



Buckinghamshire County Council Select Committee

Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Report to the Children's Social Care and Learning Select Committee

Title:	The Educational Psychology Service Action Plan
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Cabinet Member sign-off:	Cllr Mike Appleyard

Purpose of Agenda Item

1.1 This paper provides an update to Select Committee following the previous Educational Psychology Service (EPS) paper tabled last year.

Background and Context

2.1 Like many Local Authorities across the country, Buckinghamshire's Educational Psychology Service (EPS) is currently experiencing a number of challenges in regards to delivery of services to vulnerable children and young people (CYP). These stem from two key factors.

2.2 Firstly, there have been a number of significant factors directly derived from the revised Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015). This had the following direct impact on the EPS, including;

2.2.1 Increasing in population age range from 5-18 to 0-25 leading to an increase in the potential cohort of CYP with SEN requiring Educational Psychology involvement, specifically in requests for 'Education, Health and Care Plans' (EHCPs).

2.2.2 The new requirement to undertake a 'Transfer Conversion' for all eligible CYP with existing Statements of Special Educational Needs (SEN) by March 31st 2018. All Statements of SEN need to be 'converted' into Education, Health and Care Plans.



2.2.3 The broadening of the potential scope for EHCP requests and requests to contribute towards Annual Reviews of EHCPs to a wider proportion of the population (e.g. early years children and post 16 young people).

2.3 Secondly, there have been a number of significant profession and service related factors that have affected the ability to deliver education psychology (EP) services effectively and which have been evidenced and described in previous reports, including:

2.3.1 A national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EPs)

2.3.2 High competition between Local Authorities for prospective Educational Psychology (EP) candidates

2.3.2 High statutory demands and reduction in the range of services Educational Psychologists engaged in providing Early SEN Support and prevention work.

2.3.4 Increasing reliance on Locum EPs at a significant additional cost compared to retained EPs (average +30% per annum).

3. Key issues

Staffing and recruitment

3.1 The above factors have resulted in an increase in staff turnover in Buckinghamshire and a shortage of retained Educational Psychologists. This shortage is currently being backfilled by locum Educational Psychologists.

3.2 The Educational Psychology Service budget has remained at the same level for the previous two years, however the current high demand for statutory services has meant that nearly all current EPs are focused on statutory assessments, conversions, tribunals and Early Years SEN 'CHSU5' work and very little capacity is engaged in early intervention and prevention work.

3.3 Currently, the statutory demands require a greater amount of EP capacity than is currently budgeted and staffed. Currently, additional funding of £200k via the 'SEN Reforms Grant' has been provided in order to engage further EP capacity, however recruiting additional EPs is proving challenging given the current national context.

3.4 Table below shows current funding in place to support frontline EP service provision:

	Statutory and Link EP funded budget (derived from BCC+DSG**)	Funded 'Front line' retained EP Establishment (FTE) less Business Support Services/ Management costs / Corporate overheads
2014/15	£1,404,324	16.4
2015/16	£1,345,984	15.3
2016/17	£1,345,984 (+ £200,000*)	15.3 (+ 2.8*)

*Additional funding currently used to pay the additional costs of employing locum EPs.

**Additional funding has been provided previously for specific projects, however only an additional

£100k is provided currently for Nurture and Holding Hands projects via DSG.

3.5 The table below shows the current breakdown of frontline EPS staffing provision (retained Senior EPs, EPs and locums):

Senior EPs	2.4 FTE
Main Grade EPs	9.6 FTE
Locum EPs	4.0 FTE

3.6 In summary, the EPS has an overall funding for retained staffing capacity of 17.0 FTE via a combination of retained EP capacity of 13.0FTE and an additional 4.0 FTE of locum capacity.

3.7 Given the additional costs of engaging locum EPs (+30% of that of retained EPs), the reliance on locum EPs to provide services places pressure on the additional funding provided via the SEN Reforms Grant.

Current and ongoing service demands

3.8 The EPS has experienced significant increases in statutory work (including statutory assessments for Education, Health and Care Plans, Transfer Conversions of Statements of SEN, Tribunals and Early Years CHSU5 notifications).

3.9 Because of the often complex nature of the work an assessment typically takes two days to complete from start to end. Assessments are 'holistic' in nature and aim to assimilate a wide range of contextual information relating to a child or young person's SEN. The complexity of many children and young people's context, and the range of potential professionals involved in their support, means that EPs will always seek to ensure a high quality, accurate and evidence based assessment is undertaken. Tribunal cases are often the most complex and demanding, both in terms of assessment rigour, but also in terms of time required to liaise with all stakeholder and attend hearings. A tribunal typically requires up to 5 days of EP time, however some maybe longer where multiple hearings are required.

3.10 The table below shows the overall assessment demands. There is currently a backlog of EHCP assessments and Conversions. Tribunals and CHSU5's are responded to as required and Transfer Conversions currently replace Annual Reviews of EHCPs. The FTE EP capacity required to clear all backlogs by 31 March 2018 is shown together with the annual number of assessments typically received by type:

Assessment Type	Current Backlog	FTE required to clear by Mar 31st	Ongoing Annual Average / Required FTE
EHCP Assessment	130 cases	6.5 FTE	550 cases / 7.0 FTE
Conversion	500 cases*	14.5 FTE	N/A.
Tribunal	N/A		40 cases / 1.0 FTE
Early Years CHSU5	N/A		130 cases / 1.5 FTE
Annual Reviews	N/A		400 cases / 4.5 FTE
TOTAL		21.0FTE	14.5 FTE

*Projected number requiring EP involvement Oct '17-Mar '18.

3.11 In summary, in order to successfully complete all backlog statutory work the EPS requires an additional 3.0FTE EPs is required above the existing 17.0FTE Retained and locum EP establishment.

3.12 As a result of staffing shortfall and demand, current EPS performance for completion of assessments within the 20-week statutory timescale is low. The current performance and corresponding performance targets are set out below:

	July	Aug	Sept	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Target
Target			10%	20%	40%	40%	60%	80%	80%	100%
Actual	8.7%	9.0%	9.6%							

3.13 Key actions currently being undertaken to address staff recruitment issues and increase performance are set out in the relevant section below.

Re-establishing early intervention and prevention

3.14 It is recognised that there is a need to ensure EP capacity is re-focused onto the early intervention and prevention activities in order to support the effective management of statutory demands. Furthermore, there is a need to ensure other partner agencies across education are similarly focusing on effective early intervention and prevention activities in order to ensure the right support in put in place for the right children and young people at the right time.

3.15 A pilot programme is currently under development with the primary aim of ensuring robust and appropriate early education support. Key to this is the reinstatement of a 'Link EP' to all education settings across the county. Further details of this are set out in the relevant section below.

3.16 It is anticipated that the implementation of 'co-production' of outcomes within EHCPs directly with children and young people, parents and carers and other professionals will reduce likelihood of potential tribunal hearings and costly EP time attending associated hearings.

4. Summary of key actions and associated costs

Staffing and recruitment

4.1 Two FTE Retained EPs recruited for this academic year. In the interim the equivalent of four FTE Locum EPs have been engaged over the last 18 months.

4.2 Recruitment and Retention Package for EPs. This has been implemented in order to both retain existing EPs and attract new recruits to the Service. This has been in place for one year, with positive results (only one leaver and 4 new EP recruits over a 12 month period (two started and two joining us in September 2017)).

4.3. Introduced a multi-platform recruitment initiative in order to attract a wider range of potential candidates to apply for a post in Buckinghamshire. This is being broadened to include an enhanced 'recruitment drive' including:

4.3.1 Review of current recruitment campaign by Insight Team

4.3.2 Revised recruitment content to include 'talking heads' videos by Director of Education and Executive Director, case studies and 'thinkpieces' to promote working in Buckinghamshire's EPS.

4.3.3 'Open Evening' in geographically central location (London) to attract prospective employees.

4.3.4 Maintained a focus on a 'grow our own' programme for EP recruitment, including;

- Maintenance of two Psychology Assistant (PA) posts designed to lead the post holders on places on a Doctorate in Educational Psychology training course.
- Maintenance of 4 Trainee EP training placements for Year 2/3 Trainee EPs. Interventions have had positive results as 3 out of the previous 4 EPs recruited having passed through the 'PA' and Trainee route.

4.4 Additional costs associated with actions above:

4.4.1 £200,000 to provide 3.0FTE additional EPs above the 17FTE currently employed in order to meet ongoing demands and address backlog. This would provide a total of 22FTE EPs and would enable the EPS to reinstate Link EP services as well as manage ongoing statutory demands.

4.4.2 £25k to undertake recruitment drive as set out above.

Early intervention and prevention

4.5 Improved working practices between EPS and SEN Team, resulting in better coordination of priorities and understanding of demands. SEN colleagues are working closely with EPS in order to ensure only highest priority Transfer Conversions require EP involvement.

4.6 A more child and family centred approach is under development, including;

- Co-ordinated joint assessments of SEND between Education, Health and Cares Services;
- Co-production of outcomes for EHCPs between Education, Health and Care Services.

4.7 Strengthening of Early SEN Support in order to manage the number of statutory request received. Several initiatives underway, including development and implementation of:

- Graduated Approach and associated supporting documentation for schools and settings;
- Repositioning EP / SENO engagement prior to the statutory process in order to ensure only the most appropriate statutory requests are received;
- Engagement of wider support services in provision of support prior to statutory assessment being requested.

4.8 SEN Pilot programme under development in order to re-establish early intervention and prevention service activity. Briefly, the Pilot will involve the engagement of an additional 2.0FTE EPs in order to facilitate the re-establishment of 'Link EP' capacity to education settings in order to support the following:

4.7.1 Work with identified schools to understand the needs of the cohort of children with emerging SEN, SEN Support and existing children with EHCP's

4.7.2 Ensure all SEN support children are registered and their SEN Support Plans are effective

4.7.3 Provide advice and support to schools to ensure the Graduated Approach has been fully implemented, and ensure appropriate advice from specialists has been sought and acted upon at the earliest stage

4.7.4 Attend cluster meetings of professionals/family to discuss individual cases where Graduated Approach has been completed but an EHCP is not required

4.7.5 Collaborate, alongside other professionals in the design and implementation of bespoke packages to support children's needs in mainstream settings

4.7.6 Advise on when an EHC assessment is required and ensure the new 20 week process is adhered to.

4.8 Additional capacity costs in order to achieve actions above:

4.8.1 £150k for two main grade EPs to support the service in re-establishing the early SEN 'Link EP' support.

5 Summary

5.1 The Educational Psychology Service has experienced unprecedented challenges over the last few years in terms of staff retention and service demands. The effects of this have been seen in poor performance against key performance indicators (20-week statutory completion rates). This has led, in turn, to the re-focusing of service delivery in order to respond to statutory demands.

5.2 In order to accelerate the improvement process, additional locum EP support is being engaged in order to enable the existing Conversion and ongoing statutory assessment demands to be met with increasing success. Additional Locum EP capacity has been identified (starting September 2017). This, combined with the new EPs recruited will assist the improvement process. Additionally, private organisations have also been re-approached to see if they could provide additional capacity to meet current demand. Based on projected staffing levels, Key Performance Indicators have been set for the EPS over the coming months in order to monitor progress.

5.3 A number of additional actions have been implemented in order to mitigate against further service under performance, including, a comprehensive Recruitment and Retention pay package and engagement and refreshed recruitment drive.

5.4 Further, strategic developments are also underway in order to strengthen BCC's Early SEN Support, focusing on establishing positive and supportive relationships with CYP, their parents / carers and school / educational settings earlier on prior to a request being made via the SEN Pilot and re-establishment of 'Link EP' role.

5.5 In order to achieve this, the EPS must maintain a focus on elimination of the outstanding accumulation of assessments, increase the 20-week completion rate for new assessments and complete all conversions within statutory timescales.

5.6 It is recognised that the EPS requires additional staffing capacity in order to achieve the actions set out above, and that this additional capacity will require additional resourcing.