

SILCs working group report to Scrutiny Board (Children's Services)

Membership

Councillor Bale
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Summary

The SILCs working group met on three occasions during September and October 2006.

The first session focused on recommendations covering the operation of the SILCs themselves, including pupil numbers, accommodation, partnerships, outreach, finance and the North West SILC.

The second session focused on the remaining recommendations, covering broader issues of communications, training, parental involvement and consultation.

During the working group's discussions, members discussed extensively the levels of public and professional awareness of an overall strategy and direction for the future of special educational needs provision. They felt this needed articulating more clearly. As a result, a third session was held which specifically considered the experience of Norfolk County Council in conducting a consultation on their future strategy for SEN provision.

Some members of the working group also visited the East SILC and the North West SILC to see how practice on the ground was developing. In addition, the Chair of the Scrutiny Board was invited to attend part of a joint planning day with SILC principals and mainstream heads.

Overall, working group members were pleased to see evidence of the amount of in-depth work going on which would tackle the issues raised by the inquiry. Members felt that there was evidence of a more coherent strategic approach to the SILCs emerging.

However, there were some specific areas that were highlighted as key to the continued successful development of the SILCs strategy in the future. These are:

- The need for a clear and well-managed debate with all stakeholders about the principles and future direction of the SILC strategy. This should lead to the production of a baseline document to communicate the strategy and future areas for development to everyone, as a context to individual restructuring proposals in the future.

- The need for training in mainstream schools to equip all staff to deal appropriately with children with the levels of special educational needs that are now routinely met in mainstream schools. This capacity building is crucial to the successful development of the SILCs approach.
- The need to develop a sustainable financial model for SEN provision in Leeds

Session One

The working group felt that if the lessons are to be learned from the implementation of the SILCs, and particularly the North West SILC, then there needs to be a clear and well-managed debate about the future, including the accommodation strategy and use of resources, involving **all** stakeholders.

If the strategy can be well articulated and widely understood (including the commitment that some provision will remain whilst there is demand from parents), it will provide a context within which people can understand individual proposals for future changes in provision. We recognise that further changes will be needed over time.

We were pleased to see evidence of the detailed work being undertaken to review funding models and pupil number projections, and stress that these need to be kept under ongoing review, to ensure that the funding model progresses and that pupil number projections remain robust.

Session Two

Training continues to be a big issue for schools generally but particularly, in this context, training to improve staff awareness and competence in dealing with children's special educational needs in mainstream settings.

This is a national issue, identified as a key finding in the Parliamentary Select Committee's report on special educational needs, but is crucial if staff are to have the confidence to support and deliver the SILCs strategy.

We asked officers to feed back our strong support for ensuring that SEN was included as a key feature of the School Centred Initial Teacher Training (SCITT) and any other relevant teacher training programmes delivered locally.

We also discussed the demands on SILC staff to develop new skills in training colleagues and providing outreach support, as opposed to hands-on teaching. This was in addition to their own development needs, as each of the area SILCs moved from specialist to generic SEN provision.

We heard that one excellent approach was to develop networks, such as the autism network, but that it was important that such opportunities were widely available to relevant staff.

In terms of communication, we heard that Manchester City Council's Parent Partnership Service had produced a useful series of documents for parents and carers, on the special educational needs support.

We discussed the need for work to be done to improve communication with parents about their individual children's needs, including the need to rebuild confidence in local authority services such as Parent Partnership.

We also heard about the approaches adopted by Norfolk and Bradford to communicating their SEN vision for the future.

We stressed the need for improvements in communications both at an individual level and in relation to the strategic development of the SILCs.

Session Three

At this extra session, we received information about the review of SEN provision carried out in Norfolk, and the consultation process that informed the outcomes of the review.

We felt that there were some useful examples of good practice, and were encouraged by the number of parents and young people who responded to the consultation.

In particular, we noted that in both cases, specific proposals for reorganising SEN provision were able to be set within an overall strategic context. We felt that this was an important lesson for Leeds.

We also highlighted the development of the Independent Living Project as a good local example of the involvement of people with learning disabilities and their parents and carers in planning strategic change.

SILC Visits

The following issues were raised during the visits, which we felt need to be addressed:

- Transport is an issue, including the length of time children spend on buses in some cases
- The lack of quality local further education provision for pupils with SEN, with many pupils ending up at provision out of the authority
- The ongoing shortage of speech and language therapy
- Partnerships - a) the potential for some pupils to move off the SILC roll (as had happened with the ending of the Broadgate partnership); and b) the geographic distribution of partnerships