

Delivering the SEND Reforms in Sheffield: an update on progress

Background

1. The SEND Reforms, set out in part three of the Children and Families Act 2014, came into force in September 2014. Implementation has now been underway for two years and while much progress has been made, significant challenges remain – not least ensuring that Sheffield is able to convert over 2,000 statements to EHC Plans by April 2018; as well as delivering EHC Plans within the statutory timescales.
2. The first SEN2 data report covering a full 12 months of the reforms has now been published by the Department for Education (DfE) for the calendar year 2015. This allows us to compare and contrast our performance with other areas, taking into account that the data was six months out of date by the time it was published in June.
3. DfE continue to proactively support delivery of the reforms. They have extended the SEN Grant until March 2018 and continue to maintain a free-to-access regional network of professional advisers and support organisations that run conferences, share good practice and offer advice, support and challenge to individual local authorities. Sheffield completes a termly progress monitoring return for the Department and receives regular progress monitoring visits by a member of DfE's advisory team.
4. This update covers progress on:
 - Inclusion Strategy
 - Locality Working
 - The Local Offer
 - Delivering Education Health and Care Plans
 - Working with Parents, Children and Young People
 - Inspection

Inclusion Strategy

5. Sheffield City Council recognises that successful delivery of the SEND Reforms needs to be part of a much wider approach to support all vulnerable children and young people aged 0-25 and their families. An Inclusion Strategy and action plan has been developed and its implementation overseen by an Inclusion Programme Board, chaired by the Executive Director for Children, Young People and Families. Board members include senior school leaders, the Chief Executive of Learn Sheffield, senior leaders from the Clinical Commissioning Group and the Children's Hospital, Directors from adult and children's social care and the Lead Member for Children, Young People and Families. Parents are represented by Healthwatch.
6. The SEND Reforms make up a significant part of the Inclusion Strategy, which also includes Early Help and Support, Alternative Provision, Respite Care, SEND Transport, Autism Strategy etc. The Strategy also links closely to other key change programmes such as Transforming Care and Future in Mind. This will ensure that the SEND Reforms are delivered as part of a joined up, coordinated approach to supporting children, young people and families.

Locality Working

7. The Inclusion Strategy will be delivered through locality working so that decisions are made by those working closest with children, young people and their families. This means individual needs can be identified early and more accurately, and support put in place quickly. Sheffield's Multi-Agency Support Teams are already delivering in this way, working with schools and health partners in local areas as part of delivering our Early Help and Support programme.
8. The 0-25 SEND Team and the Educational Psychology Service and Autism Service are now also operating at locality level, based around the seven (A-F) geographical school localities. There are seven Locality Managers in the SEND Team, each allocated to a specific locality, supported by a team of six Inclusion Officers and six officers in the Business Support Team. The Locality Managers also have responsibility for specific special schools.
9. An identified team of Educational Psychologists is also allocated to each locality school area. Two Principal Educational Psychologists and two Senior Educational Psychologists are leading on providing a reconfigured Inclusion Service to the localities which includes our Autism Service. Recent successful recruitment to the Service means vacancies have been filled and good support can be more readily provided to schools and families. To deliver this approach successfully, the Educational Psychology Service is now a fully funded, rather than traded, service. This means schools no longer have to pay to access support over and above statutory requirements
10. Schools themselves are working together in their localities and will have one or more senior SENCOs acting as a Locality SENCO. These SENCOs are working closely with the SEND Locality Manager, and the Senior Educational Psychologist to identify need and agree support – both at SEN Support level and in making decisions about whether an EHC Plan is required. Working closely with the Multi-Agency Support Teams localities will ensure needs are being identified correctly and support is made available to families outside of school where that is needed.
11. Since April 2016, all school localities have been given a share of the £2.1m high needs funding pot based on the proportion of SEN within their locality. Working with the SEND Locality Manager and their allocated Educational Psychology team, localities can now make both strategic and individual decisions about support and resources. All localities have been at different stages of implementing this new approach and during the Autumn Term this new way of working will become fully embedded. We have already seen good examples of localities using their funding to secure locality-wide support for needs that are more prevalent in their area.
12. To support this new way of working, we have developed two tools: the Sheffield Support Grid and My Plan. The Support Grid identifies levels of need and the type of support that should be being provided. Through locality and city-wide moderation, this will ensure that children and young people will get the support they need wherever they are in the city and regardless of which school they attend.
13. My Plan is a non-statutory version of an EHC Plan. It allows need to be identified, outcomes to be agreed and monitored and support to be in place for those whose need does not require a statutory EHC Plan. My Plans should be completed in collaboration with parents so they can see that their child's need has been recognised

and is being addressed. My Plan supports the requirements in the Code of Practice for delivering SEN Support in schools and over time should increase good practice in schools, increase parental confidence in the support schools are providing and decrease the need for EHC Plans in mainstream settings.

14. This is an ambitious change agenda. The combination of a locality-facing workforce working in partnership with their schools, the Sheffield Support Grid, My Plan and the delegation of the high needs funding will mean that children and young people with SEN are more likely to have their needs identified early and support agreed and put in place quickly. It means parents will be able to focus on whether their child is receiving the right support based on city-wide standards. As practice improves and parental confidence increases, the demand for EHC Plans and the pressure on special school places will reduce. We want children and young people to be educated and supported in settings where they are most likely to achieve positive outcomes and be prepared effectively for adulthood.
15. Plans are already in place to develop and roll out the Sheffield Support Grid and My Plan to Early Years and Post-16 sectors; and through the Inclusion Programme Board we are working closely with health colleagues to explore how health services can be more aligned with locality delivery.

Local Offer

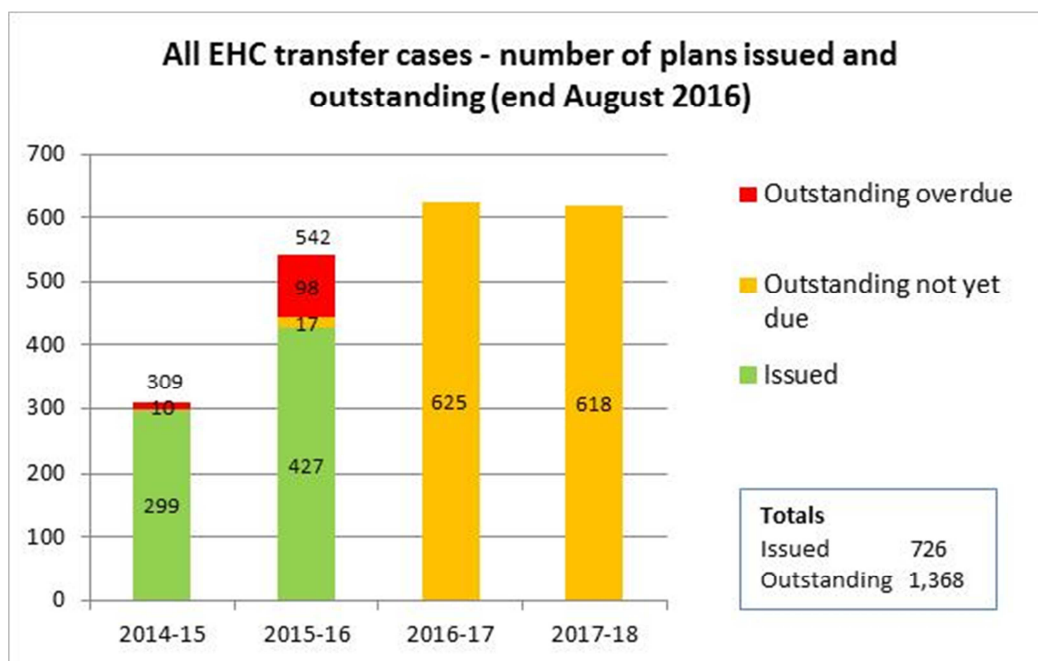
16. The Act requires local authorities to publish a Local Offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and care for those aged 0-25 with SEND. As well as providing information about provision and how to access it, the Local Offer should act as a mechanism for making provision more responsive to local needs through the involvement of children, young people and parents in its development and review.
17. Sheffield's Local Offer has been in place and compliant with the legislation since September 2014. However, it was quickly apparent that it was neither accessible nor easy to use; guidance on key things such as how to request an EHC plan was hard to find; and there were big gaps in the available information.
18. A report setting out people's views of the Local Offer and how Sheffield was going to respond was published in the Autumn of 2015 as required by the legislation. Since then, Sheffield City Council has worked with a group of parents to re-design and improve the Local Offer. The new version has been launched and can be found here:
<http://www.sheffielddirectory.org.uk/kb5/sheffield/directory/localoffer.page?localofferchannel=0>
19. We are now looking to embed the Local Offer within core business, with a clear plan for how it will continue to be reviewed annually and improved in response to feedback. In particular, work will need to be done to ensure the content is accessible, information is easy to find, up-to-date and useful to both families and professionals.

Delivering Education, Health and Care Plans

20. The SEN2 data return shows that at the end of 2015, just over 3% of new EHC Plans in Sheffield were completed within the statutory 20 week timescale. Despite significant progress that has been made in 2016, this remains one of the most challenging areas

of the reforms.

21. The latest data (to the end of August) shows that new EHC Plans are now being completed on average within 21 weeks for those that were started in 2016. Our overall average time for completion (for all cases since September 2014) remains at 40 weeks due to the significant number of EHC Plans from before 2016 that have been completed well in excess of the twenty week timescale.
22. In Sheffield we initially chose to focus our resources on converting statements to EHC Plans – particular for the cohorts of children and young people who were due to change settings each year. The table below shows the current position:



Note: Current figures held within the SEN Team show that these “backlogs” have reduced further

23. We have converted more statements into Plans in 2015/16 than were due in total in 2014/15, but still have further work to do including clearing the very small number left from 2014/15. We have completed 35% of the total conversions required by April 2018 and 85% of those due to date.
24. In 2015/16 the majority of those transferring between school settings or to post-16 provision had their plans completed by the statutory deadlines of 15th February or 31st March respectively - a marked improvement on the previous year. Where EHC plans could not be finalised by these dates, parents and/or young people were written to, letting them know what progress was being made and where possible confirming that a place had been reserved at the school or college we knew was their preference.
25. It will be important that we now maintain and increase the pace for converting statements to EHC Plans and continue to build on improvements in completing new EHC Plans within statutory timescales. We now have a full-time Head of SEND and are currently recruiting a Deputy from within the Team to provide additional leadership capacity. A Business Manager has also just been recruited whose responsibilities will include helping to plan and monitor the completion of EHC Plans. In addition, we have appointed an external company experienced in writing EHC Plans who have already been working successfully with a number of other local authorities. They will start

writing many of the new EHC Plans for us from September 2016 through to March 2017. If this proves successful at creating the capacity to complete conversions and improve timescales then we have an option to extend their contract.

26. We have also been working very closely with Health colleagues to develop processes for ensuring the health sections of EHC Plans are completed on time. These have now been agreed and implemented. This will deliver better, more timely health information for EHC Plans and will reduce delays in completion caused by missing health information. We are now undertaking a similar exercise with children's and adult's social care.

Working with Parents, Children and Young People

27. We are clear that delivering the SEND Reforms needs to be a collaborative approach with families at both a strategic and individual level. We have a number of parent groups that work with us to help design and develop the reforms and we work closely with the Parent Carers Forum, involving them in the development of different aspects of the reforms.
28. In particular, a parental working group has been helping us develop the Local Offer and parents have been involved in a working group looking to revise the format of the EHC Plan. The Executive Director of CYPF meets with a group of parents on a monthly basis to seek their input into delivery of the reforms and officers also meet with representatives from the Parent Carers Forum for a more informal session each month.
29. It has proven more difficult to engage children and young people in the development of the reforms. A single consultation exercise was conducted with young people to seek their views as part of the Local Offer review, but little further work has been done to engage them in development of the reforms. We will develop a strategy for involving children and young people in ongoing implementation of the reforms.
30. Parents, children and young people are all involved in person-centred planning as part of EHC Plan assessments. This initially focuses around a multi-agency meeting that places parents, children and young people at the centre, seeks their views, wishes and feelings and works with them to understand aspirations, agree outcomes and consider what support is needed. We will continue to improve how this works as professionals get more used to this approach and understand their role within it.

Inspection

31. The joint Ofsted and CQC SEND inspection framework began in May 2016 and a number of initial inspections have already taken place including North Yorkshire in our region. We have been working on a Self-Evaluation Form to help us gauge and monitor our progress. It will provide an evidence base for inspectors of our strengths and weaknesses and show that we have clear plans for addressing the latter.
32. Inspections last a week and are notified a week in advance on Monday morning's between 9-10am. Inspectors will visit schools, health and social providers, interview professionals and speak to parents and young people as well as looking at available data and evidence.
33. Readiness for Inspection is being overseen by the Inclusion Board

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