

## TRAFFORD COUNCIL

**Report to:** Overview and Scrutiny Committee  
**Date:** 15 January 2024  
**Report of:** Jill McGregor – Corporate Director Children’s Services

### Report Title

An overview of the Local Area SEND Inspection (2<sup>nd</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023)

### Summary

This report provides an overview of the SEND Inspection Framework, the activity that took place during our inspection in October 2023 and summarises the findings and subsequent actions taken and planned.

### Recommendation(s)

Members of Scrutiny are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.
- Provide Challenge and support to the Local Area Partnership.
- To receive regular updates on the improvement work and the Ambitions Plan.
- Agree to receive copy of our formal response and action plan, and further updates on progress against the priority areas.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

**Name:** Jill McGregor  
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**Background Papers:** Inspection Report - [Trafford Inspection Report](#)

Corporate Priorities	N/A
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	N/A
Finance	N/A
Legal	N/A
Equality/Diversity	N/A
Sustainability	N/A
Carbon Reduction	N/A
Staffing/E-Government/Asset Management	N/A
Risk Management	N/A
Health and Safety	N/A

## 1) Background

1.1 The Area SEND inspection of Trafford Local Area Partnership took place from 2<sup>nd</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> October 2023, with the inspection team being on site between 16<sup>th</sup> – 20<sup>th</sup> October. This inspection was conducted under the Area Send Inspection Framework introduced in January 2023 jointly by a team of Inspectors from Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) and as such is very much a system wide inspection reflecting the need for a system wide response to SEND.

1.2 Trafford, as a SEND area partnership, was last inspected in 2017 and at that time was deemed to be supporting children and young people well. The focus of the inspection at this time was on Local Areas' ability to meet the requirement to convert 'statements' into Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) as well as whether there were strong joint commissioning arrangements in place.

1.3 Since that time much has changed within both a local and national context, including the changed health landscape, with the implementation of Integrated Care Boards and Partnerships (ICBs and ICPs), as well the continued increase in the rise nationally in EHCPs and increased complexity of need including emerging needs post pandemic. Consequently, the new revised inspection methodology very much reflects some of these changes and has a clear focus on outcomes for children.

1.4 The purpose of Area SEND inspection is to:

1. Provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND.
2. Where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements.

1.5 The evaluation schedule used within this inspection considers 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.

1.6 There are three possible outcomes to the Inspection, and, unlike Social Care and School based inspections, these outcomes are not single word outcomes and are intended to be more outcome focused.

The possible outcomes are:

- i. The local area partnership's SEND arrangements typically lead to positive experiences and outcomes for children and young people with

SEND. The local area partnership is taking action where improvements are needed.

- ii. The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.
  - iii. There are widespread and/or systemic failings leading to significant concerns about the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, which the local area partnership must address urgently.
- 1.7 Trafford Local Area Partnership report was published on 22<sup>nd</sup> December and the Partnership was judged to have outcome ii which 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 as '*our arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND*'.

This outcome accords with our own partnership self-assessment and comprehensive strategic planning is underway to make further improvements – building upon the areas strengths whilst recognising there is more to do.

Formal monitoring of the partnership improvement activity will be through a series of Engagement Meeting with CQC and Ofsted on a 6 monthly basis. In addition, there will be oversight by DfE and NHS England – the first of these meetings with DfE is scheduled to take place on 14<sup>th</sup>. February.

## **2. Inspection Activity**

- 2.1 The inspection was a 3 week process with a team of CQC inspectors and Ofsted inspectors, including an Education HMI lead, with the team being on site for the final week.
- 2.2 The activity undertaken included meeting with over 200 practitioners from across the system visiting 2 Schools, Trafford Alternative Education Provision, a GP surgery, an early years provider; Trafford College as well as having dedicated time with Trafford Parent Carer Forum (TPF) and our young people.
- 2.3 In addition to field work activity, the Inspection involved significant scrutiny of our data and current performance, audit activity, tracking of individual children and their plans. Three surveys were also distributed, and their findings considered within the inspection; one distributed to parent carers by parent carers: one to practitioners and one to children and young people.
- 2.4 As a partnership we were required to produce a Self-Assessment (SEF), provide information on the context of Trafford as a place and SEND partnership and explore with the inspection team what we thought our areas of strength and

areas for improvement are and critically what action we were taking to further improve outcomes for our children and young people.

- 2.5 The Self-Assessment was co-produced with key stakeholders, including Trafford Parent Forum, and we are using the same methodology in the development of our improvement plans following the outcome of the inspection.
- 2.6 Throughout the field work activity the Inspection team and provided detailed feedback via Keeping in Touch meeting on that day's activity. This level of detail is not necessarily contained within the report but provides a rich source of information for reflection – both in terms of what is working well and what else we need to strengthen.

### **3. Inspection Findings**

- 3.1 As reflected within the final outcome report the Inspection both highlighted some areas of strength and areas where further improvement is required.
- 3.2 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.
- 3.3 The work that has been implemented to reshape and strengthen the SEND Partnership Board was recognised, and the additional challenge that has been brought through having an independent chair has provided a platform on which to increase our challenge each other in order to amplify some areas of improvement work.
- 3.4 Similarly the engagement and commitment of the Parent Carer Forum was seen as an area of strength – recognising their vital contributions as strategic partner not only at Board level but also within a number of strategic forums. The introduction of the Lived Advisory Experience Panels (LEAPS) by the TPF has been influential in developing services. Similarly, the work the forum within the Autism in Schools Project has enabled lived experience to be at the forefront of training.
- 3.5 By contrast, listening to and acting upon the voice of children and young people was seen as an area that needs further strengthening. This was something that had been highlighted within our SEF and whilst this is an area for improvement examples of good practice were seen within education settings, Trafford Sensory Impairment Support and within individual plans there is a need to capture this rich source of information strategically to inform service developments.

- 3.6 The inspection highlighted that for many children and young people their needs are identified accurately and in a timely way. The role of health visitors and early years services was seen as a strength and ensuring that this starts at an early stage assessed in a timely and effective way.
- 3.7.1 However, the early identification of need and responding effectively as a system to children and young people with Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs (SEMH) and neuro diversity was considered to be an area that needed further strengthening. The absence of an agreed partnership approach to address this for some children and young people is having an adverse impact.
- 3.7.2 Some areas of strength were identified in respect of our children and young people's mental health needs e.g., therapist and clinicians who know children well and develop personalised plans; CAMHS crisis management preventing some acute admissions and the support offered through some third sector providers however consistency and timeliness of support was variable.
- 3.8 Responding to this will require greater clarity of our commissioning intentions and approach under the auspices of the new operating mode of the ICB. Inherent in this is the need to have more sophisticated data across the whole system in a differentiated way.
- 3.9 EHCPs were identified as showing some signs of improvement but variability still evident. The contributions of the Educational Psychology service were identified as a key strength and the role of SENAS was seen as being helpful and whilst the inspection team could see evidence of health advice being provided it was not consistently evident within the plans. In some instances, gaps were identified in draft being shared with some health professionals thereby limiting their ability to ensure their advice was accurate.
- 3.10 Work has been progressed to revise the systems and processes in respect of seeking advice and wider EHCP processes. The roll out and implementation of our Partnership Quality Assurance Framework will support greater consistency of plans. The roles of the Designated Clinical Officer and the Designated Social Care Officer are supporting the improvement of health and social care contributions to plans.
- 3.11 Strengthening of the Annual Review process also requires improvement. For children and young people open to social care there is a need to better align different meetings and some young people the review process does not always focus on aspirations.
- 3.12 Whilst strengths were identified in the approach that has been taken to refreshing our short break offer which has included social opportunities for some children and young people further work is needed to enhance social opportunities within communities. Disparity in opportunity was identified both in respect of need

(less opportunities for children with more complex need) and where children and young people live.

- 3.13 The Ambition plan has been enhanced in this regard under Ambition 1 (Our Voices Shape Our Future), but it is acknowledged that this work is in early stages.
- 3.14 Ensuring our children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes is an area that will require focused attention and there is a need to accelerate our work in this area.
- 3.15 Some strengths such as strong proactive practice for children and young people who are not in education employment or training (NEET), transition planning for children with complex needs and are known well by services transition is effective were identified. Handover arrangements with the Learning Disabilities Team were similarly stronger.
- 3.16 However, areas for further consideration and improvements included enhancing the range of housing options, strengthening pathways for children without a learning disability as these are under-developed and ensuring that professionals consistently talk to each other in relation to transition.
- 3.17 Our ability to effectively support our children and young people at all transition stages has been a long standing issue for the partnership.
- 3.18 We are continuing to develop a transitions strategy building on work that has already taken place and there is proactive work being progressed to develop pathways for young people who do not have complex needs. Ambition 4 – “We are equipped with skills for employment and life” has been reviewed to ensure the work programme is comprehensive and this work stream is currently being led by our Interim SEND Improvement Lead to provide additional capacity and support the acceleration of the plans.
- 3.19 Underpinning the work of this Ambition will be the development of system wide performance information in the form of a PfA dashboard. This will enable the partnership to have transparency as to the effectiveness of the actions that are being taken. In addition, the lived experience of our parent carers and young people will be critical in understanding whether the actions we are taking are having positive impact.

#### **4. Progress and next steps**

- 4.1 As highlighted within the Inspection report the partnership has an agreed, co-produced strategic plan, Trafford’s SEND Ambitions plan which is already reflective of much of these identified areas for improvement. The Ambition plan focuses on:

- I. Our voices shape our future.
- II. We have the best start in life.
- III. We thrive and reach our full potential.
- IV. We are equipped with skills for employment and life.
- V. We are supported and safe in our home and communities.
- VI. We are healthy.

Dedicated workstreams and action plans are in place to progress each of these Ambitions.

- 4.2 However, we need to ensure our strategic planning and the difference it will make is translated into activity upon the ground. Underpinning our Ambitions further with a Commissioning Strategy that links to need will assist in this regard as will the wider learning from this inspection process.
- 4.3 We recognise that some ambitions workstreams are stronger and more mature than others and such they are having greater traction; for others there is a need to accelerate and amplify activity. Membership all workstreams has been refreshed and there is good system wide representation within them.
- 4.4 Work is currently underway to ensure system wide understanding of the Ambitions plan and improvement activity. This will not only promote better connectivity and shared understanding but will also ensure we have the right professionals supporting delivery upon the agreed actions through a more distributed model.
- 4.5 We have ensured that the detailed learning from the inspection has been shared at leadership levels across the partnership for appropriate dissemination to individual teams.
- 4.6 It is proposed that the partnership will produce a dedicated plan that responds to specific requirements for improvement that have been identified within the inspection and that this will be aligned and incorporated into the work that is already being progressed (The Ambitions Plan). This will enable progress and traction against the inspection recommendations to be readily scrutinised and the difference it is making to be formally reviewed through both existing governance and further reporting to Scrutiny as appropriate.
- 4.7 We recognise that responding to the recommendations and areas for improvement will continue to require a system wide response and working collaboratively at all levels and maintaining momentum and not being complacent will be critical. However, we are in a position where we have a number of key building blocks in place.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1 Members of Scrutiny are asked to:

- Note the contents of this report.
- Provide Challenge and support to the Local Area Partnership.
- To receive regular updates on the improvement work and the Ambitions Plan.
- Agree to receive copy of our formal response and action plan, and further updates on progress against the priority areas.