



# HILLINGDON

LONDON

## Policy Overview Committee Review Scoping Report 2014/15

### Hillingdon's Implementation of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Reforms

#### Aim of review

The Children and Families Act was given Royal Assent in March 2014 and brought about the most significant reforms to the statutory framework for Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for 30 years. These changes to the law implemented a new system seeking to help children and young people aged 0 to 25 with SEND. More specifically, the changes aimed to provide a system that was:

- Person centred;
- Outcome focused;
- Delivered through a co-ordinated and integrated model of support; and
- Inclusive of families in planning and decision making.

Following the passing of the Act, the reforms were implemented gradually and came fully into force on 1 September 2014. Given the significant upheaval associated with these changes across a range of areas, it has been suggested that this single meeting review could not effectively encompass the entirety of the reforms. As such the aim of the review will be to assess the impact and implementation of two primary areas; the introduction of a 'Local Offer' and the transfer of current SEN Statements to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHC Plan).

To meet this aim the following Terms of Reference are proposed:

#### Terms of Reference

1. To gain a comprehensive understanding of the SEND Reforms and the Council's implementation thereof to date;
2. To gather evidence in order to gain an understanding of the implementation of the following areas of the SEND Reforms:
  - a. The Local Offer
  - b. Education, Health and Care Assessments / Plans;

3. To assess the impact on the Council, young people and families of the raising of the age of support to 25 with a focus on the Local Offer and EHC Plans;
4. To assess whether the aim of producing a person-centred and outcome-focused approach has been met;
5. To ensure that the new model is co-ordinated and integrated across Council services;
6. To ensure that newly developed systems allow families to be included in planning and decision making;
7. To evaluate plans and timelines for the conversion of Statements of SEN in to Education, Health and Care Plans;
8. To identify where aspects of the Local Offer and EHC Plans are not being implemented to a satisfactory level;
9. To identify where there are challenges and / or gaps in the new system; and
10. To put forward practical recommendations as to how the service could better implement areas of the reforms.

### **Reasons for the review**

It has already been noted that the SEND Reforms constitute a major upheaval for a range of service areas across the Council. However, they also constitute a major opportunity for services to be shaped to provide more relevant, helpful and effective for children, young people and families. It is clear that this Committee could have an instrumental role in this process.

This Committee's Terms of Reference state that some of its core areas of responsibility include: education services, school performance and attainment, education and learning partnerships and social care services for children and young people with special needs. As will be seen from the information contained below, it is clear that the implementation of the changes touches upon many areas of the Committee's remit and, therefore, is an appropriate topic for its consideration.

## **INFORMATION AND ANALYSIS**

Prior to expanding on the two core areas of this review which will necessarily highlight gaps and challenges in the new system, it is important to be clear that Hillingdon has made extremely good progress in implementing a new service in the light of the reforms. Indeed, the Department for Education (DfE) commended the Council for its approach to project and programme management including its self-assessments of progress and links into the wider work of the Authority. They also noted that parents and health partners seemed well engaged in the reforms and that the new assessment and planning process was thorough and based on best practice.

It is also important to note that there is no expectation that, at this early stage, reforms will have been fully implemented with no further work to be undertaken. Instead, all local authorities have made implementations gradually and will be continuing to refine and progress changes over the coming years. The Committee will need to hold in balance the desire for a 'complete' service and the iterative nature of the changes being undertaken.

Nonetheless, officers have highlighted where there are challenges in the Local Offer and the transfer of EHC Plans that the Committee could profitably explore.

### **Local Offer**

The purpose of the SEND Local Offer is to provide information for parents, carers, children and young people in a single place in order to help them to understand what services they can expect from a range of local, regional and national agencies. The Offer also includes information on statutory entitlements.

Hillingdon's Local Offer was made available online by 1 September 2014 in accordance with the requirements of the reforms.<sup>1</sup> However, the intention was always that the Local Offer would be phased in and that it would develop over time based on feedback from service users. Officers have advised that the Offer is currently not as useful or relevant as they would like it to be but that feedback is gradually being gathered from families to form an evidence base upon which to develop the provision. Members can find further information on the current offering via the website (URL below) but, in summary, it provides:

- Information on services available locally and nationally. This is divided into various categories for ease of reference and provides links to the websites of each site.
- Information broken down by ages setting out the services / support available to each age group. This includes links to Council services and initiatives.

As Members will see from the website, a number of the categories have yet to be fleshed out and do not yet contain detailed information. The intention is that, once complete, the offer will appear to users as strategic rather than as disjointed information. Consequently, an integral part of this review will be exploring the current local offer, considering feedback / evidence from users and making practical recommendations as to improvements. This may not simply take the form of suggesting new or revised content but also assisting

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<sup>1</sup> Hillingdon's Local Offer can be found at the following URL:  
<http://search3.openobjects.com/kb5/hillingdon/fsd/localoffer.page>

officers to prioritise which areas should be developed and improved to meet residents' most urgent requirements.

## **Education, Health and Care Assessments/Plans**

Independent Parental Special Education Advice (IPSEA) explains Education, Health and Care Plans as follows:

*"An EHC plan is the document which replaces Statements of SEN and Learning Difficulties Assessments for children and young people with special educational needs.*

*An EHC plan can only be issued after a child or young person has gone through the process of EHC needs assessment. At the end of that process, the local authority has to make a decision, either to issue an EHC Plan or not."*

Plans should include the special educational needs and special educational provision of the child/young person, the EHC Plan should also detail:

- Health care provision that has been assessed as reasonably required; and
- Social care provision which is being made for the child/young person under the Chronically Sick and Disabled Persons Act 1970 and any other social care provision that has been assessed as reasonably required.

The transfer of Statements of SEN to EHC Plans is a significant task that is expected to take up to 2018 to complete. However, the Council has made good progress in putting the necessary processes in place to facilitate the transfer from one statutory system to another. Progress to date has included agreeing an EHC Plan template which was commended by the DfE for being fully compliant with the guidelines. The Council has also produced a timeline for completion of the transfer process by the end of March 2018.

However, officers have stressed that the more efficiently the transfer process is completed the better and more cost effective it will be for the Council. Until this is fully complete, 2 independent statutory processes will be running conterminously which requires, for obvious reasons, significantly more resources. Part of the plan to speed this process is to diversify the range of staff able to undertake EHC assessments so that it does not rest solely on a single team.

Plans are also being made to develop a 'tell us once' approach to how the Council interacts with children, young people and families so that they are not repeatedly being asked the same information from different Council services. This would include combining aspects of, for instance, Child in Need Plans with the EHC Plans as much of the same information requested is duplicated in these two documents. This more joined up approach would, however, require the development / acquisition of a software system able to run the process.

The Committee will hear evidence on the current status of the transfer and the challenges being faced. This will offer an opportunity to contribute to the process and ensure that the Council is in a good position to ensure that plans are transferred on time and in a way that delivers the necessary support to vulnerable young people and their families.

## **EVIDENCE & ENQUIRY**

### **Witnesses and timeframes**

This is a single meeting review meaning that it will base its recommendations on the findings of a single witness session. Unfortunately, it would not be possible to expand the review any more than this as its final report must be considered by Cabinet prior to the end of this municipal year. The timeline set out below will ensure that the Committee's report will be considered by Cabinet on 23 April 2015.

The suggested witnesses for these sessions and the suggested dates are set out below:

<b>Session Information</b>	<b>Suggested Witnesses</b>
<b>Agree Scoping Report</b> <i>(14 January 2015)</i>	The Head of All Age Disability will be present at the meeting to present the scoping report
<b>Witness Session</b> <i>(18 February 2015)</i>	§ Head of Disability Services § Disability Services - Programme Manager § Headteacher - Hillingdon Virtual School § Representative from the DfE
<b>Consideration of Draft Final Report</b> <i>(18 March 2015)</i>	The draft final report will be presented by the Democratic Services Officer.

In addition to formal witness sessions, the Committee may wish to consider undertaking an additional session with young people and parents that have been affected by the reforms. This will ensure that the findings of the review are not based solely on the evidence of Council officers but also on the lived experiences of the previous and new systems.

### **Risk Assessment**

Relevant officers have been advised that this review is proposed and are aware of the possible implications on their workload.