

BRIGHTON & HOVE CITY COUNCIL
SCRUTINY PANEL ON SERVICES FOR CHILDREN WITH AUTISM

12.30pm 15 OCTOBER 2013

COUNCIL CHAMBER, HOVE TOWN HALL

DRAFT MINUTES

Present: Councillor Jarrett, Pissaridou and Wealls

Also in attendance:

Other Members present:

PART ONE

25. PROCEDURAL BUSINESS

Apologies from Rosie Moore, Co-optee.

There was no reason to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

26. CHAIR'S COMMUNICATIONS

Thank you all for attending. Welcome to this information-gathering meeting of the Scrutiny Panel looking at services for children with autism.

As you know, we have had two previous meetings where we heard from support groups and parent/carers. We are now keen to hear your views and experiences. I will ask you each to say who you are and then speak for around 10 minutes and then the Panel will ask any questions.

27. DRAFT MINUTES FROM THE MEETING ON 17 SEPTEMBER 2013

The minutes are still in draft as there are still some comments outstanding. There were no amendments from the Panel.

28. TO HEAR FROM WITNESSES

There was a change to the published agenda and Jenny Brickell was not present.

Lalli Howell, SEN Pathfinder (LH)

LH has been an autism specialist for 30 years. She was invited by the Department of Education to take part in the Pathfinder project. The Government published a Green Paper in 2011 which stated that local authorities needed to work in partnership and LH firmly believes in this. Parents are the experts and to go forward local authorities must work with parents. They are in the second phase of the project and working with 50 families. 60% of these children have autism or significant communication difficulties linked to their disability. What is suggested for children with ASC is valid for most children they work with. LH believes that one of the most effective interventions is working with families. Sometimes you need to look at the school and home environment to see where the key pressure points are. One child described their days as “climbing Everest every day”.

They are now looking to work with an additional 115 families – the target the Government has set is 165 by July 2014. They are working with children between 0 and 25 and if any families wish to be involved please contact LH. The new project will involve new Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) which views the child in a more holistic way. In the last 18 months, LH has felt that families are getting more choice and control and there is a better way of working in partnership with families.

The SEN pathfinder will be running new surgery drop-ins in King’s House once a month for families to talk to the SEN team. This happened in the past for families with ASC but stopped. The local authority has an unfair bad reputation but the goodwill is there and there are some great people.

The SEN pathfinder is also looking at personal budgets which give families choice over how money is spent.

There is a big piece of work going on in working with schools. They are saying to schools let’s stop and reflect - not just give the knee-jerk reaction that there is no money. It must be about the needs of the child. It is not all about the curriculum but about giving children the opportunity to feel happy at school. Schools need to be flexible – there are lots of examples of a SENCO who has said yes to small changes and they have made a huge difference. Schools do have resources and we need to work with schools.

Sometimes the problems are not to do with education and you need to sit down and see where the problems are. If someone is too anxious they can’t learn. One example was a child who was very anxious and they discovered that the problem they had was in their housing. This can only be identified by sitting down with the family and taking a holistic approach. The housing issue was solved and six months later the child was learning well. Another example was of a child who hated the reading scheme in school but once the books were replaced with books about dinosaurs, the child went up two levels.

They are talking to colleagues about working together – one of the challenges is to sort out the communication channels.

Q – Is the drop in surgery for all parents? Can it be expanded?

LH – It is for all parents and is being advertised in the schools bulletin. It will initially be one and a half hour coffee morning/afternoon but they would like to expand it if there was a need.

Q – What is the background to the pathfinder? What are the resources and how did you recruit people?

LH - The Pathfinder was already established when LH joined. There were initial discussions with SENCOs and Heads of Special Schools who identified families by looking at where the needs were for those schools. LH met with schools and 4 families per school from 16 schools (some have dropped out now). Together with the families and Amaze and health care professionals they designed the EHCP. LH is the lead on the Pathfinder and works with a parent from Amaze one day a week and one parent 4 hours a week. She is scaling up the work. By September 2014 the EHCP will be statutory (statements are still in place now).

Q – Parents need to be seen as part of the solution not part of the problem. How can we change attitudes?

LH – This is a huge culture change (although it shouldn't be). They are currently running one training session a fortnight for colleagues in education, health and social care. Last week they did a training session with CAMHS, transition team, adult social care and the educational psychologists. The SEN team talks regularly to schools.

Q – Are personal budgets seen as part of the solution?

LH – Yes in that it is to do with money but it is also to do with being flexible, looking outside the box. They are looking at children with SEN in the mainstream who have additional funding (around £6,000) that the school receives to cater for that child. Currently the school gets this money but they want it to be used in consultation with the families and not just the schools decision how it is spent.

1-2-1 support is not always beneficial – schools need to be more creative. A social skills deficit is at the core of ASC and 1-2-1 support can isolate a child and create a reliance on that adult. There are more effective ways to help a child than 1-2-1 with a TA.

Q – What about educating children about children with ASC?

LH – The ASCSS is constantly training young people about autism. LH did one powerpoint with a girl with autism and she controlled the slides and put the powerpoint together. As a result the school identified two other children with ASC who had slipped through the net but got flagged up as a result of the presentation. This is a very successful intervention – children explaining to other children - and very effective in tackling bullying. But it needs to be done more often.

Q – It sounds like an excellent project that can change attitudes. Is it an ongoing programme rather than part of the Pathfinder?

LH – It is embedded in the ASCSS practice. You need parental permission and some parents need persuading.

Mary MacPhail, Interim Head of ASC Support Service (MM)

MM - The ASCSS offers this to schools – either to specific children or the whole class and it can be used with very small children. It can also be done through story-telling or powerpoints. This intervention is most successful when it is about one child. They might not use the language of ASC or Aspergers but talk about one particular child and what they do well, what their challenges are and what you can do to help. In some secondary schools they do whole

year group awareness of autism and how it impacts on a child. Sometimes an individual child will stand and talk about their lives. This intervention usually comes about if a person is asking a lot of questions about their differences or having difficulties. The parents have to agree. Some parents aren't ready for this.

Q – This is about changing culture. What will bring on this step-change? Will the EHCP help?

LH – What is needed is training in a systematic way. Starting with the SENCOs who feel pressurised. They need to get the message that the focus shouldn't be on league tables. SENCOs are great and we need to use their expertise. The Pathfinder is looking at expanding School Councils because children often have the answers and we need children to be more involved.

Q – Can the ASCSS be more proactive and tell schools they need to co-operate?

MM - The ASCSS would love to be more proactive than we already are, ultimately we cannot make a school do something. Some teachers don't believe in our suggested interventions and see it as pandering to the child, for instance using their special interest or giving them learning breaks. Training is key.

LH – There must be a way of enabling young people themselves to talk to teachers, for example, a child saying I panic every day when I am faced with a blank page, can you put three lines on it please telling me what I need to do.

Q – ASCSS is invited in by the school – how can you increase take up? There needs to be consistently good practice and we need to find ways to get all schools on board to raise standards. Are all schools getting involved? What is the most effective route to getting people involved in the Pathfinder?

LH – You need to start with the Head because they hold all the powerful tools. There are regular Headteachers conferences and the messages need to go there. SENCOs are being trained but it needs to be relentless as people change jobs, move on etc.

Q – Is the training regulated? For child protection training there are registers of who has been trained and when.

MM – The ASCSS usually contact schools when we are made aware of a new diagnosis and arrange an initial observation and meeting. The ASCSS did a questionnaire in September and one of the questions was around training in schools. We have details of who has attended training but schools also keep this information. IDP was set up a few years ago and all schools were offered it but there were some that didn't take it up. We are involved with the team looking at tier training. This is coming out of the SEN partnership strategy and part of the project is to look at what training there is. ASCSS don't offer specific training to Governors but would welcome the chance to do so. They send a leaflet to schools on what training we are providing each term and offer training to TAs on our regular visits to schools. It would be good to see training for the lead SEN Governors.

Q – There are also LA Governors. All nominated SEN and LA Governors could be asked to pursue the option of ASC training.

Mary MacPhail

MM - The ASCSS was set up in 1999 as part of Downs Park School and they still operate out of Downs Park, although they are running out of space which is a little unsettling. There have been lots of issues around line-management and who is guiding the service. There is no Service Level Agreement (SLA) but the Head of Downs Park is MM's line manager. The last Head of the ASCSS stepped down in June 2013 and MM has been Interim Head since then.

The service started out as 2 F/T teachers. It is now 4 P/T posts which equates to 3FT. There is also a P/T administrator and P/T parent liaison post. Initially it was the ASCSS teachers who identified the need for this parent Liaison post and it was funded by the revenue from courses. More recently, the LA funded this post but this stopped in Dec 2012 and there was no parent liaison for this year but there is someone now in post.

The ASCSS has 238 pupils on its books – a huge number for 3 F/T people. They try to review each pupil every term. The previous Head of service tried to manage the caseload by allocating cases as active or non-active. This needs to be tightened up a little. They are working with 43 primary and 9 secondary schools at the moment. They were working with pre-schools but the funding has been delayed but may yet come through. They do work with PRESENS helping with children who have a diagnosis.

What is working well? The recent questionnaire sent out to 64 schools has only had 31% response rate. The results show that: 95% are satisfied and feel supported by the ASCSS; 81% feel there is a good awareness of ASC among their staff; 85% feel the ASCSS helps them have a good relationship with parents and carers and 95% have received some training from ASCSS in the last two years, Whole staff training is seen to be the most beneficial training. 88% think the ASCSS support inclusion.

It is great to have the parent liaison role (Alicen Haire – AH) and this needs to be developed. The coffee mornings have resumed and it was good to see parents they hadn't seen for a while. AH has been in contacting parents and linking with Amaze and meeting parents in schools. AH has also been to people's homes to help, for example, with a boy struggling with transition.

They are working on a draft development plan and looking at the SEN partnership and then see where the ASCSS's role sits. They are looking at the protocols and procedures and what is driving these.

The challenges include implementing the development plan and ensuring it is embedded into the draft autism plan, Early Help Partnership Strategy and SEN Partnership Strategy; raising parental confidence and looking at why parents have concerns.

Q – Who has overall view of all the strategies and is pulling it all together? Can ASCSS see how they fit in?

MM – ASCSS are working with the SEN team led by Regan Delf. Next week there is a training day looking at working together. They are discussing how the ASCSS fit into the goals and bigger picture – this has been missing previously and it is fantastic it is happening.

LH – The meeting next week is all about how it all makes sense and how to develop good pathways.

MM – Another challenge is how to manage the increasing caseload without compromising the service. How can they broaden their remit? They are a small team but a very effective one. The ASCSS used to work on building schools capability to make sure schools can do it themselves but this has been taking too long. Some schools are good, but not all.

LH – At the start of the ASCSS there were 2 F/T staff with 50 people on the caseload. Now there is 238 caseload and 3 F/T staff!

MM – There are some areas of good practice. Where there is a key worker who oversees what happens and communicates well within the school team, including parents and the ASCSS. A good communication system is very important. On one recent occasion they were asked to help a TA plan a programme of social skills for a child which they did then got an email from the SENCO saying the teacher didn't want to do it. Communication and social skill strategies must be part of good work. Good practice also involves regular target setting evaluating what is working and going forward. Close working with parents is also key.

Q – Can parents go direct to ASCSS?

MM – This hasn't been encouraged in the past because we are often out in schools but it would be great and now we have our Parent liaison that can happen more. In some schools, the Headteacher wouldn't recognise MM although she has been working with the school for years. In others this is far from the case. Some parents do not get the ASCSS reports although they are supposed to be given to them by the schools. There is a SLA with schools which we are revising and this will clarify what schools need to pass on to parents.

The Autism Education Trust is DfE funded and has brought forward tier training. There are also 2 great resources: the Autism Education Trust Standards and Competency Framework for raising competency in schools. It is an audit which will help identify where schools need to improve and what they are doing well; and the NICE guidelines on the management and support of children and young people on the autism spectrum. These are also about the environment and working in partnership.

The ASCSS would like parents to come in and help with training (some parents have found training patronising in the past).

Q – Can you go into the universities teacher training sessions and do a module on ASC?

MM- This has been offered before but the ASCSS hasn't been asked to provide any training.

LH – LH was part of this in 2007. It was only half a day though and felt more like a box-ticking exercise. It is essential that it is part of teacher training courses and should be at least a week long.

Q – Can we look at designing a module? The LA is a huge employer in the city could we put an LA stamp on it?

Q – It has been suggested in the past that the ASCSS was an advocate for schools. Are you an advocate for the child or the school?

MM – ASCSS is an advocate for the child not the school. MM's experience is that they are more likely to be an advocate for the parent, not the school. We are an advocate for the child first and the parents will help us with this. Often children manage in school but things come out at home.

Q- We need a robust, independent, non-scary complaints process. How can we give families a robust complaints process?

MM – The ASCSS are looking at how to measure their performance and improvements. They will be providing opportunities to feedback – anonymously or not. Parents can really work with the ASCSS.

Q – Do you work with CAMHS?

MM – Not really directly. CAHMS contact ASCSS post-diagnosis and forward paperwork

LH – ASCSS must work with CAMHS especially as children approach secondary school. Of the most successful interventions was a project on social skills run with CAHMS on recreating the home environment.

Q – A recommendation from the Panel may be that there must be a more structured way of working between ASCSS and CAHMS.

Q – Should Ofsted be looking more closely at how schools are dealing with SEN and more specifically ASC?

MM – The Ofsted report on Downs Park did look at the ASC service provided. Ofsted do have a SEN remit.

Q – Could Ofsted be encouraged to look at ASC and SEN in depth? Sometimes this will be a paper exercise.

Q – How are you funded?

MM – The ASCSS has £150,000 from the delegated fund. They charge £75 for schools to go on training and that is used to pay for resources. For instance the ASCSS don't have ipads but it is important for ASC children to have access to computers and the current use of excellent Apps which can help a young person with ASC. We offer a free space on our training for instance to our host school

Q – Services need to be properly funded. The ASCSS has a limited budget.

MM – Funding is very tight. Realistically the ASCSS can only go into a school 3 times a term and that is for a child who is really struggling. For some children they only go into school once a term although they would like to go in every 2 or 3 weeks. How the caseloads are allocated and the number of visits per child is carefully planned out.

Q – Who is in charge of exclusions? If schools are excluding children with ASC then they should be challenged on this.

MM – Schools don't have to tell us if they exclude a child with ASC. We have identified that work needs to be done with those who are at risk of exclusion to prevent it. Schools can be a little defensive. One example was a child was excluded but when the details were unpicked, it was the end of term and the TA who was normally there to help the child wasn't there. ASCSS will look to see what information they have on exclusion data.

Q – How is the pathfinder funded?

LH – The SEN pathfinder has £150,000 until 31/8/13 which mainly goes on salaries. They give money to schools if they need it to provide the extra help needed. They also fund the Amaze 'insider' courses. 24 parents were trained last year as part of the pathfinder. The dream is to provide alternative curriculum in schools. Children can't always function if they need to adhere to lots of rules. They need to be educated but schools need to be creative. One example was a child who wasn't accessing learning but loved fishing was given 3 hours fishing a week and then started to learn. Children's needs must be met in a meaningful way.

Q – Are there any secondary schools who have parent liaison roles?

MM – It might be part of the key worker role. Schools with trained key workers are excellent at supporting ASC students. ASCSS will look to see if they have any information on the number of schools who have key workers. Some schools may have resistance to accepting children who have ASC as they are worried they won't be able to meet their needs alongside the needs of others.

Q – We need a more consistent good practice across schools and proper training. There must be good communications.

LH – Training teachers is very important. They must have the ability to differentiate work for children – it makes a huge difference.

Q – We will look at the teacher training courses and ask what they do now about ASC and SEN.

Chair – Thank you very much for coming to the meeting. If there is anything else you feel the panel should consider, please let us know.

29. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is 6 November 2013.

The meeting concluded at

Signed

Chair

Dated this

day of