

Essex County Council SEND structure update

Reference Number: PAF/15/20

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| Report title: Essex County Council SEND structure - update | |
| Report to: People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee | |
| Report author: Graham Hughes, Senior Democratic Services Officer | |
| Date: 23 July 2020 | For: Consideration and identifying any follow-up scrutiny actions |
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| County Divisions affected: Not applicable | |

1. Introduction

This item is a further update following on from the last discussion with the Committee in November 2019.

2. Action required

The Committee is asked to consider:

- (i) **the attached latest update (Appendix 2).**
- (ii) **To consider how it wishes to continue to monitor the service restructure.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The 14 February 2019 meeting of the Committee discussed with Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Development and Innovation, the aspirations and objectives behind a planned public consultation on future SEN services. A link to the meeting papers is here – [PAF 14 Feb 2019 agenda papers](#)
- 3.2 As part of that formal consultation the County Council was looking to have a principles and values based conversation with parents and discuss a vision for long-term service provision. The formal public consultation exercise was completed and an analysis of the feedback was incorporated in an update from Mr Holloway at a meeting of this Committee on 11 July 2019. A link to the meeting papers is here [PAF 11 July 2019 agenda papers](#)
- 3.3 A further update was discussed at the Committee's 14 November 2019 meeting. A link to the meeting papers is here [PAF agenda papers - 14 November 2019](#) . An extract of the minutes of that discussion are in Appendix 1 to this report. One of the actions arising was for Mr Holloway to return to update on the first few months of implementation of the new structure. Ralph Holloway, will be in attendance today to provide the update and participate in discussion.

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4. Update and Next Steps

The update is attached as Appendix 2 and 3. Next steps are as proposed under Action Required.

5 List of Appendices

Appendix 1 – extract minutes from 14 November 2019.

Appendix 2 – SEND structure update

Appendix 3 – The New SEND Structure (power point organisation charts)

Extract of the Minutes of the meeting of the People and Families Policy and Scrutiny Committee, held at 10.15am in Committee Room 1 County Hall, Chelmsford, CM1 1QH on Thursday, 14 November 2019

4. Special Educational Needs update

The Committee considered report PAF/26/19 providing an update on a review undertaken of SEN provision in Essex and specifically public engagement on a SEND Strategy and Redesign. Ralph Holloway, Head of SEND Strategy and Innovation, Essex County Council joined the meeting to introduce the update and answer questions.

During discussion the following was highlighted and/or noted:

- A public engagement survey had been run between 22 March and 31 May 2019 seeking views on a proposed vision and principles for SEND and ways of working. It was proposed to enable and support the development of a school-led SEND system, grow the specialist SEND provision in Essex and redesign and new approach for ECC SEND teams.
- Around 30,000 parents of those children with ECHP plans had been consulted together with young people, and educational, health and social care practitioners. Over 1000 responses had been received with overwhelming support for the vision aspiration for the service.
- However, there has been some concerns expressed about the changing roles of the SEN teams. Schools had also queried whether there would be a further shift of accountability to them.
- The new strategy aimed to reduce the number of professional contacts for schools and parents and reduce the multiple handovers between professionals.
- In the spring term the service would work with the Family Forum to develop an action plan. A lot of work would be done to increase parental confidence in the system and move away from a focus on crisis (statutory) services and plan earlier intervention.
- There was some anecdotal evidence that some parents felt they had no choice other than to home educate to meet all their needs. As a result, the service was looking to see if they could develop a support model located within mainstream education which further reduced some of the barriers facing SEN pupils in such an environment – e.g. difficulties in moving around between classes.
- The new service design sought to support schools strategically and encouraging the use of any pre-existing in-school specialism first. Where bespoke support was needed then the service would develop an appropriate training process and programme.
- It was highlighted that in recent years there had been a 400% increase in diagnosis of autism. The number of people with an ECHP where the main component was autism, had increased significantly. Some members queried whether mainstream

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schools were able to meet the diverse needs across the autism spectrum. Four autism support centres had been established within mainstream schools to provide some specialist support and the service were looking to develop an outreach model to expand the access across the mainstream sector. Similarly, the service was looking at any opportunities for existing special and enhanced provision schools to share some of their specialist knowledge and support with the mainstream where appropriate.

- The new specialist schools being built were being funded by the Department of Education in a similar way to Free Schools. The County Council had limited influence on the surrounding infrastructure (i.e. parking provision) at specialist schools. However, Mr Holloway would raise the importance of adequate car parking provision with the infrastructure team.
- It was acknowledged that current feedback suggested that signposting for parents at a time of crisis was not as good as it could be with digital online tools, in particular, hard to navigate. To assist this, there would be an engagement facilitator role in the new structure.
- Four new 'preparing for employment' officers had been created in the new structure to work with employers and develop meaningful employment opportunities.

Conclusion:

The Chairman thanked Mr Holloway for his attendance. The new SEN teams would be in place in the new year. The following actions were **agreed**:

- (i) Mr Holloway agreed to return to update the committee in summer 2020 once an implementation review with schools had been completed.
- (ii) In the meantime, further information would be provided on the final service structure and individual roles.
- (iii) A briefing and discussion session in each quadrant would be arranged specifically for school governors and feedback on this would be provided to the Committee.

Recommendation – Mr Holloway was asked to highlight and emphasise to the infrastructure team the importance of adequate car parking provision at the new special schools being built.