



West Berkshire Council

SEN and Disability Strategy for Children and Young People

2013 – 2016

DRAFT

1. Introduction

The purpose of this strategy is to set out the Council's vision for services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) over the next three years.

The strategy identifies what we consider to be current priorities for development in West Berkshire. It also sets out the ways in which we plan to meet the new legislative requirements of the Children and Families Bill, effective from September 2014, which will significantly change the way in which services are delivered to children and young people with SEN and disabilities and their families.

Our aims are to enable children and young people with SEND to achieve the best possible life outcomes, including

- academic achievement in line with their potential
- having the skills to live as independently as possible
- having access to paid employment wherever possible
- having friends and relationships and belonging to their communities

This strategy links to the Council Plan, the Education Service Plan, the Schools Accessibility Strategy, the Adult Social Care Strategy, the Policy for Supporting Adults with a Learning Disability and the Health and Wellbeing Strategy.

2. Key Principles

The strategy is underpinned by the following key principles which inform the way in which we strive to work with children and families.

We will always treat children, parents and families with respect, listen to their views and work together in partnership.

We will fully involve children and families in decisions which are made about them.

We will have high expectations and aspirations for what children and young people with SEND can achieve.

We will work collaboratively across teams and with other agencies to provide a joined up response to children's and families' needs.

We will develop the staff working with children with SEND to ensure they have the skills to deliver high quality support.

We will promote equality of opportunity for children and young people with SEND to ensure they have access to the same opportunities as their peers.

We will aim to intervene early when a special educational need or disability is identified.

We will aim wherever possible to support children to remain at home and within their local communities.

3. Services for children with SEN and disabilities in West Berkshire: where are we now?

Since West Berkshire Council became a unitary authority in 1998, there have been a significant number of developments in the provision of services for children with SEN and disabilities. It is timely to review these achievements as we are about to embark on a major programme of change to implement the SEN and disability reforms in the Children and Families Bill. The following are examples of service developments. This list is not exhaustive.

- New resourced units have been set up in mainstream schools for children with autistic spectrum disorder (ASD) and for children with hearing impairment, to enhance the pattern of resourced provision already in place.
- A specialist resource for children with sensory impairment has been established at Brookfields Special School.
- Opportunities for inclusion have been enhanced through colocation of The Castle School's nursery with Victoria Park Nursery and colocation of its Post 16 Department at Newbury College.
- A comprehensive SEN training programme for schools is in place including support with implementation of the Equality Act.
- Schools have access to a range of support services including the Educational Psychology Service, Special Needs Support Team, ASD Service, Sensory Service, Language and Literacy Centres, Behaviour Support Team and the Specialist Inclusion Support Service (SISS). These services are still offered free of charge so that children have equal access regardless of the school's ability to pay.
- Speech therapy and occupational therapy services for children in schools have increased to meet rising demand and specialist teachers are working jointly with therapists to support children in school and deliver training.
- Young children with SEN and disabilities are well supported through the Pre School Teacher Support Service.
- The Early Support Programme (an approach to working with children with complex needs and their families) has been trialled with young children, with positive results, and the Early Support approach is being extended to

older children. The Early Support approach is consistent with restorative approaches which are being promoted in West Berkshire.

- A significant number of staff who work with children with SEND have been trained in key working, both within the Council and in other agencies, and are starting to use these approaches.
- The SEN and Learning Support Teams were combined with the Disabled Children's Team in 2009 to create an integrated education and social care team, providing opportunities for better joint working.
- The Castlegate Centre, which provides short breaks for children with disabilities, is jointly commissioned by the Council and the Health Service
- There has been a significant increase in the number and range of short breaks opportunities.
- The number of families receiving Direct Payments has increased and Personal Budgets are now being piloted, to provide further choice and control.
- A counselling service, specifically for parents of children with disabilities (SNACS) has been set up.
- Person Centred Planning approaches have been introduced in the two special schools, with very positive feedback from parents and professionals.
- The West Berkshire Parent Partnership Service, Parent2Parent, provides a range of services to parents / carers of children with SEND, including independent advice, information and training.
- Both special schools have had new build Post 16 facilities which has improved their facilities for children with complex needs.
- The special school funding system has been redesigned to resource special schools to take children with more complex needs.
- Access to the physical environment of mainstream schools has improved through a programme of access works.
- Work has been done to improve transition processes, including creation of a Virtual Transition Team to ensure joint planning takes place. A Multi Agency Transition Protocol is in place.
- Work has taken place with Newbury College to develop a new course for 2013 which will enable more young people to have their needs met locally.
- The number of disabled young people who are NEET (not in education, employment or training) is reducing. Work experience opportunities have increased and there are initiatives to improve access to employment, notably Project Search, a partnership between Brookfields School, Reading College, the Royal Berkshire Hospital and West Berkshire Council.
- An independent travel training programme for children with SEN and disabilities has been set up, LIFT (Learning Independence for Travel).
- A new service for young people with severe Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties, Engaging Potential, has been set up and is achieving a good success rate in getting previously disengaged young people in to

education and employment. The service was provided with new premises in September 2012.

- Performance on completion of statutory assessments of special educational needs within the required timescales is very high.
- The number of cases which are referred to the SEN Tribunal because the parents and the Local Authority are not in agreement is very low.
- Children's Services now sits with Adult Services and Housing in the Communities Directorate, under one Director, which provides good opportunities for improving transition between children's and adults' services. A piece of work on transition has been identified in the Directorate's work programme.

4. Incidence of SEN and disability in the 0 to 25 population in West Berkshire

In autumn 2012 there were 3376 children in the 0 to 19 age group who were identified as having special educational needs. 2618 of these were at School Action or School Action Plus and 758 had a Statement of Special Educational Needs.

Trends in recent years have shown that numbers at School Action are going down, possibly as a result of improved strategies employed by schools to raise the attainment of low achieving pupils.

Numbers at School Action Plus and numbers of statemented pupils have remained fairly static. However, within the latter two groups we are seeing increased complexity of need. More young children with profound disabilities are surviving, so there is a "bulge" of very complex children coming through the system. In addition, the rate of diagnosis of autism has increased dramatically. By way of illustration, in 2005 there were 100 children in West Berkshire mainstream schools diagnosed with autism. By January 2013 this had risen to 458. There has been no corresponding reduction in numbers of children with autism attending our special schools, so overall numbers have increased significantly. This level of increase is broadly in line with national trends, although there is some evidence of higher incidence of autism in the Thames valley area. Children with autism now represent by far the highest proportion of children with statements (35%).

64% of statemented children attend mainstream schools and 36% are in specialist provision. There has been a slight increase over the last five years in the percentage of statemented pupils placed in mainstream schools and a slight reduction in the percentage placed in specialist provision (62% mainstream/ 38% specialist in 2008 compared to 64% / 36% currently) but this is not significant. Numbers of children placed in independent and non maintained schools have reduced from 66 in 2008 to 55 currently.

The number of children known to the Disabled Children's Team is currently 186. This includes 125 cases with active social work involvement plus 61 cases known to the Occupational Therapists in the team. The vast majority of children on DCT's caseload have a statement of special educational needs, apart from very

young children who are likely to be statemented in the future but have not yet had a statutory assessment.

Local Authorities have taken on financial responsibility for students in FE colleges who have special educational needs. Colleges, like schools, fund children with mild to moderate SEN from their own budgets and the Local Authority provides additional “top up” funding for students with high level needs. There are approximately 100 West Berkshire young people with a high level of SEN in the 16 to 25 age group who attend local or specialist FE Colleges.

5. Identification of our priorities: what the data is telling us

We are able to build on a strong foundation as we move forward with the development of services for children and young people with SEN and disabilities. In order to identify what our priorities should now be, we have analysed data which is available to us and we have conducted a consultation with parents and other stakeholders. The information we have gleaned through data analysis and consultation is telling us that whilst there have been many positive developments, there are still areas to be addressed. These are summarised below:

- (i) The gap in achievement at Key Stage 2 between children with SEN and their peers has narrowed but is still too wide at 52.1% (2012 results).
- (ii) Some mainstream schools make excellent provision for SEN but parents report variable experiences and some schools require more support to come up to the standard of the best.
- (iii) There are specific demographic pressures in relation to increases in children with very profound and complex needs and also children diagnosed with ASD. The number of children diagnosed with ASD has more than quadrupled in eight years and this dramatic increase is putting pressure on services.
- (iv) The number of external placements is reducing, but we are still over reliant on external provision, in particular for children with ASD and hearing impairment.
- (v) There is also a relatively high demand in West Berkshire for placements in independent specialist FE Colleges, suggesting there are gaps in and / or lack of parental confidence in SEN provision in local FE colleges.
- (vi) Parents report a lack of joint working between agencies in some cases and a feeling that services are not joined up
- (vii) Whilst short breaks provision has increased, there is a lack of family based respite.
- (viii) Parents find it difficult to access information about services and to understand what they are entitled to.
- (ix) Not enough young people with disabilities are getting in to paid employment and there is insufficient access to supported employment.

- (x) There is a lack of local supported living specifically for the 19 to 25 age group.
- (xi) Transition to adulthood is still seen as an area of difficulty by parents, particularly in knowing what will be available and how it can be accessed.

6. The National Context

In addition to addressing specific local needs for children with SEN and disabilities, the Council will also be required to implement the reforms required by the Children and Families Bill. The requirements of the new legislation are consistent with the way we want to develop our services in West Berkshire. By September 2014, all Local Authorities will need to have the following in place:

- Creation of a new Education, Health and Care assessment process which will be a joined up assessment process involving all three agencies. It will replace the statementing process and will also incorporate other assessments. The EHC assessment process will lead to an Education, Health and Care Plan being issued instead of a Statement of Special Educational Needs. This will be a holistic plan to meet all the young person's needs and will set out what services each agency will provide.
- All families whose child is given an Education Health and Care Plan will be given the option of a Personal Budget to purchase certain elements of their child's support, in order to give them more choice and control over how services are delivered.
- Young people will be supported through an Education Health and Care Plan beyond the age of 19 where necessary (statements currently cease at age 19) and potentially up to the age of 25 if a young person needs longer to achieve their identified outcomes.
- A "Local Offer" will need to be in place setting out all services which are available for children and young people with SEN and disabilities up to the age of 25, and how they are accessed.

The strategic priorities set out in the next section of this document reflect both identified local needs and the requirements of the Children and Families Bill.

7. Priorities

The following have been identified as five key priorities for the next three year period:

- (1) Improve multi agency working and coordination of services for children with special educational needs and disabilities**
- (2) Increase support for and involvement of parents / carers, young people and families**
- (3) Support mainstream schools to develop their SEN provision**

- (4) Develop local specialist services for children with SEN and disabilities and reduce reliance on external provision**
- (5) Improve transition to adulthood**

It should be noted that the list of activities under each key priority below is not intended to be a comprehensive list of all the activity which is required to meet the objective. There are many strategies already in place to support children with SEND and their families. Existing and ongoing services and initiatives do not need to be set out again in this strategy. What the bullet pointed lists under each priority attempt to capture are either new areas of activity or activities which require a particularly high level of focus in order that we can deliver on our current priorities.

7.1 Improve multi agency working and coordination of services for children with special educational needs and disabilities

Whilst work has taken place over the last few years to improve multi agency working through, for example, integration of SEN and Disabled Children's Teams, piloting of the Early Support approach, delivery of key worker training and closer working with Adult Social Care, we recognise that there is still more work to do. Some parents who responded to the consultation felt that agencies were still not working together as effectively as they could. A major thrust of the SEN reforms in the Children and Families Bill is to improve joint working and holistic planning for children, notably through the Education Health and Care assessment and planning processes.

We are committed to developing and improving multi agency working and coordination of services for children with SEN and disabilities and their families. We plan to do this by:

- Promoting the **Early Support approach** across all agencies working with children with SEND and their families and across all age groups / phases. This is an approach which focuses on putting families at the heart of decision making, effective coordination of services, joined up planning and key working.
- Providing **key worker training** to all staff working with children with SEND both within the Council and in other agencies.
- Allocating **identified key workers** to families of children with the most complex needs.
- Developing our new **Education Health and Care assessment and planning** process, in line with legislation, to deliver more joined up assessment and holistic planning.
- Working with Health (the Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust) to develop **integration of speech therapy, occupational therapy and physiotherapy services**, reducing duplication and creating a less complex route in to services.

- Developing **joint commissioning with Health** and a stronger focus on children with disabilities in the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.

7.2 Increase support for and involvement of parents/carers, young people and families

Services to support parents and families of children with SEN and disabilities have developed in recent years, in particular as a result of increased use of Direct Payments and a broader range of short breaks. However, parents' responses to the consultation emphasised the significant strain on families who are caring for a disabled child, so there is a need to give further consideration to the ways in which we support families.

Children are more involved in their statutory annual reviews through person centred planning approaches, which have received very positive feedback, and parents have been involved in strategic planning through representation on various strategic groups. We acknowledge, though, that there is scope for better involvement of children and parents, both in planning their own services and in local strategic planning.

We are committed to improving support for parents and carers and to increasing the involvement of parents and children.

We plan to do this by:

- Piloting **Personal Budgets** in 2013 with a view to full implementation (for families who want them) by 2014.
- Recruiting **more family based respite carers** who are able to provide short breaks for children with SEND in a family setting.
- Reviewing the **range of short breaks** available to establish what gaps still exist.
- Extending the **SNACS counselling service** for parents / carers of children with disabilities (subject to evaluation and resources).
- Increasing use by all agencies of the **Early Support information resources** for parents / carers.
- Producing the **Local Offer**, as required by the Children and Families Bill, setting out all services available locally for children with SEND and how they can be accessed
- Working with Family Voice, local voluntary groups and the Parent2Parent Service to increase **parental involvement in strategic decision making**, particularly in planning implementation of the SEND reforms in the Children and Families Bill, and ensuring that new systems are co produced with parents.
- Developing the role of the forum for children with disabilities and using it for **more systematic consultation with young people**.

7.3 Support mainstream schools to develop their SEN provision

Work has been ongoing in recent years to help mainstream schools develop their SEN provision through training and advisory support from a range of SEN support services. A comprehensive SEN training programme is in place and schools have access to a broad range of SEN support services. As an Authority we are strongly committed to enabling children with SEN and disabilities to be included in their local mainstream schools, where this is what parents want. Mainstream schools have significantly gained in experience and expertise in meeting a wider range of needs in recent years. Many offer a very high standard of support to children with SEN and disabilities.

However, one of the strongest messages from the consultation with parents was that there is still too much variation in the support offered by different mainstream schools. It is clear that some schools still need more support to offer the best possible experience to children with SEN and disabilities.

We are committed to bringing the quality of SEN provision in all mainstream schools up to a high standard.

We plan to do this by:

- Conducting an **audit of SEN training** completed by staff in schools (including accredited training) and using this data to inform the SEN training programme and to target specific schools with skills deficits.
- Aiming for all schools' Special Educational Needs Coordinators (SENCOs) to have completed the **accredited SENCO training** programme.
- Strengthening the SEN and Equality Act content of **Headteacher and Newly Qualified Teacher** induction and training.
- Providing training for schools on the **Early Support approach, key working and effective working with parents.**
- Reviewing and extending **training opportunities for teaching assistants**, as this group of staff plays a key role in promoting the attainment and progress of children with SEN.
- Monitoring the difference in achievement between children with SEN and those who do not have SEN (known as "**the SEN gap**") by individual school and targeting support accordingly.
- Promote schools' knowledge of and **take up of SEN support services.**

7.4 Develop local specialist services for children with SEN and disabilities and reduce reliance on external provision

It has been a continual focus of our SEN strategy to develop local services to meet as many needs as possible within the Authority. A range of new provision has been successfully developed over time and the number of external placements has reduced. It is not anticipated that West Berkshire, as a small unitary authority, will ever be totally self sufficient in this respect. There will always be a need for a small number of children who require highly specialist services to be placed in out of area provision. There is scope, however, to make

further enhancement to local services and offer more opportunities for children to be supported through local services.

The two groups of children who are most heavily represented in independent and non maintained school placements are children with Autistic Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and children with hearing impairment (HI), followed by children with Behavioural, Emotional and Social Difficulties (BESD).

We are committed to providing as many services as possible for children with SEND and their families within our local community.

We plan to achieve this by:

- Reviewing and enhancing our **primary provision for children with hearing impairment.**
- Establishing **new resourced units for children with ASD** attached to a mainstream primary school and a mainstream secondary school in the centre / west of West Berkshire, to complement the ASD resourced units in Theale.
- Considering how to improve provision for secondary age **pupils with very high anxiety / school refusers** (including those with ASD), possibly through the Pupil Referral Unit (PRU) Service.
- Developing the PRU Service to provide for more **statemented children with BESD.**
- Enhancing provision in our special schools for children with **ASD and highly challenging behaviour.**
- Reviewing the age profile of children with very complex needs and the **capacity of our special schools** to meet future demand.
- Reviewing the need for / viability of **residential provision** attached to our special schools.
- Working with local FE Colleges to develop **more local Post 19 courses** for high needs learners.
- Working with Adult Social Care to develop **local supported living** arrangements specifically for the 19 to 25 age group, to complement local Post 19 college courses.

7.5 Improve transition to adulthood

There has been a lot of positive work done in recent years to improve transition to adulthood, particularly around improvement of processes, data sharing and joint planning, as well as the introduction of person centred planning at transition reviews and enhanced opportunities to access work experience and supported internships. The number of young people with disabilities who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) is reducing.

Nevertheless, parents still identify the transition to adulthood as one of their greatest areas of concern, particularly the transition from Children's Services to Adult Social Care and from school to college.

In addition, Local Authorities are currently in the process of taking over significant responsibilities from the Education Funding Agency and the Raising Participation Partnership to commission, fund and monitor placements for High Needs Students in FE Colleges. This is an area in which all Local Authorities will need to develop their capacity and expertise.

We are committed to improving the experience of transition to adulthood for young people with SEND and their families and to improving life outcomes for young people.

We plan to do this by:

- Conducting a **full cross service review of transition** to adulthood for young people with disabilities to determine what structural or other changes would help to improve the process. (This is already in the Adult Social Care work programme).
- Promoting better and earlier joint working between Children's and Adults' Services and setting out roles and responsibilities of all agencies in a revised **Multi Agency Transition Protocol**.
- Developing **Person Centred Planning** approaches in mainstream schools.
- Developing the **partnership with local FE Colleges** including sharing of expertise / services between school and college sectors.
- Working with Health to clarify **pathways from paediatric to adult health services**.
- Working with the Raising Participation Partnership, FE Colleges and other agencies to **promote employment** of young people with SEND, including access to supported employment and job coaching.

8. Implementation

Implementation of this Strategy will be supported through the Council Plan, the Education Service Plan, the Children's Services Plan and the Adult Social Care Plan. These plans include a number of relevant performance indicators including:

Reduction of the SEN attainment gap

Introduction of Personal Budgets for children with disabilities

Creation of new services for children with complex needs

Reduction in out of area placements

Reduction in numbers of young disabled people who are NEET

In addition, implementation will be supported through team plans and performance management objectives of relevant staff.

9. Monitoring and Review

This Strategy will be reviewed and refreshed on an annual basis. The first review will be due in summer 2014.