

Item No.	Classification: Open	Date: 8 February 2012	Meeting Name: Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub- Committee
Report title:		Supplementary evidence for review of parenting support	
From:		Strategic Director of Children's Services	

SUMMARY

1. The Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Sub-Committee is conducting a review of support for parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disability. It heard evidence from parents and stakeholders on 19 October and 28 November 2011.
2. This report sets out supplementary information in response to the evidence received by the sub-committee, to support the development of its report and recommendations. The substance of the evidence has been grouped under the following headings.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

National and local policy landscape

3. The vision of services locally for children with special educational needs and disability (SEND) is governed by the Children and Young People's Plan (CYPP). This includes the priorities 'Independence for children and young people with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, and their families' and 'Schools and settings are able to meet their students' needs'. These priorities commit partners to commission services that support universal settings to be equipped to meet their students' and families' needs, and also to build the capacity of children, young people and families to live independent lives.
4. The national policy drive of successive governments is towards greater integration across agencies, with services working holistically and seamlessly around children and families. The local authority is committed to transforming services to achieve these improved outcomes.

KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

SEND services review

5. The department is committed to continuous service improvement and learning from the experiences of service users. In September 2011, in reviewing progress against the CYPP, the Children and Families' Trust agreed a review of SEND provision in response to issues raised by families, professionals and carers as well as the changes in national policy and funding. The scope of the review will cover many of the themes seen in the evidence submitted to the scrutiny sub-committee. Broadly, this service transformation review will cover three areas:

1. Simpler, more transparent access to information and support

a) Access to information

6. We recognise that parents need clear accessible information – this was highlighted in the short breaks services consultation as well as the evidence heard by the scrutiny sub-committee.
7. There is a wide range of information and support available for parents. The SEN team routinely surveys parents' experience of information sources, and generally finds good levels of satisfaction, with 80% of parents rating as excellent or good the way their caseworker keeps them informed. The authority is committed to simplifying what information is on offer and how families can access it. Over the coming months, we will review existing information points and material, and consult families on what improvements they would like to see, with a view to streamlining where possible.

b) Access to support and identifying families

8. The department has good systems for indentifying families in need and how they are subsequently supported by different agencies. However the SEND review will also consider how existing systems can be improved and early help provided. This is in the context of transformation of early help provision to ensure help is targeted at those who need it most through using resources such as children's centres.
9. We believe families should be able to access services in the way that best suits them, so we are working with partners and voluntary sector partners, to develop a 'single point of access', which will make it easier and quicker for families to receive the support they need. The common assessment framework (CAF) is an assessment tool designed to support the early identification of children with additional needs and reduce the number of times that parents have to tell their story. As this tool is increasingly used by agencies it will ensure that detailed assessments are completed more quickly.

c) Statutory assessments

10. The department recognises parents and carers' frustrations about the length of time assessment can take. The SEND review will include assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of the systems and procedures for assessing and commissioning support packages, and in ensuring that decisions continue to be taken transparently. It will set out how education, health and social care services can work together more effectively to provide holistic assessments and more effective help to families.

d) School travel assistance policy

11. The review and consultation around the school travel assistance policy last year was highlighted in the evidence to the scrutiny sub-committee. This sought to introduce a more transparent assessment process, and included widespread consultation with families and key stakeholders over several weeks.
12. The aim of the consultation was to ensure that eligibility criteria were fair and would enable the authority to ensure that the limited resources available for this

service were targeted effectively to children eligible to receive it. The new policy increases the options available to families and enables support to be targeted at the individual needs of the child.

2. Greater choice and control

13. Personal budgets and direct payments have the potential to profoundly affect the relationship families have with agencies. They put families in the driving seat, and free them to use their resources to best meet their need – whether that is to purchase support from an authority or voluntary sector service, employ their own personalised support or fund other activities. Personal budgets also make greater use of the family’s own resources, and give families the freedom to access support from their peers as and how they wish.
14. A central driver in the SEND review is increasing families’ choice and control over the support they receive. Services recognise that parents and carers are the ‘experts’ on their child, and seek to ensure there is good involvement of parents and carers in planning and evaluating services.

3. Meeting families’ needs more effectively

15. Outcomes for children with SEND are strong in Southwark, with more pupils with SEND attaining expected attainment levels at KS2 and GCSE than the national averages. The percentage of pupils making two or more levels of progress in English and maths between KS1 and KS2 is the second highest in the country.
16. Feedback from parents, carers and young people highlights that they want fairer access to universal services. The authority recognises this can be improved, and is continuing to expand the range of services on offer with partners. The recent short breaks services statement, for example, highlights the wide range of universal support already available, and is helping to promote the local offer to families and to identify gaps which services are working to fill.
17. The transition to providing early help more effectively means the authority is reviewing the balance of provision across the borough, to ensure it meets needs. This is about developing ways of working with partners which give families more choice and control about the support they receive.

AUDIT TRAIL

Lead Officer	Rory Patterson	
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CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / CABINET MEMBER		
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Finance Director	No	No
Cabinet Member	No	No
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