority Action Plan seeks to address all areas identified during inspection as requiring improvement, and was co-developed by the council, partners, and parent/ family representatives. The plan is co-signed by Chief Executives of OCC and BOB ICB.
7. Report of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee to Cabinet, dated 17th October 2023, included 12 recommendations. Responses to these recommendations are detailed below.

Report

Overarching Recommendations (issued by HOSC and People's Scrutiny Committee):

8. Recommendation 1: For Leadership over the Partnership and of Children and Young People's SEND provision to be explicitly set out and communicated clearly to families and all stakeholders; as well as clear measures of how leadership will be developed and demonstrated at all levels, and to demonstrate how new ways of working with stakeholders will put families at the heart of transformation.

Response: Partnership leadership, assurance, and oversight of SEND provision is by the Oxfordshire SEND Improvement Board (SIB). The Board provides transparent visibility of progress, constructive and robust challenge, as well as celebrating what is working well and improving. The progress of improvements will be routinely scrutinised by appropriate scrutiny arrangements (People Scrutiny, HOSC and ICB Quality Group).

Operational delivery of the Priority Action Plan (PAP) is via the Partnership Delivery Group (PDG), supported by time-limited Task and Finish groups. SIB, PDG, and Task and Finish groups all include Parent/ Carer representation. Continued improved communication with families and stakeholders is a key focus of our SEND action planning. It underpins our governance arrangements, is a key priority within the PAP, and is a focus area of our Working Together Task and Finish group.

9. Recommendation 2: To ensure good transparency around any action planning and the improvement journey for SEND provision for Children and Young People, and to develop explicit Key Performance Indicators for measuring the effectiveness of improvements that are open to scrutiny. The Committee also recommends for more comprehensive action planning after the publication of the initial action plan requested by Ofsted, and for this action planning to be made fully transparent. The SIB will consider at its inaugural meeting how best to ensure information easily and publicly available.

Response: The Priority Action Plan includes development of an Integrated Local Area Partnership SEND dashboard, based on partnership KPIs, with performance overseen by the SIB. As above, ongoing PAP action planning is operationally overseen by PDG and Task and Finish Groups. PDG reports monthly to the SIB.

10. Recommendation 3: For the Leadership to adopt restorative thinking and practices with utmost urgency to reassure affected families, and for this thinking to be placed at the heart of any co-production exercises to help families feel their voices are being heard as well as for the purposes of transparency.

Response: Restorative Approaches are well-established within Children's Services. Co-production with children and families is at the heart of PAP and wider action planning. As noted, they are represented within all leadership & delivery bodies for SEND improvement.

11. Recommendation 4: To ensure adequate and timely co-production of action planning to improve SEND provision, and for the voices of Children and their families to be considered in tackling the systemic failings highlighted in the report. The Committee also recommends that the Partnership considers timely allocation of seed funding for the development of co-production involving people with lived experience; and for joint commissioning of training and alternative provision across Oxfordshire, involving multi-agency stakeholders, the voluntary sector, and families.

Response: SIB responsibilities include ensuring that co-production is embedded in the culture of SEND services. Our Multi Agency Quality Assurance (MAQA) forum has the purpose of setting out consistent, service specific processes for the quality assurance of Education, Health, and Care Plans, ensuring that good practice and learning is shared, informs training and professional development for all professionals involved in the process, underpinning our vision for shared responsibility for improving outcomes, on the improvements achieved and next steps.

Partnership training, and impact measures, are included in the PAP. All PAP actions are time-specified, ranging from December 2023 to post-July 2025, dependent on prioritisation and practicability.

12. Recommendation 5: To continue to improve working collaboration amongst the Local Area Partnership to integrate support mechanisms and services as effectively as possible, and for rapid improvements to be demonstrated on clear and efficient information and patient-data sharing on children with SEND.

Response: There are existing arrangements to enable the sharing of information across partners. The effectiveness of these will be considered as part of the improvement journey.

13. Recommendation 6: For every effort to be made for children and young people with SEND to receive the support that is specifically tailored toward and appropriate to their own needs and experiences; and for those involved in providing support services to be aware of the additional/ alternative services available which a child may also need a referral to. It is also recommended that improvements in one-to-one communications with families should be prioritised by Oxfordshire County Council, using the budget agreed by cabinet immediately following the Ofsted report.

Response: Priority actions within the PAP include co-production of both refreshed Local Offer and development of local area partnership early help and early intervention strategy. Together with improved EHCP assessment process, and Team Around the Family, this will enable the delivery of needs-led provision and the progression of outcome led plans with families. As noted above (Paragraph 8), continued improved communication with stakeholders and families is a key priority.

14. Recommendation 7: To consider the use of digital resources for enablement, including at an individual level; and to ensure EHCPs are up to date and that they constitute living documents for families.

Response: Timeliness and quality of EHCPs, along with improved parental access to the digital portal, are addressed within PAP item 3. Actions include ensuring accurate, timely, and effective assessment, and effectively meeting needs, particularly at points of transition. Assessment timeliness is improving, despite increasing demand. Timeliness of completion within 20 weeks has improved from 40% in June 2023 to 50% in the last month.

HOSC Recommendations:

15. Recommendation 8: For SEND commissioning to be developed using the Ofsted report as a baseline, and to place person-centred mental and physical health of children and their families with SEND at the centre of decisions on how funding is spent to maximise social value. The Committee also recommends for the Local Area Partnership to map all funding sources available for, and to explore joint commissioning of services and training that could improve the overall health and wellbeing for children with SEND.

Response: PAP priority actions include a focus on improved commissioning and strong relationships with commissioned providers, to improve capacity, meet demand, and meet the needs of children, young people, and their families. The PAP is also focused on ensuring commissioning arrangements support timely decision making and transition arrangements, and that there is a multi-agency approach to meeting the needs of children with emotional and mental health difficulties. The Leadership and Partnership Task and Finish group has responsibility for integrated commissioning of SEND services.

The Oxfordshire Joint Commissioning Executive, which plays a key role in the delivery of many Priority Action Plan actions, reports into the Partnership Delivery Group.

16. Recommendation 9: To ensure that there is clarity of information on any physical or mental health services for children with SEND, to reduce the risk of confusion and lack of awareness of such services amongst parents, carers or families of children who require support for their mental or physical health.

Response: A local area pathway is being developed for children and young people with emotional wellbeing and mental health concerns. The i-THRIVE framework (an integrated, person-centred, and needs-led approach to delivering mental health services for children, young people, and their parents/carers) will be linked to the Early Help Strategy and Team Around the Family.

17. Recommendation 10: To exercise learning from how other Counties and Systems have provided well-coordinated and effective SEND provision; particularly where measures have been adopted to specifically reduce the

tendency for poor mental or physical health amongst affected Children and Young People.

Response: Our response to the SEND inspection, including development of PAP and KPI dashboard, has been informed by learning from other local authorities. Children's Services senior leadership bring a wealth of experience in delivering transformation and service improvement within other local authorities. This includes both the recently appointed independent chair of the SIB, Steve Crocker (Former President of Association of Director of Children's Services) and new SEND/ Children's Services Improvement. We have invested in an additional Assistant Director for Early Help & Prevention, and Strategic Lead for Specialist Projects. Deputy Directors for Children's Social Care/ Education are likewise experienced.

18. Recommendation 11 : To ensure that staff involved in Health, Care, Education, and any relevant Voluntary Sector organisations are sufficiently trained and aware of children that may be neuro-divergent, have a learning difficulty or a disability (SEND); and for such staff to be adequately aware of the support and resources available, and the processes for referring such children for any relevant mental or physical health services that they might require.

Response: As noted above, partnership training is embedded within the PAP. The Working Together Task & Finish group leads on Workforce Development.

19. Recommendation 12: For HOSC to continue to follow this item and to evaluate the impact of any changes or improvements made, with specific insights into the following; the Partnership's Action Plan as requested by HMCI; the overall measures taken to address the concerns raised by the Ofsted/CQC inspection; the progress made by CAMHS in reducing waiting times for treatment of children with SEND who require mental health support; and on how the NHS is working to increase the overall acquisition and availability of data on SEND children's mental health from key mental health providers.

Response: There are clear governance and reporting structures, as outlined above. We can provide updates as required.

Anne Coyle
Interim Corporate Director for Children's Services
November 2023