

Health and Wellbeing Board

Agenda Item 10

26 January 2021

## Report of SEND Local Area Improvement Programme

### 1. Background

- 1.1. Following the SEND Local Area Inspection of Walsal Council by Ofsted and the CQC it was found that there were 9 areas of concern and that a Written Statement of Action (WSoA) was needed from the Council. The Statement of Action was deemed 'fit for purpose' by Ofsted in October 2019 and was published on the council's website: <http://go.walsall.gov.uk/education/sendi>.
- 1.2. The actions within the WSoA have been split across four workstreams: Co-production and Engagement, Improving Outcomes, EHCP Assessment Processes and Joint Commissioning.
- 1.3. A Local Area Improvement Board (LAIB) was established to oversee the implementation of the WSoA and meets monthly. The LAIB is independently chaired by Vicki Whittaker-Stokes – a parent and foster parent of children with SEND who has SEND needs herself and vice chaired by Teresa Tunnell, deputy chair of FACE – Walsall's parent and carer advocacy group for SEND. The board is also attended by the workstream leads, the relevant strategic leads from the LA, CCG, the chair of the Strategic Education and Inclusion Board (SEIB) and the portfolio holder for Education and Skills.

### 2. Governance

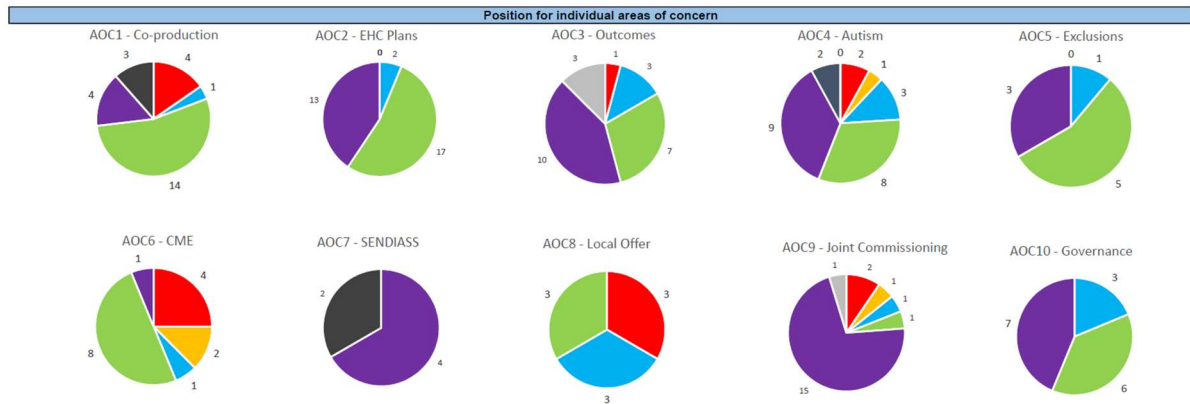
- 2.1. Over the past 12 months, the governance in relation to the WSoA has been reviewed and refined and continues to be improved.
- 2.2. The workstream leads along with other key operational leads who work in areas outlined in the statement of action meet on a monthly basis to discuss in detail progress of key actions, next steps and to resolve any issues in relation to the development of SEND services and the implementation of the WSoA.

- 2.3. The four workstream leads then prepare a highlight report for the LAIB outlining key achievements, key areas of concern and a general update. These reports are corroborated and supported by more detailed documents and an overview from the Programme Lead.
- 2.4. A recent Governance Review of the Board which included interviews with key members about how well they thought was working and what could be improved, identified a number of recommendations which were approved by the Board at the December meeting – these recommendations will be implemented over the coming months. One of those recommendations was to strengthen the links between the LAIB and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- 2.5. Walsall's progress in delivering the statement of action and the effectiveness of the Board are monitored by the Department for Education (DfE) and Care Quality Commission (CQC) on a quarterly basis via their attendance at the LAIB. The outcome of these monitoring visits are shared via a letter from Pat Tait, our DfE lead and have always been positive, however, they also feature a number of recommendations for further improvement which are acted on between monitoring visits.

### 3. Progress against the WSoA and risk management.

- 3.1. Significant progress has been made against the actions outlined in the WSoA with 135 (73%) of the actions either completed or completed and embedded. 9% of actions are beyond milestone and these are being closely monitored via a risk log with assurances provided to the LAIB that there are mitigating actions in place. Where there are blockers to progress, these are discussed at LAIB with recommendations made in relation to next actions as to how issues may be resolved.

Not Started	Beyond Milestone	Delayed	Paused - Covid Exception	In Progress	Complete	Complete and Embedded	Closed	
0	16	4	4	18	69	66	7	Current Action RAG Ratings
Not Started	Beyond Milestone	Delayed	Paused - Covid Exception	In Progress	Complete	Complete and Embedded	Closed	
2	14	3	0	27	89	42	7	Previous Period Action RAG Ratings (October Board)



3.2. In addition to risks relating to specific actions, overarching risks to the programme are identified and raised with the Board where necessary. A recent risk was in relation to the capacity of Health colleagues to contribute to key areas of work – following a discussion at Board and the commitment from strategic leads to seek and implement solutions there has been a significant improvement in this area.

#### 4. Key areas of progress

- 4.1. Covid-19 has caused a number of challenges in relation to the implementation of actions and the drive to improve the SEND offer for children and families in Walsall. Despite this, significant improvement has been made in a number of key areas.
- 4.2. Our Inclusion Strategy and Accessibility Strategies have now been written in co-production and consultation with partners and parents and carers. These have now been finalised and are due to be finally signed off by the LAIB at the February board.
- 4.3. We have also recently completed a public consultation on our revised high needs funding formula. High needs funding is accessed by schools based on the assessed needs to pupils. Now that the consultation is completed, the funding formula will be finalised and implemented.

#### 5. Co-production and engagement

- 5.1. Co-production and engagement has improved over the past 12 months. As well as the LAIB being chaired by the deputy chair of FACE, regular Zoom sessions are also in place for parents, organised by FACE and the lead for co-production and engagement and attended by professionals from the council or partner agencies depending on the theme. Generally, two sessions on each theme are

held, one in the morning and one in the evening across a couple of weeks to maximise the opportunity for parents to be involved.

5.2. A survey was recently carried out with parents and carers of children with SEND in Walsall asking them for their feedback in relation to EHCP processes and this evidenced some positive feedback:

- 209 (69%) felt fully involved in EHCP process
- 136 (46%) felt child or children fully involved in process
- 143 (49%) felt there were opportunities for child or children's voice to be heard
- 219 (73%) had EHC process explained to them
- 225 (75%) felt they were able to ask questions throughout the process
- 201 (67%) felt their views were considered during process
- 145 (49%) felt their child or children's views were considered during process
- 202 (68%) felt their expertise and experience were valued throughout process
- 214 (78%) thought that the EHCP clearly set out support to be put in place

5.3. An action plan has been developed to take forward the learning from the survey and implement further improvements.

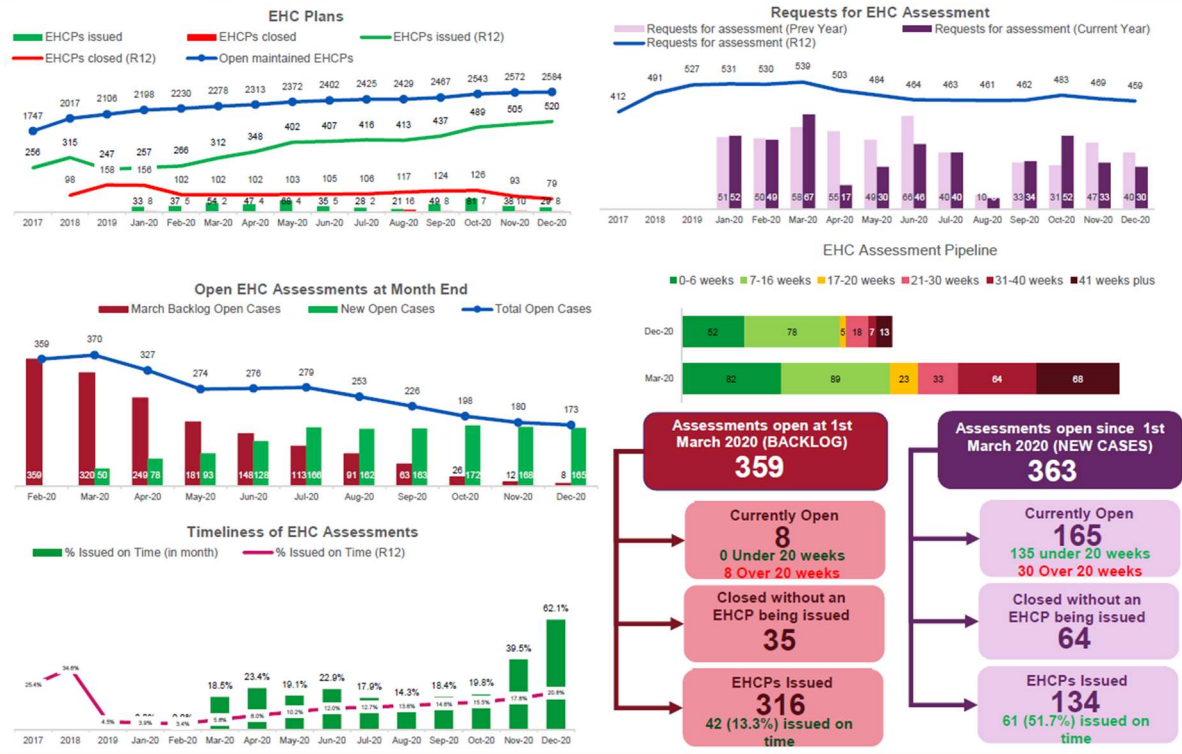
5.4. The local offer has been thoroughly reviewed with much of the information updated. Work is now taking place to implement a revised look and feel to improve navigability and ease of use.

## **6. Education, Health and Care Plan Assessment Processes**

6.1. One of the key areas for improvement identified in the WSoA was in relation to Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) Assessment processes. Timeliness of EHCP assessments was outside statutory requirements (20 weeks) and the inspection highlighted that there was not clear information for parents and carers about what the process entailed.

6.2. A large backlog of assessments was identified and at the beginning of March 2020 and additional resources were put in place to clear the backlog. This work was completed at the end of October 2020. Throughout the year, both the backlog and new requests for assessment were closely monitored with a detailed dashboard and report being presented at each LAIB for discussion. Now that the backlog has been cleared, timeliness of newer assessments is rapidly improving.

**EHCP Timeliness Recovery Plan Dashboard**



6.3. An electronic, web based system for supporting EHCP assessments has been implemented (EHC Hub). This was piloted over the summer and implemented for all new cases from 01<sup>st</sup> November. It will now start to be rolled out for use with EHCPs that are being reviewed.

6.4. An Operational Partnership Group has been set up which meets monthly. Part of the role of this group is to ensure that EHCP assessment processes are joined up and to also undertake audits and dip samples of assessments, advices and plans to ensure that improving performance is underpinned by improving quality.

**7. Future Work**

7.1. The implementation of the WSoA is due to continue until September 2021–discussions are now beginning of what the future of SEND improvement will look like beyond the life of the WSoA. Between now and September, there will be an ongoing and continued focus on implementing the remaining actions and ensuring that those that have been completed are embedded in the day to day way of working.

7.2. As the result of the inspection in 2019 was a WSoA, there will be a requirement for a further inspection. This was due to take place at some point from October



**Walsall Council**



2021 – however, due to Covid-19 this is likely to be delayed as full inspections have been paused since March 2020. However, Ofsted are undertaking voluntary assurance visits to focus on the Local Area’s response to supporting children and young people with SEND through the Covid-19 process, plus another key area of focus. Walsall have volunteered to take part in an assurance visit. This will take place at some point from March onwards, with the specific date to be agreed with Ofsted in the coming weeks.

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