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Town Hall
Trinity Road
Bootle
L20 7AE

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Please contact:

Laura Bootland

Contact Number: 0151 934 2078

e-mail:

laura.bootland@sefton.gov.uk

Dear Councillor,

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE (CHILDREN'S SERVICES AND SAFEGUARDING) - TUESDAY 12TH NOVEMBER, 2024

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

Agenda No.	Item
5.	Cabinet Member Update Reports (Pages 3 - 10) Report of the Chief Legal and Democratic Officer Appendix A – Education Update, attached.

Yours sincerely,

Laura Bootland
Democratic Services

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CABINET MEMBER UPDATE Overview and Scrutiny (Children's Services and Safeguarding)		
Councillor	Portfolio	Date
Diane Roscoe	Cabinet Member Children, Schools and Families	November 2024

Introduction

After the tragic events in Southport, where children's services in Sefton rallied round the community and provided support to children families and schools we are entering into a focused period of work rebuilding trust and community cohesion. Our Early Help transformation is progressing with services already being delivered in Family Hubs, with a plan for a celebration of this work (rather than a launch) to happen in the new year. In Children's Social Care we are focusing relentlessly on practice improvement and are preparing with partners for an Inspection of Local Authority Children's Services, expected in the next six months. In Education, we are rolling out the team around the school initiative to the schools in Southport and working on the implementation of our updated Attendance Strategy. We are also preparing for a SEND (special educational needs and disabilities) inspection, which is likely to take place in 2025.

This report will focus on what is working well and highlight any areas of concern in Education and Inclusion.

Southport Recovery

The response to the Southport tragedy and the subsequent civil unrest from schools and their support systems in the area has been unprecedented and a source of pride for the council.

The multi-agency Children and Families Group continue to meet fortnightly and includes the Headteacher from Marshside Primary School.

Since September children in the area have returned to school and overall, it has been a calm return. Headteachers have raised concerns about inclusion and diversity, and the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer has attended the Southport Learning Partnership as well as holding a training event for primary and secondary Headteachers. Psychological support is being provided to all the families who have been affected by the attack, through close links with the psychological support cell. School staff are also able to access talking therapies. We are also working closely with the Family Liaison

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Officers from the Police who are working with the affected families. The schools where children are attending whose parents have been imprisoned following the unrest are linked with support for children from a charity which works with the families of prisoners. We have instigated close working between education, the police, and the council communications team in order to enhance community safety in the Autumn and Winter including Operation 'Banger'

Progress is being made with the roll out of Team Around the School in Southport with recruitment taking place and a launch in December.

What is working well?

Attendance

An updated Attendance Strategy has been written and disseminated to schools in Sefton, in response to Government guidance: Working Together to Improve School Attendance¹, which became statutory in September. In Sefton, we have adopted an **'attendance is everyone's business'** mindset.

It is not just schools and local authorities that have a role here; multi-agency approaches to attendance are a key part on our attendance improvement journey. We recognise the importance of the role schools play in safeguarding and we know children who are persistently absent and not accessing full-time education are at increased risk of being victims of harm, exploitation, radicalisation, as well as falling behind at school, and the impact this has on their life chances.

A clear communication and marketing plan is in place to raise awareness of the importance of attendance amongst professionals, parents, and carers across the borough. We have instigated piloted targeted support meetings for attendance issues, which include instilling the positive impact for children of being in school. These are now being rolled out to secondary schools. All schools in Sefton are actively utilising the government's WONDE education attendance reporting system. We have developed new co-created policy for responding to pupils with health needs in place to ensure school and partners are intervening in line with the new guidance. Meetings with SEND caseworkers about attendance have also started, and a system is now operational to receive data from independent and out of borough SEND places. We have developed an Education working party with Sefton Youth Justice Team to look at improving attendance of those children involved in the criminal justice system. We are also now having meetings with Children's Social Care in relation to the new guidance delivered by the Deputy Virtual School Headteacher, focusing on interventions when children with a social worker are identified as having poor attendance. Emotionally Based School Avoidance co-produced guidance has been shared with schools and there have been training sessions with staff and parents.

¹ [Working together to improve school attendance - GOV.UK](#)

School Improvement

The school improvement team have analysed unvalidated school outcomes for KS2 and KS4 and all maintained schools, where outcomes have been identified as low, have had a visit from the team. The professional dialogue has been welcomed by school leaders and forms part of the intelligence system used to support our statutory duties around the schools causing concern process.

As school improvement has responsibility for our maintained schools, Keeping in Touch visits to all category green maintained schools are being carried out by Professional Partners and will be completed in the Autumn Term. Schools in the OFSTED inspection window have had early meetings to help them prepare for the inspection. These KIT meetings support our identification of school need and council/school common themes and priorities. All maintained school leaders have agreed to and welcomed this visit. To further strengthen our schools causing concern processes, monthly meetings are now taking place alongside the statutory once a term meeting. These meetings involve the service managers across Education Excellence and representatives from HR and finance. This 'joined up' approach has provided greater clarity as all services are considered thus ensuring the RAG rating of our schools is more robust.

Schools have been supported through the OFSTED inspection process. Our allocated Senior HMI has delivered a session on the changes to the inspection framework. Several schools have been inspected under Section 5 and Section 8 inspections and have been supported through the process by the Service Manager School Improvement. All outcomes are confidential until the report is published.

Engagement with many of our academies continues to be a strength. Service Manager School Improvement and Interim Head of EE Service meet regularly with Pope Francis MAT and have a good working relationship with Southport Learning Trust and Rainbow MAT.

It is encouraging to note in terms of 14-19 participation and our statutory duties that The September Guarantee for 2024 for participation in learning is currently 98% for Year 11 leavers. This matches last year's performance. It is 94% for Year 12 which is 2% lower than last year. Sefton continue to have the best participation rates in the Liverpool City Region. The Post 16 Learning Directory for Sefton has been updated and circulated to all key staff and partners. The team have supported the work in relation to implementing the new Quality Assurance and Commissioning Framework for Alternative Provision with schools and provider settings. The latest data for Careers Education Information, Advice and Guidance (CEIAG) shows that schools are improving against the Gatsby Benchmarks with an average of 5.8 Benchmarks achieved in full.

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14- 19 engagement in Education Employment and Training for vulnerable young people – Raising Participation into Learning.

As part of the NEET Reduction and Early Intervention Service commissioned by Employment and Skills and delivered by Career Connect (CC) we deliver a targeted Information Advice and Guidance service to promote Education Employment and Training (EET) to vulnerable groups through intensive working in partnership with specialist services already supporting young people Cared for and Care Experienced young people pre 16 risks of NEET from year 10 and 16-18 Sefton Residents

- Youth Justice
- SEND aged 14-25 Years (With ECHP or High Needs agreed with SENSIS Team)
- Pinefield – complimentary education
- Children who Elected Home Educated (EHE) and Children Missing from Education (CME)
- Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Impact (name changed to Waterside)
- Teenage Mothers/Pregnancy 14-19
- Young Carers
- Early Help and Supporting Families
- Year 11 'Risk of NEET Indicator'

In addition, all young people NEET or at risk of NEET are allocated an advisor who has regular contact and builds trusted relationships to coach and support career pathway, transition to education employment or training, raising aspirations and participation into learning.

The service provides intensive careers information advice and guidance and helps identify suitable provision for young people with an EHC plan which leads to costs savings to the LA, particularly if the young person remains in Sefton Provision. They also provide invaluable data/intelligence and analysis to look at the needs of pre 16 and look for solutions for vulnerable young people. CC have placed 56 young people from our vulnerable groups/particularly SEMH/most with ECH plans/SEN support needs into positive learning outcomes.

Without this pre-engagement support (advocacy, careers information, advice and guidance, family engagement and home visits and strong partnerships with council departments), these young people may have been NEET once they reached 16.

Since April 2024, **5259** interventions with **1387** young people pre-16 and post 16 including those in our vulnerable groups and NEET young people have been delivered.

SEND

An Interim Head of SEND has been appointed to implement development and improvements. In preparation for the imminent SEND Local Area Inspection an inspection readiness group has been established and is meeting weekly. The self-evaluation framework has been reviewed and is being reproduced in line with the Local Area Inspection framework.

The timeliness for Education Health and Care Plan development for children has improved, compliance with the 20-week time frame in August was 52% and in September 56%. The national compliance data is 50.3%. Our year-to-date rate is 46% and was 43% last year. The backlog of children waiting for a plan has reduced from 240+ to 38. no children waiting.

Delivering Better Value/ Inclusion

The recent DBV DFE progress report and review has been successful and the DFE feedback has been extremely positive. The Graduated Approach has now been launched and evaluative feedback was positive. Overall, the programme continues to be on track with the proposed adjustments made to some activities within the workstreams and timescales following the last progress report and meeting.

Due to recent events in Southport, the Inclusion Conference date has been postponed from the 25th of October and will be delivered on the 14th of February 2025. All key speakers can deliver on this date. There will also be additional workshops based on recent events, including Anna Freud, to deliver appropriate sessions including anxiety and attendance.

Post 16 education employment and training for young people with SEND

We have increased the number of partners delivering Supported Internships for young people with SEND in the borough. Twenty one young people are utilising the Supported Internship programme in 24/25, up from 14 in 22/23. By pooling resources within the Liverpool city region, we have created a Supported Internships Employer Engagement Co-ordinator post and have developed pre Supported Internship support for providers to deliver additional support in terms of addressing barriers to participation.

Our post 16 Local Offer pathway information has been updated. We have developed Preparation for Adulthood support for young people post 16 and refreshed the PfA Transition guide.

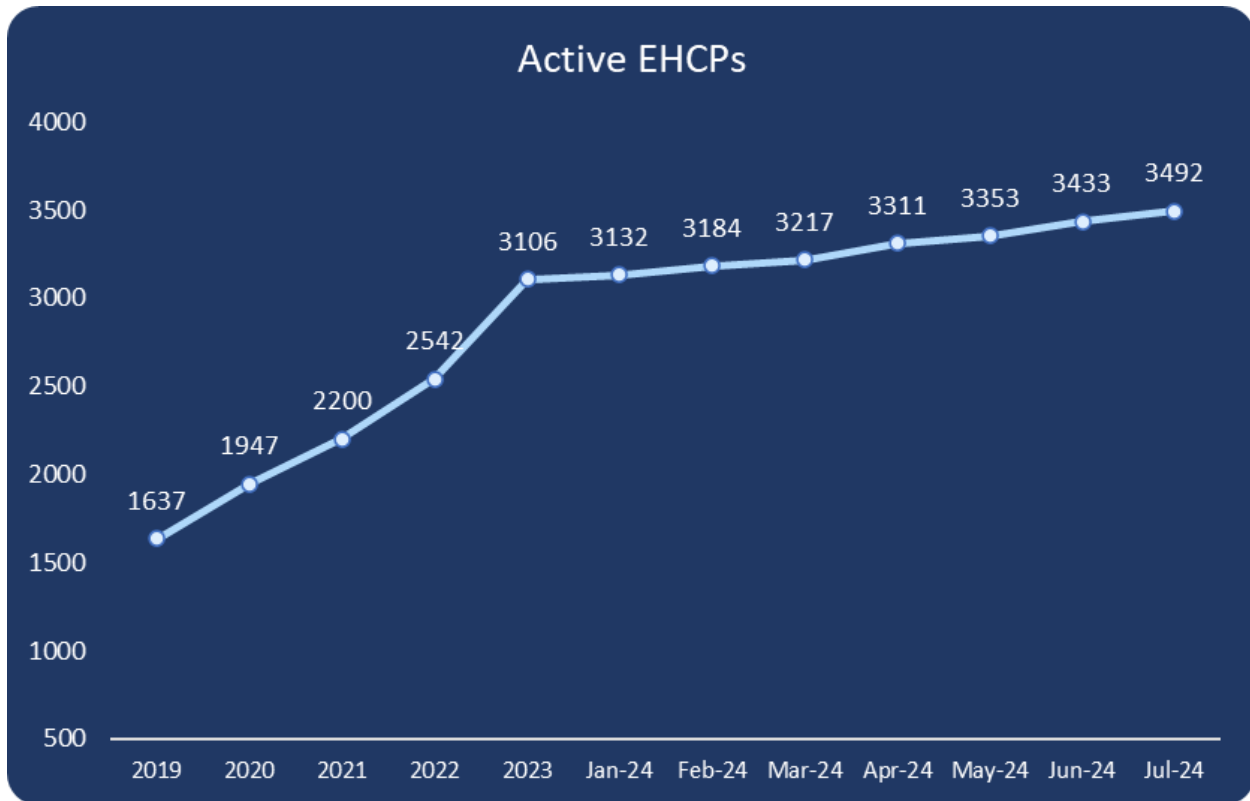
We have worked with providers to create new provision in Southport.

What are the areas for concern?

The numbers of children with EHCP plans have seen a significant increase and this is illustrated below. This is a national trend, and the reasons for the increase are varied.

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There is a post pandemic effect as well as an increasing number of children being identified and diagnosed as having additional needs.



An increase in EHCPs has led to an increase in the demand for support for children with Special Educational Needs.

Despite our response to improving the sufficiency of school placements for children who have special educational needs and disabilities we have not been able to keep pace with the amount of Special school places needed. This means there is has been an increase in the number of children who have to attend school away from their home/ local area. This is because there is insufficient capacity within SMBC maintained special schools and within mainstream special bases to accommodate the increasing volumes of CYP who are identified as needing a special school place through their EHCP. There is an increasing need to seek places in independent schools.

Last year, councils across the country issued 84,400 Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) – an increase of 26% on the previous year. The national deficit on high needs block is now estimated at around £3.2bn in 2024, an increase of £1bn on the previous year.

The national picture is reflected locally in Sefton. High Needs budgets are under extreme pressure. High Needs is in a cumulative deficit position at the end of 2023/24 of £38m and this is likely to increase in 2024/25.

Post 16 young people with SEND

There has been an increase in the number of young people with SEND aged 16 – 24 (887 June 2024 compared to 710 in June 2023) and an increase in High Needs funding requests (238 in 23/24 compared to 203 in 22/23) Some parents/carers and young people are reluctant to participate in Supported Internship programme, preferring to remain in education until 25. There is an identified increase in young people reaching post 16 education having not attended pre 16 schooling, and an increase in number of young people experiencing mental health/anxiety issues.

Home to School Travel

The exponential increase in demand special school places has directly driven an increase in demand for Travel Support as those awarded EHCP's will also be eligible for Travel Support if they are assigned an alternative, special school rather than their mainstream school.

What are we doing about it?

The development of the graduated response as part of DBV will provide a more multi-faceted response to children with additional needs, including early intervention, however this is still in development, and will not be effective in reducing the number of children with EHCP plans for a while, until it is properly embedded.

We will review and implement a more efficient data system and SEND dashboard which will inform performance and efficiency in the service. Increasing the number of teaching assistants as part of our Transformation programme by implementing a programme of recruitment and development of residents will give additional capacity to schools to support children with SEND.

We are planning that all Family Hubs will be delivering services for children with SEND in local communities once they are up and running.

We are implementing plans to develop more capacity within the South of the borough related to the needs of children and to investigate further expansion across the Borough.

For post 16 young people with SEND, in partnership with the Sefton Parent Carer Forum, a raising awareness session was held in January 2024 aimed at young people and parents/carers. A new session will be held in January 2025, to increase participation.

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Enhanced transition partnership support has been established between Crosby High and local Further Education (FE) colleges.

We have created greater flexibility in relation to the allocation of Post 16 High Needs Funding for local FE Providers

Importantly, we have piloted two new programmes with providers to help those young people who have struggled to attend secondary school due to anxiety/social, emotional, and mental health needs.