

Committee: Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

Date: 29th September 2022

Wards: All

Subject: SEND Written Statement of Action

Lead officer: Jane McSherry, Director of Children, Schools and Families

Lead member(s): Cllr Brenda Fraser, Cabinet Member Children's Services, and Cllr Sally Kenny, Cabinet Member Education and Lifelong Learning

Contact officer: Maisie Davies - Head of Performance, Improvement and Partnerships

Recommendations:

A. Members of the panel to discuss and comment on the contents of the report

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 The report provides members of the panel with information on the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA) and associated work by local partners to address the areas for improvement identified.

2 DETAILS

2.1 Following a 2019 inspection by Ofsted and Care Quality Commission, Merton was asked, as a local area partnership, to develop a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to address three areas for development identified:

Area 1: A lack of cohesive oversight of, and effective planning for, the implementation of some key aspects of the reforms, particularly by health partners

Area 2: The inconsistent quality and contribution of health partners and the poor utilisation of health information in EHC assessment and planning

Area 3: Poor quality EHC plans compounded by ineffective quality assurance.

2.2 Since then, the partnership has been working hard to address these areas together and considerable progress has been made to strengthen strategic and operational partnership working (see also Appendix One). This includes:

- Improvement in the quality of professional advice provided for EHC assessments and the quality EHC plans, as evidenced by routine quality assurance and audits. Team Manager audits in the SEND

Integrated Service have shown improvements in all sections of EHC plans. Between 2020-21 and 2021-22, Outstanding ratings improved from none to 6% of all EHC plan sections rated and Good ratings improved from 57% to 85% of all sections rated. In line with this, the proportion of Requires Improvement ratings have decreased from 42% to 9% and there were no sections rated Inadequate.

- Improvement in timeliness of professional advice provided for EHC assessments and completion of EHC plans, as evidenced by our performance reports. Between January and August 2022, 77% of EHC plans (excluding exceptions) were completed within 20 weeks, an improvement on 71% in 2021 (January to December) and above the national average of 60%.
- Parents, carers, children and young people are given opportunities to feedback routinely. This has included positive views of support received from partners in the system, alongside supporting identification of next priorities for development (e.g. annual reviews, which has led to the development of annual review improvement plan). In the latest responses to SENDIS online feedback form, the service received 3.7 out of 5 rating by parents/carers and young people gave a rating of 3.8 out of 5 stars for 'my views were included in the plan'. Merton's parent/carer forum, Kids First, is also represented on a wide range of strategic and working groups, providing routine feedback from their membership and supporting the partnership to co-produce solutions.
- Improved operational partnerships, including more collaborative relationships established, revised procedures including new EHC advice templates and improvements to multi-agency panels, and a robust quality assurance framework embedded including single- and multi-agency audits. This has been accompanied by a strengthened training offer rolled out across the partnership, including bespoke training for some providers, picking up areas for development from audit and performance reports.
- Refreshed governance structures, including a new multi-agency SEND Governance Board chaired by the council's Chief Executive and a fortnightly senior WSOA Task & Finish Group, continue to provide stronger oversight of progress against the WSOA alongside delivery of the 2020-23 SEND Strategy and the Safety Valve Programme.

2.3 Quarterly monitoring meetings take place with regional leads at the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England, attended by partnership leads and representatives from Kids First. These will continue until a re-visit takes place in Merton under the Ofsted and CQC SEND inspection framework, which will be focused on determining whether sufficient progress has been made in addressing the three areas for development details above.