

## **TRAFFORD COUNCIL**

**Report to:** Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 11<sup>th</sup> July 2023  
**Report for:** Information  
**Report of:** Karen Samples: Director of Education  
Sally Smith: Head of SEND & Inclusion

### **Report Title: SEND Update and Education, Health and Care Plan Quality Assurance & Timeliness**

#### **Purpose**

This report will provide a general overview of SEND in Trafford, and the current performance in respect of the timeliness of Education Health and Care Plans. In doing so, some comparator information is also included, and it will consider the reasons as to why we have experienced some challenges and the actions that are being progressed to address this. The report also refers to the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans, including plans for improving the quality assurance arrangements and strengthening management oversight and grip.

#### **Recommendation(s)**

**That the contents of the report are noted and to receive further updates as appropriate.**

#### **Summary**

In Trafford we are committed to having well-planned provision that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families. This means integrated services across education, health and social care which work closely with parents and carers, to ensure that individual needs are met without unnecessary bureaucracy or delay. It also means a strong commitment to early intervention and prevention so that help is provided in a timely way.

This is exemplified through our **SEND Ambitions Plan** which has been co-produced with Trafford Parent/Carer Forum. A renewed Quality Assurance Framework has been drafted which partners from across Education, Health and Social Care have endorsed. The accountability brought about by the Quality Assurance Framework and monitoring systems will help to ensure that Education, Health and Social care services work TOGETHER with children and young people and parents and carers to fulfil their duties for SEND under the Children and Families Act 2014. The Strategic SEND Partnership Board provides the necessary scrutiny and oversight of the delivery of the ambitions and performance.

#### **1.1 Background**

Trafford Local Area was last inspected in 2017, since which time much has changed organisationally and within a Policy context. Such changes have included:

- The realignment of the CCG and Local Authority rather than the continuation of the two being a formal arrangement.
- Community Health Services in Trafford transferred from Pennine Care to Manchester Foundation Trust on 1 October 2019 and Trafford Local Care Organisation was formed.
- In September 2021 children’s community health services were aligned through a management structure to Manchester children’s community health services, which strengthened the children’s professional and managerial leadership across both areas.
- The formation of our Locality Board (Trafford ICB arrangements) and the implementation of Greater Manchester Integrated Care Board

In addition, we have needed to respond to changing and emerging needs post pandemic as well as system-wide pressures and demand including significant pressures within the education and health system. However, within this changing landscape we have continued to work together with the needs of children and families being at the forefront. We have co- produced our Local Area vision for children and families in Trafford with SEND with families and key partners.

Our vision “to have well-planned provision that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families” reflects our collective commitment to our children and families of children with SEND. It places co-production and working with families, through integrated service delivery across education, health and social care, at the heart of what we seek to achieve.

Fundamental to our vision is the commitment to ensure children and families are receiving the right help, at the right time, in the right way, providing holistic support to the whole family. Our graduated approach, inclusion charter and our family help strategy are key enablers in delivering upon our aspirations.

We believe that every Trafford child and young person should have their needs met, as far as possible in their local community through effective multi-agency support and provision for children with SEN and disabilities so that they are supported and empowered to make good educational progress and can move on easily to the next stage of their education and later into employment and independent adult life. Our Early Years and Educational outcomes for children in Trafford are strong but we know we have more to do to ensure our help and support in all aspects of children’s and families’ lives is of the highest possible quality.

Transition remains a priority for all our children and young people. We know we have more to do to ensure our young people and their families are supported at all key points in their lives especially in respect of preparing our young people for adulthood, independence, and employment, as well as maintaining positive relationships with others. Preparation for Adult is a key priority in our Ambitions Plan (Ambition 4 - We will ensure that our young people with SEND have the same opportunities as all young people, so that they could have the same life outcomes).

## **1.2 Governance**

Leaders from across the system come together through our new and emerging governance arrangements to provide whole system connectivity and ownership. As a Local Area, Trafford has benefitted from system-wide support including political and corporate support within the Local Authority. In the last year and in response to the new health and care landscape, findings of the LGA Peer Review (2021) we have been systematically reviewing our Governance arrangements.

Changes that we have adopted to strengthen our system wide governance and to ensure strong connectivity with the integrated care board arrangements have included:

- The re-shaping our SEND partnership Board which is currently chaired by an expert in the field.
- A commitment and actively progressing arrangements for the co-chairing of our SEND partnership Board with our Parent Carer Forum (TPF) and Health Leaders.
- Recently establishing a Chief Executive and Lead Member Assurance meeting for SEND, ensuring political and senior officer line of sight to SEND. The Leader of the Council also attends this meeting ensuring that the Political line of sight sits at the highest level.
- This coupled with the Chief Executive of the Council being the NHS Placed Based Lead means that health and Local Authority alignment is strong.
- A dedicated Children's Commissioning Board has been established and re-shaped which reports directly into the Trafford Locality Board (our local ICB arrangements) ensuring that there is a whole system line of sight to commissioning and transformation activity, including funding pressures.

Our SEND Strategic Partnership is well attended and has good representation from across the entire system. Headteacher representation at Board level ensures that it is well placed strategically to maintain a focus on inclusion, outcomes and achievement.

Delivery of the SEND Strategy and the Ambitions Plan is overseen by our SEND Partnership Board with dedicated Ambition workstreams driving forward delivery of the plan. Our Parent Carer representatives are influential members of the Board and our aim to achieve co-chairing between Health, the Local Authority and Trafford Parent Carer Forum will cement the sharing of decision making.

Additional scrutiny and line of sight is provided through the Chief Executive of the Council & Place Based Lead GM NHS ICS, Lead Member, Deputy Place Based Lead and DCS all being either core members or associated members of the Locality Board. Political scrutiny is further enhanced through the Assurance meeting and reporting into Children's Scrutiny.

In this way we are embedding our model of distributed leadership and our vision of making SEND "everyone's business".

## **1.3 SEND Ambitions Plan**

We have co-produced a SEND Ambitions plan that sets out our strategic intent and the actions we will take improve outcomes for our children and families. Delivery of the Ambitions Plan has oversight from the SEND Ambition Steering Group and is progressed through dedicated workstreams, with leaders from across the system taking responsibility for driving forward our plans. In this way we are actively working towards our aspiration of making SEND *everyone's business* being turned into action on the ground. Our plans have been linked to outcomes and we have collaborated with The Council for Disabled Children to help and support us in this regard.

**Our Ambitions for SEND are:**

<b>Ambition 1</b>	<b>Ambition 2</b>
<b>“Our voices shape our futures”</b>	<b>“We have the best start in life”</b>
We will provide opportunities and remove barriers so that the voice of children, young people and their families influences service planning, design, delivery and review.	We will support children with SEND and their families throughout early childhood to ensure they have the best start in life
<b>Ambition 3</b>	<b>Ambition 4</b>
<b>“We thrive and reach our full potential”</b>	<b>“We are equipped with skills for employment and for life”</b>
We will build confidence of parents/carers and young people in local SEND provision & ensure that children & young people with SEND can attend	We will ensure that our young people with SEND have the same opportunities as all young people, so that they could have the same life outcomes.
<b>Ambition 5</b>	<b>Ambition 6</b>
<b>“We are supported &amp; safe in our homes and communities”</b>	<b>“We are Healthy”</b>
We will ensure that our children and young people with SEND receive the right help and the right time and live within their families where it is safe to do so	We will deliver universal, targeted and specialist services to support children and young people to people to have the best health, mental health and wellbeing as possible by working collaboratively across health providers & commissioners.

We remain committed to prioritise the delivery of our ambitions but the strength of our collaboration and collective commitment coupled with a strengthened understanding of data across the system, means we are in a position to progress our plans.

**1.4 EHC Plans**

We have experienced a significant rise in the numbers of 0-25 year olds with an Education, Health, and Care plan, 2745 in Jan 23 compared to 2448 in Jan 22

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/data-tables/permalink/65b16e97-afee-45f4-8c06-08db6d8a8e6d>)"

The table below highlights the growth in EHC Plans over the last 3 years which the EHC team are currently case-holding.

YEAR	NO. OF EHC PLANS
2019	2034
2020	2258
2021	2447
2022	2808

Across all English metropolitan boroughs, the proportion of pupils with education, health and care (EHC) plans range from 2.5% to 5.3%. Trafford has a value of 4.2%, compared to an average of 4.0% in nationally.

Indeed, national statistics produced recently, indicate a **9% growth in cases** and a **23% growth in requests for assessments**.

The following shows the position over time, with regards to referrals into the EHC service.

	2021	2022	2023 (end of June)
Requests (No.)	413	518	369
EHC Plans issued	269	455	223
Plans issued within 20 weeks (%)	71%	40%	59 %
Total no. of EHCPs	2447	2808	2767
Year on year % Increase in Plans	8.37 ↑	14.8 ↑	-1.46% ↓
% Refuse to assess	7.8	9.1	14
% Refuse to issue	2.9	4.6	2
EHCPs ceased	99	137	-

### Trafford Assessment Panel (TAP)

Trafford's Assessment Panel considers referrals for an EHC needs assessment. The panel includes partners from across education, health and social care and reviews referrals from both schools and parents.

### Moderation and Resource Panel (MAR)

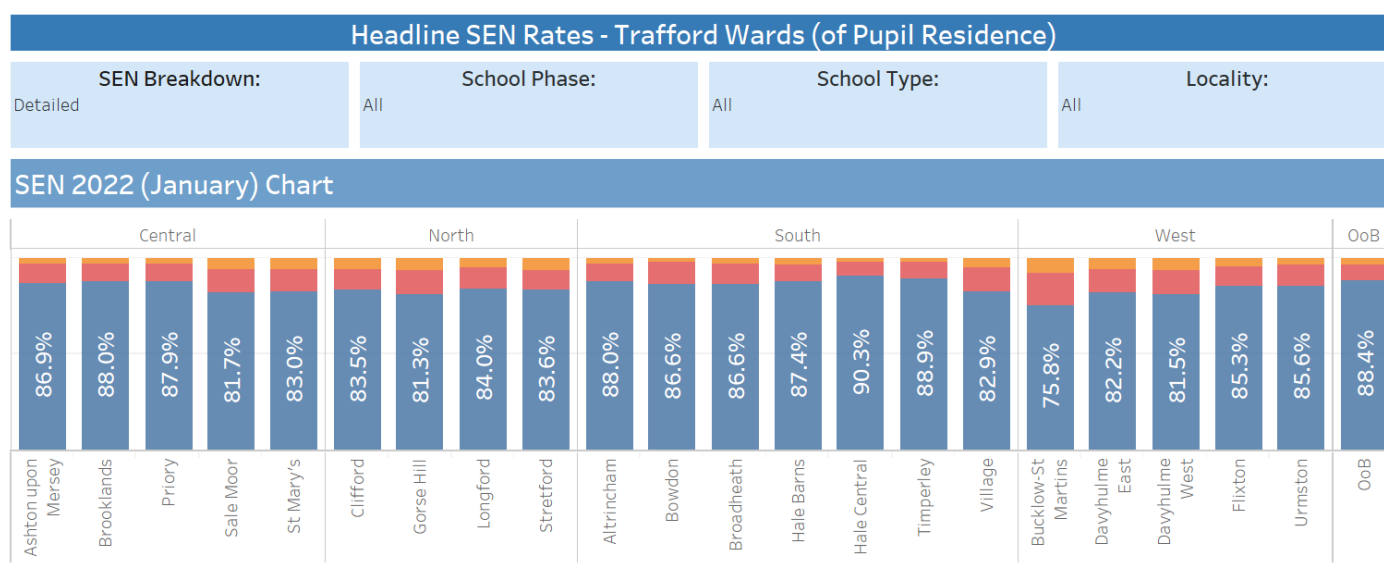
Trafford's MAR Panel determines if an EHC Plan should be issued. It also makes recommendations, agrees outcomes and type of placement and the suggested funding allocation.

If there is a decision not to issue a plan, this is because the assessment has shown that the child's needs can be met by school/college resources at SEN Support.

The vast proportion of requests for an EHC Plan come in from schools and settings, but we also receive referrals from parents/carers or young people themselves.

% Received	2021	2022	2023
Education	69.5	69	70
Parent/carer	30	29	26
Young person	0.2	0.8	0.4
Other	0.7	0.9	1.1

The following charts illustrate the most recent breakdown of SEN rates in the different wards. The blue bar shows the percentage of non-SEND pupils, the red bar shows the percentage of pupils at SEN Support and the orange bar provides the percentage of pupils with an EHC Plan.

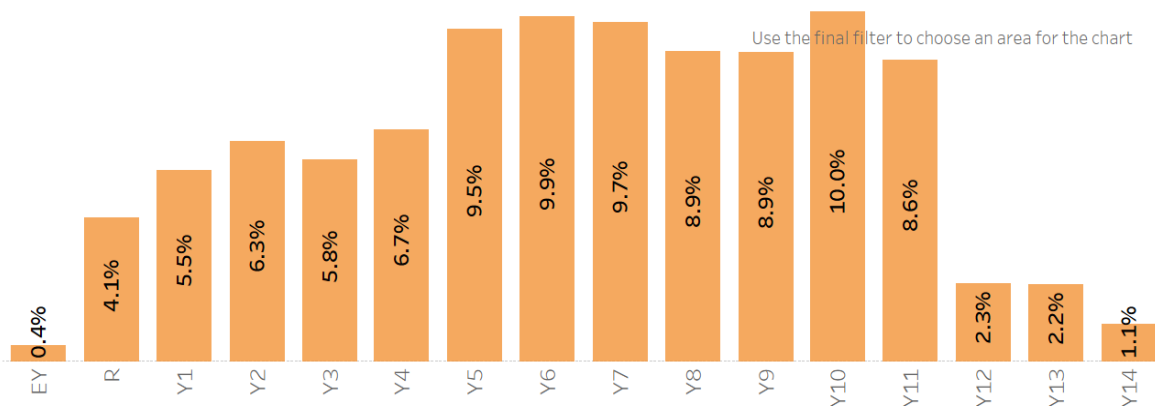


From this data, it is clear that Bucklow-St-Martin's has the highest number of children/young people with SEND with 16.4% supported at SEN Support and 7.8% having an EHC Plan. Sale Moor, Gorse Hill and Davyhulme West also report higher number of pupils with SEND.

In addition, the following charts provide information on the percentage of pupils with an EHC Plan across year groups, the gender breakdown and those who are eligible for free school meals.

The chart below, highlights the number of pupils with an EHC Plan across the different year groups.

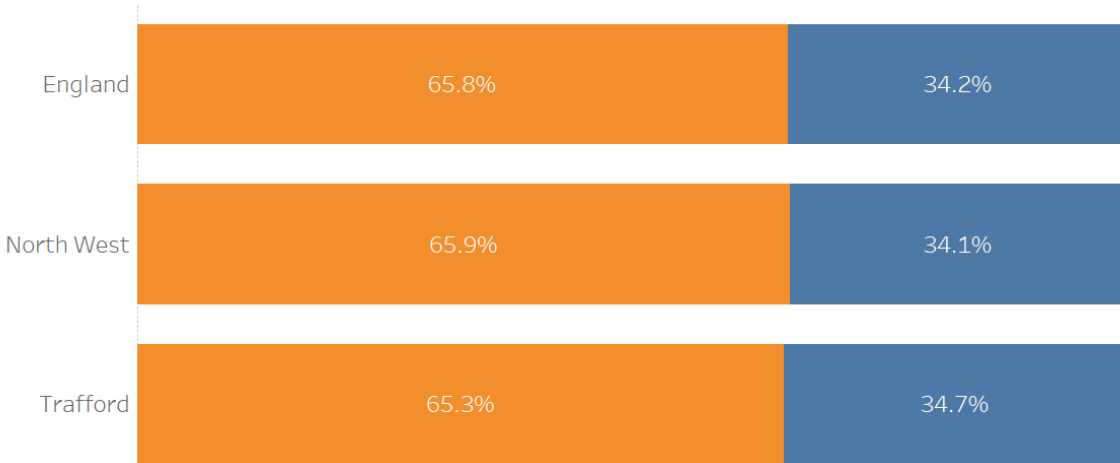
Bar Chart (Total Pupils - Trafford)



This reflects the spike in the number of plans from year 4 to year 5 and the drop off from year 11.

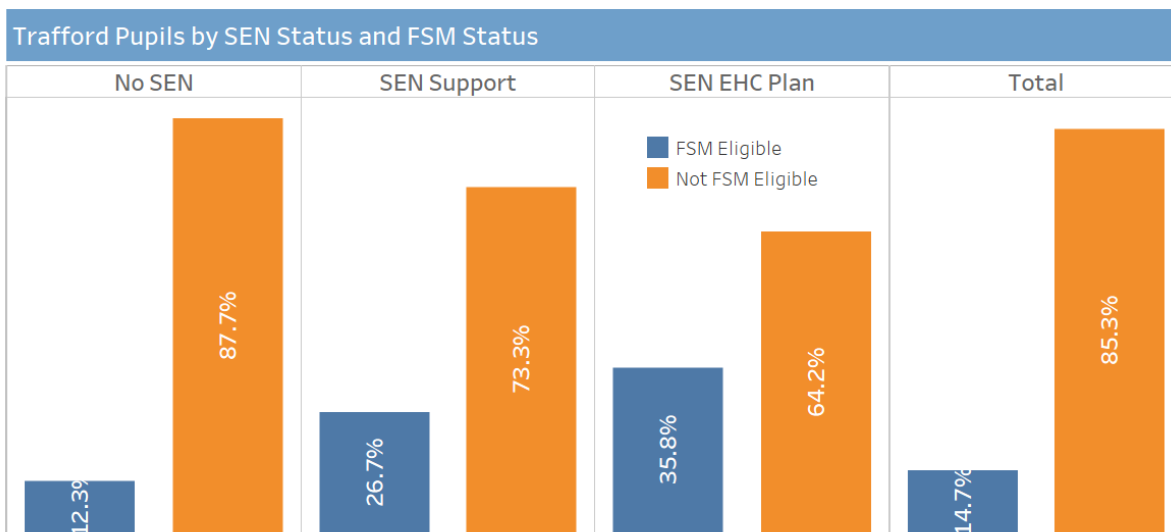
SEN Rates by Gender 2021/22

Gender Split (%) of SEN Pupils: Total Schools, Total Pupils



The vast majority of pupils with SEND are boys, which is a similar position to both the national picture and that of the Northwest.

Finally, the next graph shows the proportions of young people eligible for free school meals (FSM) who have SEN needs. Overall, most young people with SEND are not eligible for FSM although there is a higher proportion of FSM pupils with an EHC Plan at 36%.



### Issuing EHC Plans in the 20-week timescale

Increased demand coupled with staffing pressures across the system has impacted on the timeliness of assessments and we have needed to take action to address this. Timeliness of EHCP completion has varied between 20% and 52% (compared with 71% in our last publicly reported data). Indeed, national statistics also report a drop in timeless data to 50.7%. We recognise that this is frustrating to families and means we have not consistently provided the right help at the right time.

Improving the quality and timeliness of EHC Plans is a priority within the SEND Ambitions Plan with oversight from Sally Smith, Head of SEND and Inclusion. We are adopting the mantra of, **“There is no 21<sup>st</sup> week.”**

The following actions are captured within the plan:

PRIORITY ACTIONS	SUCCESS CRITERIA
Hold monthly SEND Performance Clinics to maintain robust oversight of timeliness data.	Timeliness data improves to pre-pandemic levels.
Hold additional panels to tackle the backlog of requests.	By April, the backlog will have been concluded.
Implement a communication strategy so that caseworkers communicate effectively with schools and families.	Reduction in complaints and escalations from schools and parents
Establish clear expectations around timescales for TAP and MAR-weekly combined multi-agency EHC panels.	TAP decision by wk 4 and MAR by wk 12. MAR panel decision to issue by week 12-14 (not 16)
Increased accountability, management and supervision implemented for caseworkers, including establishing a framework for supervision and support for complex cases that cause delays.	System of supervision in place. Staff understand what is expected of them and baseline expectations are established- caseworkers supported in decision making and completion rates of caseworkers is monitored.



<p>Improve quality and timeliness of health advice in relation to the requirements of the Code <b>and submission of advice is of high quality.</b> Identify SEND Champions in provider teams and involve them in the QA process.</p>	<p>All partners are clear about timescales within the EHC process and adhere.</p>
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## High Needs Budget Position

Like many Local Areas this rise in demand for support has placed significant pressures on high needs funding and has resulted in a reported deficit of £2.165m. Similarly financial challenges exist across the health and care systems so working collaboratively will better support us to deliver on vision for children and families with SEND.

### 1.5 Quality Assurance of EHC Plans

Most recently in **June 2023, Paula Thompson-Jones, an Ofsted SEND trained inspector**, carried out sampling work to replicate the process Trafford will go through when we have our Local Area SEND Inspection.

**A summary of the findings are below.**

- The views and aspirations of children and young people were all included on the request for EHC assessment form. However, they tended to be a set of single line statements. Whilst these provided some useful insight **it did not ‘bring the child to life’**
- Children and young people’s **educational needs were generally well described** in many cases with a sense that the professionals contributing to this section know the child well.
- For the most part **health needs were framed in relatively general terms.** Plans do not routinely contain sufficient information from health partners contained even when the children had significant needs.
- EHCPs **do not routinely contain information about the social care needs of children.** Where Social Care was involved, the emphasis was on recording the case status, ‘child in need, child protection, looked after’ rather than identifying the Social Care need.
- **Provision was generally detailed and clear.** It was particularly helpful when it was described in a way that a parent would have a good sense of the support they could expect to see for their child.

Ambition 3 will drive activity to improve the quality of EHC plans.

### **What will ‘Good’ look like across Trafford?**

As the external validation has highlighted, there are a number of improvements that must take place to ensure that our families’ experience of navigating the SEND process and the quality of EHC plans improves at pace. Our commitment is as follows: We will:

- ✓ Work together with children and young people and their parents/carers to **ensure they are valued and able to fully contribute** to developing an Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan which identifies both the needs and aspirations of children and young people accurately **throughout a person-centred plan**.
- ✓ **Use a strengths-based, relational approach** to planning for children and young people, focusing on what works well and what they like in order to help to plan provision to meet their needs.
- ✓ **Deliver plans in a timely manner**, respecting each other's views at all times.
- ✓ **Have a skilled workforce** with the skills, knowledge and understanding to ensure we fulfil our statutory requirements in relation to current legislation.
- ✓ **Ensure the Graduated Approach for SEND informs the provision and strategies** used to help meet the needs of children and young people.
- ✓ **Enable children and young people to achieve their dreams and aspirations** and celebrate their successes.

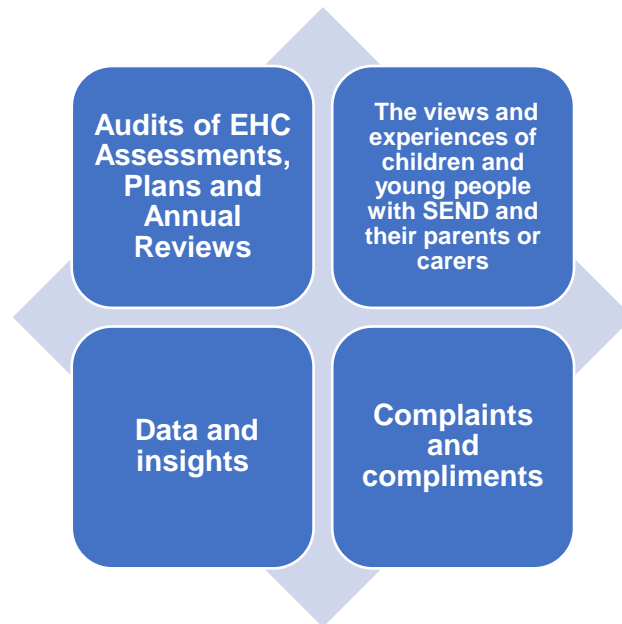
This will be achieved in part through the Quality Assurance Framework and throughout our SEND ambitions.

## **1.6 Quality Assurance Framework**

A new draft quality assurance framework has been created in April 2023, which details our approach to the Quality Assurance of EHC Plans. This is with a view to:

- Ensure children and young people benefit from consistent high-quality Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans
- Ensure compliance with the Children and Families Act and SEND Code of Practice for EHC Plans
- Drive high-quality practice across Trafford
- Improve the lived experience of children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers
- Improve outcomes so that children and young people with SEND reach their potential and have their needs met

This framework considers the four domains of quality assurance in Trafford, and how we bring together the learning from all four to drive improvement in what we do.



There are four tiers which support audit the Board's audit arrangements:

Tier 1: Quality Assurance of agency contributions

The arrangements that individual agencies have in place to assure the quality of their own contributions to EHC Assessments, Plans and Annual Reviews.

Tier 2: Single Agency Audit

All partners across education, health and social care are responsible for undertaking single agency audits to ensure the quality of information shared and assessment is of a high quality. This means each area, education health and social care looking at how their advice fits into a whole EHCP using an audit specific to their area.

Tier 3: Multi Agency Audit

Multi-agency meetings will take place to audit the quality of EHC Assessments, Plans and Annual Reviews will take place each half term

Tier 4: System Leader Review

In addition to single and multi-agency audit, representatives from the SEND Partnership Board (including TPF) will, with the support of the Multi Agency Audit Panel, review an individual EHC Plan and/or an Annual Review with methodology. With consent, this will include meeting with the child or young person and their parent or carer as a conversational audit to understand their views, ambitions and any perceived barriers.

**Additional forms of quality assurance**

There are other forms of quality assurance that provide real insights into the views and lived experience of families and young people. These focus on gathering the lived experience of our families, children and young people.

- i. Thematic Lived-Experience Advisory Panels (LEAP)

Trafford Parent/Carer forum established the LEAPs following discussions with the Communication & Engagement Group, as a mechanism to enable parents to truly share what it feels like when caring for children with SEND. The panels are led by parents and relevant officers/professionals attend and **actively listen**. A number of panels have taken place thus far, to discuss the themes of Short Breaks, Speech & Language and Preparing for Adulthood. The findings of the LEAPs are fed back at the Communication & Engagement Group and relevant action plans put into place. The Strategic SEND Board will continue to monitor the developments and improvements identified through the LEAPs and gain assurances from relevant partners that action has been taken.

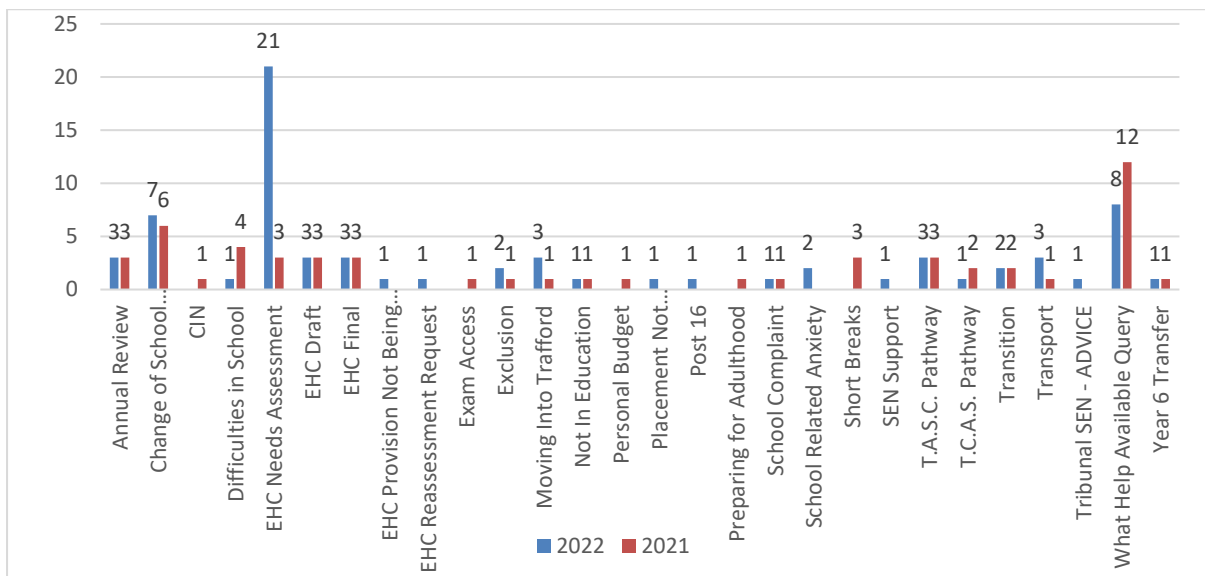
ii. Annual Trafford Parent/Carer Forum Survey

TPF sends out a survey annually to capture the views of families who have children with SEND. These are also shared with the C&E group and reported to the Strategic Board. We have also asked TPF to sense-check our revised Ambition Plan so that it is meaningful and can be understood by families and most importantly, will address the needs of our children, young people and their parents/carers.

iii. SENDIASS Report

The SEND Independent Advisory Support Service has previously shared highlight reports of their activity with the strategic board. This informs the number of contacts the service has received as well as the themes they are supporting families with. The service had a period of time without a manager due to not being able to recruit, so there was limited feedback, but there has been a new Head of Service recently appointed so these reports will commence and be reported into the Steering Group.

The last report (July 22) provides an insight into the types of contact made by parents.



This enables the Communication & Engagement Group to analyse the detail behind the data to ensure families are effectively supported and informed and report to the Steering Group if actions need to be taken.

iv. The Voice of the Young Person

Gorse Hill Studios host an annual “Let’s Talk Conference” for young people with SEND. This has enabled children to come together and share their views as well as participate in a number of creative and sporting activities.

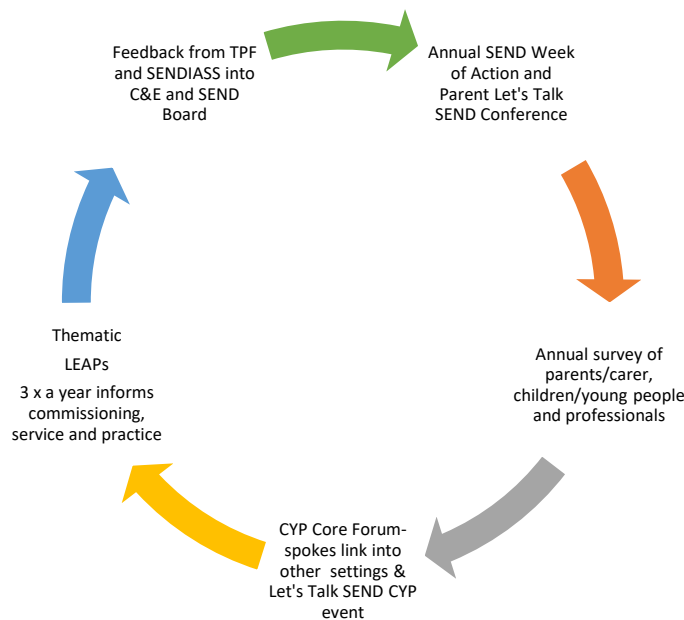
The Communication & Engagement group work with Gorse Hill studios to determine the themes and plan for the day, to ensure we maximise the opportunity to get meaningful feedback which will help to drive forward improvements for our children and young people.

v. Analysis of data and performance indicators

We monitor and analyse performance through our SEND scorecard to identify strengths and areas for improvement. The is data captures a host of information related to education, health and social care performance statistics.

We will continue to monitor the impact on outcomes (and progress) for children and young people and will develop case studies to share best practice. This includes trends in data, both what is going well and what isn’t going well. The SEND Strategic Board will provide multi-agency oversight and ensure actions plans are created, and that actions are prioritised and delivered to bring about improvements across education, health and social care.

***The diagram below captures the additional quality assurance mechanisms that are in place.***



**Actions taken – next steps**

I. Training and workforce development

A package of training has been made available to our Health and Social Care colleagues which is provided through the Council for Disabled Children

website and through the Designated Clinical Officer. This has focused on “What good advice looks like” and provides case studies to discuss and work through. This training module has been shared with colleagues in Social Care and the vast majority of children’s social workers have accessed this. We are mindful however, that with changes of social worker, there remains an ongoing risk of training not being accessed.

Regular training and updates are also provided through the termly SENCo forums for schools with a particular focus on person-centred plans and reviews. All SENCOs are required to complete the NASENCo qualification.

### **Next steps**

- Performance reports to show training that has been accessed by relevant partners. Ensure adult social workers have accessed the CDC training.
- During the summer term development day for the EHC team, ensure all complete the CDC training module and carry out moderation activity of EHC Plans. The team to revisit the checklist used to QA plans and update to ensure sufficient rigour.
- Cluster SENCOs to provide bespoke support to SENCOs around effective provision-map planning and person-centred reviews and plans.

## **II. Audits**

- Audits have been completed from across a number of teams in Childrens Social Care including the Children with Additional Needs service, Safeguarding & Review Service and a Thematic Review of Children attending Egerton High School.
- EHC co-ordinators also carry out on average, 25 quality assurance checks on EHC plans each month and peer challenge the quality assurance.
- There have been 3 multi-agency audits in addition to the sampling of cases undertaken by Paula so far, and 12 EHC plans considered.

From the audit activity thus far, it is clear that there is still too much inconsistency, but the feedback of audits will drive forward the necessary training and improvement that needs to take place.

### **Next steps**

- Use the Steering Group to scrutinise audit reports and performance updates.
- Ensure Education, Health and Social Care services carry out dip-sampling of advice and draft plans and support improvements.
- Ensure the EHC Manager implements a system of regular oversight of the QA checks of plans from the EHC team.
- Ensure Adults Social Care have systems in place to quality assure the input into EHC plans.

- Strategic leads who attend decision-making panels will quality assure the advice provided at panel to ensure draft plans are more robust and person-centred. Learning from panels will also be disseminated amongst the relevant teams.
- The DSCO to establish systems of support when children/young people are not known to social care through the early help offer.
- Continue to embed the QA Framework and produce audit performance reports for the Strategic Board.

Performance reports of the above will also be shared with the Steering Group and **Learning and Improvement Group**.

### III. Learning and Improvement Group

We think it is important to have a continual learning and self-improvement culture, and we will develop ownership of practice and standards through the Learning and Improvement Group. This group has been established to provide the necessary oversight of audit activity and provide training and support to drive forward improvements. We have only had 1 meeting so far, so this is in its infancy and there is representation from strategic lead. Audit reports will be brought for scrutiny and training and development activity identified for each service area.

Portfolios of “what good looks like” will be prepared and shared across the local area and a performance overview report will be provided for the Strategic Board.

## 1.7 Conclusion

Clearly, significant improvements are required to ensure that all partners from across the SEND system are providing high quality support to our families and young people as identified throughout this report. Through the strengthened governance and oversight, the refresh of the SEND Ambitions Plan, the embedding of the quality assurance framework, a system of high-quality training and the rigorous monitoring cycle that will take place, we are confident that the conditions for improvement are being established and that all are committed to ensuring that outcomes for children and young people with SEND are the best they can be.