

<b>Committee:</b> Community and Children's Services Committee	<b>Dated:</b> 20/09/2024
<b>Subject:</b> The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Peer Review	<b>Public</b>
<b>Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?</b>	<b>Providing Excellent Services</b>
<b>Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?</b>	No
<b>If so, how much?</b>	N/A
<b>What is the source of Funding?</b>	N/A
<b>Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain's Department?</b>	N/A
<b>Report of:</b> Judith Finlay, Executive Director of Community and Children's Services	<b>For Information</b>
<b>Report author:</b> Kirstie Hilton, Head of Service – Education and Early Years	

### Summary

- A new Area Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Inspection Framework was published by the Government in November 2022 and has been in operation since January 2023. A recent Area SEND engagement meeting with Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) took place on 9 July 2024.
- The last Area SEND inspection in the City of London (COL) was in March 2018, and the local area could be inspected at any time. In preparation, the COL commissioned a peer review to assess its readiness for the Area SEND inspection.
- This report provides Members with the findings of the peer review, the recommendations, and actions that are being taken to strengthen the local area's work around timely identification, assessing and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND, ensuring that they are well prepared for adult life, and that they are integral and valued members of the COL community.

### Recommendation

#### Members are asked to:

Note the report.

## Main Report

### Background

1. The peer review was undertaken by Achieving for Children – The London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames in April/May 2024, with a final report dated June 2024. See Appendix 1.
2. The review team included the Executive Director of Children Services, the Director of Education Services, the Associate Director for SEND, the SEND Service Manager, the Designated Clinical Officer for SEND, the Designated Social Care Officer for SEND, and the SEND Projects Officer.
3. The review involved evaluating COL data and documents in relation to SEND, such as the COL's SEND Self-Evaluation Framework (SEF), strategic plans and policies, the Local Offer, the structure of the local area partnership, and information about the services we provide. It also involved sampling a small number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), interviewing partners across education, health and social care, interviewing representatives from the City Parent Carer Forum (CPCF), and meeting with parents and carers.
4. As the focus of the review was on preparing for the Area SEND inspection, the Area SEND Inspection Framework and Handbook (Ofsted and CQC, 2023), was used to structure the peer review activities, main findings and recommendations. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the SEND Inspection Framework.
5. An Area SEND engagement meeting with Ofsted and the CQC took place on 9 July, with senior leaders from the partnership (Education, Health and Social Care) and two parents/carers present. The meeting was very positive and reflected all the excellent work that the partnership does in supporting our children and young people with SEND. A copy of the SEND Engagement Meeting Letter can be found in Appendix 3.

### Main Findings

#### **Children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support**

6. The review found that *professionals know children and young people extremely well and work with them and their families to develop effective plans to secure the provision that they need*, and that they are at the centre of the local area's thinking and actions. Children and young people's voices and views are represented around their individual support needs, their EHCPs reflect their views and aspirations, information is provided in accessible and age-appropriate formats, and there is a trusting relationship between families and services.
7. An identified area for development is around the provision of advocacy services for parents and carers, particularly those whose first language is not

English. We have already strengthened the service level agreement with the Tower Hamlets and COL SEND Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) for parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. The agreement now includes the provision of an advocacy service for children and young people aged 16–25 years, which is provided by trained advocates who are themselves young people. Where English is an additional language, volunteers with appropriate language/interpreting skills and a lived experience of SEND will be engaged to support the advocacy/support session with parents and carers.

### **Children and young people’s needs are identified accurately and assessed in a timely and effective way**

8. The review found that *support for children in the early years is a considerable strength, with a good Local Offer in place for families in the City*. Children’s needs are identified effectively and there is successful signposting to support services and assessment referrals. There is strong multi-agency support for parents and carers; assessments are timely; advice is of a high quality; and good-quality EHCP needs assessments and plans are completed within statutory timescales, through an effective planning and decision-making panel.
9. The SEND Ranges – a framework for staff in educational settings for ages 0–25 years to address the early identification of SEND – was rolled out to settings in the COL in the summer of 2023. The review found this to be an effective framework for staff in educational settings in supporting the early identification of needs, providing advice on adaptations, and guidance on assessment.
10. In terms of health assessment, children and young people do not wait too long for their needs to be assessed in high-demand services such as Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) or speech and language therapy. While there are longer waiting times for neurodevelopmental assessments, help such as specific pre-diagnostic support is offered to families waiting for autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) assessments.
11. The review also found that operational partnership groups, such as the Special Educational Needs and Disability Co-ordinator (SENDSCO) Network and Vulnerable Children Group, support identification, assessment and planning.
12. No areas for development were identified in this area.

### **Children and young people receive the right help and support at the right time**

13. The peer review found that *there is good evidence that EHCPs are effective and making a positive difference to children and young people, and that educational and wider outcomes for children and young people with SEND*

*are good. Parents are positive about the quality of the help and support that their children receive.*

14. EHCPs are effective in providing the support that children and young people need, and statutory annual reviews of EHCPs are timely and effective. Children and young people with EHCPs attend schools that are judged to be good or outstanding by Ofsted. The review found that there is a strong multi-agency support offer for children with an EHCP, as well as for those receiving SEND support.
15. In terms of children and young people who are receiving SEND support, the review noted the challenges and the arrangements that are in place for identifying and tracking these pupils. We acknowledge that there is work to be done in this area in terms of how we may be able to monitor the progress and outcomes of these children and young people, and we are considering ways to improve this area.
16. Regarding areas for development, the review noted the challenges in identifying the right health provider for children and young people with specific needs. This is due to the number of different health organisations in different local areas, and different Integrated Care Systems which provide services to COL children and young people and their families. The steps being taken to establish a neighbourhood health model for the City and Shoreditch Park were noted, and the review recommended that it would be beneficial to have a clear statement of intent, plan and timescale for this work.
17. There is work to be done to further develop the Local Offer website to keep the content up to date, and to ensure that families and professionals can easily navigate the content. The Local Offer is always under review, and there are plans to do further work with the CPCF to develop the Local Offer.

### **Children and young people are well prepared for their next steps and achieve strong outcomes**

18. The review found that the planning and support around transitions at key stages of education is effective, particularly given that children and young people attend a wide range of educational settings outside of the COL. Children and young people are engaged in planning their next steps, with preparation for adulthood routinely starting at the age of 14 years, with effective multi-professional planning and joint working across education, health and social care.
19. An area for development is around expanding the range of vocational opportunities for young people, strengthening their pathways into employment, including developing supported internship, traineeship and apprenticeship opportunities – both within and beyond the COL.

20. The review suggested that the role of the Preparing for Adulthood Partnership Lead, which is led by Hackney, could be strengthened and better embedded in the COL to enable Preparing for Adulthood developments to be taken forward at greater pace.
21. The complexities already identified in relation to health services for families living in the COL are exacerbated during young people's transition to adulthood when further adult health services are introduced. This was particularly noticeable in relation to mental health services and the transition from CAMHS to adult mental health services.

### **Children and young people with SEND are valued, visible and included in their communities**

22. The review found *good examples of children and young people with SEND being valued and celebrated in their schools and communities*. Children and young people participate in activities in the community. The CPCF have been supported by the COL to develop inclusive sports provision for their children and young people at Golden Lane Sports and Fitness Centre. They have also worked with planners in the COL Corporation to develop inclusive play facilities as part of the St Paul's development.
23. In terms of areas for development, the review found that *some parents were of the view that the City of London is not inclusive in its mindset, by which they mean that it does not proactively think about inclusion. Here they made a distinction between the directorate responsible for Children's Services, which they reported was very inclusive, and the wider City of London Corporation and its institutions, which they reported were not*. The review suggests that it may be beneficial to produce a statement or charter that sets out the City's ambition for inclusion in relation to children and young people with SEND.
24. Co-production is an area for development. This is a way of working where children and young people, families, and those that provide the services work together to help design and create services that works for them all. The review suggests that COL and partners develop an agreed definition of co-production with parents and carers, and identify a small number of co-production priorities each year. This is a feature of the forthcoming SEND Strategy 2025–2029, which will come to this Committee.

### **Leaders are ambitious for children and young people with SEND and have an accurate, shared understanding of their needs**

25. The local area partnership is ambitious for COL children and young people with SEND, and we know our families well. This is reflected in the peer review.
26. *There is a clear vision and ambition for children and young people with SEND. The SEND Strategy is currently being refreshed based on a clear multi-agency assessment of local need. There is strong engagement*

*from partner organisations in this work, as well as from parents and carers. Leaders respond to changing needs. There are comprehensive strategies, plans and guidance that support the delivery of the main SEND Strategy.*

- 27. There is strong engagement from partners in the strategic SEND Programme Board, which is responsible for driving forward the SEND Strategy. The Board has representation from all local area partners as well as from parents and carers. The Board is jointly chaired by senior leaders from education, health and social care, and there is a real sense of shared ownership and accountability for the strategy and the local area plans, as well as strategic teamwork. There is evidence that members use the Board to constructively challenge each other and hold each other to account.*
- 28. The SEND Programme Board has identified clear priorities for joint working. These include supporting inclusion and early intervention, increasing parental engagement in co-production, and reducing waiting times for ASD and ADHD assessments.*
29. The review noted the complexities of the governance arrangements around SEND – which are due to cross-borough arrangements – and commented that it would be helpful to review all the strategic governance arrangements for SEND so that the local area can be assured that any duplication is minimised.

### **Leaders commission services and provision to meet the needs and aspirations of children and young people**

30. The review found that the services commissioned for children and young people to help them achieve their aspirations are effective, that leaders are confident in the efficacy of services, and they are clear about outcomes.
31. To address the challenges of securing specialist school provision for children and young people, and in commissioning health services due to the cross-border issues, the review suggests development work and joint commissioning with other local authorities to enhance the Local Offer and expand access to specialist school places while taking a more co-ordinated approach in terms of health provision.
32. Work has started on the COL's approach to alternative provision, and the review recommends that this is completed as a priority.

### **Leaders evaluate services, make improvements and create an environment for effective practice and multi-agency working to flourish**

33. The review found that the Local Area partnership has a clear understanding and commitment to improving access to CAMHS. It is focused on improving practice for individual children and young people, monitoring attendance, educational achievements and EHCP outcomes,

visiting settings, and routinely tracking the impact that each provision has on each child or young person with SEND, and it takes suitable action where necessary to ensure that all children achieve. The review considered that *leaders have effective oversight of services and understand where services need to develop or improve.*

34. There is much to be proud of. The review considers that the local areas' SEND SEF *does not fully capture the effective work and positive outcomes that are being achieved for children and young people with SEND in the City.* The SEF is being amended to better reflect the local areas' strengths.
35. The review noted that quality assurance of services happens within individual service. An area for development is a quality assurance framework for SEND services that can be used by multi-agency partners. Steps are already in place to address this.

## **Recommendations**

36. The review sets out 10 recommendations around:
- I. Accelerating plans for the development of a neighbourhood health model so that children and young people with SEND can access the health services they need in their local area.
  - II. Reviewing the governance arrangements for SEND to minimise duplication, and provide assurance that there is a clear focus on delivering the priorities in the SEND Strategy.
  - III. Developing a clear definition of co-production across the local partnership, and agreeing a small number of priorities for co-production with parents and carers and children and young people.
  - IV. Considering options to develop the cross-border commissioning of services to improve the SEND Local Offer, and particularly to increase the local availability of health services and specialist school places.
  - V. Reviewing the Local Offer website to update its content so that it includes the information that children, young people and families say they need, and to make it more easily navigable and searchable.
  - VI. Finalising the strategy for alternative education provision.
  - VII. Reviewing SENDIASS to ensure that it has the capacity to meet the needs of families in the City and can offer them the information and advice they need in a timely way, with options for the provision of advocacy services for parents.
  - VIII. Considering options to improve the timeliness of direct payments.
  - IX. Developing a multi-agency quality assurance framework for SEND.
  - X. Updating the self-evaluation to fully reflect the strengths of the local partnership and explain how partners are working together to address challenges and areas for development.

## Plans to address the recommendations

37. A comprehensive action plan is in place to address the recommendations, and progress is being made on these. See Appendix 4 for the SEND Peer Review Action Plan – July 2024.

## Corporate & Strategic Implications

38. **Contributes to the Corporate Plan** – Providing Excellent Services. Supporting people to live healthy, independent lives and achieve their ambitions is dependent on excellent service. Vital to that continued pursuit is enabling access to effective adult and children's social care, outstanding education, lifelong learning, quality housing and combatting homelessness.
39. **Strategic implications** – Corporate outcome: Contribute to providing excellent services by ensuring that the local area partnership is working well together and in collaboration with parent carers, children and young people to ensure that children and young people with SEND achieve their full potential and that they live happy, healthy, independent lives.
40. **Resource implications** – N/A
41. **Financial implications** – N/A
42. **Legal implications** – The duties on local areas regarding provision for children and young people with SEND are contained in the Children and Families Act 2014. This legislation sits in the context of the Equality Act 2010. The *Area SEND Inspection: Framework and Handbook*, sets out the legal basis and the principles for the SEND inspection.
43. **Risk implications** – If children's SEND issues are not identified early, assessed and supported, this will impact on their educational attainment, progress and wider lifetime chances.
44. **Equalities implications** – All children and young people, regardless of their special educational needs or disabilities, will be part of a community where they can learn, achieve and participate in activities with other children and young people, and will be prepared to have a fulfilled adult life.
45. **Climate implications** – N/A
46. **Security implications** – N/A

## Conclusion

47. The COL is awaiting inspection under the new Area SEND Inspection Framework published by the Government on 30 November 2022. The governance of the SEND Strategy is with the SEND Programme Board. A Peer review took place in April and May 2024 to support the work of the service in inspection readiness, and a recent engagement meeting with

Ofsted and CQC reiterated the positive work that the COL is doing to support children and young people with SEND. Following a report by Achieving for Children, the COL has developed an action plan, listing a number of recommendations and actions. These will be monitored along with the SEND Strategy and SEND SEF through the SEND Programme Board to ensure that the local area is well prepared for the area inspection.

## **Appendices**

- Appendix 1 – City of London SEND Peer Review – Report by Achieving for Children (The London Borough of Richmond Upon Thames – June 2024)
- Appendix 2 – Area SEND Inspection Framework [Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-inspections-framework-and-handbook)
- Appendix 3 – SEND Engagement Meeting Letter with Ofsted and CQC, 9 July 2024
- Appendix 4 – SEND Peer Review Action Plan – July 2024

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