



Report to Cabinet

Date: 12 September 2023

Title: **Pathways for Children with SEND – Children’s & Education Select Committee Report**

Cabinet Member(s): Councillor Anita Cranmer, Cabinet Member for Children’s Services & Education

Author and/or contact officer: Katie Dover

Ward(s) affected: None specific

Recommendations:

The Children’s and Education Select Committee recommends the following to Cabinet:

Availability of Information

Recommendation 1

The review group supports the ongoing and review on Buckinghamshire’s “Local Offer” to be customer-focussed for children, young people and their parents. We recommend a more user-friendly approach with simple language, and suggest the inclusion of inserted videos, clear links to first port-of-call contact lists for each area of diagnosis and examples of pathway diagrams.

Recommendation 2

The Cabinet Member for Children’s and Education and the Chairman of the Children’s and Education Select Committee write jointly to the Government to recommend a change of name of “The Local Offer” in order to make it easier for parents to find when searching websites for their first access to information.

Communications Planning

Recommendation 3

The county-wide communications plan being developed for SEND should include promotion of our Local Offer, and this must include further promotion via social media.

Recommendation 4

A neurodiversity resource pack should be developed with key contact information about the Local Offer, charities, relevant organisations and health professionals so that it could be given to parents by all agencies as an initial signposting tool.

Recommendation 5

The neurodiversity resource pack should be promoted in all relevant forums e.g. Headteacher and Governor network meetings and it should also be shared with all Councillors in order to assist them in their casework with residents.

Training and Network Development

Recommendation 6

The Council support the implementation of the training qualification for all SENCOs as stated in the Government's SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan.

Recommendation 7

The SENCO meetings network be extended to ensure that all SENCOs have the opportunity to attend regular meetings for the purposes of sharing best practice and timely information.

Recommendation 8

The Cabinet Member for Children's and Education and the Chairman of the Children's and Education Select Committee write jointly to the Government to recommend a substantial increase in the number of university degree places for Educational Psychologists nationally, to enable educational psychologists to give greater support to schools on work relating to neurodiversity in children and young people.

Recommendation 9

A programme of neurodiversity in-school training be developed for all teachers and wider school and nursery staff.

Recommendation 10.

All secondary schools should be encouraged to deliver neurodiversity talks in school to foster a greater awareness and understanding of neurodiversity amongst pupils.

Reason for decision:

For Cabinet to consider the recommendations of the Children's and Education Select Committee with a view to improving pathways to services for SEND children and young people.

1. Executive summary

1.1 A rapid review group was set up in November 2022 by the Children's and Education Select Committee with the aim of investigating the pathways to finding information for children and young people with SEND when first trying to access services and support. This involved a) assessing views from different sources with regards to the availability and accessibility of information required by parents to gain support from services for their children and b) gaining understanding on information for services specifically relating to gaining help for children with autism, ADHD and anxiety/depression.

2. Content of report

2.1 The review group aimed to gain improved clarity for parents of children with SEND regarding what information is available and how to access it through available resources. It also hoped to gain understanding for parents on the roles and responsibilities of professionals working to support children and young people with SEND, and to offer suggested improvements to the help and guidance available for families on the SEND Local Offer.

2.2 The review group work was set up against a context both nationally and locally focussing on SEND service improvements. In early 2022 the services for SEND in Buckinghamshire were inspected by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted. A written statement of action was submitted to Ofsted in August 2022, outlining what the council would do to make further service improvements.

- 2.3 In March 2023 Central Government published its report “Right Support, Right Place, Right Time” – its SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan outlining its aim of providing a “single national system that delivers consistently for every child and young person with SEND and in alternative provision”. The focus for the government was also on the importance of early identification of needs in an inclusive system and highlighted the need for timely, high-quality services and support in mainstream settings.
- 2.4 The group took part in a range of evidence gathering sessions from November 2022 to March 2023 with a wide range of council officers, through visits to primary, secondary, grammar and special schools, with lead professionals from related organisations and by interviewing parents with SEND children.
- 2.5 The final stage of evidence gathering with individual meetings with parents provided a crucial insight into the first-hand experiences of parents in accessing the system of services potentially available to them when concerned about gaining help for their child. This process highlighted a range of issues such as difficulties in knowing where to go for assistance, how to gain diagnoses, and symptoms being recognised and supported.
- 2.6 Through the evidence gathering process, the group recognised that the need for early access to SEND support information is crucial to enable parents to gain access to services as soon as possible. The interviews with parents and schools highlighted how early access to information could make a considerable difference to a child’s outcomes and therefore the level to which they might access their potential.
- 2.7 It was further recognised that clear communication of sites of information was crucial and information sharing between professionals, both with each other and with school pupils more widely was essential to raise awareness and understanding of the various SEND conditions.
- 2.8 Parental interviews and statistics reviewed showed that parents are acutely aware of their child’s needs and challenges and therefore their views are paramount in determining if a child needs the help of services.
- 2.9 A fuller explanation of the key findings supporting the recommendations outlined above is set out in the report at Appendix 1.

3. Legal and financial implications

- 3.1 These will be considered as part of the Cabinet’s response.

4. Corporate implications

4.1 These will be considered as part of the Cabinet's response.

5. Local councillors & community boards consultation & views

Not applicable

6. Communication, engagement & further consultation

6.1 The report and recommendations were produced by a cross-party review group of Members from the Children's and Education Select Committee.

6.2 Recommendations made will inform the Communications Plan on SEND services.

7. Next steps and review

8.1 Cabinet will provide a response to the Select Committee recommendations at its meeting on 12th September 2023. The Children's and Education Select Committee will then receive an update on progress achieved, after 6 and 12 months.

8. Background papers

8.1 None.