

# Scrutiny Inquiry - Provision of EHCP Support in Leeds

Date: 24 January 2024

Report of: Head of Democratic Services

Report to: Children and Families Scrutiny Board

Will the decision be open for call in?  Yes  No

Does the report contain confidential or exempt information?  Yes  No

## Brief summary

Children and Families Scrutiny Board has identified Education Health and Care needs Plans (EHCPs) as an item for detailed scrutiny in the 2023/24 municipal year.

As such the Board has initiated an inquiry into the provision of EHCP support in the city. Running concurrently with this is improvement work being led by the Children and Families directorate supported by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) aimed at delivering effective, sustainable change to improve outcomes for children and families accessing EHCP and SEND support services in Leeds.

This item brings these two work streams together for Board member consideration. Appendix 1 provides a report from the December Executive Board which sets out the latest position on the improvement work and Appendix 2 provides a summary of a Scrutiny Board Working Group held on 23 November 2023 which was an evidence gathering session aimed at hearing the lived experiences of parents and carers in Leeds through feedback from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum (LPCF).

The Board is currently targeting inquiry completion in the 2023/24 municipal year. The directorate led improvement work will be ongoing until late March. In addition to comment on the Working Group summary and Executive Board report, views are sought on the timescales for the inquiry and whether the completion of the directorate improvement work should be considered a key milestone before the Board finalises its inquiry work.

## Recommendations

Children and Families Scrutiny Board is asked to:

- a) note and comment on the aims and ambitions of the directorate led improvement work set out in Appendix 1
- b) note the working group summary at Appendix 2 which sets out feedback on EHCP support services in Leeds from the Leeds Parent Carer Forum (LPCF)
- c) consider the timescales for the Provision of EHCP support inquiry in light of the ongoing improvement work and existing plans the Board has for inquiry completion.

## What is this report about?

- 1 At a national level, demand for EHC assessments and EHCPs has been increasing exponentially in recent years, in Leeds demand for these services has increased by 118% since 2016 and demand has continued to increase following the Covid-19 pandemic. This, allied to increasing complexity of needs, has placed significant pressure on the Council's SENSAP service.
- 2 The workload pressure has led to difficulties in meeting statutory timescales associated with EHCPs and therefore an increase in concerns being raised by parents and carers accessing services. The Children and Families directorate has recognised these issues and initiated a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) – Review Process which commenced in the Summer of 2023 with the aim of identifying the key issues and delivering improved services to children and families in the city.
- 3 At its meeting on 13 December 2023 the Executive Board approved a rapid review activity to improve services in this sphere and also endorsed the need to ensure that the views and experiences of children, young people parents and carers are at the heart of future arrangements.
- 4 More detail can be found on this at Appendix 1 to this report but the key principles that will drive the review and delivery of improved services are as follows:
  - Codesign a future way of working with families.
  - Design processes that retains the focus on the Child and value-adding staff effort.
  - Create an approach to the Code of Practice which aligns with the Leeds Way.
  - Ensure Leadership which is stable and consistent.
  - Deliver a Culture which promotes equity and is obsessed with the voice of the child.
- 5 The Council is not working in isolation on these issues, as noted above this is a national issue and as such has been the subject of Government intervention through the Department for Education (DfE) sponsored workstream, 'The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Change Programme'. This programme, which was referenced in the both the SEND and AP Green Paper published March 2022 and the SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan (March 2023) is designed to test and refine significant system-level SENDAP reforms. This Government work is similarly aligned to the work of the Council in that it aims to deliver system change that will improve outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND or in AP and their families.
- 6 In support of this work the Children and Families Scrutiny Board has initiated an inquiry into the Provision of EHCP support in Leeds. A key element of this is to hear directly from parents and carers accessing support services in the city and to use that feedback to inform the ongoing inquiry. By hearing about the lived experiences of parents and carers the Board will also be able to check and challenge the work of the directorate and as appropriate make recommendations as to how the Board feels services might be further improved or to endorse the approaches being taken to drive up performance.
- 7 As a result, a Scrutiny Board Working Group was held on 23 November 2023 as an evidence gathering session with the LPCF Steering Group attending to provide feedback on their lived experiences accessing EHCP support. A summary of the evidence heard is provided at Appendix 2 and representatives from LPCF have been invited to attend this meeting.
- 8 The evidence heard at the Working Group provides honest, open and challenging feedback from LPCF on service provision in Leeds. Senior Officers from the C&F Directorate recognise and acknowledge the experiences, challenges and frustration relayed by the LPCF to the Scrutiny Board.

## What impact will this proposal have?

- 9 The Council's Vision for Scrutiny contained in Article 6 of the Constitution sets out the nationally agreed four principles of good scrutiny. Within these are a commitment to promote scrutiny as a means to ensure the voice and concerns of the public can be heard and to improve public services by ensuring that reviews of policy and service performance are focused.
- 10 Consideration of both the December Executive Board report and the Working Group summary will provide an element of check and challenge on the ongoing improvement work and will contribute to the commitment to codesign a future way of working with families and assist in putting the views and experiences of children, young people parents and carers at the heart of future service provision.
- 11 It is hoped that the inquiry into the provision of EHCP support will lead to recommendations that improve services in the city.

## How does this proposal impact the three pillars of the Best City Ambition?

- Health and Wellbeing       Inclusive Growth       Zero Carbon

- 12 The terms of reference of Scrutiny Boards in Leeds promote a strategic and outward looking Scrutiny function that focuses on the priorities of the Best City Ambition. This work item is aimed at having a particular impact against health and well-being and inclusive growth by seeking to review and improve services for children and families who access EHCP support.

## What consultation and engagement has taken place?

Wards affected:

Have ward members been consulted?       Yes       No

- 13 At the 7th of June Children and Families Scrutiny Board discussion with the Director and Executive Board members suggested that the Provision of EHCP Support would be a positive area of focus for the Board in 2023/24 and the Board supported the inclusion of the EHCP work item in its work programme for the year.
- 14 The draft terms of reference and final terms of reference for this inquiry have also been before the Board for comment and agreement in July and September along with a summary of a previous Working Group held in September, which was considered by the Board at its October 2023 meeting.
- 15 The Working Group summary at Appendix 2 is an example of direct engagement with children and families accessing EHCP services in Leeds.

## What are the resource implications?

- 16 There are no specific resource implications associated with this report.

## What are the key risks and how are they being managed?

- 17 There are no specific risk implications associated with this report, Appendix 1 contains details on the risks associated with overall work stream being delivered by the directorate.

### **What are the legal implications?**

18 There are no specific legal implications associated with this report. Although it should be noted that any new or revised arrangements should be legally sound and reflect the legal framework governing the EHC process.

### **Options, timescales and measuring success**

#### **What other options were considered?**

19 Not applicable.

#### **How will success be measured?**

20 The completion of an inquiry report in the 2023/24 municipal year or a commitment to ongoing work in this area as part of the Scrutiny Board's future work programming.

#### **What is the timetable and who will be responsible for implementation?**

21 The timetable will be dictated by the Board through regular consideration of the work programme at each public meeting that is held and during the inquiry work itself. The Board, in consultation with the Principal Scrutiny Advisor, will be responsible for production of the inquiry report.

### **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) – Review Process – Update Report, considered by Executive Board at its meeting on 13 December 2023.
- Appendix 2 – Summary Note from the Scrutiny Working Group held on 23 November 2023.

### **Background papers**

- None