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To:
The Chair and Members of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and
Safeguarding)

Date: 6 July 2018
Our Ref: DAC/O&S
Your Ref:

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Dear Councillor

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING) - TUESDAY 10TH JULY, 2018

I refer to the agenda for the above meeting and now enclose the following report which was unavailable when the agenda was printed.

Agenda No.	Item
10	Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group - Final Report (Pages 3 - 34) Report of the Head of Regulation and Compliance

Yours faithfully,

Democratic Services

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Report to:	Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) Cabinet	Date of Meeting:	10 July 2018 26 July 2018
Subject:	Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group - Final Report		
Report of:	Head of Regulation and Compliance	Wards Affected:	(All Wards);
Portfolio:	Cabinet Member - Children, Schools and Safeguarding		
Is this a Key Decision:	Yes	Included in Forward Plan:	Yes
Exempt / Confidential Report:	No		

Summary:

To formally present the final report of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group.

Recommendation(s):

Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding)

That the following recommendations be supported and commended to the Cabinet for approval:-

Cabinet

That the following recommendations be approved:-

1. That the Head of Schools and Families be requested to:-
 - (a) Review the current provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) units within schools, in order to ensure that appropriate provision is available within the relevant schools, as evidence provided suggests that the current system is not meeting the needs of children and their families appropriately.
 - (b) Encourage relevant schools to consider an alternative term for "SEN unit", possibly describing themselves as a "SEN-friendly school", in order to reduce stigma and improve compliance with the Equality Act.
 - (c) Liaise with the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups and Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust in order to explore the possibility of requesting assessment appointments by professional experts to be carried out in schools wherever possible, particularly specialised schools and those

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schools with a unit, in order to provide a “safe” environment for children, with less preparation required for those children who experience anxiety when their routine is disrupted.

- (d) Encourage those schools that have a SEN unit to have a dedicated Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), particularly where there are a high proportion of children with SEND, as evidence provided indicates that access to appropriate resources is greater in settings where there is a dedicated SENCO.
- (e) Encourage schools to include SENCOs on the management team for the school, in order to enhance the profile of SEND.
- (f) Encourage schools to support SENCOs to undertake referrals of children with SEND for professional input and assessment appointments, in order to minimise delays in obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
- (g) Explore the possibility, in conjunction with the Council’s Senior Educational Psychologist, of encouraging schools to undertake joint training on SEND for parents/carers’ groups within schools, with teachers and governors, in order to ensure that the information and approach provided are consistent, appropriate embedded
- (h) Consider the possibility, in conjunction with the Assessment, Resource and Provision Planning Team, of including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for parents/carers of children with SEND within the information available on school admissions, as part of the “school readiness” approach, in order to create an efficient and effective home-school partnership from the outset.
- (i) Explore the possibility of increasing communication with parents/carers on SEND through the Borough’s Family Wellbeing Centres, particularly from an early years’ perspective and possibly through the development of leaflets, in order to enhance “school readiness” for the children and their parents/carers.
- (j) Liaise with the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups to explore the possibility of requesting that information on SEND for parents/carers is included with/within the Personal Child Health Record (red book) and through the Healthy Child Programme, in order to assist in early intervention.
- (k) Encourage schools to include potentially useful contacts and useful events on SEND within school newsletters, in order to ensure that all parents/carers have access to them.
- (l) Encourage primary schools to share good practice and to consider undertaking inclusivity education with all children, particularly relating to SEND and neuro-diversity, in order to raise standards and ensure equitable and universal access to provision within schools.
- (m) Revise Sefton’s Local Offer in order to make it more user-friendly and accessible to parents/carers, which could include ensuring that it is easier

to find on the Council's web-site, using less formal language and the inclusion of a glossary of terms and abbreviations.

- (n) Liaise with the Council's Head of Health and Wellbeing in order to:
 - (i) Encourage schools to advertise and promote the School Nurse drop-in sessions within their newsletters, so that parents/carers have a greater opportunity to access them.
 - (ii) Request the School Nursing Service to approach the SENCO Forum, with a view to discussing the Healthy Schools Programme and to clarify the role of the School Nurse, particularly in relation to assessing children with SEND and in order to minimise delays in obtaining EHC Plans, as this would help to manage the expectations of parents/carers.
 - (o) Submit a report to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding), following an audit, providing information on the following:-
 - (i) Any high schools which are restricting the number of enhanced transitions for SEND, together with explanations for the reasons behind the decisions.
 - (ii) The number of children with SEND accessing Sefton schools who come from outside the Borough and the reasons for this.
 - (iii) Consideration of how parents who have children with SEND and who are not engaging with schools could be engaged, or re-engaged.
 - (iv) Whether funding has been withdrawn for children with SEND in Year 6 and the reasons for withdrawal.
2. That the Head of Health and Wellbeing be requested to ensure that the School Nurse carries out their role prior to any collaboration with the school SENCO, in relation to assessing and referring children with SEND, in order to minimise delays in obtaining EHC Plans.
 3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) be requested to consider the establishment of a Working Group in the future to examine post-19 provision for SENDs, in order to improve conditions for this vulnerable group of young people. This could be a Joint Working Group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills).
 4. That the Senior Democratic Services Officer be requested to liaise with relevant officers in order to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) receives a six-monthly monitoring report, setting out progress made against each of the recommendations outlined above and as a means of ensuring SMART objectives.

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Reasons for the Recommendation(s):

The Working Group has made a number of recommendations that require approval by both the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) and the Cabinet.

Alternative Options Considered and Rejected: (including any Risk Implications)

No alternative options were considered. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) established the Working Group to review special educational needs and disability process of assessment and the Working Group has performed this task.

What will it cost and how will it be financed?

(A) Revenue Costs

The support for SEN provision in schools is funded through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The High Needs Block is overspent by £1.5m and is under significant financial pressure due to the number of children requiring SEN specialist provision / 1:1 support in schools. Costs need to be reduced to keep within budget and avoid impacting on the Council's core budget if additional funding is not provided by central government. Any changes to the SEN offer in schools / specialist provision which increases cost will need to be funded from savings elsewhere in the DSG.

(B) Capital Costs

Not applicable

Implications of the Proposals:

Resource Implications (Financial, IT, Staffing and Assets): Not applicable
Legal Implications: Not applicable
Equality Implications: There are no equality implications.

Contribution to the Council's Core Purpose:

Protect the most vulnerable: Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) are considered to be some of the more vulnerable members of our communities.
Facilitate confident and resilient communities:

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By improving processes for children with SEND, this will contribute towards the facilitation of more confident and resilient communities.
Commission, broker and provide core services: The Local Authority shares responsibility for children with SEND and has a role in ensuring good quality care and services for them.
Place – leadership and influencer: The Council has a role to play in providing strong leadership and influencing Partners to work towards the provision of good quality care and services which are in the best interests of children with SEND.
Drivers of change and reform: The Council has a role to play in driving improvements for support to children with SEND.
Facilitate sustainable economic prosperity: Good support for children with SEND is more likely to lead to them reaching their maximum potential, which could include improved life chances.
Greater income for social investment: Good support for children with SEND is more likely to lead to them reaching their maximum potential, which could include improved life chances.
Cleaner Greener Not applicable.

What consultations have taken place on the proposals and when?

(A) Internal Consultations

The Head of Corporate Resources (FD.5209/18.....) and Head of Regulation and Compliance (LD.4433/18....) have been consulted and any comments have been incorporated into the report.

(B) External Consultations

A number of external organisations and Providers have been consulted on during the course of the review and these are listed within the Final Report.

Implementation Date for the Decision

Following the expiry of the “call-in” period for the Minutes of the Cabinet Meeting

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Appendices:

The following appendices are attached to this report:-

- Final Report of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group.

Background Papers:

There are no background papers available for inspection.

1. Introduction/Background

1.1 At its meeting on 26 September 2017 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) established a Working Group to review the topic of Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment; and the following Members were appointed to serve on the Working Group (Minute No. 23 (4) refers):-

Councillors Murphy, Brenda O'Brien and Spencer;
Co-opted Members Mrs. Sandra Cain, and Ms. Libby Kitt;
Former Councillor Maria Bennett; and
Former Co-opted Member Mrs. Carrie Ryan-Palmer.

1.2 Councillor Spencer was appointed as the Lead Member for the review.

1.3 Terms of reference for the Working Group were as follows:-

To review the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment, in terms of "what it will look like in the future", to include the following aspects:-

- Confidence in mainstream education to support Special Educational Needs; with particular reference to:-
 - Referrals and Assessments;
 - Information provided to parents/carers, particularly on assessment and during the transition to secondary school;
 - SEN provision in schools;
 - Sharing of "good/best practice".

1.4 The Final Report is attached for consideration

1.5 The Committee is requested to support the recommendations produced by the Working Group and commended them to the Cabinet for approval.

1.6 The Cabinet is requested to approve the recommendations.

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**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
(Children's Services and Safeguarding)**



**SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY
PROCESS OF ASSESSMENT
FINAL REPORT JULY 2018**

Overview
& Scrutiny



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Lead Member's Introduction

It gives me great pleasure to submit to you the findings of the investigation in relation to the review on Special Education Needs and Disability - Process of Assessment.

When we started the review we felt that “the child” appears to have been “lost” in the system of assessment used to obtain Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).

We had heard criticisms of certain aspects of the system from parents and carers and we tried very hard for this not to be a piece of work that set about blaming people and organisations. Instead, we met with as many groups and organisations as we could in order to hear their side of the story and to appeal to them to work with us in improving things for the children concerned.

The focus of this review was very much that every parent/carer and their family matters and that any proposed recommendations we came up with should provide outcomes to support and empower parents/carers, allowing them to take back some control over the process.

I would like to thank everyone who took part in interviews and submitted information that helped inform the Working Group. I am grateful to the Working Group Members for their commitment and efforts in looking at this issue. Finally I would like to thank our support officers for their assistance and professional support provided to the Working Group and for producing this final report.

We would like to give a special thank you to Debbie Campbell for going over and above her duties; she has been invaluable in helping us with her knowledge, time and support.



Councillor Paula Spencer
Lead Member,
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
(Children's Services and Safeguarding)



Glossary of Terms

SEN – Special Educational Needs

SEND – Special Educational Needs and Disability

SENCO – Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator. The SENCO is responsible for the day-to-day operation of a school's SEN policy. The SENCO has an important role to play in ensuring that children with SEND within a school receive the support they need. All mainstream schools must appoint a teacher to be their SENCO. The Code of Practice requires that the SENCO must be a qualified teacher and must achieve a National award in Special Educational Needs C-ordination within three years of appointment.

EHCP – Education, Health and Care Plan. The former Statement of SEN, setting out a child's Special Education Needs (educational) and any additional help a child should receive, was replaced by the Education, Health and Care Plan, which sets out educational, health and social needs for a child and also sets out the additional support required to meet those needs.

The Local Offer - A Local Authority's publication of all the provision "they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans."



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Background to the Review

A joint inspection of the Special Educational Needs and Disability Service had been undertaken by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in November 2016, and had examined the local area's effectiveness in the following:-

- The identification of children and young people with SEND;
- Meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND; and
- Improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Following the inspection the Council had been required to submit a written "Statement of Action" on five areas of concerns arising from the findings of the joint inspection, the areas of concern being as follows:-

- Action 1 – the poor progress made from starting points by pupils with a statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education Health and Care Plan at key stages 2 and 4.
- Action 2 – the poor operational oversight of the Designated Clinical Officer across health services in supporting children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities and their families.
- Action 3 – the lack of awareness and understanding of health professionals in terms of their responsibilities and contribution to Education Health and Care Plans.
- Action 4 – the weakness of co-production with parents, and more generally in communications with parents.
- Action 5 – the weakness of joint commissioning in ensuring that there are adequate services to meet local demand.

The Committee requested that a Special Meeting of the Committee be arranged in order that the findings of the Inspection could be considered in more detail along with the draft Improvement Plan addressing the areas of suggested improvement.

Subsequently, a Working Group was established to review the topic of "Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment".



Membership of Working Group

At its meeting held on 26 September 2017, the Committee resolved as follows (Minute No. 23 refers):-

- “(4) a Working Group be established to review the topic of “Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment”; and in that respect the following Members be appointed to serve on the Working Group:-

Councillor Spencer, Sandra Cain, Carrie Ryan-Palmer and Libby Kitt;
and

- (5) the Head of Regulation and Compliance be requested to contact those Members who were absent to seek their interest in serving on the Working Group referred to in (4) above.”

Further to Minute No. 23 (5) above, other Members of the Committee were contacted in order to seek their interest in serving on the Working Group and the following Members expressed an interest:-

- Councillor Bennett, Murphy and O’Brien.

This was subsequently reported the Committee at its next meeting on 5 December 2017. In addition although Mrs. Palmer’s appointment to serve on the Committee as a Parent Governor Representative was due to expire, the Committee considered a request put forward by the Chair of the Committee and resolved (Minute No. 34 refers):-

- “(2) the request for Mrs. Palmer to continue to serve on the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment Working Group be approved.”

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Terms of Reference and Objectives for the Review

The Working Group agreed the following Terms of Reference and Objectives:

To review the Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment, in terms of “what it will look like in the future”, to include the following aspects:-

- Confidence in mainstream education to support Special Educational Needs; with particular reference to:-
 - Referrals and Assessments;
 - Information provided to parents/carers, particularly on assessment and during the transition to secondary school;
 - SEN provision in schools;
 - Sharing of “good/best practice”.

Methods of Enquiry

- Through the gathering and consideration of data, information and evidence, either from existing sources or through specific Working Group interviews;
- Meeting and talking to parents regarding their experiences;
- Through any necessary site visits, e.g. schools; and
- SEN Improvement Plan (background document).



Summary of Meetings / Site Visits

A summary of Working Group meetings and activities undertaken during the course of the review are set out below:-

Date of Meeting	Activity
5 January 2018	Scoping of review. Discussion of issues.
26 January 2018	Consideration of background documents. Discussion of issues.
16 March 2018	Discussion of issues.
20 April 2018	Interview of witness – the Council’s Senior Educational Psychologist. Consideration of information on school nurses.
18 May 2018	Consideration of information from the Sefton Parent Carer Forum. Interview of witnesses – the Council’s Consultant in Public Health, Assistant Director (Clinical), North West Boroughs and a representative of the School Nursing Service, to discuss the School Nursing Service. Consideration of information on the numbers of children with special educational needs.
25 May 2018	Interview of witnesses – a representative of Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups and two Service Managers, Community Therapies, Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust, to discuss difficulties encountered by parents/carers with appointments with professional experts. Interview of witness – the Council’s Head of Inclusion.
22 June 2018	Consideration of key findings/conclusions and formulation of recommendations.

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In addition, Working Group Members undertook site visits to view facilities for Special Educational Needs and to discuss arrangements for children with SENs at the following schools:-

Date	Site Visit
28 February 2018	Meols Cop High School, Southport Birkdale High School.
2 March 2018	Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School, Seaforth Rimrose Hope Church of England Primary School, Seaforth.



Background Documents

Working Group Members considered the following documents during the course of their review:-

1. Procedure / Process - Education, Health and Care Assessment and Plans (EHC)
2. Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice: 0 to 25 Years
3. Special Educational Needs and Disability Service - Update on the Implementation of Actions arising from the Joint Inspection with OFSTED and CQC.
4. Figures - Trends for Sefton EHCP
5. Legal Position for the Council - Legal Authority Duties
6. NICE guidelines and the role of Educational Psychologists
7. Information received from Healthwatch Sefton regarding the SENs agenda and feedback obtained from parents/carers.
8. Service Specification for the 0-19 Healthy Child Programme for Sefton
9. The SEN2 (2018) Form – numbers of children with Special Educational Needs
10. Information received from the Sefton Parent Carer Forum.



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Interviewing Key Witnesses

Staff and parents/carers of Meols Cop High School;

Staff and parents/carers of Birkdale High School;

Staff and parents/carers of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School;

Staff of Rimrose Hope Church of England Primary School;

Working Group Members visited the schools above to meet with staff, parents, and in some cases, governors, to discuss SEND provision within the schools and to discuss experiences of parents/carers of children with SEND.

Senior Educational Psychologist

Working Group Members met with the Senior Educational Psychologist for discussions and to ask questions regarding the work of the Council's Educational Psychologists.

Sefton Parent Carer Forum

Working Group Members attended a meeting of the Sefton Parent Carer Forum to hear about issues raised by parents/carers of children with SEND.

Working Group Members also requested a meeting with representatives of the Sefton Parent Carer Forum for discussions and to ask questions regarding parents' and carers' experiences of special educational needs, particularly in schools. Unfortunately, due to unforeseen circumstances, representatives of the Forum were unable to attend the meeting. However, they did submit a very comprehensive document setting out the most important issues for families with SEND in Sefton.

Public Health

Working Group Members met with the Council's Consultant in Public Health for discussions and to ask questions regarding commissioning for school nurses.

North West Boroughs Healthcare Foundation Trust

Working Group Members met with a representative of North West Boroughs Healthcare Foundation Trust for discussions and to ask questions regarding the School Nursing Service as the Trust provides the Service in Sefton.

Representatives of the School Nursing Service

Working Group Members met with a representative of the School Nursing Service for discussions and to ask questions regarding service provision within schools.



Clinical Commissioning Groups

Working Group Members met with a representative of the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups for discussions and to ask questions regarding assessment appointments by professionals. These assessments are then used to formulate Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plans) for the child with SEND.

Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust

Working Group Members met with two Service Managers, Community Therapies, of the Trust, to discuss assessment appointments by professionals, as the Trust provides these services in Sefton.

Inclusion Service

Working Group Members met with the Council's Head of Inclusion for discussions and to ask questions regarding SEND from an inclusion perspective.

Team Leader, Resource & Provision, EIP Family Support

Throughout the course of the review, Working Group Members were advised by the Council's Team Leader, Resource & Provision, EIP Family Support, on the procedures and processes involved for children with SEND, including the Education, Health and Care Assessment and Plans (EHCPs)

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Key Findings and Conclusions

The following paragraphs have been numbered to correlate with the recommendations, in order for the reader to find the rationale behind the recommendations more easily.

- 1 (a) Resource/SEN units within schools have been in place for some time and some are in need of a re-vamp. Having held discussions with schools, parents/carers, etc. some doubts were held by Working Group Members regarding whether the right provision is currently available within the right schools and whether they are meeting the needs of children and their families appropriately. Members were advised that the current SEN provision has not been reviewed for some time and they considered that a review should be requested.
- 1 (b) Throughout the course of the review Members of the Working Group, together with parents/carers of children with SEND, expressed dislike for the term “SEN unit” and considered that it had acquired negative connotations that did not foster inclusivity for the children who use those units. This could be seen to disadvantage users within mainstream education. Members considered that a different expression, such as schools describing themselves as “SEN friendly schools” could be seen to be a more inclusive description and should be explored and encouraged.
- 1 (c) During the site visits undertaken to schools, parents/carers of children with SEND, particularly those children with autism, reported that assessment appointments could be disruptive and unsettling for children. Members of the Working Group heard that on more than one occasion, this has been compounded when professionals had cancelled appointments, sometimes at the last minute. The Lead Member had personal experience of this herself. Working Group Members considered that wherever possible, assessment appointments by professional experts could be carried out within schools in order to provide a “safe” environment for the child, with less preparation required for those children who dislike having their routine being disrupted. School Nurses representatives and SENCOs interviewed by the Working Group were supportive of this proposal. The proposal was also raised with representatives of the Clinical Commissioning Groups and of Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust who were not opposed to the idea, in principle. This proposal would require discussions with relevant Partner organisations.
- 1 (d) The site visits undertaken to both primary and secondary schools highlighted different practices being adopted by schools with regard to SENCOs. Some schools have a dedicated non-teaching SENCO, whilst others choose to have SENCOs combined with a teaching role. Working Group Members considered that some excellent practice is being undertaken in certain schools with a dedicated SENCO. Where schools have a SEN unit, Members considered that schools ought to be encouraged to have a dedicated SENCO, particularly where there is a high proportion of children with SEND.



- 1 (e) The Council's Senior Educational Psychologist considered that the best SENCOs were those who on the management structure of the school concerned as they were able to have an overview of the school and be able to challenge other staff, if necessary. Working Group Members considered that all relevant schools should be encouraged to include SENCOs on the management team, in order to raise and enhance the profile of SEND.
- 1 (f) Throughout the course of the review, a number of reports were made by parents/carers and some schools that delays in referral of children with SENs for professional assessment were occurring in obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans. The lack of a dedicated school nurse was cited as one reason as sometimes delays occurred in waiting for input from School Nurses on conditions. One school SENCO in particular was undertaking referrals of children herself, in order to minimise delays. Members of the Working Group considered that this good practice could be extended to other schools and that all SENCOs could be encouraged to undertake this role. The School Nurse representatives consulted with were also supportive of this proposal.
- 1 (g) When Working Group Members met with the Council's Senior Educational Psychologist, discussion took place on the possibility of the Educational Psychologists providing training on SENs for parents/carers' groups within schools and Working Group Members requested whether the provision of joint training of parents/carers, together with teachers could be explored. It was considered that this joint training would support the work of the SENCO. The Senior Educational Psychologist was supportive of this proposal.
- 1 (h) Transition was considered to be a very important time, particularly for parents/carers of children with SEND and appropriate information was not always readily available at that time. Working Group Members considered that information could be made available within the Transition booklet, in order for it to be readily available to all parents/carers, which would ensure inclusivity. With regard to publicity, Members considered that information needed to be provided to everyone, with blanket targeting of all children, rather than just targeting those children considered to require it. Members also considered that the inclusion of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for parents/carers of children with SEND could also be included within the Transition booklet and that this could increase "school readiness". These approaches would ensure inclusivity for all.
- 1 (i) When Working Group Members undertook site visits to schools, parents/carers of children with SEND reported that they had not always been in receipt of the information they required, particularly from an early years' perspective. This had caused some concerns and delays in ensuring that children were "school ready". Working Group Members acknowledged the important role of the Borough's Family Wellbeing Centres and considered that increased information for parents on SEND could be communicated through the Centres. This would maximise "school readiness" for both children and parent/carers.

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- 1 (j) In considering information available, Members of the Working Group considered that information on SEND could be included with or within the Personal Child Health Record, which is known as the “red book”. Members felt that such information, readily available from an early age, could assist parents/carers with early interventions for children with SEND. This proposal would require discussions with relevant Partner organisations.
- 1 (k) During site visits undertaken to schools, parents/carers of children with SEND felt that they were not always in receipt of the information they required. Working Group Members considered that schools could utilise their newsletters more fully in order to include potentially useful contacts and useful events on SEND.
- 1 (l) The site visits undertaken highlighted some excellent practice being undertaken within certain schools. One primary school in particular was undertaking neuro-diversity education with all its pupils in relation to SEND. Working Group Members considered that this best practice could be shared with primary schools, in order to encourage tolerance and understanding in future generations and assist in changing the culture towards SEND. This would also increase inclusivity within primary schools.
- 1 (m) During the course of the review concerns were raised that not enough was being done to highlight the availability of Sefton’s Local Offer. During the site visits made to schools, at least one parent of a child with SEND was not aware of it. Working Group Members considered that this was a “gap” in the main route into the SEND service and that the Local Plan could be revised in order to make it more user-friendly and accessible to parents/carers. Although the information is currently present on the Council’s web-site, Members considered that it was not particularly easy to find and that it could possibly be highlighted on the “home page” of the “Schools and Learning” information. Members also considered that the language used within the Local Offer is not particularly “user-friendly” and probably not quite appropriate. A glossary of terms and abbreviations used would also be helpful.
- 1 (n) (i) When Members of the Working Group attended a meeting of the Sefton Parent Carer Forum, they heard a number of parents report that they did not see the School Nurse. Members subsequently met and raised this point with representatives of the School Nursing Service and it was considered that more could probably be done by schools to promote the drop-in sessions for School Nurses within schools, including utilisation of the school newsletters. Such promotion would increase opportunities for parents/carers to access the drop-in sessions.
- 1 (n) (ii) During one site visit to a particular school, the SENCO considered that lack of access to a dedicated School Nurse was causing delays in preparing documentation to obtain EHC Plans. This matter was discussed when Working Group Members subsequently met with



representatives of the School Nursing Service. On enquiry, it became clear that this was not the case and that the role of School Nurses was misunderstood. Representatives of the School Nursing Service indicated that they would be supportive of approaching the Sefton SENCO Forum, with a view to clarifying their role. This would minimise delays in obtaining EHC Plans. This proposal would require discussions with relevant Partner organisations.

- 1 (o) (i) During the course of the review and at the site visits to schools in particular, some schools and parents/carers considered that some high schools are deliberately restricting the number of enhanced transitions relating to SEND, due to the cost implications involved. Working Group Members considered that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) could request a report investigating this matter further, together with any reasons for the restrictions.
 - 1 (o) (ii) During the course of the review and at the site visits to schools in particular, some instances emerged of children with SEND accessing Sefton schools from outside the Borough, particularly due to some of the excellent practices being undertaken within certain Sefton schools. Working Group Members considered that information on this could be incorporated within the report referred to in 1 (o) (i) above.
 - 1 (o) (iii) During the course of the review and at the site visits to schools in particular, it became apparent that there are a small number of parents who have children with SEND and who are not actively engaging with schools. Working Group Members considered that consideration could be given as to how these parents could be engaged, or re-engaged, and information on this could be incorporated within the report referred to in 1 (o) (i) above.
 - 1 (o) (iv) During the course of the review and at the site visits to schools in particular, some parents reported that support had been withdrawn for their child during Year 6 at primary level and that this had not been helpful for the child's progress. This could cause issues with transition, academic progress and integration for children and support had to be re-sought at high school. Working Group Members considered that investigations could be undertaken to ascertain reasons for the withdrawal for funding and information on this could be incorporated within the report referred to in 1 (o) (i) above.
2. Throughout the course of the review, a number of reports were made by parents/carers and some schools about delays occurring in the process of obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans due to children not being referred quickly. The lack of a dedicated school nurse was cited as one reason as sometimes delays occurred in waiting for input from School Nurses on conditions. Working Group Members met with School Nurse representatives and found that all schools within the Borough receive the services of a School

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Nurse, with only one or two exceptions. Nevertheless, Members considered that it was important to remind both the School Nurse and the school SENCO of the need to collaborate, in order to minimise delays in undertaking assessments and referrals of children and in obtaining EHC Plans for them.

3. Members of the Working Group were conscious that the SENDs agenda ran from age 0-25. There was not time, however, to examine post-19 provision for SEND, although concerns were held regarding this age bracket. Members considered that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee could consider the establishment of a further Working Group to examine post-19 provision and that this could be a Joint Working Group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills).
4. All Overview and Scrutiny final reports include a recommendation for a monitoring report on the progress of implementation of recommendations to be submitted back to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee after six months, as a matter of course. In accordance with this practice, Members of the Working Group agreed that a request should be made for a six monthly monitoring report to be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding), setting out progress made against each of the recommendations submitted by the Working Group. Members were also keen for the monitoring report to be measured against SMART objectives (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Results-focussed, and Time-bound).



Acknowledgements and Thanks

In producing this report on Special Educational Needs and Disability Process of Assessment, acknowledgements and thanks are attributed to the following individuals and organisations for their time and input:-

- *The Council's Senior Educational Psychologist;*
- *The Sefton Parent Carer Forum;*
- *The Council's Consultant in Public Health;*
- *North West Boroughs Healthcare Foundation Trust;*
- *The School Nursing Service*
- *The Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups;*
- *Alder Hey Children's NHS Foundation Trust*
- *The Council's Head of Inclusion;*
- *The staff and parents of Meols Cop High School;*
- *The staff and parents of Birkdale High School;*
- *The staff and parents of Our Lady Star of the Sea Catholic Primary School;*
- *The staff of Rimrose Hope Church of England Primary School;*
- *Jacqui Kerr, Team Leader, Resource & Provision, EIP Family Support;*
and
- *Debbie Campbell, Senior Democratic Services Officer.*

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Thanks must also go to the Members of the Working Group who have worked hard and dedicated a great deal of time to this review, namely:-

Councillor Paula Spencer (Lead Member)
Former Councillor Maria Bennett
Councillor Paula Murphy
Councillor Brenda O'Brien
Co-opted Member Mrs Sandra Cain
Co-opted Member Ms. Libby Kitt
Former Co-opted Member Mrs Carrie Ryan-Palmer



Recommendations

1. That the Head of Schools and Families be requested to:-
 - (a) Review the current provision of Special Educational Needs (SEN) units within schools, in order to ensure that appropriate provision is available within the relevant schools, as evidence provided suggests that the current system is not meeting the needs of children and their families appropriately.
 - (b) Encourage relevant schools to consider an alternative term for “SEN unit”, possibly describing themselves as a “SEN-friendly school”, in order to reduce stigma and improve compliance with the Equality Act.
 - (c) Liaise with the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups and Alder Hey Children’s NHS Foundation Trust in order to explore the possibility of requesting assessment appointments by professional experts to be carried out in schools wherever possible, particularly specialised schools and those schools with a unit, in order to provide a “safe” environment for children, with less preparation required for those children who experience anxiety when their routine is disrupted.
 - (d) Encourage those schools that have a SEN unit to have a dedicated Special Educational Needs Co-ordinator (SENCO), particularly where there are a high proportion of children with SEND, as evidence provided indicates that access to appropriate resources is greater in settings where there is a dedicated SENCO.
 - (e) Encourage schools to include SENCOs on the management team for the school, in order to enhance the profile of SEND.
 - (f) Encourage schools to support SENCOs to undertake referrals of children with SEND for professional input and assessment appointments, in order to minimise delays in obtaining Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs).
 - (g) Explore the possibility, in conjunction with the Council’s Senior Educational Psychologist, of encouraging schools to undertake joint training on SEND for parents/carers’ groups within schools, with teachers and governors, in order to ensure that the information and approach provided are consistent, appropriate embedded
 - (h) Consider the possibility, in conjunction with the Assessment, Resource and Provision Planning Team, of including Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for parents/carers of children with SEND within the information available on school admissions, as part of the “school readiness” approach, in order to create an efficient and effective home-school partnership from the outset.

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- (i) Explore the possibility of increasing communication with parents/carers on SEND through the Borough's Family Wellbeing Centres, particularly from an early years' perspective and possibly through the development of leaflets, in order to enhance "school readiness" for the children and their parents/carers.
- (j) Liaise with the Sefton Clinical Commissioning Groups to explore the possibility of requesting that information on SEND for parents/carers is included with/within the Personal Child Health Record (red book) and through the Healthy Child Programme, in order to assist in early intervention.
- (k) Encourage schools to include potentially useful contacts and useful events on SEND within school newsletters, in order to ensure that all parents/carers have access to them.
- (l) Encourage primary schools to share good practice and to consider undertaking inclusivity education with all children, particularly relating to SEND and neuro-diversity, in order to raise standards and ensure equitable and universal access to provision within schools.
- (m) Revise Sefton's Local Offer in order to make it more user-friendly and accessible to parents/carers, which could include ensuring that it is easier to find on the Council's web-site, using less formal language and the inclusion of a glossary of terms and abbreviations.
- (n) Liaise with the Council's Head of Health and Wellbeing in order to:
 - (i) Encourage schools to advertise and promote the School Nurse drop-in sessions within their newsletters, so that parents/carers have a greater opportunity to access them.
 - (ii) Request the School Nursing Service to approach the SENCO Forum, with a view to discussing the Healthy Schools Programme and to clarify the role of the School Nurse, particularly in relation to assessing children with SEND and in order to minimise delays in obtaining EHC Plans, as this would help to manage the expectations of parents/carers.
- (o) Submit a report to a future meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding), following an audit, providing information on the following:-
 - (i) Any high schools which are restricting the number of enhanced transitions for SEND, together with explanations for the reasons behind the decisions.
 - (ii) The number of children with SEND accessing Sefton schools who come from outside the Borough and the reasons for this.



- (iii) Consideration of how parents who have children with SEND and who are not engaging with schools could be engaged, or re-engaged.
 - (iv) Whether funding has been withdrawn for children with SEND in Year 6 and the reasons for withdrawal.
- 2. That the Head of Health and Wellbeing be requested to ensure that the School Nurse carries out their role prior to any collaboration with the school SENCO, in relation to assessing and referring children with SEND, in order to minimise delays in obtaining EHC Plans.
- 3. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) be requested to consider the establishment of a Working Group in the future to examine post-19 provision for SENDs, in order to improve conditions for this vulnerable group of young people. This could be a Joint Working Group with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Regeneration and Skills).
- 4. That the Senior Democratic Services Officer be requested to liaise with relevant officers in order to ensure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Children's Services and Safeguarding) receives a six-monthly monitoring report, setting out progress made against each of the recommendations outlined above and as a means of ensuring SMART objectives.

Overview & Scrutiny



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