

## Special Education Needs and Disabilities 0 – 25 (SEND 0-25) – Progress Report

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### 1. **Context**

1.1. The SEND Strategy 2016 and SEND Priority Action Plan (following a Gloucestershire led Peer Review held in May 2017), set out to address a number of key issues, including:

- An historic set of arrangements with schools which mean that the number of pupils' subject to formal SEN assessment and planning is significantly lower than other areas.
- Improving the capacity of the partnership to ensure high quality Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) are in place where needed.
- Supporting the capacity of Somerset schools to support pupils with SEND to achieve improved outcomes.
- Increasing the capacity of the SEND casework team to meet the numbers of children who are assessed as needing an EHCP.

These areas for development are set in the context where Somerset has a number of strengths including:

- The strategic participation of the Parent Carer Forum and the 'Unstoppables' continues to be a strength of the Somerset partnership.
- Many examples of outstanding practice from schools and specialist services across the partnership.
- Well-resourced specialist support and outreach support to schools.
- A strong partnership between schools and the LA leading the improvements outlined below.

Planning for revising the Somerset's Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy for Children and Young People aged 0-25 2016-2019 is to begin in 2018.

### 2. **Issues for consideration/Recommendation**

2.1. To consider progress in addressing the SEND challenges in Somerset.

Key aspects of the Plans achieved include:

- Health colleagues have stepped up their engagement the health aspects of the SEND strategy and priorities, with support from the Council for Disabled Children (CDC). The CDC is also assisting in improving joint commissioning between the CCG and the Council.

- A series of SEND 0-25 multi-agency practitioner conferences were delivered across Somerset during 2017 with the aim of improving understanding of Somerset's SEND strategy, identifying barriers and strengthening partnership working in localities across Somerset.
- Improved guidance has been issued, at the request of School SENCO's, in relation to using Early Help arrangements to support children with SEND.
- The capacity of the SEND team continues to increase, with improved timeliness and the team is now on track to complete the transfer of Statements to EHCPs, in line with statutory timescales. Further work across the partnership is taking place to improve the quality of assessments and plans.
- The first phase of a new banding system for pupils with SEN Support, set out in the SEND Strategy, has been implemented across all schools in the autumn term – allowing for better identification and targeted support for those children most in need.
- The new banding system combined with improved data matching with children's social care systems has enabled improved identification of those children to be prioritised for assessment for an Education Health Care Plan (EHCP).
- Plans have been agreed for investing in the sufficiency of Special School & Resource Base places to enable more children's needs to be met within the Somerset state school system.

## **2.2 Governance and Leadership**

- The commitment and active engagement of the Council's lead for Children's Services in drawing together the SEND strategy to ensure every child and young person in Somerset have the best possible opportunities.
- The Director of Children's Services (DCS) regularly attends Headteacher meetings and since May 2017 leads the High Needs group reporting to Schools Forum and the Strategic SEND Board.
- Commitment from Somerset Council to deliver the statutory SEND work. This can be demonstrated by the financial and resource commitment to improve the information management systems; increase the number and quality of case work officers; a programme of development and training for SEND.

## **2.3 Parents**

Somerset has a strong and active Parent Carer Forum (PCF). The PCF is well organised and have the skills and knowledge required to fully participate in meaningful co-production of strategies, policies and service development. Membership has increased significantly over the last two years and is becoming representative of the wider community of families who have children and young people with SEND.

## **2.4 Children and Young People**

The Unstoppables forum is a group of young people aged 13-25 with special educational needs and/ or disabilities (SEND). They, with the support of Somerset County Council, aim to increase the voice of children and young people with SEND in Somerset. They work with a range of projects to help young people develop their skills and better prepare to fully participate in the SEND agenda. This includes the multi-platform initiative “Access to Community” campaign to help people feel more confident to go out and take part in activities in their local area delivering training and support sessions or taking an active part in making important decisions about funding for groups who support children and young people with SEND. Their Annual Report is attached for information (appendix A).

Representatives of the young people’s forum attend and take an active part in formal meetings and events. Examples include the steering group meetings for the Local offer, Somerset EHCP moderation events and regional SEND events.

## **2.5 SEND Financial Context**

The Government has decided that in the future the amount of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which is spent on pupils with special educational needs and disabilities will be ring fenced. Currently Somerset is spending more on these services than currently allocated in the schools’ budget (DSG), in 2016/17 an additional £2.9m was spent, with a further overspend projected for this year of £2.3m (£5.2m in total). If this overspend is not addressed this shortfall will either have to come from individual school budgets and/or other essential council services.

The Government is also requiring more of the schools’ budget to be given to schools directly rather than allocated by councils on central services, as schools are usually best placed, with input from parents, to organise the most effective support.

These changes are in the context of a challenging funding environment. Whilst central government funding of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has seen a cash increase for Schools in Somerset of 3%, the High Needs funding element, which funds SEND central services and specialist provision, has been increased by less than 1%, and the available funding is not keeping pace with rising needs or costs.

## **2.6 SEND Strategy**

Key Outcomes include:

- A clear strategy for the development of specialist placements in all four geographical areas of Somerset to ensure equity of access and clarity of pathways for SEND.
- Realignment of resources to create additional capacity to address need.
- Publication and implementation of core standards in all educational settings across all age groups 0-25 on how to support children with SEN at SEN Support.
- Increased clarity for parents on what they can expect from educational

settings in relation to support for SEND.

- Review of High Needs top-up allocation to ensure fair and transparent decision making and sustainability of resources ahead of the national funding formula.

## **2.7 Areas we are working to improve**

Over the past two years the LA has led a thematic review to develop and deliver a complete system around SEND. This included a review of the sufficiency of places in special schools and resource bases (completed); a review off provision of SEN support and High needs funding for pupils with the most complex needs (completed); a review of SEND support services (in progress).

**For Information:**

**Engagement and Participation Annual Report**