

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Children and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
Date: 23rd July 2024
Report for: Information
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Report Title: Progress Report following the Local Area SEND Inspection

Purpose

This report will provide an overview of the progress made against the strategic priorities, following the Local Area SEND Inspection.

Recommendation(s)

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

Summary

Our SEND Improvement work continues to be progressed through Trafford's SEND Ambitions Plan which provides our overarching approach and strategic intent and is scrutinised and challenged through the strengthened governance arrangements that are in place. Our SEND Ambitions Plan drives our response to the inspection findings as we are committed to ensuring that our progress is clear and that, as a partnership, we hold each other to account and critically come together as a system to make improvements. Some of these include:

- Robust governance from across the partnership
- Strengthened SEND performance oversight through data dashboards and performance clinics
- The implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework

1.0 Background

Ofsted and CQC conducted a Local Area Special Educational Needs & Disability inspection in October 2023. This inspection was conducted under the new Area Send Inspection Framework introduced in January 2023, by a team of Inspectors from both Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) reflecting the system wide approach to SEND.

The inspectors focused on whether:

- Children and young people's needs are identified accurately & assessed in a timely & effective way.
- Children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support.
- Children and young people receive the right help at the right time; children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes; children and young people are valued, visible and included in their communities

The overall outcome of the inspection was that Trafford's, "local area partnership's arrangements led to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND." Inspectors recognised the strengths and the positive work that is making a difference to our children and young people, but clearly recognises that there is more to do.

Whilst the inspectors provided the Council and ICB with more detailed feedback which highlighted strengths and weaknesses, the report identified the following areas where improvements are required:

- ✓ Leaders across the partnership should ensure that the SEND strategy is fully embedded across health, education and social care. They should tighten their strategic oversight so that all workstreams have equal clarity in how they are mapped out and organised. This is to reduce the disconnect and to improve accountability between strategy and practice.
- ✓ Leaders across the partnership should improve transitions for children and young people between children's and adults' services and within health, education and social care. They should improve their strategy and timeliness in relation to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.
- ✓ Leaders across the partnership should develop, deliver and embed a clear approach to address how they will support children and young people with a range of mental health and neurodiverse needs. This includes identification, assessment and support for children and young people, with or without a diagnosis.
- ✓ Leaders across the partnership should increase the opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard and acted on both at a strategic and individual level. They should also develop the range of, and access to, social opportunities for children and young people in order to reduce the current inequality across some areas within Trafford.

It is of particular significance that the Inspection team were clear that leaders from across the partnership were ambitious for children and young people with SEND and much work had taken place to strengthen the planning and governance to drive forward improvement. This, coupled with confirmation that as an Area Partnership we know ourselves well and this is reflected in our strategic planning, means that we are well placed to make further improvement. The Local Area Improvement Plan is detailed through the SEND Ambitions Plan and can be found on the Local Offer <https://www.trafford.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/SEND-inspection.aspx>

2.0 Areas for improvement

2.1 Leaders across the partnership should ensure that the SEND strategy is fully embedded across health, education and social care. They should tighten their strategic oversight so that all workstreams have equal clarity in how they are mapped out and organised. This is to reduce the disconnect and to improve accountability between strategy and practice.

The SEND Steering Group and Strategic Partnership SEND Board provides the mechanism to ensure oversight is strong across all the SEND Ambitions.

Key Objectives

- a) To ensure there is clear sight of the progress against the ambitions plan across the system through having active work streams with clear plans of activity.
- b) To align performance and quality metrics against the Ambitions
- c) To ensure through relevant governance that the work of the Ambitions is clear and transparent with opportunity for escalation and challenge.

- d) To ensure the work of the Ambitions plan and our improvement activity is rooted in and influenced by practice.

Progress

Strategic oversight and strong governance continues to be a priority across the SEND Local Area and this has been achieved in part, through the recruitment of an Independent Chair of the Strategic Board. Members of the DfE and NHS also attend Strategic Board meetings to provide additional check and challenge. The SEND Strategic Board links directly to the Locality Board, ensuring a clear line of sight from senior leaders and the prioritisation of SEND.

Our multi-agency SEND Steering group is responsible for driving forward the delivery of our plans and this is progressed through a series of dedicated Ambition work streams. We believe that this approach means we can connect our vision and aspiration with practice and making a difference to our children and young people. The Steering Group continues to have oversight of the progress against the SEND Ambitions Plan and receive reports from the Ambition Leads detailing activity and impact, to ensure pace and traction continues in those areas. Each Ambition has dedicated workstreams which is cross-partnership and key performance indicators are in place to monitor progress and ensure strengthen accountability.

A summary report is provided to the SEND Strategic Partnership Board by the Chair of the Steering Group which highlights both progress and risk or barriers. This enables SEND Leaders to agree actions that need to be progressed and mitigations to be implemented within the risk register. As parent/carers and schools are represented on the Board, their views and agreement is provided.

Performance reports are provided regularly to the SEND Partnership Board which identify the metrics aligned to the SEND Ambitions. In addition, the Lead Member/Chief Executive Assurance Meetings ensure that appropriate strategic oversight of performance and progress is in place.

2.2 Leaders across the partnership should improve transitions for children and young people between children's and adults' services and within health, education and social care. They should improve their strategy and timeliness in relation to preparing young people with SEND for adulthood.

Work in this area is driven through Ambition 4 of the Strategic Send Ambitions plan, led by the SEND Improvement Lead with colleagues from across Education, Health and Childrens and Adults social care.

Meetings take place 6 weekly to provide oversight of action planning, although there is a degree of overlap with other ambitions meaning work also takes place outside of the formal meeting structures which drives governance.

Key Objectives

- a) Develop and embed a borough-wide all-age transition strategy for SEND ensuring that there is appropriate focus on Preparing for Adulthood
- b) Co-produce practice standards for Reviews across the system
- c) Develop system guidance for the alignment of reviews
- d) Children's aspirations are central to the whole process from assessment and through review.
- e) There are range of housing options that meet the needs of young people.
- f) Transition pathway for all young people with SEND are clear.

- g) Young people and parents and carers have access to clear, accessible information in relation to transition.

Progress

Work has continued with parents and key stakeholders across the system to develop a transition strategy. There has been a workshop with parents and professionals held in March with a further one planned for September. Over 50 parents across the 2 dates will have attended and their feedback is affirming the areas of improvement identified in the action plan. Transition and in particular SEND transition has been supported by the education representatives on the SEND board and conversations have taken place across the community of schools to further develop this work. Lived Experience Advisory Panels

There is ongoing work in relation to annual reviews as a whole, but with a particular focus on transition reviews; this is especially important as we know this is the area where parental feeling is the strongest in that this does not work in the way that it should, to ensure that the support for young people during some of the most difficult times for them is strengthened. The performance information pertaining to annual reviews is available and scrutinised through governance. There are plans to review the paperwork and standards around targeted attendance and expectations around the recording of the meeting by the autumn term of this year.

Quality assurance of a sample of annual reviews takes place and is reported through the Learning and Improvement Group. Work relating to the quality of the plans and guidance reflects the importance of ensuring children's views and aspirations are clear. Steps have been taken to align the review of short breaks packages and the EHC annual review and we are working to explore how this alignment can also take place for children/young people who are cared for and have a Personal Education Plan or have a Child in Need or Child Protection plan.

There are three main pathways for young people who are likely to need adult mental health support:

Independence Pathway

The Independence Pathway is for young people with an EHCP but are unlikely to need care and support into adulthood. This is determined by the discussion at the Year 9 Annual Review. A Care Act screening tool is under development to support these conversations too. The Preparing for Adulthood EHC plan from Y9 needs to be focused on the young person's education, employment, independent living, community inclusion and health and include advice and guidance. If specialist advice and guidance is required, a referral into Adult Social Care will be necessary.

Neighbourhood Pathway

This Pathway is for young people who are likely to need care and support into adulthood and those interventions will be delivered through the four Adult Locality Teams.

Complex Pathway

When a young person has a diagnosed Learning Disability, they enter the complex pathway. This is based on access to community health colleagues (Cheshire Wirral Partnership) and the offer of support applying for those people who are identified with an IQ below 70.

Work on the pathways into adult social care has continued though the pace has been varied between the pathways. The complex pathway is the most advanced and on the whole is felt to be working well. There is more to do to ensure a consistent experience for young people and work is progressing to better capture the performance information.

However, work on the neighbourhood pathway has developed at slower pace but is now working more effectively for children known to children's services. We are now focusing on ensuring that young people who are not known to children's services who may need to access this pathway do so in a timely way. Our newly established post-16 panel and the introduction of a post-16 co-ordinator in the EHC team will help this process.

There has been a further piece of work related to the mental health pathway for children open to CAMHS; although this is in place, the priority is to develop the front facing information for families and this will be launched soon. There is more to do to ensure that all professionals, families and young people have access to information to ensure they are aware of what support exists for young people post 18 in relation to their mental health and how to access it. There will be a very small number of young people who require support through adult mental health teams although this will not be the case for the majority of young people with an EHC plan for Social, emotional, mental health needs.

2.3 Leaders across the partnership should develop, deliver and embed a clear approach to address how they will support children and young people with a range of mental health and neurodiverse needs. This includes identification, assessment and support for children and young people, with or without a diagnosis.

Work in this area is driven through Ambition 6 of the Strategic Send Ambitions plan, led by our Health partners, but commissioning is a golden thread running throughout our whole ambition plan.

Key Objectives

- a) Children with SEMH and those who are neuro diverse will have their needs met at the earliest opportunity
- b) We will have an evidence based clear understanding of the needs for children and young people with these needs.
- c) Children and young people will have their needs met at the earliest opportunity. This will not be diagnostic dependent
- d) We will have system wide SEND data dashboards at strategic and operational levels.
- e) SEND commissioning is informed by current system wide data and performance information.
- f) Electronic systems are in place and performance reporting is available across service

Progress

The Integrated Care Board (ICB) Joint forward plan includes key items which correlate with our SEND Ambition Plan including reducing waiting times and transforming pathways to deliver a needs-led approach. This also includes support for schools for children/young people with mental health and neurodiverse needs, the prevention of Tier 4 hospital admissions, improving speech and language provision and reducing emotionally based school non-attendance.

Since the SEND inspection, a pre and post diagnostic offer has been commissioned to provide timely support and communication for families, provide signposting to available support, delivery of more targeted support in schools and to families, as well as more specialist support through pre and post diagnostic courses. As part of this offer, this will include clinically and nationally recognised interventions including iBasis, PACT and Riding the Rapids. However, the challenge of waiting times to access health services remains a challenge and numbers awaiting diagnosis are continuing to increase. Whilst we are not alone with this issue, the SEND Partnership is sighted on the challenges and are working hard to mitigate against the risks that sit around this.

Commissioners are also currently working with the providers of the Neurodevelopment pathways to identify what support has been provided to each child and provide communication to all families on the waiting list so that they can access support whilst they are waiting. Trafford have bid to bring the Autism in Schools model currently operating in secondary schools across the borough to deliver in primary schools. This will see the offer integrated across 7 of our primary schools and will enable learning to be replicated across further schools in the coming years.

We have commenced engagement work with key stakeholders across Education, Health and Social Care and Children and Families, in order to ensure the strategies reflect the voices of our residents. The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment has been refreshed and ensures we have the mechanism in place to respond to the needs of our residents. The next phase, through a multi-agency approach, will be to identify the key themes and priorities from this work through a process of check and challenge. This will allow us to ensure our strategies are co-produced and focused on the delivery of services through a needs-led approach.

GM ICB have also developed a SEND performance dashboard which includes key areas of reporting for mental health, community health services, health input in to EHCPs, the neuro-development pathway data, Learning Disability health checks, Dynamic Support Register (DSR) numbers and those accessing services via the DSR. This will have oversight from the Strategic SEND Board as well as internal health governance systems.

MFT have commenced the data transfer for the Autism and ADHD pathways which were the remaining services to add to the PARIS system and will be completed in the coming weeks.

Commissioners are working with TLCO to start the review of the community health services. This will commence with the Physiotherapy and Occupational Therapy services in the coming weeks. We will also be carrying out quarterly monitoring of community health services from September in order to inform local and regional assurance meetings.

GM ICB, through the Trafford locality, commission mental health services through the Thrive model. Services range from signposting to risk support delivered by NHS Trust and VCSE providers including additional mental health services based within schools and Trafford College. Details can be found in the attached padlet link: [Trafford Thrive - Mental Health and Emotional Wellbeing \(padlet.com\)](https://trafford-thrive-padlet.com)

The [SEND padlet](#) provides an overview of Trafford's SEND commissioned and community support offer.

2.4 Leaders across the partnership should increase the opportunities for children and young people's voices to be heard and acted on both at a strategic and individual level.

They should also develop the range of, and access to, social opportunities for children and young people in order to reduce the current inequality across some areas within Trafford.

Work in this area is driven through Ambition 1 of the Strategic Send Ambitions plan, led by the SEND Improvement Lead with colleagues from across the SEND Partnership but most importantly children and young people and parent/carers.

Key Objectives

- a) SEND Partnership activity will be driven by and focused on issues that are important to children and young people.
- b) EHC plans will be personalised and reflect the individuality of children and young people.

- c) All activity will reflect engagement with and the voice of children and young people
- d) Children and young people are consulted and influence the development and transformation of local services.
- e) To ensure equity of access across the borough
- f) To ensure social opportunities are accessible and available to children across a range of needs

Progress

Work is ongoing in relation to the quality of plans and ensuring they reflect the individuality of children and young people. Our quality assurance framework is in place and learning is shared through the Learning and Improvement Group. This then ensures that activity is targeted where improvements are required. To date, the quality assurance activity reflects some improvements in this area within the EHC plans themselves, and there is a much greater sense of young people and their views though we have more to do to reduce variability.

Greater Manchester Youth Voice have been commissioned to deliver a SEND youth panel and this will start in September. This will enable children and young people to be integral to the development and transformation of services. In addition, a SEND participation role to be located in the Youth Engagement Service has been agreed.

A review of short breaks has been ongoing and there has been a series of engagement activity with children and young people, parents and carers. This information will be utilised to inform the recommissioning of services.

3.0 Education, Health & Care Plans (EHCP): Timeliness and Quality

Ambition 3 of our SEND strategic plan focuses on improving the quality of our EHCPs and Annual reviews as well as meeting the statutory timescales of the EHC process. The timescales include decisions to carry out an EHC needs assessment, issue an EHC Plan, the completion of a final EHCP and the Annual Review process including the issuing of amended plans following this. The actions are captured in a timeliness and quality action plan that sits below the Ambition Plan.

Improvement in the timeliness of decision making to assess and to issue has been made through improved tracking. Issuing within 20 weeks is slowly improving again but this has been slow this year due to increased numbers of plans. There are currently 3100 EHC Plans, and our latest timeliness figure is 53.4% which is above the national data of 50.3%.

As mentioned previously, the Annual Review process is a key area for improvement. This includes the timeliness of holding the meetings, notifying families of our intentions to amend, and issuing the new plan. We are not only focused on timeliness but also improving the quality of this process and we are revisiting training on person centred reviews for staff and settings. We are working through a restructure in the EHC team which alongside additional investment in targeted posts is designed to improve timely communication to families and young people and drive forward the improvements required.

Greater scrutiny and monitoring of performance data is now happening at all levels in a much more challenging and robust way. Data system development through Power BI to provide dashboard reporting at operational and strategic levels will support this further and is inclusive of dedicated performance clinics which are chaired by the Director of Education.

In addition, our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for EHCPs is being embedded, with regular multi-agency audit meetings taking place; these have been focused on preparing for

adulthood, Y6-Y7 transition and new plans produced on the template being tested for the DfE Change Programme. Increased audit activity alongside service quality assurance and dip sampling is beginning to show the green shoots of improvement. This includes the following:

- ✓ Where there are cognition and learning needs, EHC plans are clear and well written
- ✓ There is an improved evidence-based understanding of issues
- ✓ The voice of the child/young person is captured well in plans
- ✓ There has been a significant improvement in the quality of social care advice and the use of a new template provided through our involvement in the Change Partnership Programme has assisted with this
- ✓ Speech and Language needs, advice and support has been strengthened

However, there are also some clear priorities for the partnership to continue to improve as variability still remains with some needs better described than others.

Following each audit there is a Learning and Improvement Group (LIG) where learning is shared, and actions agreed. This is developing to include learning from complaints and tribunals. The implementation of both the performance clinics and the QAF are a significant step change in terms of ensuring oversight and influence of day-to-day practice and will be key enablers in driving forward improved outcomes.

Finally, but most significantly, Ambition 3 also includes work on the development of inclusive practice in mainstream schools and sufficiency planning. We remain committed to ensuring we are an inclusive borough and ensuring effective, high quality SEND Support provision is in place for all children and young people is critical to this work. As a result, we have already rolled out the Early Years Ordinarily Available Provision framework which has been developed across Greater Manchester and the Primary and Secondary frameworks are following imminently. These documents will work alongside the Trafford Graduated Approach to ensure that quality first teaching strategies and robust intervention planning is in place to ensure children's needs can be met without the need for an EHC Plan. Area Lead Sencos have been recruited from some of our schools to provide moderation support for our schools.

4.0 Conclusion

Trafford partners are committed to providing the best quality education, care and support for all children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). We are beginning to see the green shoots of improvement which are needed but we know we still have to work hard to maintain the pace and traction required.

We continue to drive forward our improvement work to ensure that we have a well-planned provision that meets the needs of children and young people with SEND and their families though working in an integrated way with parents and carers. We are committed to ensuring that individual needs are met without unnecessary bureaucracy or delay and early identification and support is at the heart of what we do.

Our aspiration is that by working together and investing in our workforce, we will make SEND 'everyone's business'.