

6 April 2020

Ms Helen Lincoln, Director of Children's Services

Ms Lisa Allen, Clinical Accountable Officer, Basildon and Brentwood Clinical Commissioning Group

Dr Ed Garrett, Accountable Officer, North East Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

Mr Andrew Geldard, Chief Officer, West Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

Mr Terry Huff, Accountable Officer, Castle Point and Rochford Clinical Commissioning Group

Ms Caroline Rassell, Accountable Officer, Mid Essex Clinical Commissioning Group

Essex County Council
County Hall
Market Road
Chelmsford
Essex
CM1 1QH

Dear Ms Lincoln, Ms Allen, Dr Garrett, Mr Geldard, Mr Huff and Ms Rassell

This letter is written in accordance with The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015¹ to inform Essex local authority and the five clinical commissioning groups (CCGs), as principal authorities, that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have jointly evaluated the written statement of action submitted to us on 27 March 2020.

The statement of action is deemed to be fit for purpose in setting out how the area will tackle the significant areas of weakness identified in the published report letter. We, at Ofsted and the CQC, recognise that during the current uncertainties coming out of the COVID-19 pandemic, progress through the plan may not be as at first intended. Importantly, and particularly relevant to current uncertainties, the plan focuses on the systems and processes to support leaders and front-line professionals in their roles and responsibilities through the life of the plan. Given there are five CCGs, it is good to see that the plan emphasises strong joint commissioning arrangements across the whole area, as set out in JC1-17, specifically JC8-14.

I note the priority given to firmly establishing governance arrangements, including clear roles, responsibilities and accountabilities. The arrangements indicate a sense of urgency and, as you say in the plan, actions ('activities') that build on existing programmes and strategies towards sustainable improvements.

¹ The Children Act 2004 (Joint Area Reviews) Regulations 2015
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1972/regulation/4/made.

Activities and milestones are spread out appropriately over the next two years, particularly in relation to joint commissioning. While not all activities are specific, they are measurable and time-bound.

Inevitably, the plan will benefit from some additional detail to make clear how the partnership will carry out the activities and what they look for to evaluate the impact. It may be that the specific information is within the associated action plans, but senior leaders could consider the following aspects to strengthen the written statement of action:

- It is not clear where area leaders and professionals for care will contribute to the delivery and evaluation of the activities.
- Page 5 of the plan states that 'The role of education settings will be crucial to our success.' The specific roles and accountabilities of leaders in schools and other educational settings are not clear in the activities and success measures.
- Stipulate clearly the outcome measures for effective leadership (EHC1, OV2).
- For ID1-8, the views and experiences of parents and carers not accessing POET or the Essex Family Forum could be missed, and likely to be a sizable proportion of those affected by the activities and outcomes.
- JC15 sets out the intention that the local offer website provides meaningful information to families and that the information is used to access services, but it is not clear how this will happen. The same lack of clarity applies to J8-14.
- EHC3 and 5 aim to inform parents and carers of intentions to cease EHC plans in a timely way. The plan lacks information about how to make sure that the rationale will be clearly understood by parents and carers.

The written statement of action must be published on local websites², so that parents, carers, children and young people can understand the actions you are taking to improve the effectiveness of the area in identifying and meeting needs, and improving outcomes for children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Yours sincerely

Paul Brooker
Ofsted Regional Director, East of England

² Regulation 4 (5); www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2015/1792/regulation/4/made