

CITY OF DONCASTER COUNCIL

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

THURSDAY, 16TH MARCH, 2023

A MEETING of the CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL was held at the COUNCIL CHAMBER, DONCASTER on THURSDAY, 16TH MARCH, 2023 at 4.30 PM

PRESENT:

Chair - Councillor Leanne Hempshall

Councillors Tim Needham, Bob Anderson, Laura Bluff, Steve Cox, Susan Durant, David Nevett and Rob Reid

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

Officers:

- Leanne Hornsby - Assistant Director, Education, Skills, Culture and Heritage
- Martyn Owen – Head of Service (Inclusion)
- Jane Reed - Head of Service (Education and Skills)
- Damon Stead – Transport Team Manager
- Young Advisers

		<u>ACTION</u>
22.	<u>APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE</u>	
	Apologies for absence were received from Antoinette Drinkhill and Bernadette Nesbit.	
23.	<u>TO CONSIDER THE EXTENT, IF ANY, TO WHICH THE PUBLIC AND PRESS ARE TO BE EXCLUDED FROM THE MEETING.</u>	
	There were no items on the agenda.	
24.	<u>DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST, IF ANY.</u>	
	There were no declarations of interest made.	
25.	<u>MINUTES OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL MEETING HELD ON 8TH DECEMBER 2022</u>	
	RESOLVED that:- the minutes of the meeting held on the 8 th December, 2022 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.	

26.	<u>PUBLIC STATEMENTS</u>	
	<p>A statement was provided by Mrs Olivia North as follows.</p> <p>“I understand SEND from a number of different angles, first and most important is the title I am normally recognised for, I am Kai North’s mum. Next, I am a neurodiverse adult who was home-schooled due to archaic attitudes and failures in the education system. I am also a professional who studies and works in early years development.</p> <p>Discussing my neurodiversity is not something I do often because it can be met with sympathy, pity, and a lack of understanding, something I neither need nor want, occasionally it is even met with patronising undertones. I am a highly educated 40-year-old woman who sees and experiences the world differently.</p> <p>At twelve years old I was diagnosed with an adjustment disorder to everyday life events, a behavioural disorder and school phobia linked with underdeveloped social skills, twenty-eight years ago no one connected the dots. My parents were advised home-schooling was the best option as education wasn’t really for me. I left school and could barely read or write.</p> <p>Eleven years ago, Kai was born, within the first eighteen months, we became aware Kai was not developing typically. Kai was referred for GDA at two with joint support from our GP and community nursery nurse. We were extremely lucky that the waiting list was short at that time and Kai was diagnosed at three years old with ASD, Kai’s ASD report discusses Kai’s prevalence of demand avoidance. Whilst demand avoidance is a contentious term and is often debated, I live with Kai, the anxiety and need are very real. Kai currently attends a SEMH school in Wakefield and will move to a PDA hub in April as his current school has said they cannot meet his needs from September moving into Secondary.</p> <p>It has not been an easy path and we have met various obstacles along the way including all Doncaster schools stating they cannot meet Kai’s needs, and Educational Psychologist asking if I had considered home-schooling and CAMHS stating that Kai’s needs were too complex to be met by CAMHS, and he was diagnosed and we were just left to do our best for Kai on our own. I want to tell you something about Kai, Kai is a wonderfully funny and intelligent child who cannot stand injustice, Kai will always stand for those facing injustice and those who are not as fortunate as he is. Kai wrote a report on why collective punishments don’t work in schools and subsequently changed his school’s behaviour policy and one of my lecturers marked the report as 63! Not bad for a child apparently 3 years behind at school. The schools that turned Kai away are missing out not Kai.</p> <p>When Kai was discharged from CAMHS, after 18 months of school avoidance and a mainstream school who, despite their best efforts</p>	

were not equipped to meet Kai's needs and with no SEND school willing to give us a chance, I decided that Kai would not be another child with unmet needs and slip through the net and had no education so I returned to education. I am extremely privileged, my mum was able and willing to sacrifice her career and take early retirement to support me and provide childcare. Returning to education was life-changing for me, it was here for the first time it was formally suggested that I was autistic, and I was diagnosed earlier this year. I studied hard and gained my Maths foundation qualification and English GCSE, I have four A levels at distinction in social sciences and criminal justice, and I will finish my degree in child development, with a predicted first-class degree in May next year and will start my Masters in SEND in September of the same year.

My husband, Kai and I have battled to get where we are now, I restarted my education to make sure Kai would get all his needs met. Now my dream is bigger, I know not every child with SEND will have a hyper-focused parent who can get a degree to navigate a system stacked against them. I want to make sure that never again is a SEND child told education is not for them, and that school systems will understand those who just need to be focused differently. I would like professionals to acknowledge that an underfunded system is stacked against parents and to think about the use of terms like parental choice. I, my husband, and thousands of other parents did not choose any of this. We would not change Kai for the world, Kai changes every single person he meets for the better, but there must be an acceptance that often the only choice we have is between a rock and a hard place. If I was truly choosing Kai would attend a local school with his friends, with staff trained to understand and teach how he learns, not in a system that tries to force Kai, and thousands of SEND children, into a stereotyped box, to which they will never fit and nor should they have to. Kai would go to breakfast clubs and afterschool clubs he would be accepted and included. Changing schools mid-year or risk not having a school come September, giving up our careers to take our children to out-of-area schools or sending our child off every day with strangers with no SEND training are not parental choices, it is exactly the opposite, we have no choice. The term is used to create an illusion of choice so we shoulder the responsibility if something goes wrong. In my new, bigger, dream parents and let's be honest that is primarily mothers, do not have to put careers on hold, leave education, or negotiate start and finish times with employers because there is no wrap-around care for children with SEND. They will not need to explain numerous phone calls and having to leave work because schools are experiencing distressed behaviours due to unmet needs. The current government says more stay-at-home mothers need to return to work and contribute to the economy, how do the mothers of SEND children realistically return to work when often we spend as much time at school as our children do? Who is picking up our children when our children are being sent home from school, who is providing our specialist after school and holiday childcare? We are not even a consideration, never

	<p>mind a priority, the enormity of what we do is ignored. The first step to change is when we acknowledge the current system and education plan is not working, not for SEND children and not for their families.</p> <p>I am often told how my return to education is inspirational and how proud I should be, but for me, it will always be tainted with disappointment and sadness, no matter how much we are told things have changed, 28 years after an autistic child was told education was not for her, getting a degree, a Masters and a working memory of law and legislation seemed like the only option to ensure her child was never told the same when he was on the path to no education. Governments, funding and legislation models will always change and somewhere along the line we've forgotten that every child matters."</p>	
27.	<p><u>SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITY (SEND) STRATEGY UPDATE</u></p>	
	<p>The purpose of this item was to update the Panel on the progress of the refreshed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy, which was approved by Cabinet in November 2022. It was reported that consultation with the wider system took place during September to November 2022, with delivery beginning in January 2023.</p> <p>The Chair made reference to a recent meeting that the Panel held with representatives from the SENCos network, and discussed areas such as challenges around training, recruitment and EHCPs. The Chair remarked how informative and interesting the meeting had been.</p> <p>The Chair relayed a comment made by a member of the Panel who had been unable to attend the meeting, that "it had been good news regarding the inclusion of Doncaster on the DfE's 'Delivering Better Value in SEND' financially and the access to wider support/expertise and cooperation".</p> <p>A question was raised on their behalf, around neighbouring local authorities who had had their high needs block funding increased by 10%, and it was asked whether that was the same for Doncaster and how it would affect the SEND plan? The Director of Children, Young People and Families commented that there had been a 10% uplift in Doncaster and this would be used as well as possible.</p> <p>SEND Strategy - It was commented that the issues raised within the public statement were areas that had also been seen nationally and that there was an awareness of them in Doncaster. The Panel was informed that the Government had acknowledged the challenges in ensuring that local areas were able meet the needs of young people and had produced their own action plan around making necessary changes. Reference was made to the work undertaken with children, young people and their families and through the Department of</p>	

Education. It was explained that this work involved looking at the intelligence of the local system that included data and the experiences of young people in their placements. It was explained that the work indicated how we needed to look at prioritising having the right provision at right time and planning the appropriate response to needs and as needs change.

It was showed through work undertaken that certain costs could be avoided if the system was optimised to meet those needs earlier (as part of the strategy's "graduated approach"). Reference was made to academic outcomes where nationally there was not enough young people with SEND accessing good quality education, training and employment, and had resulted in another priority within the strategy. It was added that the strategy also focused on making sure that the day-to-day experiences of children and young people was the right one based upon what their experiences have been living within the current system.

Voice Of Children and Families/Examples - An outline was provided of the amount of interaction undertaken with children, young people and families. This interaction had included 8 workshops, surveys of children and young people, working with young advisors, school youth councils and two groups of young people's voice (informing the direction of travel). It was added that the surveys that had been carried out November 2022, would be repeated again in Summer and Winter 2023 in order to understand any differences identified.

It was explained that there was a Young People's Board in place to hold the Council to account on what progress was being made against the strategy, alongside regular co-production opportunities with parents.

Members were informed that key issues highlighted through children and young people included communication, training and understanding in mainstream schools and there was a need to make sure we have the right provision in place. It was recognised important that schools were equipped with skills and training to ensure that its culture was able to change accordingly.

It was felt that the historic waiting list for autism diagnosis had been too long and Members were assured that this was a priority within the strategy, although there was a lot more to do. In addition, it was stated that efforts were being made to ensure that there was a broader range of things to do Post 16, for example, accessing employment.

Increase in Number of Assessments and EHCPs - The Panel was informed that locally the patterns of identification have reflected the national picture. It was commented that there was no one specific reason for this increase. It was explained that there were challenges for 0-5 years in communication around speech and language and

stated that it was about building a system to meet those needs as those young people get older. Reference was made to how education institutions had been under a great deal of pressure and children had been isolated which had exacerbated the development of young people's skills and created gaps in learning.

SEN and ACSETS Team – Members were informed that, there were no plans to review the SEN and ACSETS teams at this stage. Members were informed that a range of areas had been brought under Equity and Inclusion and there was a need to look at inclusion throughout the whole pathway, at which point it would be made clear whether capacity was right or wrong. It was noted that there were 13 individuals in posts within the SEND team. An outline was provided as to how this was made up with the ASCETS team who were part of the Education Psychology service. It was expressed that there was an opportunity to look this as part of the wider inclusion piece of work.

Members were informed that capacity had been increased over recent months and it was explained that the completion of ECHP plans were also dependent on other parts of system that included health, speech and language coming together in a timely fashion.

The Director of Children, Young People and Families summarised that there were effectively three components involved which included demand, processes and the system.

ECHP Reviews - Concern was raised that the Local Authority was not attending EHCP annual reviews. It was explained that it was the schools responsibility to undertake the annual review. It was stated that from a SEND and inclusion perspective, the Local Authority was looking to undertake a 12-week and a 6-month review, which the SEND team was beginning to undertake. Members were assured that although the Local Authority may not be present at the annual review, they were still engaging with those schools.

In view of children attending an independent provision who employed their own Education Psychologist, it was felt that they needed to work closer together with the Local Authority to ensure the offer was robust. It was explained that the Education Psychologist in the Local Authority provided a classroom assessment of the learning needs of the young person, then the Education Psychologist in the independent provision needed to support that plan and ensure that those needs were met.

In terms of the completion of ECHP reviews, it was acknowledged that there was inconsistency and that the Council's role was to track completion. Members heard that the Council was looking to bring it in closer to the reviews around school improvement. Members were informed that the Local Authority was bringing teams together around children to implement the new ECHP system. It was explained that through delivering the Better Value Fund, there would be an online

system that would automatically send prompts and would help improve this process.

It was considered important that support and challenge meetings were being undertaken with maintained mainstream schools. It was explained that there was a set of indicators around inclusion (part of which were ECHPs reviews) and Members were assured that steps were being taken to address performance. It was explained that it was more difficult with academies and trusts as the Local Authority did not have the same leavers, although steps were being taken to challenge them around inclusion indicators and working with the DFE on that.

Implementation of the Strategy – Members were informed that throughout the process, the Council had worked across the school system and that the vast majority of schools were academies. It was explained that the implementation plan had been developed with schools through the SENCo reference group, and the Headteachers group. It was commented that whilst not all partners had responded immediately, the Local Authority was pleased with the response from the school system. It was noted that although there were differences in terms of accountabilities for academies and schools, they were sharing resources, funding and a set of schools working in particular localities.

Members were informed that the level of accountability was what was difference and that there was a clear plan overseen by the Local Area SEND Partnership Board who in turn reported to the Education and Skills Portfolio Board and then onto Team Doncaster.

The Director of Children’s Services stated that one of the biggest issues was changing the culture.

In terms of outcomes, it was felt that it was about taking from the positive and learning from the negative. It was continued that the market was another issue that was presented significant challenges. It was hoped that the Local Authority would be able to shape and influence the system in Doncaster in line with the plan. As an example, it was explained that the Big Picture Doncaster was difficult to get off the ground but was now working really well.

Members were reminded of the pressure that the system was under, with demand up 18% for EHCPs that needed to be assessed (which increased numbers of those children and young people that needed specialist help). It was explained that there were currently around 300 places and as these were not always considered the most suitable for some children, this had resulted in looking for placements outside of a system already under pressure. Reference was made to how difficult it was to open a specialist school and it was commented that for some children it about having the right school in the right place.

Members were reminded that the strategy and plan had come from

people who had been through the system so the local picture was clear. Members were informed that work had been undertaken with partners from across the country as well as other Local Authorities.

The Panel welcomed receiving a future update on the progress made against the strategy.

Vacancy Management – It was commented that vacancy management extended to schools as well as the Local Authority, Members heard that the Council was looking at the way recruitment was undertaken and how vacancies could be made more accessible. It was commented that in the long term, consideration was being given to how as a Council we use the Apprentice Levy and 'grow our own'.

Reference was made to a recruitment campaign for teaching assistants and it was recognised that there was a need to develop workforce skills across all ages and sectors. Members were informed that schools were saying that there were difficulties finding people with suitable level of training experience to fill those posts. Concern was also raised about why schools were employing through agencies. It was continued that this was about developing a professional framework and encouraging schools to 'grow your own'. Members were informed that this project was being picked up through the Council's Education and Skills Programme and talking to other areas about the initiatives that they have in place.

Identification Of Areas Of Need/improvement - Members were informed how there was a great deal of activity going on with different groups. Members were told that there was the SENCo group (as well as sub groups of the SENCo group) who were either working on areas or scrutinising and reporting back. The Head of Inclusion added that he attends the SENCo network to report on progress against the plan. Reference was also made to the other wider groups involved in the plans delivery.

Priority 6: 'Improving the use of data and information' - In terms of how robust and comparable data was, Members heard that this had been the first time the partnership had such a comprehensive dashboard in place. It was explained that comparative data was used where possible, although some data had not been published nationally. Members were assured that the data dashboard was comprehensive and covered comparator areas including timeliness. Members were also told that work was being undertaken on publishing the first SEND Joint Specific Needs Assessment.

SEN Identification and 0-5 provision – Members raised concern that the report excluded SEN identification and provision for 0-5 years. It was explained that work had been undertaken throughout the age range and involved working with the Early Years team. Members were informed that the objective of the plan was to range throughout the 0-

25 years pathway. It was noted that at present, there was no continuity, which was considered an issue for transitions for young people as well as for settings. Members were assured that there was a clear ambition for a single system to be in place.

Report Content – It was confirmed that various references in the report included “SEND Board”, “Local Area SEND Board” “Special Educational Needs and Disabilities board” and “SEND Group” all referred to the same thing.

Performance Clinics – It was clarified that performance clinics had been established since September 2022 and took place on a quarterly basis. It was explained that the information considered included finance, performance, HR (including sickness and vacancies) and process. It was noted that there was a particular focus on Better Value and the SEND project.

Ability For Schools To Cater For Young People With Different Needs And Conditions - Members were informed that the plan was for all schools to cater for young people with different needs and conditions, and therefore specialist providers needed to become more equipped to do this. It was noted that shared placements was about helping those in mainstream schools accessing support that can only be found in special schools or could be about trialling placements. Members were told how there were no shared placements in Doncaster nor there was a history of undertaking those. There was a brief overview of the benefits that could be gained from shared placements and from working together.

Behaviour Policy in SEND – Concern was raised around the impact of the Behaviour Policy’s on those children with SEND. Members were told that this was included as part of Priority 2 of the strategy, which set out challenges around mental health and particularly the environmental factors. It was explained how there was a commitment around having trauma informed training for all professionals, tracking experiences and data in some schools, having those conversations and reframing the way that things are done.

Stronger Advice and Guidance for Schools – It was explained that this was about guidance for schools in terms of following and strengthening processes and procedures as part of the local system at an early stage. It was added that this was also about supporting local processes and holding schools to account for delivery on such areas as the high needs block.

Children Currently Not in School – It was outlined that through integrating teams there was clearer line of sight of those children and young people that did not sit within more traditional parts of the educational system, for example, those that were home educated. Members were informed that contact was made to ensure that they

were in the most appropriate provision. It was acknowledged that there were situations where young people were moved into the city and there was a requirement to define their needs and look at appropriate placements. Members were assured that the Council acted with urgency in those cases, to ensure that they were receiving the right education at the right time.

It was outlined that the number of Children Missing in Education (CMIE) had been around 300 during the Summer reducing to 75 more recently. In relation to Elective Home Education (EHE) numbers, this had been closer to 700 and was now at 509. Members were assured that those numbers were reducing quickly, there was a good monitoring process in place and communication had improved where children and young people were moving across areas.

Supporting parents of SEND children to remain in their careers – Members heard that there was a need to continue listening to parents and try to support them as best we can. It was recognised that it was difficult to provide wrap around support for those families.

SEND Transport – There was a brief discussion around the potential of bringing school transport for children and young people with SEND in-house. It was explained that there were already challenges in recruiting to certain posts and efforts were being made to attract drivers and escorts. Challenges included the impact of Covid on older people working, earning more in alternative posts such as delivering (which had reduced the pool of potential applicants), and the infrastructure needed on site to park and secure buses overnight.

It was explained that the service had identified a training need and a package was being rolled out in the Autumn term. It was noted that some schools offered training and invited staff. A Member raised concern that training previously provided had not been well attended.

Members also voiced concerns around a lack of consistency in using the same drivers and felt that it was important that drivers had a good understanding and knowledge of children with SEND in order to offer a good service to children and families. Members were informed about what was in place to address this and it was recognised that incidents could have an impact and were investigated. An outline was provided of the scale of work managed by the team with the resources that were available. There was a brief discussion around licensing and issues around signage on cars.

RESOLVED that the Panel note the content of the report and recommend that that consideration is given to;

- i. Training being made compulsory in the future for drivers on school transport routes for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND); and

	ii. That the Panel to be kept informed of progress made on the implementation of the SEND strategy.	
28.	<u>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY WORKPLAN AND THE COUNCIL'S FORWARD PLAN OF KEY DECISIONS</u>	
	<p>The Senior Governance Officer presented the Scrutiny Work Plan that had recently been agreed by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee and the Council's Forward Plan of Key Decisions.</p> <p>RESOLVED: That the update be noted.</p>	