

SEND IMPROVEMENT BOARD UPDATE:

OCTOBER 2023

Dear Colleagues,

This month's meeting opened with John Coughlan explaining his dual commissioner role in more detail. The Board were reassured that although there may possibly be some future logistical challenges around meetings and schools visits, his role as SEND Commissioner and the work it entailed would continue to receive his ongoing attention and commitment. He felt the SEND improvement journey work would in fact benefit.

He went on to explain that the s.114 notice had been issued for a purpose, and was a measure of the scale of the financial challenges the city was facing, specifically around the equal pay liability and Oracle issues, and reiterated the importance of setting sustainable revenue budgets for the future. It was important to recognise that the Commissioner team was in place to support the city moving forward, and not hinder it.



Desiree Edwards, Interim Head of Service for SENDIASS attended to present on the positive progress being made in the SENDIASS service with over 1125 parents, young people and professionals having accessed the service for free, confidential and impartial advice and support. It was evident that with 16 out of the 21 minimum standards being reached, considerable improvements had been made, and no formal complaints had been received. A Steering Group consisting of parents and SEND partners had been formed, and the team continued to work proactively with parents and young people to seek non-litigious routes when working with SENAR and schools. The presentation was well received, and the team congratulated on their performance.

Helen Ellis, Director SEND and Inclusion presented a report on the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) which demonstrated the progress, challenges and next steps. Changes in systems and processes were creating improvements, but the actual positive impact on parents, carers and young people remained key and at the heart of everything. Progress continued around annual reviews, quality of EHCPs and waiting times, and although exclusion rates were increasing, considerable preventative work was being undertaken with schools. Challenges remained around children out of school, with continued effort around sufficiency, and overall good growth had been seen in resource bases. Feedback methods continued to be discussed with the PCF, with both parties recognising that feedback should be a normal course of daily activity, not in addition to. Discussion took place around a SEND Improvement Plan that incorporated APP.

After a short break, it was an absolute pleasure to welcome members of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) to the meeting. Jo, Amanda, Lucy and Gwilym reflected on their own personal journeys and provided detail on the important work they've undertaken whilst being members of the PCF. Engagement had not been particularly good over the past months, but consideration was being given to different ways of engaging with parents and attracting new members to the forum, including a marketplace style event for parents to meet BCC staff members in the various service areas, and visiting established groups in different localities to gain further insight. The presentation provided valuable information and was gratefully received by the Board.

Chris Kelly and Ella Drake from Newton attended to provide information on the Developing Better Value (DBV) programme. They explained how the programme worked to identify and implement local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and place the system on a more sustainable financial footing. Details on the two modules that Birmingham had taken part in were provided – Module 1 was complete and concentrated on where the High Needs Block had been spent, with particular focus on maintained special schools; Module 2 was underway and would provide better understanding on how more effective support can be given to children and young people with SEND. It was agreed that once all the data had been collected and interrogated, Chris and Ella would be invited back to the Board for further discussion.

It was unanimous that the meeting provided valuable and insightful information, and allowed an excellent platform for discussion and questions. Our sincere thanks go to all who contributed, and we very much look forward to providing further updates from our next meeting beginning December.

With our continued thanks and very best wishes

Sue Harrison, Strategic Director Children and Families

John Coughlan, SEND Commissioner