

TITLE	Education Health and Care Plan Review
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 20 March 2018
WARD	None Specific;
DIRECTOR	Interim Director of People Services - Paul Senior

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

The findings of the Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) review will improve outcomes for children and young people aged 0 -25. Young people will stay in education, employment and training by improving the quality of EHC plans. The plans will be more specific in terms of the provision required and the intended outcomes.

RECOMMENDATION

Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is asked to consider and support the recommendations arising from the review in order to improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans and the contribution to improving outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs and/or Disability (SEND) in the local area.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

This report presents the findings from a small-scale evaluation commissioned by Wokingham Borough Council. The remit was to examine the quality of the SEN Team's Education Health and Care (EHC) plans. The evaluation also looked more widely at SEN processes to establish if and how far they were meeting the needs of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and securing the best possible outcomes across education, health and social care, currently and as they prepare for adulthood.

The study was conducted from September 2017 to October 2017 and used an audit methodology, which evaluated not only the quality of SEN statements/EHC plans and SEN Annual Reviews (AR) but also explored SEN processes and decision making.

There were 601 children and young people with SEN statements/EHC plans at the time of the audit, and a total of 60 SEN case files were audited.

Background

1.0 Background

1.1 The Special Educational Needs and/or Disability reforms were introduced in September 2014 under the Children and Families Act 2014. Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans were introduced to ensure that children, young people up to age 25 were supported and their parents/carers. EHC plans are based on a single assessment process and they have replaced Special Educational Needs (SEN) statements.

1.2 In May 2016, Care Quality Commission and Ofsted started inspection the effectiveness local areas to find out how well they are implementing the SEND reforms. 152 local areas will be inspected over a five-year period. Inspectors will look at EHC plans and assess the quality of the plans and how well they meet the needs and improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

An independent evaluation of EHC plans was commissioned towards the end of the autumn term in 2017 The scope of this exercise is outlined in the section below.

2.0 Scope

2.1 The overarching aim of this study was to evaluate:

Wokingham Borough Council's SEN Teams, Education Health and Care (EHC) plans/SEN Statements and how far were meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN across the borough, in securing the best possible outcomes across education, health and social care.

2.2 The specific questions addressed were:

1. Were SEN Annual Review processes ensuring that EHC plan outcomes were being met.
2. Was the recording and clarity of primary SEN need outlined.
3. What was the quality of the SEN Resource Panel Process and decision making; the type of resource provision agreed; the financial arrangements and if and how this was supporting SEN need.
4. Was there evidence of children and young people with SEND being supported through a SEN Support plan without the need for an EHC plan.

Analysis of Issues

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3.0 Analysis of Issues

3.1 Effectiveness of Annual Review Processes

The audit revealed that most of the 601 children and young people with EHC plans are having their needs met in local mainstream provision within the borough.

3.2 The SEN audit focused on looking at the quality and content of EHC plans. The EHC plans largely reflected a 'person centred' approach, in which parents and young people are involved and their opinions are listened to. It was noted the quality of the EHC plans had improved since their introduction in 2014. There were a number of areas identified in which the EHC plans could be improved further, one of the key areas was to ensure that plans were SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely) or outcome-focussed.

3.3 The EHC process of monitoring and reviewing through the SEN Annual Review was analysed. This was identified as an area that needed attention, with much greater oversight and monitoring of this process by the SEN Team, to ensure that outstanding actions are followed up on and that reviews are dynamic and responsive to changing needs.

3.4 Post 16 EHC Plans

The EHC plans for young people post 16, were found to be variable in quality. It was not always easy to gain a sense of the 'voice' of the young person within the plan. Some EHC plans were not written in an age appropriate way and the 'aspirations' section, did not feature ambitious but realistic 'aspirations', which included working towards, independence, employability and community engagement.

3.5 The SEN audit found it difficult to evidence that post 16 provision such as colleges were meeting young people's needs, due to the lack of compliance in completing Annual Reviews. Immediate work is needed to ensure there is increased monitoring by the SEN Team to ensure that college provision is leading to improved outcomes for post 16 learners.

3.6 There is still work to do in establishing a clear Preparing for Adulthood (P4A) pathway, along with ensuring there is a range of local provision for post 16 young people, which includes not only education and training but employment options and apprenticeships and internships. It is anticipated that the proposed new operating model of a 0-25 SEN Service, will add additional workforce capacity, dedicated to furthering the work in this area, and ensuring compliance with the SEN Code of Practice.

4.0 Recording of primary SEN need

4.1 Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) remains the biggest area of primary need for children and young people on EHC plans. 241(40%) out of 601 children and young people have ASD as their primary SEN need. Of these 172 learners attended local mainstream schools or colleges, which suggests that High Needs Top-up Funding is being used well and is supporting children and young people with SEN in local provision.

5.0 SEN Resource Panel Decision Making

5.1 Audit findings revealed that there needs to be a stronger evidence base for all SEN resource allocations and checks and assurances that these resources are leading to improved outcomes. Decisions made and decision letters need to clearly record how decisions were reached and next steps.

5.2 Wokingham Borough Council, has acknowledged the need, and is in the process of reviewing the current resource allocation system (top-up banding system) in order to ensure there is a transparent, equitable evidence - based funding mechanism, which helps manage the growing pressures on the High Needs Funding Block allocation.

6.0 Children and young people on SEN Support

6.1 Audit findings revealed that more work is needed to promote a culture of early identification of need and use of SEN support as an early intervention response. With this requires a culture shift and change in attitude towards a belief that SEN resources can only be secured through an EHC plan.

6.2 Where there had been evidence of SEN Support, and use of Exceptional Needs Funding (ENF) this still usually resulted in an EHC plan being issued. The work being undertaken to analyse the impact of ENF will go some way in evidencing whether this model is effectively supporting children and young people without the need for an EHC plan.

7.0 Recommendations

Effectiveness of Annual Review Processes

1. Improve further the quality of the EHC plans with a particular focus on having more targeted interventions and specific outcomes. This will ensure that demonstrable progress is being made against the outcomes set.
5. Provide ongoing and differentiated training for the staff group to reduce variance in quality between individual team members.
6. Present information clearly in EHC plans should so that non-specialists can understand it.
7. Ensure EHC plan are more 'integrated' and reflect an understanding of the contribution of other professionals such as health and social care with a clear focus on supporting children and young people with SEN achieve their outcomes.
8. Identify the needs of children and young people with SEN early and improve the level of scrutiny over initial referrals for EHC assessment, to ensure as far as possible that children get the right level of support at the right time.

9. Increased monitoring and oversight of the high cost spend on ISP will ensure that these placements continue to be appropriate, are value for money and are leading to improved outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

10. Improving the interface between schools (post 16), colleges, post 16 providers and the SEN Team. This will help to ensure that the post 16 provision is securing good outcomes for young people as they move in to adulthood,
SEN Resource Panel Decision Making

11. Tighten the SEN Resource Panel decision making processes by ensuring multi-agency representation, characterised by creative use of resources, a level of challenge, a strong rationale and robust evidence-based decision making. SEN Resource Panel members will have a cost-conscious awareness and an understanding of the impact of long term of decision making.

12. Further improve Quality Assurance and monitoring frameworks to ensure that specialist high cost placements are value for money and are improving outcomes for children and young people with SEN.

13. Develop a SEND Commissioning Strategy will outline a commitment to a 'local first' approach. Expand the range and quality of local provision and reduce the need to place children and young people in ISP/Out of Borough placements.

14. Develop and implement a banding system which is equitable and has a greater flexibility for meeting the needs of children and young people with SEN.

Children and young people on SEN Support

15. Support schools to ensure they are confident in managing the needs of children and young people with SEN without the need for an EHC plan where appropriate.

16. Support children within SEN early years as far as possible without the need for an EHC plan.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of the austerity measures implemented by the Government and subsequent reductions to public sector funding. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions in excess of £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	N/A		
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	N/A		
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	N/A		

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
N/A

Cross-Council Implications
N/A

List of Background Papers
N/A

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