

PEOPLE AND FAMILIES POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

14 FEBRUARY 2024

PUBLIC QUESTIONS REGISTERED AND TO BE ASKED AT THE MEETING

Deborah Nye

I have a few questions regarding Item 4 on the agenda about SEND sufficiency:

Q1 - Page 3 of the paper step 1 and 2 refer to more inclusive mainstream provision. How will this be implemented in the real world when the attitude of some schools is often just as much of a barrier to SEND provision as funding? When SEN parents challenge the LA on this topic they have been told the LA cannot compel any school to do anything and there appears no robust checks and balances in place that are being used effectively by the LA to guarantee legal and statutory duties are being discharged correctly by schools regarding SEND provision and EHCPs. How will the LA improve this issue?

Q2 - Page 3 point 2 - many mainstream schools turn away parents from visiting a school if their child has an EHCP. Then if the school allow a visit they explain they will be contesting the placement and its rare the child is welcomed. Meanwhile specialist provisions heavily restrict visitors to their schools too. How can parents access placements with this kind of reception from the provisions themselves? What are the LA doing to ensure specialist and mainstream placements allow more timely access for parental visits and less refusals at consultation? In this answer please provide the numbers of refused consultations per year for the last 5 years in mainstream and specialist placements.

Q3 - Financial landscape - page 4 - this omits reviewing current expenditure and if it's necessary. For instance, some cases request their own medical experts to review a child when the child has already been reviewed privately, and more in depth. This is surely a waste of taxpayers money. Medical professionals doubling up on reports is a waste of money. Will this be reviewed and stopped?

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Catherine Pope

Re: SEND sufficiency briefing paper, point 4 on the agenda.

My understanding of this paper is that it appears to set out how the council intend to ensure there is sufficient provision in both mainstream and specialist schools for children and young people with SEND in Essex. Also within this same paper it is reported that there is a strain on SEND funding and mentions exploring where savings can be made against current spend. Therefore it is highly relevant I ask how much money has been spent yearly for the last five years by ECC on Judicial Review cases brought by families against the council (and council-maintained schools) regarding SEND education issues? In answering this I would like the total cost and a breakdown of the total cost to include (amongst other costs) ELS's costs, barrister costs and costs awarded to families or made to families by the council. Also costs incurred by the LA defending LA-maintained provisions. This question should also be applied to Tribunals similarly.

My second question is that within this same paper I can't identify how or to what extent parent/carer's voices of SEND children and young people have played an active part in the formation of this plan as it stands currently. Or how it addresses the current failures in SEND provision at ECC highlighted by Ofsted and reported to ECC by SEND parent/carers and their advocates such as solicitors or advocate groups. Then also why the compilation of this plan and all ECC's SEND plans are not advertised directly to SEND parents (eg via a letter to schools) as many parents are not represented by advocates and remain unaware of such plans or that they have a chance to ask a question.