



To: Listen 4 Change

Children's Services
Department
Atlas House
Corporation Street
St Helens
Merseyside
WA9 1LD

16 December 2022

Special Educational Needs & Disability (SEND): Current Pressures

Dear Sara

As you are aware we wrote to Education Settings and partners in November to advise on the current pressures in the SEND Assessment and Review Service. This letter is to update you on actions taken to address this matter.

The Service undertake a range of duties which fulfil the statutory responsibilities for SEND under the Children and Families Act 2014 to ensure that children with SEND have timely assessments and multi agency plans which meet their identified needs. The SEND Service is responsible for a range of functions which include the following:

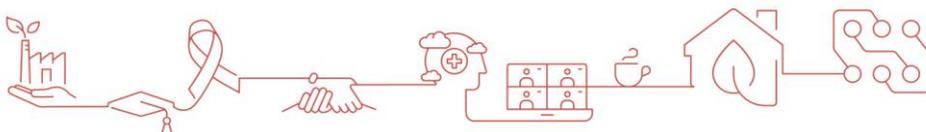
- Undertake assessments for children with SEND who require specialist provision, coordinating professional advice, and production of new Education, Health and Care Plans
- Liaise with education settings regarding placement options and negotiate appropriate provision to meet need
- Ensure all EHCPs are reviewed Annually and updated where appropriate
- Undertake Transition Reviews for pupils in key year groups (yrs -1,2,6,9,11,14)
- Undertake re-assessments where children's needs have changed or the school placement appears to be at risk
- Provide advice and guidance to schools on Equality duty and reasonable adjustments
- Managing the transfer and placements of pupils moving into borough and processes relating to the transfer of EHCP
- Manage responses to parental appeals including attending mediation, preparing the statement of case, preparation of witnesses and attending Tribunal and represent the Local Authority at SENDIST. This includes appeals against health and social care provision.

Since 2015 the number of children supported with an EHCP's has increased year on year, from 490 in 2015 to over 1400 in October 2022.

This has created significant pressures on the Local Authority, with a small team of 9 casework managers. Unfortunately, over the summer we have had a series of resignations from the team, for a variety of reasons, and this left a team of 3.5 staff.

Since September, we have been working to appoint to vacant posts. As a result:

- Two new casework managers, Dan Collins and Glenda Standing, joined the team on 5th December.



- Successful appointments have been made to two casework managers and we hope they will start work in January once all the relevant background checks have been undertaken
- An offer of employment has been made to the Senior Casework Manager post and we hope that the individual will start with us in March. In the interim, Rachel Graham has joined the team in the Senior role on a temporary contract.
- A successful appointment has been made to the Administrative Assistant and we hope they will join us in January
- Recruitment is underway for an Administrative Officer, with interviews taking place in January
- Louis McClusky, the SEND Apprentice has been appointed into the role of Clerical Officer and he started in role in November.
- The Service has engaged with an agency team of EHCP staff who are supporting the service to prepare draft EHCPs and to update EHCPs from Annual Reviews.

Alongside recruitment to vacant posts, the Council has assessed the staffing requirements in light of increased numbers of pupils with EHCP's to ensure that the service can provide the level of service that families deserve. As a result, the Council has approved funding for an additional two casework posts. Interviews are taking place on 22nd December for additional casework manager posts.

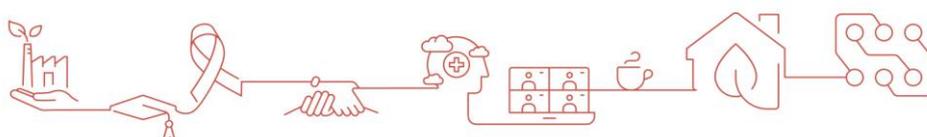
Whilst we build up the service, we will continue to prioritise cases in the short term including;

- Decisions to assess – in line with statutory duty to decide within 6 weeks
- New Assessments – new assessments will continue to be a priority. The Council currently has a considerable backlog of cases due to gaps in capacity in the Educational Psychology service and this will now be exacerbated by gaps in the casework service and so will continue to be a challenge. The service will prioritise new assessments for cared for children and those in transition.
- Pupils moving into borough with an EHCP – we have approximately 40 pupils per year who move into borough and will continue to prioritise the placement and coordinating provision for these children, as well as ensuring a safe transfer of pupils with EHCP who move out of borough
- Annual Reviews – our key focus is on the transition reviews. There is a large volume of transitions reviews this year with 424 EHCPs due for review before February 2023. Given the volume, the service will need to prioritise which reviews it is able to attend and this may need to be on Teams if we are now able to accommodate in person. Schools are asked to notify the SEND team where a local authority representative at a meeting is critical.

SEND Helpline

The Service take a high volume of calls to the SEND Helpline. Until the service is back up to strength we have re directed the casework team to focus on EHCP's and as a consequence the Helpline will operate with a reduced complement of staff. In the meantime, where parents have a caseworker they should continue to contact them if they wish to discuss their case. General enquires can be made through the Council's customer contact centre.

We know this is valued by parents and will review as staff join us.



We appreciate this is an unsatisfactory situation and are disappointed to have to take such a drastic position. However, I hope this provides some reassurance that the Council has acted swiftly to address the gaps in the service and that by Easter we will be back up to full strength.

We would ask for your patience and understanding as we address the gaps in the assessment service, and your support in managing this very difficult situation. We benefit significantly from the advice and guidance the Forum provide and look forward to your involvement in the induction and training of the new team.

We will continue to keep you updated on the position.

Yours Sincerely



Sharon Fryer
Head of SEND & Inclusion

