

February 2018

Dear Steve

## **CHILDREN'S SERVICES PEER CHALLENGE: NORTH EAST LINCOLNSHIRE, FEBRUARY 2018**

Thank you for taking part in the thirty-second Yorkshire and Humber Region Children's Services Peer Challenge activity, the third in North East Lincolnshire and the sixth to have a theme around SEND as its focus. More specifically, you asked us to look at the following:

- An assessment of NEL's response to managing the impact of the SEND reforms
- An analysis of NEL's SEF to assess the accuracy of its judgements paying particular attention to key elements of the SEF:
  - Leadership and management
  - Governance
  - EHCPs
  - Voice

Your preparatory work for this Peer Challenge was extensive and was immensely helpful in enabling the Peer Challenge team to focus its activity appropriately. The team received a good welcome and excellent co-operation and support throughout the process. It was evident to us all that all those we met were interested in learning and continued development.

It is important to stress that this was not an inspection. A team of peers used their experience to reflect on the evidence you presented through documentation, conversation and observation. We hope their conclusions, captured in our final presentation to you and in this letter will assist you in your on-going improvement.

### **1. Background**

The Peer Challenge process developed for Children's Services across Yorkshire and the Humber builds on the peer review model that was developed by the Local Government Association (LGA) and all 15 Local Authorities are engaged in the process.

In order to support the Peer Challenge process, all Local Authorities have nominated key members from their senior leadership teams including their Director of Children's Services (DCS) to be trained in the Peer Challenge process and to lead Peer Challenges. Peer Challengers have either undertaken regional training or are LGA accredited peer reviewers.

### **2. Process**

The Peer Challenge in North East Lincolnshire was provided by a team led by [REDACTED]

[REDACTED]. The Challenge was managed and coordinated by [REDACTED]

The team spent two days working in the Local Authority collecting evidence with which to frame their findings and then drew together and presented their conclusions on day three of the Peer Challenge. This activity took place on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> February, Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> February and Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018. Prior to the on-site activity, colleagues in North East Lincolnshire shared a wide range of information with the team to support its preparations.

As well as a desk-based analysis of documentation, the Peer Challenge process involved a wide range of on-site activities, including discussions with over 50 people. These activities included: interviews and focus groups, visits to settings and observations of meetings and training activity. We also looked at a selection of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and Annual Review documents.

We met officers at all levels within Children's Services, the Children's Services Lead Member, a number of learning provider representatives, parent/carer representatives, colleagues from the health and voluntary sectors, children and young people.

As a result of this activity we identified over 130 strengths and areas for consideration, which have been refined and matched against the broad headings of your scope, plus 'headline' strengths and areas for consideration sections. These headings form the basis of this letter.

It is important to note that:

- We can only report on what we saw, heard and read – and this was inevitably limited to what it is possible to achieve in a two day period
- Much of what we have identified will be familiar to you – and this was confirmed as we made our presentation on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018.

### **3. Detailed Findings**

#### **3.1 Headline Strengths and Areas for Development**

##### **Strengths**

- A huge vision and ambition for system change
- Strong partnerships
- Significant strengthening of SEND activity since April 2016
- A strong SENCO network which is reported as well supported
- Strong evidence of a person centred approach to children, young people and families

##### **Areas for consideration**

- Develop, in partnership a sufficiency strategy for SEND to address the emerging challenge of local special school places being insufficient to meet demand
- Strategically promote a culture of inclusive practice in all schools and settings
- Review, develop and further promote the Local Offer website
- Clarify the place of SEND in emerging area wide governance arrangements
- Develop a joint commissioning strategy

#### **3.2 NELs response to managing the impact of the SEND reforms**

##### **Strengths**

The Single Access Pathway is under development, with a launch date in March, and has potential to ensure a consistent, inclusive and fair approach to assessment and support.

Practitioners are person centred and sensitive to pressures on families, as evidenced through focus group discussions with SENCO Forum representatives, parent groups and NELC SEND practitioners and through EHCPs.

Professionals effectively collaborate to share and develop expertise. This was noted across professional groups, sectors and phases. A particular example we noted was of Adult Services DoLs training being provided for Children's Services Social Workers.

There is effective collaboration between SENDIASS and the Parent Carer Forum to ensure that families are appropriately supported.

There is effective support for SEND activities across the system: the CAMHS LAC team was referenced as being effective, as was housing support for young people with SEND who are progressing through transitions.

NELC facilitates a strong SENCO Forum which is well attended; SENCOs are involved in the development of approaches to SEND and value this opportunity. Schools and settings value the Forum as a means of supporting quality and consistency in SEND activity. SENCOs report that a wide range of LA support is available to them, including training and access to a password protected section of the NELC website which contains a wide range of continuously refreshed and developed support materials and guidance.

There is investment in a broadly based workforce to support the SEND agenda. A wide range of services are provided. SENCO Forum representatives particularly value the 'My Plan' approach to SEN Support and commented positively about the BAC processes and the Mental Health initiative.

### **Areas for Consideration**

In relation to the 0-19 Programme currently underway consider whether '0-25' better reflects your intentions than '0-19+', We note that you have invested time and energy in securing wide ownership for the 0-19 offer. However, SEND practice includes the 0-25 agenda and it may be helpful to ensure that partners and families are clear on your 0-25 ambitions.

Refresh the SEND Strategy and urgently create a joint commissioning strategy. The SEND strategy which is currently in place was published in 2016. Some of its content and aspirations may still have relevance, but it is urgently in need of refreshing, not least to take account of the continued changing context in which you are operating and to provide a clear statement of your current ambitions and intentions. The launch of this refreshed strategy will be an opportunity to further raise the profile of SEND.

Some parents/carers report confusion about SEND reforms and thresholds. It is important to note that our sample size was small, and may not be representative, but you might want to test out amongst a broader group of parents/carers, perhaps through the Forum, whether this confusion and uncertainty is more widespread, and if so, what remedial action might be appropriate.

Maintain the focus on addressing timescales for SEND statutory processes. You have invested significant resource and energy to meet statutory timescales and

although timescales are not always met, your performance is not dissimilar to other LAs. This is something that demands a relentless focus and will no doubt be monitored through the SEND Strategic Board.

Ensure that the configuration of SEND resources match the strategy to improve outcomes for children and young people. We have commented on the broad based SEND workforce in North East Lincolnshire, but are the specialist elements now configured and deployed in a way which matches your current and emerging ambitions? You may want to use your emerging SEND Strategy as a reference point for asking this question.

Respond to the strong view amongst some parents/carers that access to services is only unlocked following clinical diagnosis. You are clear that this is NOT the case – but it was a strongly held view by some of the parents/carers we met and they gave us examples. This is worthy of further analysis and perhaps a re-statement of your position – maybe alongside the launch of the Autism Pathway?

The Local Offer is underdeveloped and usage appears low; its use should be encouraged by professionals from all agencies and parents/carers. You have a sub group of the SEND Strategic Board addressing the Local Offer. It may want to think about how partners might promote the offer – for instance what might be the role of the Parent Carer Forum in promotion of the Local Offer? How might the Offer be promoted by front line professionals in their 1:1 activities with families?

### **3.3 Leadership and management Strengths**

Leaders have a clear, coherent and shared vision for North East Lincolnshire. The outcomes framework provides a sound foundation around which everyone concerned with better outcomes for the people who live and work in North East Lincolnshire can coalesce. Those leaders we spoke to were able to clearly and consistently articulate the vision, suggesting it as both owned and understood. This vision is underpinned with strategic plans and is communicated through newsletters, leadership visibility at staff events and activities, posters and screen savers.

There is strong and effective collaborative activity across LA/CCG. This is a long standing partnership and there are tangible examples of its value: joint protocols; some joint commissioning of activity; a co-produced pathway for autism (about to be launched) and the establishment of a transitions team. Partnership working is strong across the system. Partnerships are long standing and deep, helped by a relatively stable workforce at strategic level. Schools and settings reported good access to LA support services. We saw evidence of appropriate challenge within partnerships, for instance between the LA and schools and settings to build inclusive practice.

The NELC/CCG Union is a flagship innovation which creates a secure, strategic foundation for further development. Rather than being the stimulus for partnership it has the potential to accelerate and deepen existing arrangements.

There is a strong ambition for improvement with a clear rationale and foundation for key decisions. Your plans to establish a single front door, incorporating CAMHS, would be an example of this.

There is a sense of energy within the system. This was widely reinforced in our conversations at all levels and across sectors and particularly by practitioners. The energy is visible: leaders make it their business to attend events and activities as well as producing regular newsletters.

CAMHS waiting times are low, with only one pending Tier 4 admission – suggesting provision which intervenes early enough to prevent crisis. You have recently re-commissioned CAMHS with your existing provider.

### **Areas for Consideration**

Develop a communications strategy to ensure that all, particularly those beyond the centre, understand the potential and the structure of the new LA/CCG Union arrangements. We have noted a range of communication activity to disseminate vision, aspirations and the opportunities of the Union and other strategic arrangements. You also recognise that communication is a process rather than an event. However, there is more to be done – particularly with partners and stakeholders further away from the ‘centre’.

Utilise data and intelligence to ensure a clear understanding of current and future sufficiency demands in NEL to inform a strategy for all SEND groups but particularly for those with severe, complex and / or SEMH needs. Demand on local special school places has increased and they are close to capacity. This creates an immediate and urgent short term sufficiency challenge. The more strategic, medium to long term issues include capacity, but also need to focus on culture and practice; perceptions of parents/carers about provision; capacity of some mainstream schools and settings to respond to pupils with SEND and the need to develop a consistent culture of inclusivity. These issues need to be openly debated in collaboration with partners and stakeholders informing a co-produced strategic response.

There are examples of inclusive practice but you need to encourage and collaborate with mainstream schools and settings at a strategic and operational level to extend awareness, commitment, skills and knowledge so that the needs of children and young people at SEN Support can consistently be met.

Consider how to address the widespread negative perceptions about access to CAMHS. We were surprised that the CAMHS narrative amongst many that we spoke to was so at variance with reported CAMHS performance. It may be that expressed concerns relate to services which are not captured in published data; that expectations are unrealistic or that the narrative has just not caught up with service provision. This needs to be explored.

## **3.4 Governance**

### **Strengths**

You have recognised the need for strong strategic governance of the SEND agenda and have created the SEND Executive Board to support this aspiration. The Board in its current format is more strategic than previously. It is a relatively new part of your overall governance arrangements but has clear terms of reference and an active range of work streams with clear accountabilities.

The Scrutiny Panel has taken an active interest in the SEND reforms.

There is a strong and active parent carer forum, which has been involved in co-production. Examples of this would be the role of the forum in developing the new single front door arrangements; the new Autism Pathway and their engagement in your refresh of the Local Offer website. Parents/carers are enthusiastic about contributing to the SEND agenda.

### **Areas for Consideration**

Consider the place of SEND in the emerging governance arrangements arising from the Union. The creation of the Union and ongoing reflections about more integrated ways of addressing North East Lincolnshire's future are prompting strategic reflections about the best governance arrangements to underpin your strategic aspirations. This creates an ideal and timely opportunity for the place of SEND to be promoted and considered in this broader context.

Support the development of a joint commissioning strategy by establishing a sub group of the SEND Executive Board. This is an urgent task which you are already addressing and you will want a mechanism to oversee not just the creation of a widely owned strategy, but also its implementation and development. The location of the sub group under the SEND Executive Board places it in a broader strategic context and will ensure appropriate monitoring and scrutiny of activity and progress

Parent/carers groups are keen to support the SEND agenda but have said that some meetings are not always timed to enable their engagement.

### **3.5 EHCPs/Voice Strengths**

You have made excellent progress in transferring Statements of SEN to EHC Plans – with only 8 to complete before the national deadline. This is performance which will be the envy of many other local areas and is testament to your focus, tenacity and energy.

SENAG is positively and effectively chaired, has broad and consistent representation and conversations are reflective, measured, well informed by up to date documentation and intelligence and have 'voice' at their heart. We noted a creativity in your approach to solutions and a strong sense of partnership around the table. There is clear evidence of health and social care involvement in SENAG decisions.

The 'My Plan' approach offers a positive vehicle to capture and meet individual need and contribute to EHC planning processes. When it is used by schools and settings it is reported as helpful for work with families.

There is a strong culture of person centred planning. Training has been provided to help ensure schools, settings and others put families at the centre of planning. The 'My Plan' approach should help embed this approach across NEL for those at SEN Support. Children in a special school context reported feeling involved in planning approaches to their own learning, and were clear about personal targets.

Schools and settings report positively on the work of SENART, which works effectively to support appropriate EHCP decisions. There were also comments from one special school about the effectiveness of support from the CAMHS clinical psychologist, and from others about the responsiveness of social care when involved in cases.

The individual voice of children and young people is captured in a wide variety of ways. Services contributing to the EHC planning process go to lengths to include the interests and aspirations of children and young people. The views of younger children are included through observation and discussion with families. Children and young people are at the centre of the 'My Plan', and the early-years equivalent, approach.

The local authority is exploring a range of ways to engage a wider range of parents/carers. Examples of this would include: webinars and use of social media. There have also been opportunities for parents/carers to jointly access training with health and local authority staff.

We also noted a range of QA processes in place to monitor, ensure and improve the quality of EHCPs ranging from a comprehensive QA framework to good practice in teams where EHCPs are reviewed and challenged in team meetings.

### **Areas for Consideration**

Consider how to secure comprehensive coverage, usage and awareness of 'My Plan' or similar tools. You report that 'My Plan' is used by 50% of schools and settings. When it is used, and used well, it has clear benefits. You need to invest energy in securing its broader take up, perhaps using some of the positive feedback from those who do use it to stimulate wider usage. Some professionals are unaware of 'My Plan' which suggests the need for a greater emphasis on communicating messages internally as well as across partners.

Ensure that all social care needs are captured in EHCPs and that social care and health outcomes are consistently integrated. We reviewed a small sample of recently completed EHCPs and they did not have any social care needs recorded in the outcome section – whereas in the body of the document, some care needs had been identified. As part of addressing this challenge you may need to more clearly define and communicate that 'care' does not just equate to 'social worker' or even 'social care', but is something broader.

Children and young people at SEN Support require a more cohesive focus to ensure better outcomes. Whilst we heard of activity to develop better primary to secondary transitions and some evidence informed activity to develop speech and language skills, gaps persist in progress and outcomes for this group, and a more coherent approach is required.

Develop a forum to ensure there is a systematic way of capturing the system wide voice of children with SEND. We noted a children and young person sub group of SENDIASS, which is positive, but you need a group which is able to reflect on the broader SEND agenda and which is representative of the wide range of SEND needs across children and young people in North East Lincolnshire.

Consider how to broaden school and settings engagement in SENAG to ensure perspectives from across phases and a range of settings.

Whilst we have noted a QA framework for EHCPs it does not describe how the collective learning from this will be utilised to drive improvement. This needs to be addressed.

## **4. Next Steps**

You and your colleagues will now want to consider how you incorporate the team's findings into your improvement plans. We hope that you find our reflections helpful.

It is important that this letter describes accurately what we have observed and analysed and that it provides you with an appropriate summary to facilitate change. If this letter contains any factual inaccuracies, please do not hesitate to contact me and amendments will be made as appropriate. If you have any concerns or comments about the analysis or recommendations, do not hesitate to contact me in the first instance. If we are unable to resolve any issues, there is a mechanism for escalating concerns, which is through to the Chair of the SLI Executive group. A sub group of the SLI Executive will consider any concerns you may have.

Once again, thank you for agreeing to receive a Peer Challenge and to everyone involved for their participation.

Yours sincerely



Lead for Peer Challenge in North East Lincolnshire