

People Scrutiny Committee

**In-Depth Scrutiny Project
2022/23**

**‘Providing First-Class
Services for Families of
Children with Special
Educational Needs and
Disabilities’**

Final Report and Recommendations (June 2023)

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 I am pleased to be able to present this report and recommendations of the in-depth scrutiny project for 2022/23. In undertaking this work, the Project Team were conscious that the Council needed to work efficiently and effectively to enable families to receive the support they were entitled to, particularly for the most vulnerable young people with SEND. We were particularly aware of the need to improve the way that the Council works with parents and carers, including local service providers, and the need to be aspirational in how we support our children and young people with SEND.
- 1.2 I would like to thank all councillors and officers for their contribution to the in-depth scrutiny project. I would also like to thank those parents who gave their time to speak with members of the Project Team, in particular representatives of Southend SEND Independent Forum and SEND The Right Message for their direct input to the project in the presentation of the views of local parents, and to the practitioners and service teams within Southend-on-Sea City Council who welcomed councillors and were open to our questioning and scrutiny. Finally, I would like to thank officers of the Democratic Services Section for their assistance and support during the course of the in-depth scrutiny project and in the production of this final report.



Councillor Tricia Cowdrey
Chair of the In-Depth Scrutiny Project Team

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 Each of the Council's scrutiny committees (the People Scrutiny Committee, the Place Scrutiny Committee and the Policy and Resources Scrutiny Committee) has traditionally undertaken an in-depth scrutiny project each year. The in-depth projects are selected at the beginning of each municipal year and generally focus on the Council's corporate priorities or matters of local concern. Recent in-depth scrutiny projects have also been aligned with the ambition and outcomes arising from the Southend 2050 programme. The in-depth scrutiny projects lead to the development of reports and recommendations which advise the Executive and the Council on its policies, budget provision and service delivery. Participation in the in-depth projects enable councillors to be actively involved in a specific topic and to influence and shape proposals around service improvement that will result in improved outcomes.

3. FRAMEWORK OF THE IN-DEPTH SCRUTINY PROJECT

- 3.1 At its meeting in July 2022, the People Scrutiny Committee agreed that an in-depth scrutiny project be undertaken during the 2022/23 municipal year on the theme of 'Providing First-Class Services for Families of Children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities,' as part of the scrutiny work programme for the year.

3.2 There were a number of reasons for the identification of the In-Depth Scrutiny Project which included feedback from parents that they felt their voices had not been sufficiently heard through the Ofsted Inspections and Peer Review. In addition, Councillors had identified a need to be able to source information, advice and guidance for parents of children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Councillors wanted to feel confident in signposting families to appropriate services and support and to be able to advocate on their behalf when appropriate/possible.

The agreed scope of the in-depth scrutiny project was:

With a focus on the experiences of parents and carers of children and young people with SEND, to review what had already been done and undertaken following the LGA Peer Review of the Council's SEND services. This included assessing the impact of the recommended actions set out in the plan established to respond to the findings and recommendations from the review of the Council's SEND service and what had and had not worked well, based on those recommendations. Specifically:

- (a) Identify any improvements in the SEND offer, the impact the improvements have had on children, young people, and their parent/carers, what has not been successful and as a result where further focus is required to improve the offer and outcomes for SEND service users and their families.
- (b) Review the current process and approach to transition from Children's into Adults' services. Specifically:
 - When are young people with care and support needs flagged with adult services.
 - What is the process of engagement with Adult Services before the age of 18?
 - How is the young person involved in the process?
 - How are their parents involved in the process?
- (c) Clarify the difference between transferring and transitioning. Specifically clarify:
 - How is this applied by different services?
 - The respective legislation and guidance that different services operate within.
 - The circumstances in which children or young people move out of Southend and the respective roles/responsibilities of the Council following any families moving out of or into Southend.
- (d) Review and identify what is needed to enable Councillors to respond effectively to enquiries from their residents/families with Children with special educational needs and/or disability. Specifically:
 - Review how councillors currently respond to issues raised by families with children with a special educational need and/or disability.
 - Review the current training offer to Councillors on SEND.
 - Review how the Local Offer works.

3.3 The review was set within the context of the Council's 2050 ambition and priorities and the Project Team was tasked with reviewing relevant issues and to report back to the Cabinet with appropriate findings and recommendations.

4. METHODOLOGY

- 4.1 The review was undertaken on behalf of the People Scrutiny Committee by a Project Team comprising the following members appointed by the Council on 19 May 2022:

Councillors: T Cowdrey, A Dear, N Folkard, K Murphy, M O'Connor and M Stafford

Former Councillors: L Salter and A Thompson

- 4.2 Councillor T Cox was appointed to membership of the Project Team by the Council on 14 July 2022 to replace former Councillor L Salter and former Councillor B Hooper was appointed to membership of the Project Team by the Council on 20 October 2022, to replace former Councillor A Thompson.

- 4.3 Councillor T Cox was appointed as Chair of the Project Team at its initial project scoping meeting held on 26 September 2022. At the request of Councillor Cox and with the agreement of the Project Team, Councillor T Cowdrey subsequently assumed the role of the Chair of the Project Team from January 2023.

- 4.4 At the request of the Project Team, the relevant Cabinet Members and Group Spokespersons were invited to participate in the in-depth scrutiny project.

- 4.5 The Project Team was supported by relevant officers including M Marks (Executive Director (Children and Public Health)) and S Tautz (Principal Democratic Services Officer/Project Co-ordinator). Other officer support was provided in respect of specific elements of the in-depth scrutiny project:

G Bloom (Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities)

L Chiles (Local Offer and Co-production Officer)

L Hunt (Director of Education, Inclusion and Early Years)

C Jacobs (SEND Project Officer)

S Leibrecht (Director of Adult Social Care Operations)

L-M Minnis (Director of Childrens Social Work, Early Help and Youth Support)

L Thomas (Co-Production Lead)

- 4.6 The Project Team met on six occasions between September 2022 and April 2023. Although the progress of the in-depth scrutiny project was interrupted by an unannounced local area SEND inspection by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted in January 2023, efforts were made by the Project Team to ensure that the timescale for the delivery of the project was maintained and that the project was completed within the 2022/23 municipal year.

- 4.7 The project was undertaken using an evidence-based approach to the consideration of service provision, through a mixture of experiences presented by parents, carers and parent/carer representatives and councillors, alongside informative presentations that supported our understanding of the current provision of services to support SEND children and families.

- 4.8 A project plan for the in-depth scrutiny project was agreed by the Project Team in November 2022, having been agreed by the People Scrutiny Committee in October 2022. The project plan set out the scope and framework for the project, alongside a work programme of thematic evidence-gathering activities around the following specific areas identified as key to the desired outcomes for the project:

- (a) The action plan arising from the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review of SEND services designed to improve SEND service provision, undertaken in November 2021.

- (b) SEND offer improvements and impacts, including feedback from engagement with parents, carers, local SEND parent/carer groups and SEND service providers.
- (c) The process and approach to transition from Children's into Adults' Services and the provision of clarity around the respective roles and responsibilities in circumstances where a family moves out of Southend.
- (d) Lived experiences, including the views and experiences of parents/carers and SEND service users.
- (e) The review of arrangements for the 'co-production' of SEND services, including the current Co-Production Charter.
- (f) Member training, including the review of the current training offer for councillors on SEND and how councillors currently respond to issues raised by families with children with a special educational need and/or disability.

4.9 The following sources of evidence were considered as part of the in-depth scrutiny project:

- (a) Case studies, experiences and feedback.
- (b) Specific examples of issues within the scope of the project where things have not gone well.
- (c) Relevant data etc. held by the Council or obtained from published sources or benchmarking arrangements.
- (d) Information/feedback from relevant officer teams.
- (e) The presentation/demonstration of relevant systems and processes.
- (f) A review of recommendations arising from the Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review of SEND services.
- (g) Meetings with relevant teams and officers and external bodies engaged in the delivery of SEND services.

4.10 Relevant case studies prepared as part of the in-depth scrutiny project have been published on a dedicated Microsoft Teams channel.

4.11 Although we had originally intended that a survey would be undertaken to help the Project Team understand the views and lived experiences of parents/carers and SEND service users, this was deferred as a result of the inspection of SEND services undertaken by Ofsted in February/March 2023, to avoid any confusion arising from the respective review processes.

4.12 As part of the methodology for the delivery of the in-depth scrutiny project, it was agreed that individual members of the Project Team would be encouraged to engage with parents, carers, local SEND parent/carer groups and SEND service providers to facilitate the submission of case studies for presentation as part of the project. In this regard, the Project Team requested that the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) prepare a schedule of appropriate local SEND parent/carer groups and SEND service providers that might be willing to engage with individual members of the Project Team with regard to aspects of the in-depth scrutiny project, alongside appropriate 'questions' that could be utilised by councillors as a basis for informed discussion around relevant issues. Amongst the membership of the Project Team, former Councillor B Hooper expressed interest in undertaking direct engagement with regard to current arrangements for transition from Children's into Adult's Services and the transfer of children and young people to other local authorities, including engagement with the Lighthouse Project and the Children with Disabilities Team.

5. LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSOCIATION PEER REVIEW

5.1 A SEND peer review looks at how an education setting provides for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. The findings of a peer review are

intended help to improve SEND provision and strategy to support children and young people to achieve good outcomes.

- 5.2 A peer review of the Council's provision of SEND services was carried out by the Local Government Association (LGA) in November 2021. The peer review followed an inspection revisit by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission earlier in 2021, which found that there had been sufficient progress made in most areas of significant weakness identified in an inspection carried out in October 2018. An action plan was developed in response to the recommendations of the LGA arising from the peer review in November 2021.
- 5.3 At the meeting of the Project Team in November 2022, we considered aspects of the work programme for the joint in-depth scrutiny project, around the review of progress against the action plan that had been developed following the Peer Review. The Project Team received a revised version of the Action Plan prepared by the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) as a means of reviewing activity that had been completed and to assess the impact of the actions set out in the Action Plan, including what had and hadn't worked well.
- 5.4 At its initial scoping meeting in September 2022, the Project Team agreed that the focus of the in-depth scrutiny project should be on the assessment of current progress around the recommendations arising from the Peer Review, in order to identify key areas of work for the project. The Project Team welcomed the layout of the action plan and supported a suggestion of the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) that the actions be captured under the headings of matters that were a focus for the in-depth scrutiny project, those actions that could be regarded as business as usual activities and actions that had been completed.
- 5.5 A separate update setting out current progress and achievements against each of the actions arising from the Peer Review and highlighting where relevant actions will be taken forward as part of a new framework arising from the development of a strategic action plan in response to a further Ofsted inspection undertaken in February 2023, is attached as an appendix to this report.
- 5.6 We make recommendations with regard to specific aspects of the action plan later in this report and also recommend that the revised version of the action plan should form the basis of the regular update made to the People Scrutiny Committee on progress with the delivery of the recommendations arising from the Peer Review, until such time as the response to the recent Ofsted inspection has been finalised and a revised action plan produced.

6. SEND OFFER IMPROVEMENTS & IMPACTS

- 6.1 At the meeting of the Project Team in January 2023, we considered the 'SEND Offer Improvements and Impacts' theme of the work programme for the joint in-depth scrutiny project.
- 6.2 We consider that it would be appropriate to develop a 'charter' to clarify the expectations and processes around the development of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) for children and young people aged up to 25, who need more support than is available through special educational needs support. EHCPs identify educational, health and social needs and set out the additional support required to meet those needs and the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) indicated that it was important to be able to provide clarity about the EHCP assessment process and the roles of those involved.
- 6.3 The Project Team also received the Council's SEND Local Offer annual report for 2021/22 and submitted comments on the annual report direct to the Head of Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The Children and Families Act 2014 requires that the Council must publish an annual report on Special Educational Needs and Disability that provides

feedback about the Local Offer, from children, young people and parents/carers, the progress we have made, what we have learnt and our next steps.

- 6.4 We consider that it is important to review the functionality of the Local Offer and the information available on the Council's website to make sure that it is presented appropriately and provides a clear pathway for parents and carers to access SEND advice and services.

7. YOUNG PEOPLE WITH CARE & SUPPORT NEEDS - TRANSITIONS & TRANSFERS

- 7.1 At the meeting of the Project Team in February 2023, we considered aspects of the work programme for the joint in-depth scrutiny project around the 'Transitions and Transfers' theme in respect of our young people with care and support needs.

- 7.2 The Project Team reviewed a draft 'Transitions to Adulthood in a Social Care Context' protocol that aimed to provide information and guidance for professionals supporting young people in Southend through transition (the process of preparing, planning and moving from children's to adult services) to adulthood. The draft protocol also provided an overview of statutory responsibilities and good practice guidance for Children and Young People Services and Adult and Community Services. The Director of Adult Social Care Operations reported that the draft Protocol was focussed on transition support for all young people with care and support needs, as this was a statutory requirement and was not specific to young people with SEND.

- 7.3 As part of this process, the Chair of the Project Team along with Councillor Folkard and former Councillor Hooper, met with the Social Care Team to provide input into the development of the draft protocol. The Project Team also expressed appreciation for the contribution made to the development of the draft protocol by the Commissioning Team.

- 7.4 The Project Team was advised that the draft protocol would be supported by an effective complaints system to ensure that opportunities for robust challenge to the provision of support services for young people with care and support needs, was available.

- 7.5 The Project Team also received a summary of the care and support roles and responsibilities for children that moved out of or into Southend-on-Sea, depending on their status and were reminded that the 'About Me' facility for the sharing of information between health and social care, that was being developed for national roll out and adoption. Although it wasn't possible to achieve as part of the completion of the in-depth scrutiny project, the Project Team asked to meet with the SEND Team to understand the provision of transition support for young people with SEND.

- 7.6 We also requested that members of the Project Team, the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care and Health Integration and the Director of Adult Social Care Operations liaise to consider any necessary action arising from the perceived increase in the level of the 'hand over' of young people reaching the age of eighteen to Social Care, from an existing family support setting.

8. LIVED EXPERIENCES

- 8.1 From the outset, the Project Team was concerned to offer appropriate opportunities for parents/carers to contribute to the in-depth scrutiny project, to help councillors to gain a clearer picture of families lived experiences with SEND children, enabling them to build on good practice and improve the journey for families in the future.

- 8.2 At the meeting of the Project Team in March 2023, we received presentations from representatives of Southend SEND Independent Forum (SSIF) and SEND The Right

Message (STRM) in connection with the views and lived experiences of parents, carers and SEND service users.

- 8.3 The representatives of SSIF, the recognised Parent Carer Forum for Southend-on-Sea, indicated that the Ofsted inspection of February/March 2023 had been a valuable experience and that SSIF generally supported many of the issues that had been raised as part of the inspection process. SSIF highlighted that, whilst the inspection process limited its ability to secure feedback from local families, other than via the Inspection questionnaire which Ofsted and CQC asked families and children and young people to complete, it had been suggested that some services were inconsistently provided. SSIF indicated however that the Early Help Service was widely valued and that the signposting of relevant support opportunities by the Early Help Team was welcomed by parents and carers of children and young adults with SEND.
- 8.4 SSIF highlighted that it was important to ensure 'buy-in' from schools to bridge the gap in service provision that was currently supported by the reassurance provided by the Early Help Service to help ensure consistency in the delivery of services, and that the apparent slowness of the pace of change in the delivery of SEND related services was the main cause of frustration for the Parent Carer Forum, which it was considered needed to be improved at both the strategic and operational level. SSIF suggested that SEND families had been particularly disadvantaged by the local and national response to the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly in terms of its initial and ongoing effect on the provision of education services in local schools.
- 8.5 The Project Team was advised that as the recognised Parent Carer Forum, SSIF had a strategic role in working co-productively with the Council, NHS bodies and local charities to help improve SEND service provision as the 'voice' of parents and carers, rather than purely as a support organisation for local SEND families, but that there appeared to be a general misunderstanding of the role and responsibilities of the Parent Carer Forum. The representatives of SSIF indicated that they fully supported the use of co-production techniques in the design and delivery of SEND services, but that there was no definitive definition of co-production and that such approach to service design and delivery meant different things in different situations, and that it was important that all co-production activity was clearly and adequately scoped.
- 8.6 The Project Team was informed that the Parent Carer Forum supported the concept of 'Waiting Well', where information and resource services were available to support families both physically and mentally whilst they were waiting for assessment or diagnosis but that, in reality many parents sought private healthcare assessment where they were able to afford this.
- 8.7 The representatives of STRM setting out its aspirations for effective joint working with the Council but highlighted that it was considered that most negative social determinants currently applied to SEND families, particularly through health inequality and deprivation. The Project Team was advised that STRM currently had a network of over 1470 members and was actively engaged with funding organisations to support local SEND families that were experiencing financial hardship.
- 8.8 STRM drew the attention of the Project Team to the Marmot Review into health inequalities that had been published in February 2010 that proposed an evidence-based strategy to address the social determinants of health and the conditions in which people were born, grew, lived, worked and aged, which could lead to health inequalities. STRM highlighted that the highest priority objective arising from the Marmot Review was to give every child the best start in life.

- 8.9 The representatives of STRM outlined how it could support the Council in the co-production and co-design of SEND service provision, to ensure that the delivery of services was 'right first time' and was achieved using appropriate stakeholder knowledge and experience, through effective joint working with stakeholders. STRM expressed the view that simple engagement and consultation around service design and delivery was often felt to be tokenistic and that, although a co-production approach that fully involved key stakeholders would necessarily require the investment of human and financial resources to start with, effective co-production was considered to achieve the best service delivery results in the long-term.
- 8.10 The Executive Director (Children and Public Health) reminded the Project Team that the development of an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) did not have regard to the availability of resources to support children and young people with SEND and that the 'Waiting Well' concept should be a key consideration in the provision of support for SEND families alongside appropriate early intervention and interaction, as diagnosis and the development of an EHCP was often seen as the 'golden road' for support and service provision. We understand that the 'Waiting Well' concept has been shown to demonstrate success where information and resource services are available to support families both physically and mentally whilst they are awaiting assessment or diagnosis, for example via Early Help and the Local Offer. Whilst Early Help has been identified as a positive experience for some parents, we understand that for others there has been some confusion about the role of the worker they are in contact with and their purpose or function, and we consider that this needs to be clarified in order to manage expectations.
- 8.11 The Executive Director (Children and Public Health) reminded the Project Team that the SEND 'graduated response' provided a stepped approach to the provision of support that met the needs of children and young adults at the earliest opportunity, which also involved professionals from across the education, health and social care sectors, and support services within and outside the Council.
- 8.12 The Executive Director (Children and Public Health) also reminded the Project Team of the requirements for schools to use funding allocated for the support of pupils with SEND in appropriate ways, although funding was not required to be spent on support for specific children, and that a 'SEND Information Report' should be published on a regular basis by each school. The Director of Education, Inclusion and Early Years highlighted that specialist teaching teams had been introduced into mainstream schools in other local authority areas.
- 8.13 The Project Team expressed concerns that there currently appeared to be no clear flow of information between the Southend SEND Strategic Partnership Board (with representation from the (Parent Carer Forum), the SEND Operations Group and the Joint Commissioning Group, and the People Scrutiny Committee, to ensure that councillors were able to respond to SEND issues effectively. We therefore recommend that appropriate arrangements for a clear flow of information between the Southend SEND Strategic Partnership Board (with representation from the (Parent Carer Forum), the SEND Operations Group and the Joint Commissioning Group, and the People Scrutiny Committee be investigated, to ensure that councillors are better informed and able to respond to SEND issues more effectively.
- 8.14 We consider that there is a real need to build confidence and trust with disaffected and disengaged SEND parents and that this should be addressed through the development of an appropriate communication strategy to facilitate respectful relationships and improved partnership working arrangements, whilst ensuring that everyone that wants to contribute is invited to be involved in the co-production of the communication strategy and that the strategy is developed as an 'easy read' and accessible document.

- 8.15 We have requested that the Cabinet Member for Children, Learning and Inclusion encourages all councillors to sign-up to the e-newsletter of the Southend SEND Strategic Partnership Board.

9. CO-PRODUCTION OF SEND SERVICES

- 9.1 At our meeting in March 2023, we also considered the aspect of the work programme theme around 'Co-Production'.
- 9.2 The Project Team considers that it is important to strengthen and recognise the voice of children and young people, parents and carers in improving SEND service provision and that appropriate co-production techniques are fully utilised to develop service strategies and forward planning. Co-production allows all involved to work collaboratively as equal partners to design, plan, deliver and review SEND support and services in order to achieve shared outcomes. It recognises that children and young people, parents, carers and professionals all have important contributions to make due to their differing knowledge, skills and experience. We believe that, for co-production to be most effective, all partners should be fully involved at the earliest opportunity when planning or designing SEND support or services.
- 9.3 We understand that there is currently no single recognised approach within the council to the achievement of successful co-production, which should always be flexible to need. A corporate Test and Learn Framework for co-production was currently being piloted, to inform the development of a corporate Co-production Strategy for consideration by the Cabinet later in the year, and which would include a common definition of co-production for application to appropriate joint activity across the Council. It was emphasised that, even with the benefit of the adoption of an appropriate definition of co-production, it may be unlikely that co-production partners will always be in agreement on specific matters related to the design and delivery of services and that this understanding would need to be reflected in the proposed Co-production Strategy. However, the importance of ensuring the voices of children and families are heard and valued remains paramount.
- 9.4 The Project Team was advised that the Council's commitment to successful co-production and the promotion of opportunities to become involved in co-production activities, was set out in a dedicated area of the existing 'Your Say Southend' website.
- 9.5 It was reported that the current SEND Co-production Charter was currently in development and would form part of the proposed corporate Co-production Strategy. The Project Team considered that the SEND Co-production Charter was overly detailed in its current form and requested that efforts be made to make the document more explicitly focussed on the outcomes desired from relevant co-production activity and how these would be achieved, particularly in terms of ensuring that all parent/carer voices were adequately considered through co-production opportunities.
- 9.6 We consider that co-production needs to be embedded across the Council, although we have seen some excellent practice in Adult Social Care and with the development of the Anti-Poverty Strategy which should be celebrated. We welcome the Co-Production framework currently under development and believe that the Council would benefit from the adoption of clear definitions of co-production at all levels, from individual consultation or engagement to policy development. The SEND Co-production Charter is to be reviewed and needs to be able to define co-production at all levels, from involvement in Education, Health and Care Plans to decision-making and policy development.
- 9.7 The Project Team suggested that to support successful co-production activity and increase buy-in for the value of co-produced service design and delivery going forward, a small

number of officers are identified as trained co-production champions to support and advise services and teams across the Council undertaking co-production activities.

10. COUNCILLOR TRAINING

- 10.1 At the final meeting of the Project Team in April 2023, we considered the ‘SEND Councillor Training Offer’ theme of the work programme for the joint in-depth scrutiny project.
- 10.2 We consider that all councillors should regularly complete basic awareness training around SEND, to ensure that they fully understand the SEND system as a whole and how practitioners have a part to play in supporting good outcomes, in particular:
- What SEND means.
 - The key points of legislation regarding SEND.
 - The potential impact of SEND on a family and how families can be supported.
 - Where to find more information, including external support agencies and the Local Offer website.
- 10.3 The Project Team considered that SEND training for councillors should be co-produced with the existing Councillor Development Group to include a focus on casework alongside information required to enable robust scrutiny.
- 10.4 The Project Team believes that appropriate SEND training for councillors should sit within an ‘essential’ suite of training activities, to also include Childrens and Adults Safeguarding and Corporate Parenting, for completion during each term of office of all councillors. We also consider that priority should be given for members of the People Scrutiny Committee to undertake this essential training and other relevant training opportunities available across the municipal year.
- 10.5 We also suggest that a new set of simple, easy to understand ‘Five-Minute Guides’ be developed for all Council children’s services including those focused on SEND, to help councillors to understand the Council’s SEND system and that such guides include clear process maps around issues such as eligibility for carers assessments. We consider that these ‘Five-Minute Guides’ should be published on the councillor’s section of the intranet and also be made available to parents to improve communication and clarify expectations around SEND service provision, alongside the development of appropriate FAQs to support councillor casework activity.

11. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 11.1 We consider that the in-depth scrutiny project was undertaken within the context of the Council’s 2050 ambition and priorities and that the proposed outcomes for the project have generally been achieved.
- 11.2 Throughout this report, we have identified some ‘quick wins’ in terms of aspects of the work programme for the in-depth scrutiny project, alongside the following substantive recommendations to improve the effectiveness of the Council’s SEND service delivery. We therefore recommend as follows:

Local Government Association Peer Review

- (1) That the separate report of the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) setting out current progress and achievements against each of the actions arising from the Peer Review and highlighting where relevant actions will be taken forward as part of a new framework arising from the development of a

strategic action plan in response to the Ofsted inspection undertaken in March 2023, be noted.

- (2) That any remaining actions from the LGA peer review are incorporated into the SEND Area Strategic Action Plan which the Area Partnership is required to publish within 30 working days of the publication of the Area SEND inspection report by Ofsted. This will include in respect of the peer review action plan:
 - a. The Graduated Response as set out in Recommendations 4 and 6.
 - b. Recommendation 5 (Joint Commissioning Roadmap) be taken forward as part of the Council's response to any recommendations arising from the inspection of SEND services undertaken by Ofsted in March 2023.
 - c. In respect of Recommendation 7 (Threshold of Need), priority be given to the roll-out of a new threshold of need document for all Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Learning be requested to provide an update to the Project Team on progress with the development and timescale for the threshold of need document.
 - d. Staff Training on Neurodiversity including mental health awareness.
 - e. In respect of Recommendation 9 (Neurodiversity), the Cabinet Member for SEND be requested to provide an update to the Project Team on the review of cases undertaken by the Director of Education, Inclusion and Early Years.
 - f. In respect of Recommendation 10 (Early Years), it be recommended that priority be given to this matter going forward from the conclusion of the in-depth scrutiny project, particularly around the identification of additional resources to facilitate the delivery of a strengthened Early Years offer.
 - g. In respect of Recommendation 15 (Trauma Informed Approach), it be recommended that priority be given to this matter going forward.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for SEND and the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) provide periodic updates on the implementation and impact of the Area SEND Strategic Action Plan are provided to the People Scrutiny Committee.

SEND Offer Improvements & Impacts

- (4) That the Executive Director (Children and Public Health) consider the development of a 'charter' to clarify the expectations and processes around the development of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP).
- (5) That if appropriate, the proposed charter clarifying expectations and processes around the development of EHCPs and setting out the minimum expectations of SEND service users, be combined with the similar charter document already developed for the Children With Disabilities Team.

Young People with Care & Support Needs - Transitions & Transfers

- (6) That the work undertaken by the Adult Social Care Teams to develop the 'Transitions to Adulthood in a Social Care Context' protocol be recognised and

that the Director of Adult Social Care Operations ensure that this is followed-up. Further the protocol should:

- a. include arrangements for resolving 'personality' difficulties that might arise between the families of children and young people with SEND and officers of the Social Care Team, to ensure the provision of effective care and support services in such situations.
 - b. be produced in an 'easy read' type of format, broken down to provide information and guidance on individual areas of care and support provision for young people transitioning to Adult's Services.
- (7) That Essex Partnership University NHS Trust (EPUT) be invited to present their newly formed Transitions Framework document to a future meeting of the People Scrutiny Committee.
 - (8) That the Director of Adult Social Care Operations consider opportunities to ensure appropriate oversight of transition care and support for young people offered by other organisations, such as the 'Ready, Steady, Go' tool developed by EPUT and the services provided by Southend Connexions.
 - (9) That a Preparing for Adulthood Strategy is produced which captures all the preparing for adulthood pathways, for those children with SEND and those who may not sit within a statutory framework, so that effective transitioning is embedded in Southend EHCP practice.
 - (10) That the service roles and responsibilities for children and young people with an EHC Plan that move out of, or into, Southend-on-Sea, be published on the Local Offer website and on the dedicated space for councillors on the Council's intranet, and that a FAQs be developed to support greater understanding of roles and responsibilities in these circumstances.
 - (11) That a process map identifying the journey for those children and young people with SEND either transferring out of our into authority be published and readily available to both parents and professionals.

Lived Experiences

- (12) That arrangements are made for officers to report to councillors learning from the monitoring and review of complaints about the Council's SEND service. Further that the annual SEN 2 update report is provided to Councillors.
- (13) That clarity be achieved around the role and responsibilities of the recognised Parent Carer Forum for Southend-on-Sea and that the PCF be empowered to fulfil its functions as the designated PCF working with other parent/carer groups on the development and delivery of SEND services arising from feedback and coproduction opportunities.
- (14) That the Cabinet Member for SEND be encouraged to meet regularly with Southend SEND Independent Forum in its role as the recognised Parent Carer Forum, possibly on a termly basis, to support the ongoing work of SSIF and to maintain an up-to-date understanding of current issues and concerns raised by parents.

- (15) That an appropriate communication strategy be developed to facilitate respectful engagement and relationships, improved partnership working arrangements and increased confidence and trust with disaffected and disengaged SEND parents.
- (16) That the 'Waiting Well' concept be utilised as a key consideration in the provision of support for SEND families alongside appropriate early intervention and interaction including access to good quality information and resources, and that improved clarity in the signposting and delivery of relevant services be considered to ensure that people are well informed and that the expectations of parents/carers are managed.

Co-Production of SEND Services

- (17) That, subject to the review of the current draft SEND Co-production Charter address the concerns raised by the Project Team to ensure it is focussed on the outcomes of co-production activity and ensure that parent/carer voices are adequately considered.
- (18) That the Council adopt clear definitions of co-production at all levels of service provision where possible and that co-production as a process is embedded in practice across the Council and that co-production champions within the Council are identified and trained to support good practice across Council Services.
- (19) That appropriate arrangements are established to ensure that we are engaging with commissioners in identifying co-design opportunities for service development.

Councillor Training

- (20) That appropriate SEND training for councillors is co-produced with the existing Councillor Development Group as part of a suite of 'essential' training activities for completion during each term of office for all councillors and that priority be given for members of People Scrutiny Committee to undertake such essential training and other relevant training opportunities available across the municipal year.
- (21) That appropriate 'Five-Minute Guides' be developed for all Children's Services including SEND services, to help councillors to understand the Council's SEND system and that such guides include relevant process ('roadmaps') and FAQs to support parents/carers and councillor training and casework activity.

The in-depth People Scrutiny Review of SEND assessed progress against the action plan devised in response to the LGA peer review recommendations of the Council's SEND and Children with Disability(CWD) Service. The table below provides an update on the current position in relation to those recommendations. The table captures those actions that.

- Have been completed.
- Are business as usual for the Council's SEND and CWD service.
- Will be incorporated within the new Area SEND Strategic Plan that the Area SEND Partnership is required to produce and publish within 30 working days of the publication of the Area SEND inspection report; and
- Those specific outstanding actions to be undertaken by the Council.

	Completed Actions
	Consider the level of seniority of the chair of the Resource Allocation Panel <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New Chairing arrangements in place with effect from 1/02/22
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider moving the SENDIASS service outside the SEND/CWD service. New line management arrangements in place.
	Review and refresh the Area SEND Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review completed and new 4-year strategy endorsed in the early part of 2023 by key partners via Education Board and Council Cabinet • Mid and South Essex (MSE) ICB due to endorse by Autumn 2023
	Business as Usual (BAU) - Ongoing Work
	Portfolio Holder (PFH) sample casework <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embed quarterly sampling of casework by PFH.
	Reduce the number of "refusal to assess" at initial stages of EHCNA decision. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review data and process mapping for panel assessment and procedures and monitor DNA levels.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to monitor the effectiveness and issues associated with the Hub as a source for holding all papers.
	<p>Update the threshold of need document for Children's Services</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Threshold document for all Children's Services, launched in July 2021, is under review with partners and there will be changes. Aim is to introduce the new threshold document in Autumn 2023
	<p>Incorporate learning from complaints as part of the quality assurance system.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Director of Education, Inclusion and Early Years to review all complaints routinely and feed any actions required as a result into the SEND Strategic Partnership Board to inform the service and offer across Southend going forward.
	<p>Strengthen the early help offer for children with disabilities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Increase resource identified and allocated to the Short Breaks offer. Resource increased for 2023/24. Build into the Area SEND Strategic Action Plan a focus to strengthen the Early Years offer and additional resources to deliver this offer.
	<p>Introduce specific training for staff working in SEND on Neurodiversity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> First round of training completed for Council SEND staff in post when the training was provided. Neurodiversity training to be provided (as part of the SEND service staff induction programme) to ensure new staff joining the Council's SEND Service undertake and complete it. Refresher training to be provided for all Council SEND staff every 2 years.
	<p>Expectations and Aspirations - Actions to be included within the Area SEND Strategic Action Plan</p>
	<p>Increase the pace of support and challenge to schools in the graduated response and ensure clear system wide understanding of the graduated response.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Implement the successful Alternative Provision applications by schools which will be confirmed July 2023 Southend SEND Strategic Partnership Board and Education Board to review and monitor the impact of this funding on the wider graduated in schools. Identify other inclusion projects to support the graduated offer and improve outcomes for children with SEND.

	<p>Develop clear timescales and outcomes measures for the joint commissioning roadmap.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That a Joint Commissioning Roadmap be taken forward as part of the Council's response to any recommendations arising from the inspection of SEND services undertaken by Ofsted in March 2023.
	<p>Carry out an audit of children and young people where neurodiversity is a possibility.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, Education, Inclusion and Early Years, with partners to review the number of open/closed cases over the last 12 months. • Following the review identify how the learning and information from it feeds into the Area SEND Strategic Action Plan and the identification and commissioning of future services.
	<p>Build trust with parents and carers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make sure that parents and carers and professionals receive clear and reliable information about how to access the range of support and services that are available. • Increase the pace of improvement to increase trust and confidence in the offer. • Increase and improve consistency of co-production to develop individual EHC plans. • Identify if / how to develop a trauma informed approach for those families who are angry and distressed about their previous experience.
	<p>Expectation and Aspirations - Actions to be undertaken by the Council</p>
	<p>Training and support for councillors to increase knowledge and awareness and to ensure that they fully understand the SEND system as a whole and how practitioners have a part to play in supporting good outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • That appropriate basic SEND awareness training for councillors is co-produced with the existing Councillor Development Group as part of a suite of 'essential' training activities for completion during each term of office for all councillors and that priority be given for members of People Scrutiny Committee to undertake such essential training and other relevant training opportunities available across the municipal year. • Once the training package has been co-designed ask Democratic Services to ensure that a regular rolling training programme is scheduled as part of the wider member training programme with training session offered twice per year as essential training for councillors. • That appropriate 'Five-Minute Guides' be developed for all Children's Services including SEND services, to help councillors to understand the Council's SEND system.

Conclusion

Given the update above there will be no further specific reviews of the above table on the LGA peer review recommendations. Any monitoring / oversight of the outstanding actions above will be through updates and reports on the Area Strategic SEND strategic action plan to the Southend SEND Strategic Partnership, the Southend Health and Well Being Board (HWBB) and to the Department for Education (DfE).

Existing business as usual performance monitoring arrangements of Council SEND Services, and feedback from the teams within the Council that lead and deliver the Councillor training offer.

It is proposed that a mid and end of year for information report on the Area SEND offer is provided to the Council's People Scrutiny Committee.