

People Scrutiny Commission

13 December 2021



Report of: Alison Hurley, Director, Education and Skills

Title: Progress update relating to key performance indicators

Ward: All

Officer Presenting Report: Alison Hurley

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Recommendation:

To note the actions being taken to improve two Education and Skills Key Performance Indicators (KPIs):

The significant issues in the report are:

Summary of status and actions to improve performance on the following indicators:

BPB225e 'Increase the percentage of Final EHCPs issued within 20 weeks excluding exception cases';

BPC222 'Increase the take-up of free early educational entitlement by eligible 2 year olds';



1. Summary

BPB225e Increasing the Percentage of Final EHCs Issued With the 20 Weeks Excluding Exception Cases

EHCP timeliness (excluding exceptions) improved from 0% in 2019 to 21.9% at year-end 2020.

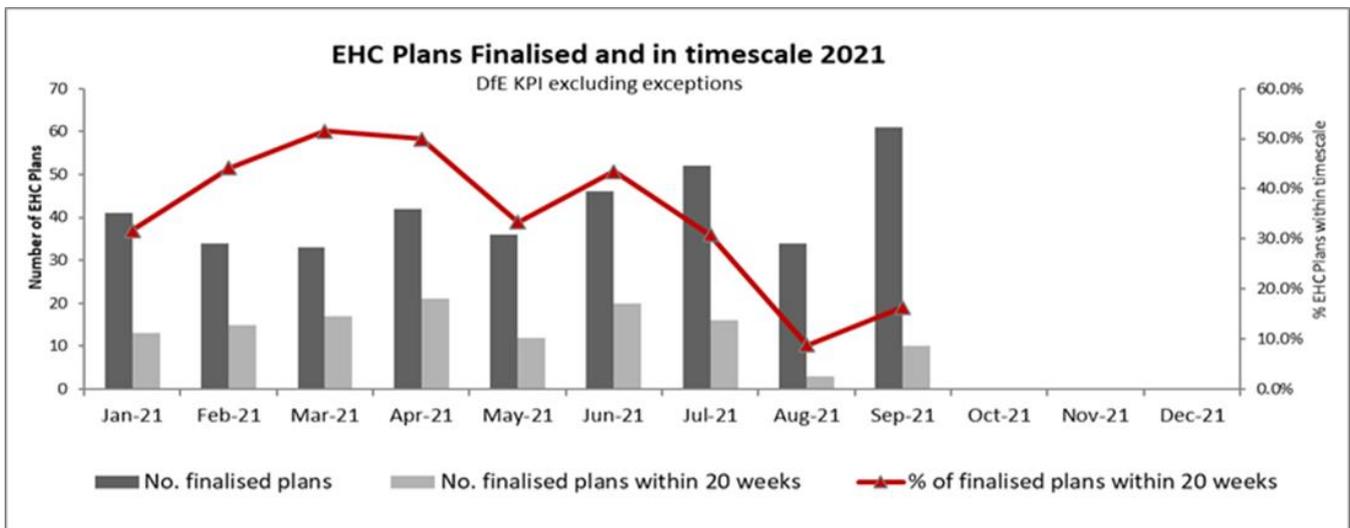
33.3% of EHC plans finalised within the 20-week timescale year to date (September 21) (excluding exceptions), significantly improved on the same period last year (20.7%).

In line with other LAs, of concern is the continued exponential rise in new EHCNA requests and the negative impact this has on the ability to finalise plans within the 20 week timeframe:

- In the first nine months of 2020 495 EHCNA requests were received.
- In the first nine months of 2021 621 EHCNA requests were received – a 25% increase.

Despite this increase in requests:

- 381 EHC plans finalised – (excluding exceptions this excludes those where an EHC plan was issued following mediation and/or an appeal).
- 75 plans issued in September 2021, highest monthly output so far this year.



BPC222 'Increase the take-up of free early educational entitlement by eligible 2 year olds

The take up of eligible 2 year old provision, as measured in the January census, has been declining in Bristol. This mirrors a decline across the South West and nationally caused primarily by the impact of the pandemic, it's impact on families and the confidence of parents to send their children to a setting during the lockdown periods.

During the pandemic, take up of free early education places in Bristol has been lower than national and in comparison to statistical neighbours.

In response, a series of actions have been identified to re-engage families and settings, improve communication and awareness of the eligible two year old offer and develop closer working with settings and other agencies.

Current data indicates that take up has improved significantly since January 2021. The sector headcount in May 2021 indicated take up had increased to 64% and provisional data from the October headcount indicates take up is at 71%. Data also indicates that 87% of the children in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) are accessing a place.

2. Context

BPB225e Increasing the Percentage of Final EHCPs Issued With the 20 Weeks Excluding Exception Cases

Actions to improve performance:

SEND Assessment Team Capacity

The SEND Assessment Manager has been in post since September 2020 and oversees 3 Senior Assessment Coordinators (SAC), who were all new in post.

The 3 SACs manage 14.6 Assessment Coordinators (AC), structured in three area pods. The SAC is the link and support for the ACs, offering advice on individual cases; checking drafts and finals before issuing; conducting monthly supervisions and monthly pod meetings to share any updates and reminders regarding processes and responsibilities. Any training needs highlighted through supervisions, individual work and outcomes from pod meetings are discussed with the manager either in monthly supervision or during the weekly meeting. This has led to Assessment Team Training on Personal Budgets; Roles, Responsibilities, and conversations to have with families and schools at each stage of the EHC Needs Assessment process.

The Quality Assurance (QA) Audits have supported the wider SEND team in identifying areas which need improving. Evidence shows marked improvement in the areas identified. QA activity also highlights any areas of development for individual case workers which is then discussed during supervision and monitored further.

A dip in EHCP performance data in 2021 reflects a period of reduced Assessment Team capacity from February 21 until July 21 due to staff leaving and general absence. In recognition of the pressures in this role, the AC roles were upgraded this year, and that has secured better recruitment outcomes.

Allocation and Issuing Final EHCPs

Weekly meetings take place between the SEND Service and Operations Managers; SEND Assessment Team Manager; Assistant Principal EP; Service Manager and Team Manager of Disabled Children and Specialist Services. Once a month the Specialist Health Advisors for SEND also join this meeting. The purpose of the meeting is to discuss:

- Current data regarding EHC Needs Assessment Requests made
- Current data regarding the issuing of Final EHCPs for the month
- Planning of allocation of caseworkers from the EP Team and the SEND Team to ensure that teams are focusing on the same cases.

- Discuss priorities regarding allocation – for example Children in Care, Key Stage Transfer
- Raise any outstanding reports which may require the appropriate team to investigate further

This weekly meeting has enabled SEND managers to better plan allocations of EPs and Assessment Coordinators and to also identify cases which will be issued within 20-week timescale.

Weekly meetings also take place with the SEND Assessment Team manager and Senior Assessment Coordinators to discuss:

- Priorities regarding issuing Final EHCPs
- Triaging EHC Needs Assessment requests
- Data for individual Assessment Coordinators, which includes number of open cases, how to move cases forward and capacity for allocation of more cases.

This meeting enables the discussion of priorities and areas to develop or focus on each week/month whilst reviewing adherence to inhouse processes and the allocation/capacity of the Assessment Coordinators.

Additional Capacity via Draft Plan Writers

To address the shortfall in the Assessment Team earlier this year, and the increase in demand, additional Plan Writers were contracted from May. This proved a successful model, so is being repeated as necessary.

Increasing Strategic Management Capacity

In recognition of the need to build leadership capacity in the SEND team and release the SEND Service Manager from line management of operational managers, a permanent post of SEND Operational Manager has been appointed to from September 2021. This post reports to the SEND Service Manager, building capacity to focus on the ongoing strategic SEND developments across Education, Health and Social care.

Education Psychology Service Capacity

The Educational Psychology Team have been focussing on improving their timeliness performance and data around performance is assisting operational management and strategic planning. To address the poor timeliness of EP reports:

- A deep dive of the EP Service was undertaken
- The process for the allocation of EP cases has been reviewed and strengthened.
- A round of recruitment to fill vacancies has been undertaken and was successful.
- A pilot was undertaken using Assistant EPs to assist with EP timeliness. This has been discontinued as whilst the Assistants undertook important work, the work did not reduce the time taken for an EP statutory assessment and reporting.
- The service has increased its use of Associate and Locum EPs through all available routes. Three routes have been used: direct contracting of Associate Psychologists; using Guidant (the BCC temporary staffing provider) and using a procurement route with private providers.

EP teams, as with all SEND Local Authority services, have been impacted by COVID. National and local estimates suggest that there has been a 20% reduction in capacity due to COVID.

QA and Specialist Health Advisors for SEND

The agreed EHC template for health advice is embedded and used by all community health clinicians. Internal quality assurance takes place within health services to review and sign-off health

advice. All Needs Assessment responses are read, quality assured and signed off by senior Sirona manager.

The Specialist Health Adviser team, employed by Sirona Care & Health, was established earlier this year and comprise of four multi-disciplinary team members who are providing health needs advice as a contribution to a child or young person’s needs assessment for children and young people not known to community health services, or whose file was closed more than 12 months previously.

BPC222 ‘Increase the take-up of free early educational entitlement by eligible 2 year olds

Actions to Improve Performance:

Data

LA data on those eligible families, who have applied for a place, indicates 75% of families should be accessing two year old provision. Further work is now in progress to identify the 4% of families who are not accessing provision even where they have applied and been offered a place in a setting and make contact establish any barriers or concerns affecting take up.

The data system has been improved so the provider can now draw down and view applications themselves which means that can then be pro-active in engaging families. However not all settings may be aware of this function and further promotion is planned.

Applications

Better online access for families, so they can apply for places, is being investigated. Applications cannot currently be submitted via a mobile phone. We know this is a key point of online access for many families and so this is being followed up with the IT system provider. Communication with families is also being reviewed to increase the use of tools such as texts and QR codes to prompt, remind and support families to make applying and taking up a place quicker and easier.

Practitioners in settings are now able to apply on behalf of a parent which has increased the number applications. This is particularly supportive for families who have limited or no access to the internet as well as those who have English as an additional language and enables settings and providers to be pro-active in supporting eligible families.

Communication

Parent Champions are also being developed as a strategy to engage eligible families. The two priority areas with the lowest take up (Lawrence Hill and Hartcliffe and Withywood wards) have been identified to pilot this work with Nursery schools based in the wards. Potential champions have been identified and training is being rolled out shortly.

Communication with settings and partner agencies, such as social care, is also being strengthened to raise the profile of the two year old offer and increase the awareness of practitioners so they can also signpost families and support them in taking up their entitlement. The team now have access to the ‘Think Family’ database that will enable us to identify those children who are involved with Social Care who are not currently accessing their 2 year old place. A plan is being developed to implement this and then inform the Social Workers to ensure they are aware of the offer.

3. Policy

The above links directly to the council’s Key Performance Indicators

4. Consultation

a) Internal

Not applicable

b) External

Not applicable

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 5b) By improving use of existing data and developing and widening communication strategies, the actions identified will reduce barriers to access and increase participation for all families.

Appendices:

None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

None