

Date: 30<sup>th</sup> July 2019

## **FAO Parents**

Dear Parents,

Having been in post for a term as Head of Integrated SEND at Buckinghamshire County Council, I wanted to write to you with an update of the progress we have made so far on our improvement journey supporting children and young people with SEND. I have been focused on improving the service's performance in terms of statutory requirements and enabling the service to be in the right position to deliver a good service to children and families.

### **The Structure of the SEND Service**

As you may be aware, the SEND Service, including the SEND Team, Educational Psychology Service and Specialist Teaching Service have recently undergone a restructure. The new service aims to:

- Increase localised working
- Improve performance
- Enable more services, settings and families to work together collaboratively

In order to achieve this, the teams have been split according to areas, with teams based in Aylesbury, Wycombe and Amersham. These are managed by Area Team Managers who will oversee the work of SEN Officers, Educational Psychologists and Specialist Teachers within these localities, enabling them to be a more frontline service for their communities:

- Amber Burton – Area Team Manager for Aylesbury (primarily based at the Abbey Centre).
- Hayley Nowley – Area Team Manager for Chiltern and South Bucks (primarily based in the Buckinghamshire County Council Amersham Area Office).
- Suzy Paylor – Area Team Manager for High Wycombe (primarily based in the Buckinghamshire County Council Wycombe Area Office).
- Julie Rowland – Area Team Manager for Sensory, Physical and Down Syndrome services – based across the county in a variety of locations.

Changes to the service to move into this new structure started to take form on the 1<sup>st</sup> April; we are currently in a transition phase, including the recruitment to vacant posts within the new structure, to ensure this can be fully in place for September. I am committed to professional development for the service and I am currently implementing a whole service training programme delivered by a range of key partners, as well as myself, focusing on our duties in relation to the Children & Families Act 2014, ensuring we are adhering to statutory timescales and improving the quality of the work that we do.

I appreciate that this has been a difficult time for all during recent times, with issues being communicated to me since I started in post with regard to communication, consistency of

approach and speed of decision making. I would like to reassure you that moving forward, we are striving to achieve a positive service for all, and both myself and the management team and the service as a whole, would welcome your feedback as we start to implement this fully from September. We have appointed Resolutions Officers that will be centrally based to support families with resolving specific issues, and more details of how to access this support will soon be available on the Local Offer. I also meet on a half-termly basis with the chairperson from FACT Bucks and the Team Leader for SENDIAS and I am keen to develop opportunities for focus groups with parents on key issues over the course of the next academic year. I am also keen to work collaboratively with parents to deliver on new initiatives for supporting settings in meeting the needs of children with SEND.

## Areas for Improvement

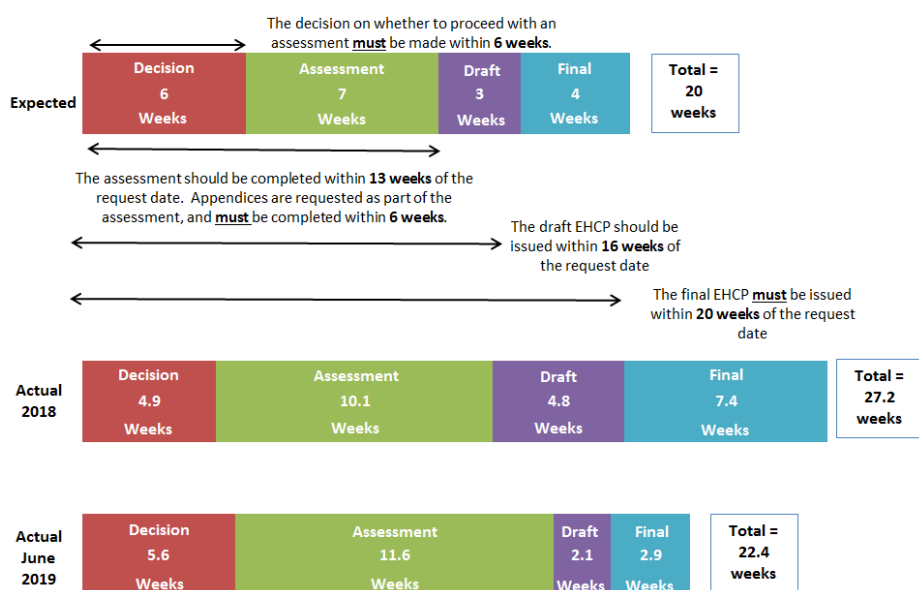
Four key areas for improvement have been identified from the SEND Improvement Plan for the Local Area (across education, health and social care):

1. Education Health and Care (EHC) Plans – ensuring we are meeting statutory timescales alongside improving the quality of the content of the plans.
2. Autism – being the fastest growing area of concern, we need to be sure that we are all in a position across the area to meet the needs of these children and young people.
3. Making sure we have sufficient school places for all of our children, both within mainstream and in specialist provision.
4. Preparing for Adulthood

Officers across the directorate are working together to ensure that this work is being carried out, demonstrating focus on the critical areas of performance that need to be addressed.

## EHC Plans

When I joined in April, there was a significant backlog of EHC plans that were taking longer than the statutory 20 week timescale which needed addressing. The majority of these plans have now been issued, with over 200 plans being issued in April and May, meaning we no longer have this backlog. The illustration below outlines the improvements we have made to the average time taken to complete plans, and this is ever increasing as we move forward.



We are also launching adaptations to our local process, including key points of communication with families and co-production meetings during the autumn term, as well as key points for feedback too. Monthly meetings are now in place to facilitate multi-agency moderation of the quality of EHCPs, utilising parental feedback on specific cases to facilitate this. A key change in this regard is going back to families, once new EHCPs have been issued, and measuring what the impact has been for them; a plan is only as good as the impact it has upon a child or young person in terms of its delivery.

## **Autism / SEND Support**

I am currently working on launching some projects in September to ensure that children & young people are supported and there is sufficient documentation available to settings and parents. The Ordinarily Available Provision document is aimed to give an overview of provision in Buckinghamshire and this will be published so that it is accessible to everyone. I am working with a number of professionals such as mainstream primary and secondary schools, Andrew Howard at FACT Bucks and the SENDIAS team to ensure that the voices of children are also considered throughout this document. We are currently looking for volunteers to become 'parent champions' where ordinarily available provision has been provided for their children with SEND Support in our schools, to support with the training and the implementation going forward of this premise. If you have had a positive experience in this regard, I would be grateful if you could make contact with Andrew at FACT Bucks so he can pass your details onto me as we really want to hear from you.

Speech Link is a project which we will be launching in the autumn term and will be in schools supporting 5 – 7 year olds over the next academic year. It is a programme that can support in the assessment and provision of children with speech language and communication needs, jointly commissioned by education and health here in Buckinghamshire, enabling schools to identify need and support children as early as possible. The programme has been used by several other Local Authorities, producing good outcomes and tracked progress has come from this, indicating that this will be beneficial.

A SEN Conference for schools was held with the focus on Autism in early June, organised in collaboration between the Local Authority and health partners. Approximately 100 school practitioners attended with excellent speakers from our special schools and health colleagues alike, with really positive feedback. The launch of the 'Autism' Toolbox' to support teachers earlier this year was further promoted through this event, signposting attendees to the Local Offer to access this and I urge all to access this very useful resource.

## **Sufficiency**

It is important for us to be clear about what provision we have to support the range of need we have and how well we are using it. We are currently working collaboratively with schools to conduct this analysis in order to inform our future strategy. We are reviewing our banding system, making it needs led, so that a consistent approach can be taken to this across all of our specialist provision, including entry and exit criteria for specific provisions where needed.

We are currently reviewing the panel processes within the SEND Service and will be putting a new process into action in September. We are aiming to reduce the number of different panels and increase the frequency of one encompassing SEN Placement Panel, ensuring that there is not a huge delay in decision making, and that we are adhering to our statutory duties.

We are also asking for a wider range of multi-agency attendees at panels to facilitate challenge and consistency.

## **Preparing for Adulthood**

The Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) programme is aimed at giving young people with an EHCP equal life chances as they move into adulthood. The Transition team do this by helping young people and families think about what they would like to do after education and use four outcomes to help people plan:

- Employment
- Independent living
- Good health
- Friends, relationships and community

By focusing on these four outcomes at annual reviews we support young people to be able to choose what they move onto after education.

The Council has started to develop a more integrated service to support this transition process. It is developing a service for people from age 0-25 to try to avoid the changes of service that happens when people turn 18 between children's and adult social care. The first part of this change is to co-locate the Children with Disabilities team (from Children's social care) with the Transitions team (from Adult social care) in Amersham. They will sit alongside each other and will undertake a joint training programme to support them working closer together during transition. With the localisation of the SEND teams this is also planned for September.

As the locality model for the SEND service develops from September, I hope that such performance improvements and support for schools – working collaboratively together – will continue to improve. We welcome the opportunity to work more closely together to ensure we are serving our children to the best of our ability within the legislative framework that we are all bound by.

With kind regards



**Hero Slinn**  
**Head of Integrated SEND Service**