

Division(s): N/A

EDUCATION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 25 NOVEMBER 2020

UPDATE ON SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN OXFORDSHIRE

Report by Hayley Good, Director for Education

RECOMMENDATION

The Education Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to note developments to date since September 2020, in order to transform the provision of education, health and care services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Executive Summary

1. This paper outlines the developments since September 2020 in transforming SEND services in Oxfordshire.

Introduction

2. As a Council and as a local partnership we are committed to achieving the very best outcomes we can for children and young people with SEND within the total resources we have available.
3. The education, health and social care system in Oxfordshire recognises that we cannot achieve the improvements required without engaging a wider range of other stakeholders in the work we are doing, including early years providers, schools, colleges and parents.
4. Oxfordshire County Council SEND services are facing financial challenges as are Local Authorities across the country, with growing expectations of our essential services, increasing demand and complexity of needs of some of our most vulnerable residents.
5. The current financial challenges provide us with an opportunity to fundamentally rethink and transform the way that we deliver local services. This will focus on developing a more inclusive approach to supporting children and young people with SEND.

Achieving the vision together

6. The local area SEND inspection revisit in October 2019 identified that there was still work to do as a partnership and stated that “Leaders have an aspirational vision for the work they are doing to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire. However, parents do not yet feel part of this vision and do not fully understand what work is being done to achieve it”.

ESC5

7. Conversations and co-production with children and their families, schools and other stakeholders and partner organisations will enable us to develop innovative solutions and sustainable change.
8. We are seeking to second an Oxfordshire Headteacher for an agreed period in order to lead the consultation and finalisation of our new SEND strategy with schools and settings. It is essential that we use this opportunity to capture the realities of the schools setting and develop insight that helps us work with schools on supporting children with SEND.

SEND Strategy and engagement

9. To support shared understanding and improved communication of our local priorities, a SEND Strategy is being finalised for wider consultation. This will make clear our shared vision for the future and identify the major changes required, both in the short to medium term and over the next five years to bring about improved services for children and young people with SEND in Oxfordshire.
10. The insight provided by the SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment is extremely helpful in order to ensure that the new SEND Strategy is aligned with the SEND sufficiency strategy and future joint commissioning arrangements. The next stage for the SEND Strategy will be an update which includes input from schools. The draft will then be made available for public consultation early in 2021.

SEND Transformation

11. A SEND Transformation Board has been created in order to develop solutions to our local challenges. It recognises that success will be achieved by working together as a whole system and making the best use of our collective resources and the strengths of our local communities.
12. It is essential that we develop high-quality provision which is available locally. This will be achieved by improving partnerships between OCC and schools in order to enhance the outcomes for children, through provision of a fully inclusive curriculum and extra-curricular offer. We are seeking to second a headteacher to lead on the consultation with schools and finalisation of our new SEND strategy.
13. We must also, as a matter of some urgency reduce the unsustainable demand for independent and non-maintained specialist placements. We will do this by investing in the sufficient supply of local, high quality, mainstream, special school and resource base places which deliver good outcomes for children.
14. Since September, we have submitted an Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) to the Department for Education (DfE). This plan sets out the actions which we will take in order to address the identified areas of concern. DfE specialist SEND advisers are in regular communication with officers and parent/carer

representatives and are satisfied with the progress we have made to date. The DfE will formally monitor progress of the APP in December.

15. Engagement is to be supported by the delivery of the Local Area SEND Communication plan. This is an action that features in the APP.
16. Progress against the objectives in the plan will be monitored via the SEND Performance Board, which meets half-termly. The Performance Board is co-chaired by the OCC Director of Children's Services and OCCG Director of Quality and Lead Nurse.

Transformation priorities

17. The Board has identified four priority workstreams that will deliver the system change that is required:

Sufficiency place planning – with the remit of reviewing demand, geography, and options and opportunities to meet the changing needs of the education of our SEND population.

- Review of need, geography and existing school estate to develop a ten-year plan

Finance – focus on reviewing the financial support currently available to schools and develop equitable funding formulas that enable earlier intervention and investment so that Oxfordshire students can receive high quality education locally

- Development of new funding formulas across Early Years, Primary Schools, Secondary Schools, Special Schools and FE/Colleges
- Development of the new funding mechanism resulting in improved funding and available packages of support to mainstream schools to support students earlier so that fewer require an EHCP.
- Review of resource bases and alternative provision with options identified that deliver improved value for money.

Continuum of SEND provision and Early Intervention – the development of clarity relating to access points and improving funding to mainstream schools so that fewer students require an EHCP to gain access to the help and support they need.

- Development of a model that outlines the stages of the SEND continuum. This is with a view to establishing and communicating a better understanding of opportunities where lack of resources potentially affects decisions that are taken. Solutions will be implemented with a focus on improving early intervention.

Commissioning – designed to monitor and evaluate all out of county placements and to work towards improving market position, negotiation and contract monitoring.

Financial and Staff Implications

18. The cumulative deficit on the dedicated schools grant (DSG) was £11m as at 31st March 2020. This has been driven by demand on High Needs exceeding the available grant. The current estimated in-year (2020/21) forecast deficit for High Needs is £11m. The cumulative deficit at March 2021 will therefore be £22m.
19. We know that it is likely that the need for these services will continue to grow as it has done over the last five years. Assuming no change in strategy and continuing growth in demand for support from High Needs, the in-year deficit was expected to be £15m for 2021-22. In July 2020, the DfE announced additional High Needs DSG for Oxfordshire of £7.5m, which has reduced the in-year deficit but will, nevertheless result in a cumulative deficit of £29.5m by March 2022.

Resourcing improvement and transformation

20. The strategy focuses on supporting learners closer to home. It is essential that we ensure a sufficient supply of local, high quality mainstream, special school and resource bases which deliver good outcomes for children. This relies on revenue and capital investment to increase the amount and type of local special school provision and revenue funding for an increase in resource base places.
21. If the additional funding results in fewer children/young people moving to more costly placements in out-of-county independent specialist provision (ISPs), the investment will payback over time.
22. The complexity of the work sitting behind each action identified within the Accelerated Progress Plan is considerable and is compounded by the range of internal and external partners involved. All are committed to achieving improvement across the Local Area - not just because of the ongoing budgetary issues, but because it is essential that we improve the quality of the services we provide so that we can achieve better outcomes for our most vulnerable residents.
23. Additional leadership capacity has been implemented with a newly appointed permanent SEND Quality Assurance and Improvement Manager who took up post in September and a full-time finance officer to support the monitoring of cost of provision. A new permanent Head of SEND will be recruited at the earliest opportunity.
24. Interim contract support is imminent and will monitor and implement improvements to the procurement of placements. A more permanent resolution for Education will be implemented in 2021 during through the development of the Health, Education and Social Care arm of the new corporate commissioning

hub and spoke model. Combined, these additional elements will have a very positive impact on the rate of progress against actions.

Equalities Implications

25. An equalities impact assessment will be undertaken as part of the High Needs Block Recovery plan.

HAYLEY GOOD

Deputy Director for Children's Services and Education

November 2020