

Minutes from Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Discussion:

The Assistant Director, Education and SEND introduced the report which set out the draft updated Joint Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Strategy which included the vision, guiding principles and the key areas of development that will be Medway's focus for children and young people with SEND over the coming three years.

Members were informed that the consultation closed on 23 September 2022 and the information gathered would be incorporated to the final Strategy Action Plan where appropriate.

120 responses were received with 280 individual comments. The three key things highlighted by respondents were the need for increased effective communication between agencies, parents, and carers, streamlining of pathway processes and ensuring the voice of the child, parents and carers were central to decision making.

Members commented that the Strategy was robust but questioned deliverability and what was in place to mitigate issues. The Assistant Director of Education and SEND said that there was a deliverability plan that had been developed and would be shared once finalised.

Transitions - in response to a question on distinct issues on the transition pathway from children to adults' service and what could be done to improve experiences and outcomes, the Officer acknowledged the issues and said that this was an area of continued focus. Specialised work had commenced on joining up the children and adults service in order to improve pathways.

Inclusion and Participation - it was commented that in order to achieve best outcomes through inclusion and participation, it was important to emphasise to third party organisations that their provision must be non-discriminatory. The officer agreed and said that this was a joint strategy that focused on changing culture in Medway and as such it was important to get the message across on promotion of inclusivity.

Communication – in response to a question on what was being done to improve communication between services and families, the officer said that improvement was needed in clearness of communication to families. Work was being done to streamline processes, make them more effective and improve confidence in the system by being clear on eligibility and legislation.

Flexibility – it was asked what opportunities there were for flexibility in response to individual circumstances. The Officer said that SEND was a regulatory arena that was restricted by several factors such as budgets, provision, parental choice, all these factors impact flexibility in the service.

EHCP Applications – it was questioned why a high number of EHCP applications were rejected. The officer acknowledged that a high number were refused, this was due to applications received from parents that had not received any input from education providers and were not aware of processes and eligibility. This had been recognised and work was being undertaken to support parents on how and when to approach for support.

Abbey Court – in response to comments regarding the issues with children not being able to attend school every day and the pressure that put on families, the Officer acknowledged the issues at Abbey Court. Members were informed that children that attended the school had complex issues which meant that they needed specialist qualified staff to support them. There was however a shortage of specialist staff which had impacted on the ability for the school to provide services daily. The situation was being reviewed on a regular basis and resources were put in place to support families whilst solutions were sought to address recruitment issues.

Decision:

The Committee noted the Draft Joint SEND Strategy 2022-25.

The Committee noted that the Strategy would be updated following the completion of the Safety Valve Intervention Programme (SVIP) and the outcome of formal consultation.