

## Children's Services SEN Review:

### Summary

March 2017



Under the Children and Family Act 2014, all local authorities have a statutory duty to identify resident children and young people under 25 who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and ensure that the necessary statutory provision is made to deliver their entitlement to education.

A child with SEND is one who has a learning difficulty or disability, which is defined as:

- having a significantly greater difficulty in learning than the majority of others of the same age, or
- having a disability which prevents or hinders him or her from making use of facilities of a kind generally provided for others of the same age in mainstream schools or mainstream post-16 institutions.

### Purpose of the Review

The review was commissioned by the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services and took place between May 2016 and February 2017. The reasons were:

- a. Special educational needs (SEN) services had not been reviewed for approximately 15 years.
- b. Headteachers have been reporting that their ability to meet the demands and needs of their pupils with SEND are limited by uncertainties about funding and lack of overall vision for SEND.
- c. Demand for statutory assessments and support have been rising, whilst the finances allocated to the Borough have largely remained unchanged.

### Approach Taken

The main focus has been upon listening to the voices of those who use services and provide SEN services. Time was taken conducting interviews and consultative groups at fifteen mainstream schools and all the special schools in the borough, together with meetings with key teams such as Support for Learning, Early Years and the Parents Advice Centre. During the review meetings took place with over 120 parents / carers and over 40 children and young people with SEND. Available SEND data was also reviewed.

### Key Findings

1. School provision is largely good or outstanding. Overall pupils identified with SEND are supported to learn and make good progress.
2. Parents / carers report satisfaction with the services provided for their children, especially at school.
3. Parents / carers were largely unhappy with the length of time it took for their child to begin most support services and about the lack of information available to them.
4. Children's Services overall expenditure on SEND services and support is relatively high and there is a strong commitment to providing support. The review remarked on some inconsistencies such as the resource allocation for the SEN Team, that coordinates statutory assessments, is low.
5. Statutory assessment and conversion processes for SEND are poor. Education, health and care plans (EHCPs) are poorly produced with too little engagement with parents / carers or the child or young person. There is an unsatisfactorily large backlog of statements of SEN and learning disabilities assessments to be converted to EHCPs.

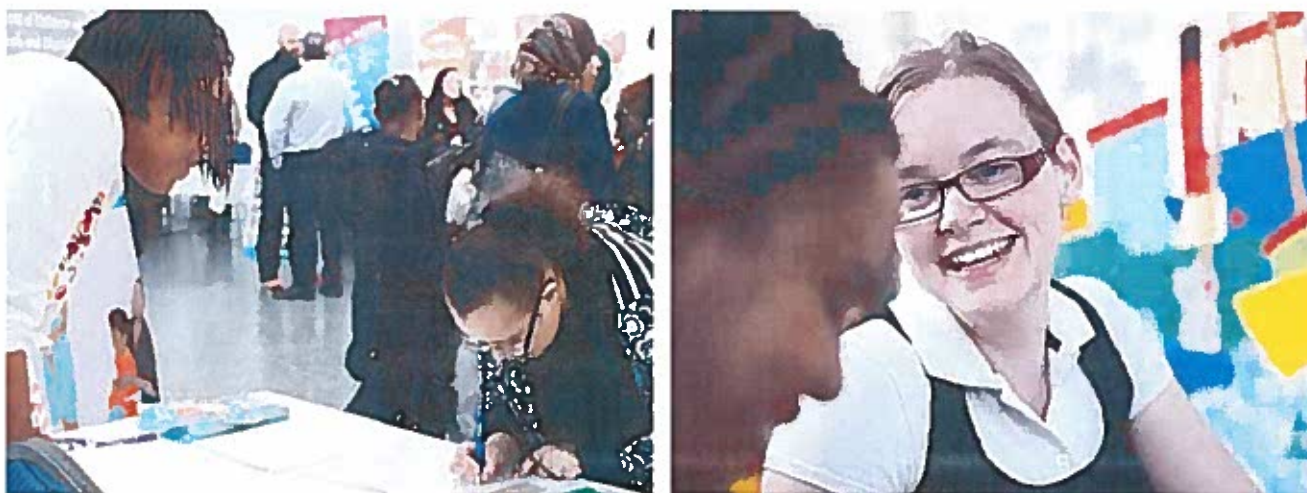
6. The Local Offer was reported by parents / carers as being difficult to navigate and incomplete and practice in co-production needs to be developed in some teams that support children and young people with SEND.
7. Data about children and young people with SEND in both Children's Services and the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are incomplete. Despite increasing demand, there is little work to project future levels of need in order to plan future places or types of provision.
8. There is inconsistency across early years' services of screening and identifying families with children with developmental needs. This is starting to be addressed as part of a reorganisation of the early years' services, including more integrated data and working with health professionals.
9. Joint commissioning and integrated working between Children's Services and the CCG are in need of development. Whilst a joint, 'memorandum of understanding' is in place, the review makes the case for SEND being a distinct thread in any children's joint commissioning.
10. Families' experience of the transition to adult services was generally a poor one. Although, not a focus for the current review, it is necessary to report that the reviewer found a disconnect between Children's Services and Adult Services within the Council, that young people did not feel properly involved in planning and that schools found themselves largely left to lead the planning.

## **Recommendations**

There are features of the provision and support for children and young people with SEND in Tower Hamlets that are good and that support them to achieve and be included at school and in their communities. However, there are important areas for development and a need to renew and establish a more united vision and direction that is in agreement with parents / carers. The review makes the following recommendations:

- A. To refresh the Tower Hamlets vision for children and young people through the development of a new SEND Strategy. This strategy should set out the ambitions and commitments for the next five years and, if possible, be jointly owned with the CCG. New reporting and accountability arrangements will need to be set up to monitor the implementation of the strategy.
- B. To overhaul the statutory assessment processes and ensure there is sufficient staffing to deliver the requirements for the conversion of statements of SEN and the completion of timely EHC needs assessments and EHC plans. To ensure there is reliable record keeping, that these data can be shared appropriately across Children's Services and that EHC needs assessment is aligned with other children's assessments, in social care and in health.
- C. To include future demand projections for specialist, SEND provision and places within wider school planning arrangements. Sufficient places need to be delivered within the constraints of the high needs funding budget and it is recommended that headteachers lead a review of the deployment of this budget now and in the future.
- D. Conduct a review of current arrangements and progression for 14 to 25 year olds with SEND and ways to ensure better planning for the transition to adult services and the achievement of improved learning outcomes and independence for young people with SEND.
- E. Set in motion arrangements for increasing joint commissioning between health, education and social care for children with SEND and their families. These arrangements should oversee work on commissioning personal budgets and greater integration across early years' services.
- F. Co-production with parents / carers and their children should be developed widely across the Borough, building on practice already in most schools, and monitored via periodic reviews and surveys.

# A NEW S.E.N.D. STRATEGY FOR CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE



## EARLY ENGAGEMENT

### Why a new S.E.N.D. Strategy in Tower Hamlets?

The London Borough of Tower Hamlets carried out a review last year of how well children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) are supported in the Borough. The Review told us that our schools, in particular, are doing a good job with our children with SEND, but that there were many things that could be organised and arranged better, including improved information for parents / carers, effective statutory assessment processes and stronger leadership for SEND services.

As a result, the Council and the NHS (Tower Hamlets Clinical Commissioning Group) plan to produce a new strategy that will establish stronger leadership and shape the future direction for children and young people with SEND. This early engagement process has been the first step in developing the Strategy.

### What did we do during the early engagement?

There has been no strategy for children and young people with SEND in Tower Hamlets for over 10 years, so we decided it was important to speak with key people (parents / carers, children and young people, professionals) about what really matters to them and the challenges for the next five years. We organised meetings at schools and through established networks such as the Parents Advice Centre and the

**“In 2022 I will be  
19. I will be  
doing things  
myself: I will be  
shopping and I  
will have money  
to spend.”**

*Student*

Council for Voluntary Service. We also had discussions with those working with children and young people with SEND.

During May and June 2017 we spoke with over 630 people, including 75 children / young people with SEND and about 120 parents / carers during. We also had about 40 responses to our online survey.

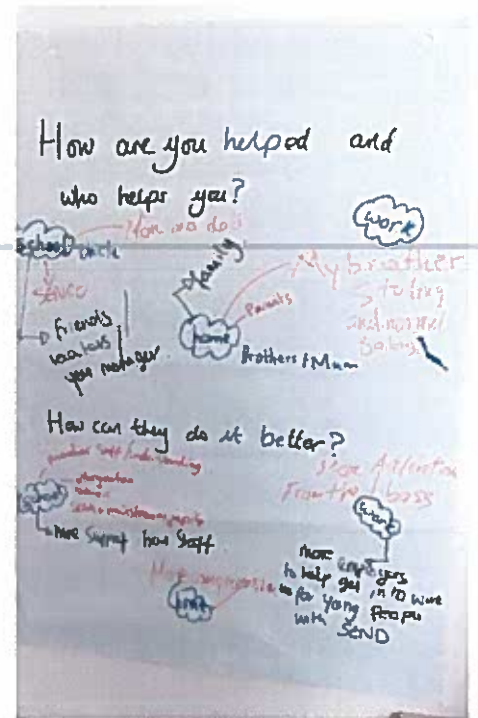
## What we were told:

We asked about the future for children and young people under seven themes. The key feedback for each theme is summarised below. We also consulted on a possible vision statement and principles for the Strategy.

### a. Leadership and accountability

*"I want to know who I should speak to if things aren't working for my child." Parent.*

*"As a voluntary-sector organisation we have found the Council will let us get involved to up to a point; but then says 'we'll take it from here'." Professional.*



Young people's feedback from a consultation event

We heard strong support for a new strategy (over 85% of respondents to the online survey). Reasons included:

- strong leadership to address fragmented services;
- the need to forge links between services where there is good practice
- being more accountable, with structures to support this
- parents / carers wanted to know who is responsible for SEND
- headteachers wanted updates on service improvements being made
- GPs wanted to know which children in their practice have SEND.

There was also support for the Strategy's principles to be worded as a charter of commitments to children and young people with SEND and for this charter to be promoted across Tower Hamlets.

**"We don't need sympathy. We need facilities and opportunities."**

Parent

### b. Pathways with clear information

*"We are bombarded with information and often told what we should be doing. How do we find the right support for our own children?" Parent / carer.*

*"Pathway maps could help professionals signpost parents to the right support services." Professional.*

*"Join up between sectors is important: why should my child's opportunities for a short break be limited by lack of health staffing?" Parent / carer.*

We heard strong agreement from parents / carers that they want better information and for it to be organised to help them work out which, of the many services in Tower Hamlets, might offer support their child.

The changes to the Local Offer website were well received, but most parents / carers did not know about the site. We were told that pathway mapping (from 0 – 25) would be a good approach to take. An offer was made to trial this for children with severe learning difficulties.



### c. Timely identification and assessment

*"I couldn't understand my child's EHC plan and it included none of the things I had said during the assessment." Parent / carer.*

*"Schools provide information and updates [to annual reviews] to the Council, but little or nothing comes back in return." School leader.*

There was strong agreement that it is a priority to achieve more efficient running of the education, health and care (EHC) needs assessments and monitoring of annual reviews, and that this is central to the credibility of SEND arrangements. Parents / carers want to see EHC plans which reflect their views and that they can easily understand. Other assessments in health and social care, especially in adult services, need

**"What do we want from the Council and NHS: keep us safe and help us to do as much as we can for ourselves."**

*Student*

to align with EHC plans to minimise the number of times parents / carers have to tell their story. Parents / carers offered to get involved as trained 'mystery shoppers' to help ensure the improvements are working well.

### d. Involvement

*"Ask us to get involved; we want to!" Parent / carer.*

*"If you are not pro-active your child can get lost. It needs to be two-way collaboration." Parent / carer.*

*"I want to be asked what I want and what would help, rather than more information." Parent / carer.*

Strong commitment to consultation and involvement is the most important issue for parents / carers. They reported not feeling involved enough: many are suspicious of the SEND 'system'.

Parents / carers want to be invited to be involved throughout the system, not just in the support for their own child(ren). Likewise, children and young people wish to have their views heard more; usually via their school / college. Feeling safe and being able to have



opportunities out of school are particularly important to them.

### e. Transitions

*"I'm really afraid for my son. I don't know what he will do when he reaches 19." Parent / carer.*

*"There needs to be a gentle transition into adult services. Too many families are told that their child will not meet criteria for adult mental health without having been assessed." Parent / carer.*

*"I want to be independent when I'm older; have help to get a job or do work experience." Young person.*

There was strong agreement for making improvements to preparations for and transition to adulthood, including more opportunities for young people to be independent and employed.

Parents carers proposed that the Mayor lead a drive to increase the work experience and supported employment opportunities for young people with SEND. The strategy should also highlight how to increase the number of supported housing places in Tower Hamlets.

## f. Finance and communication

*"Give the family more freedom to choose what is the best support for their children. The council and NHS should allow a family to have more voice in how funding is used." Parent / carer.*

*"It's important for more effort to be put into giving out information about SEND: use video & social media." Young person.*

There was a clear 'yes', to better and more regular communication: with parents / carers and with young people. There was also a 'yes' to more information about finance: for individual children and so parents / carers can hold the NHS and Council to account. Personal budgets were an area of tension: many professionals expressed ambivalence about them, whilst many parents / carers were positive and wanted to know more. A campaign to raise the profile of the Local Offer site was also suggested, plus increasing use of video as part of communication.

### What else you told us:

#### The workforce:

The Strategy should set out plans to attract and retain the right staff, skilled to support children with SEND, and with the career progression so they choose to stay working in Tower Hamlets. Some parents / carers described poor experiences they have had due to some Council, NHS and transport staff

### What happens next?

To summarise, this early engagement confirmed that there should be a new Tower Hamlets Strategy for Children and Young People with SEND.

The ideas and comments have been fed back to leaders in the Council and in the Clinical Commissioning Group. These, together with information from a rapid review of support for 14 to 25 year olds with SEND, will help us to word a draft SEND Strategy containing priorities for the next five years.

In autumn 2017, there will be a chance to be consulted: this time about the specific contents of the draft Strategy. We expect this next consultation to begin during October 2017. Updates will be posted on the Tower Hamlets Local Offer site ([www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/](http://www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/)) and be available via schools, colleges, surgeries and clinics and early years settings.

showing a lack of understanding of their child's needs and of poorly adapted facilities, for example in hospital.

#### Planning school places:

The Strategy should establish good future planning of school places for children with SEND to ensure there is sufficient provision in years to come.

#### Supportive communities:

Parents / carers of children with SEND want to be part of supportive networks and experience understanding from their local communities. Concerns were expressed about a lack of tolerance of their child's needs and about 'urban myths' in some communities: that children with SEND can be 'cured' or 'grow out of it'. The Council and NHS should campaign and help to improve the understanding of SEND among all residents of Tower Hamlets.

