

SEND Statement of Action response – Bedford Borough

July 2018

CONTEXT

The local area of Bedford Borough was inspected by OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission from 5 - 9 February 2018 to judge the effectiveness of the area in implementing the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. The Chief Inspector determined that Bedford Borough Council and Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group were required to jointly submit a Written Statement of Action because of significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice.

OUR COMMITMENT

Bedford Borough Council and Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group are committed to ensuring that the requirements of the SEND Code of Practice are co-produced and implemented for children and families in Bedford Borough.

RESPONSE

Bedford Borough Council (BBC) and Bedfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (BCCG) fully accept the findings of the Joint Local Area SEND Inspection and are committed to meeting the key actions to improve outcomes for children, young people (0-25 years) and families.

This Statement of Action (SoA) response has been co-produced between BBC, BCCG and members of the Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum (BBPCF), as well as wider consultation with schools, partners and providers. The SoA includes the strategic improvements required to meet the requirements of the inspection and includes an action plan with specific areas of work explained in greater levels of detail.

The SEND Improvement Board (SIB); the local strategic partnership with responsibility for this area of work, has taken ownership of the response and will oversee the actions taken to address the issues highlighted from the inspection. The SIB is chaired by the Council's Portfolio

Holder for Education and includes senior representatives from the BBC, BCCG and BBPCF. A governance structure is included on page 3 of this response.

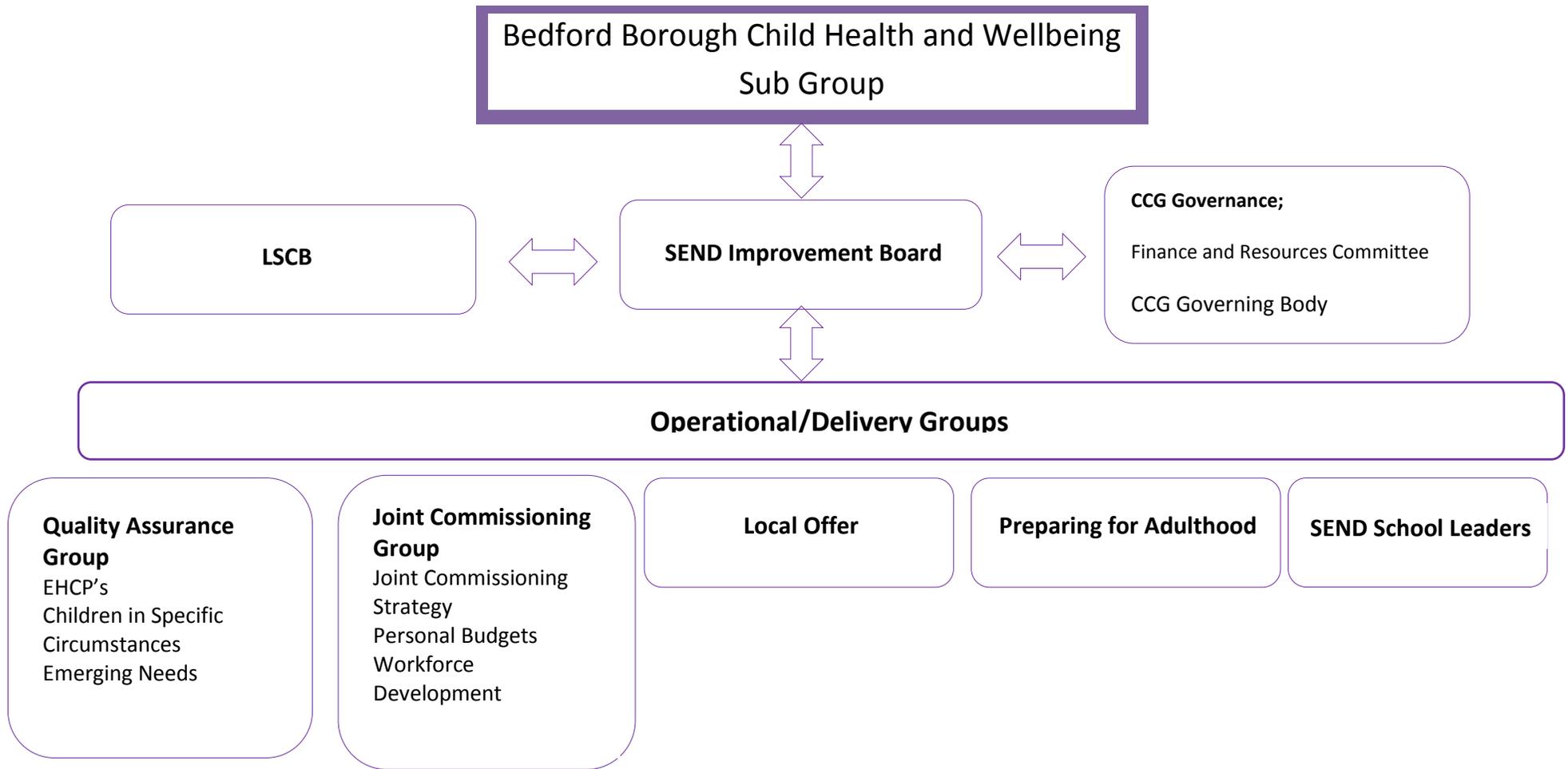
The partners met with the regional DfE Advisor and NHSE Advisor on 9 May and 4 July to further develop the SoA response.

The SoA was presented to the BBC Executive on 13 June and at the BCCG Governing Body on 6 June; both of these groups approved the draft SoA, delegating powers to appropriate individuals to finalise the more details SoA.

Key deliverables to enhance our response

1. Across the partnership, we will appoint additional jointly-funded project management resources as part of a SEND Improvement Team. These posts will be advertised by end June 18 and will start as soon as possible.
2. This additional capacity will include;
 - a. A dedicated Programme Manager who will be accountable for the SoA response and holding all partners to account,
 - b. A dedicated Local Offer Development Officer, and
 - c. A Joint Commissioning Manager for SEND.
3. The Programme Manager will be responsible for version control of the Statement of Action response to ensure activities are on track.
4. The SIB terms of reference will be amended to reflect additional responsibilities; specifically around joint commissioning functions and decision making.
5. This new structure will be in place by July 2018 with all posts expected to be filled by the start September 2018.

GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE



Inspection findings

- 1. There are no coordinated priorities, strategies or accountabilities between the services to ensure that joint commissioning is undertaken effectively.**

Context/barriers

Joint commissioning has not developed effectively in Bedford Borough. Although some budgets have been identified to be pooled, this has not yet materialised. As Bedford Borough is a small place, the economies of scale in joint commissioning are not regularly available. The block contracts that are in place have been a barrier to progress; the local interpretation of block contracts and how these are used has hindered the progress of joint commissioning. The previous contract for community health services did not allow for the flexible responses required within the Children and Families Act.

The previous community health services contract made it difficult to bring forward the change and transformation required. It had proved difficult to engage the previous provider to deliver the changes required within the inflexibility of the old contract, hence BCCG commissioned a new community provider as from the 1st April 2018. With the new provider in place we are better placed to bring forward the required transformational change to support the ambition of the SIB.

There has been a lack of clarity about available budgets for SEND services from all commissioners, e.g. Speech and Language Therapy.

There has not been a joint commissioning strategy or developments for pooled budgets locally, including clarity about decision making and accountability for commissioners, at individual and strategic levels. The local partners have been impacted by the loss of capacity in commissioning teams due to public service austerity measures.

Response

- BBC and BCCG are committed to pool or align resources, including developing additional capacity to improve the speed of our response to deliver on the action plan
- A Joint Commissioning Strategy for SEND will be co-produced and implemented by January 2019. The SIB will provide the governance for the joint commissioning strategy which will consider evidence to inform joint commissioning, as well as reviewing the decisions of panel requests/decisions. In order to produce this strategy, by August 2018 we will;
 - Identify the current commissioning arrangements for all partners
 - Identify all budgets that are allocated to services that could be jointly commissioned
 - Identify the current demand for all services – and understand current gaps. This will include ASD, SEMH, Therapeutic interventions currently not commissioned and sexually harmful behaviours including risk assessments

- Align the priorities captured with JSNA and other needs assessments and ensure any gaps in data are captured
- Understand current and projected future demand for services to include demographic growth
- The SEND and Map panel terms of reference and processes will be reviewed and updated to ensure that it is jointly managed, prioritises the voice of the child, young person and parent carer and becomes a truly multi-agency approach.
- We will develop a 'Co-production Charter' defining all partners' roles and responsibilities and ensures that the views and experiences of children, young people and parent carers are at the centre of all planning and delivery of provision.. The first draft will be approved by the SIB on 13 July – this will then be co-produced with children, young people, parents/carers and all partners and formally approved by December 2018.
- We will develop a shared outcomes framework to direct all work, recognising the different approaches for individual and strategic level commissioning. The first draft will be approved by the SIB on 13 July – this will then be co-produced with all partners and formally approved by December 2018.
- We will gain an improved understanding of unmet needs through co-producing our outcomes framework with all partners and through improved analysis of panel requests, Early Help Assessments and other local intelligence. This will include gathering qualitative information from children, young people, parent carers and all partners. This will be completed by December 2018.
- We will implement jointly commissioned services in specific areas, e.g. personal budgets, direct payments from April 2019. This will be informed by the activities above.

2. BCCG has only very recently carried out its self-evaluation to identify progress and barriers to implementing the reforms. At the time of the inspection, there was no robust action plan in place to deliver the necessary actions to ensure that outcomes for children and young people improve.

Context

The CCG self-evaluation was carried out during the inspection. Whilst the inspector recognised the wider self-assessment of the local area was reflective of the current situation the inspectors did not feel the appropriate actions were put in place by the CCG as a result of the self-evaluation.

Response

- Additional executive level leadership has been identified within the BCCG to drive this agenda forward
- A review of the DCO role specification, objectives and support network will be undertaken.
- Strengthened governance, accountability and reporting processes, internally within BCCG, and jointly to SIB to review progress against action plan

- The previous community providers were reluctant to embrace change hence BCCG commissioned a new community provider from the 1st April 2018. With the new provider in place we are better placed to bring forward the required transformational change to support the ambition of the SIB.
- The Outcomes framework for the new community services was jointly developed with BCCG, BBC and BBPCF. It is recognised that this will need to be revisited as the new service embeds itself.

3. Leaders have not ensured that the local offer provides clear, comprehensive, accessible and up-to-date information about the available provision and how to access it. Leaders are not responsive to local needs and aspirations by involving children and young people, their families, and service providers within its development and review.

Context/barriers

The Local Offer was set up in 2014 to provide accurate information about all services. It was recognised by members of the SIB in January 2018 that the Local Offer content and functionality (as a service provider database at this stage) required updating. There has not been a dedicated resource available across Bedford Borough to manage the Local Offer and accountability for updating information for users across the partnership has not been clear.

The profile of the Local Offer has not been high enough with partners; therefore the knowledge of partners (including for example schools) about the Local Offer and their role in promoting and engaging with the Local Offer has not been consistent and has not always been accurate. The current website platform for the Local Offer is not fit for purpose; the search function is not accurate and is not compatible with mobile devices.

Response

- BBC has commissioned an external web developer to improve the functionality of the current Local Offer. The new version should be available in May 2018 for testing with parents and young people, and will be designed to be more mobile/tablet friendly.
- A full time Local Offer Development Officer will be appointed in summer 2018. This person will be accountable for the development of the current system/platform and for holding all partners to account to ensure accuracy of their information.
- A decision about updating the current platform or recommissioning a new local offer will be made by July 2018.
- The content of the Local Offer is being systematically reviewed to ensure it is up to date. This work is being completed by members of the Parent Carer Forum working closely with Council officers. Existing content will be reviewed and updated by December 2018.
- The Local Offer is being merged with the Early Help website to increase the profile and use of the site and help with early identification of SEND support
- We will identify missing or inaccurate content and will ensure that this is included in the Local Offer by March 2019.

- All providers (including schools, health and social care) will have been briefed about their responsibilities regarding their information for the Local Offer by September 2018 by Council, CCG and Public Health officers.
 - Further advice and guidance to school leaders and governors will take place throughout the summer term – this will include a focus on updating the Local Offer and improving the information, advice and guidance offered by schools to parents and children. This will be delivered on an ongoing basis.
 - All CCG commissioned health providers will receive advice and guidance through the DCO and through the contract management process by September 2018
 - All Public health commissioned providers will receive advice and guidance focussing on the Local Offer and links between education, social care and health provision
- An improved feed-back function will be embedded in the Local Offer to enable children, parents and partners can inform BBC and BCCG of services gaps or concerns. All feedback will be published and shared with the SIB.
- Young people with SEND to be involved in the development and testing of the interim response and the final design
- We will explore opportunities to create an apprentice post for a young person with SEND within the SEND Improvement Team specifically to develop the local offer and to engage with young people
- Include in contract management approach with all providers
- The Local Offer will meet the Department of Health's Information Standard requirements by 2019

4. Leaders have not ensured collectively that EHC plans identify the range of needs for children and young people beyond the diagnosis or a multi-agency approach to meeting needs effectively, including the subsequent signposting and guidance around personal budgets.

Context/barriers

There has been a steep increase (from 693 to 1,117) in request for EHC plans (EHCPs) since 2014. There has been a focus on meeting the 20 week timescales and it is recognised that this has sometimes been at the expense of ensuring quality holistic plans for all children. The compliance with the 20 week assessment schedule is good; however the inconsistent inclusion of health and social care advice/recommendations has led to plans being predominantly education outcome focussed.

There has been a lack of engagement across the education, social care and health systems to ensure join up in the preparation of EHCPs and the setting of outcomes.

There has been a lack of understanding from some partners about the SEND reforms and new statutory responsibilities within the Code of Practice. This has led to an inconsistent approach to the local needs assessment process which has created confusion for children, young people and parent/carers and partners.

In addition very few children and young people have personal budgets due to limited capacity across the partnership to deliver these.

Response

- BBC, BCCG and BBPCF are rolling out a bespoke training package designed to meet the needs of all health and social care professionals completing EHCPs. This includes a focus on developing high quality outcomes within EHCPs and meeting statutory requirements.
- We will review joint processes to assess children's needs to ensure EHCPs are developed to reflect the whole child.
- We will ensure all practitioners are aware of their legal requirements under the Code of Practice by December 2018. Training will be mandatory for all managers and will be included in induction for all new members of staff.
- We will ensure all practitioners understand the way in which the legal requirements are implemented in Bedford Borough by December 2018.
- We will ensure mandatory e-learning for all members of staff to ensure understanding of the legal requirements of the Act and COP by March 2019.
- We will develop KPIs and outcomes to measure this implementation. These will be reflected in the developing outcomes framework which will include a supporting Quality Assurance and Learning Framework.
- We will review thresholds/gateways to assessment ensure they are fit for purpose.
- We will ensure that all children and young people with an EHCP have a named coordinator/lead professional as agreed with parents/carers.
- We will ensure multi agency working at the earliest stage of engagement for all children and young people with additional needs
- We will continue to build upon the improving support and liaison between social care and educational colleagues, particularly now there is a stable workforce in the social care team, particularly the Children with Disabilities Team.
- Quality assurance and monitoring processes will be further developed across the partnership, following the appointment of a SEND QA Manager in April 2018. As part of the co-production of the Outcomes framework, there will be full engagement on the associated Quality Assurance and Learning Framework which supports the Outcomes Framework.
- A STP wide Memorandum of Understanding has been agreed with NHSE to be part of a personalised care demonstration site.
- BCCG signed up to NHSE mentor scheme for Personal Health Budgets and have secured dedicated support from a neighbouring CCG who were part of the NHSE supported Integrated Personal Commissioning programme (IPC).
- An agreed EHCP advice template has been implemented since 1 April 2018 for all health and social care professionals
- There is a need to understand the number of active Personal Budget (PB) requests and those now in place.

5. **There are weaknesses in the provision across the borough for young people who have emerging SEN and/or disabilities, including social, emotional and mental health needs, and more complex needs such as autistic spectrum disorder, to live successful lives where they participate positively in wider borough life and engage successfully in education, employment, training and transition into adulthood.**

Context

Guidance for EHCPs was broadened and a graduated response for SEN support introduced in 2014 to ensure that those who have emerging SEN and mental health needs (such as autistic spectrum disorder). However, a gap exists in provision and transition which needs to be developed. Further evidence is required to understand the outcomes for young people transitioning into adulthood.

Due to a lack of a joint commissioning approach, the evidence of the Local Offer evidence including unmet needs are often unknown and not able to inform future plans. The focus of the reforms so far has largely been around EHCP conversion; further emphasis on SEND support will be developed with all partners

Response

- The new Outcomes Framework as will support this. The co-production between partners, including children, young people and parent carers on of the Outcomes framework and supporting QA and Learning Framework, will involve a full engagement process which will also focus on identifying unmet need and how identified needs are currently being met. The overall framework will ensure there is continuous of unmet need; how well needs are being assessed, identified and met.
- The SEND chapter of the JSNA has been updated to reflect the changing needs across Bedford Borough and will be further developed to reflect needs. This will be used to help inform the commissioning priorities for BBC and BCCG and to meet identified gaps in provision.
- The new and improved Local Offer website will provide more detailed evidence of gaps in provision and the demand for services that will be used in conjunction with the JSNA to identify unmet needs
- We will co-produce a Disability Friendly Employers Charter within Bedford Borough, including further enhancing the job opportunities within BBC for young people with SEND
- We will host regular workshops with all professionals to improve understanding of the local approach to SEND, and to ensure all colleagues who offer advice and guidance are well informed
- The Quality Assurance and Learning Framework will embed a system of continuous assessment and learning of how well the health, education and social system is meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND.
- Multiple methods of engagement with children, young people and parent carers will be at the heart of the system to improve our understanding of needs and to accelerate our progress to capture and identify suitable outcomes. Engagement methods will include

a minimum of two surveys per year with parents/carers, children and young people; use of social media; focus groups; structured individual and group conversations; creative methods through art, drama, play and regular attendance at Bedford Borough Parent Carer Forum regular coffee mornings to discuss system wide developments and individual case issues.

- BBC is exploring ways to ensure sufficient capacity is in place within local special schools for children and young people with SEND.
- The review of the terms of reference of the SEND panel and processes will include a review of thresholds for an EHC needs assessment will critically examine whether current local criteria need to be amended. This will be completed by December 2018
- The Council will recruit a Teaching and Learning Advisor (SEND) who will provide support and challenge for schools to ensure quality first teaching and differentiation within the classroom to meet needs.
- The Council will commission and provide a high quality CPD offer for SENCOs and other schools staff to ensure they are well equipped to improve outcomes for all children
- Further support and guidance for paediatricians especially around diagnosis, specifically around ASD, will be developed.
- Support and challenge for head teachers to provide more accurate advice re EHCPs as the only way of accessing services.
- We will complete a review of ASD diagnosis and pathway to ensure we have a clear understanding of emerging needs and what services are required. This will be completed with colleagues in neighbouring areas.
- The Local partnership will work to promote the needs of local children with SEND to a broader audience – from public services to private employers and businesses – to highlight how opportunities can be created and realised.

Statement of Action – Action Plan

Appendix A of the Statement of Action is a detailed action plan that contains the specific work that will be completed across the partnership to meet the requirements of the Statement of Action. This plan has been co-produced and will be monitored by the SEND Improvement Board and managed by the newly appointed Project Manager. Key officers from all partners are listed in Appendix B.

The key objectives are listed under each of the key five priorities identified in the inspection. Within each section, the key strategic outcomes are listed. These strategic outcomes have been mapped across to the early draft of the partnership Outcomes Framework that is critical to the improvements that will be delivered across Bedford Borough. This will enable focus on the detailed actions that need to be delivered, and for scrutiny on the strategic outcomes that need to be delivered for this Statement of Action, and to improve outcomes for children and families.

The Project Manager will be responsible for developing specific action plans, including clear milestones for longer term pieces of work that will be agreed and monitored by the SIB.