

Report to:	People Committee	Date:	10 October 2019
Report title:	Early Findings of the Independent Expert		
Report from:	Nick Ireland, Strategic Director of People Directorate		
Ward/Areas affected:	Borough wide		
Chair of Committee/Lead Member:	Councillor Marian James		
Author(s)/Contact Number(s):	Fiona Phelps, Assistant Director Education and SEND (0784907412)		
Corporate Plan Priorities:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being Active • Making Informed Choices • Living Well Independently • Keeping People Safe 		
Open/Exempt:	Open		
Signed:		Date:	26 September 2019

1. Summary

- 1.1. The Local Area's Vision, as a result of the work carried out following the SEND Area Inspection, is that in Sutton, we are collectively ambitious for our children. Together we want to provide them with the best chances to achieve their best outcomes in life, whatever their starting point, and to prepare them effectively for adulthood. Being ambitious for our children and young people is a key driver for Sutton Council and for the Local Area.
- 1.2. In accordance with the statement made at the last meeting of the People Committee on 4 July 2019 and in order to provide added scrutiny and challenge for our SEND improvement journey, the Council instigated an independent review of progress (see 1.3 below). This report is to outline the early findings of the review carried out by the independent expert engaged by the Council.

- 1.3. The independent expert has been engaged to review:
- the progress of our improvement plans and delivery.
 - practices within Cognus aligned to our statutory duties.
 - whether the arrangement between the Council and Cognus is the best possible operating model to continue to deliver education services.
- 1.4. After careful consideration and interview processes, the Council engaged Sharon Scott to carry out this work. As can be seen from her resume at Appendix C, Sharon has worked extensively in Education and SEND-related areas for many years. Having worked with several Local Authorities - such as Wokingham, Cambridgeshire and Slough - to undertake independent reviews, she was also brought in as the interim Assistant Director for SEND with Birmingham City Council following the City Council's poor Local Area Inspection outcome. Therefore Sutton Council is assured of her knowledge and expertise in the requisite areas, and her ability to undertake an effective independent review.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1. To note the progress that has been made and the findings to date.
- 2.2. To receive a further update at the next People Committee in December 2019.

3. Background

- 3.1. As noted in previous reports to the People Committee, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Area Inspection in January 2018 reviewed how well the Local Area was fulfilling its responsibilities for young people with SEND. The local area refers to the local authority and it includes the Sutton Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG), Sutton Public Health, NHS England and education settings and schools.
- 3.2. As a consequence of the issues identified, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) wrote to the Local Authority on 23 March 2018 requiring LBS and Sutton CCG to jointly submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) to Ofsted. This is in line with the 50% of boroughs inspected over the past three years, and the 63% of boroughs inspected during 2018-19.
- 3.3. The WSOA was agreed as approved by Ofsted; the "fit for purpose letter" was published in July 2018 and is on the Local Offer website. The letter notes that "It is encouraging that prompt actions appear to have been taken to further clarify leaders' roles and responsibilities in the implementation of the reforms. The written statement of action provides a comprehensible framework identifying actions already taken, proposed future actions and precise timescales for completion. The three key weaknesses identified during the inspection form the focus for the statement, which demonstrates that area leaders have considered all of these carefully and thoroughly."
- 3.4. Quarterly monitoring visits from the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) note the Local Area's good progress: the most recent one, from September 2019, states: "The

local area has continued to take forward the actions in the WSoA as part of a broader strategic, cultural and operational improvement programme. The profile of SEND has been raised amongst leaders and stakeholders and there is more consensus about the issues and priorities. However, it is evident that the scale of the change has been significant.”

- 3.5. Despite the positive reports from DfE and NHSE regarding the progress that the Local Area is making, in order to provide additional review and further scrutiny of the improvement processes now in place and as was stated at People Committee in its July 2019 meeting, the Council has appointed an independent expert (see Appendix B).

4. Issues

- 4.1. The independent expert is engaging with a range of officers, practitioners, elected Members and parents to review the areas noted in 1.2.

- 4.2. Attached is an initial report (Appendix A&B). The key points that the independent expert notes are:

- 4.2.1. Regarding progress of our improvement plans and delivery:

- A comprehensive approach is being taken to address all twenty seven actions within the WSOA
- Progress has been made in improving coherence and joint working between the local area leaders and communication has improved between the local area leaders.
- Significant progress has been made in putting building blocks in place to ensure that within the three year period allowed for improvement, Sutton Local Area will achieve good outcomes for the children and young people in Sutton who have special educational needs and / or disabilities.

- 4.2.2. Regarding progress that has been made in ensuring practices within Cognus are aligned to our statutory SEN duties

- There is strong evidence to show that the working practices within Cognus are compliant and aligned to the London Borough of Sutton's statutory duties as they relate to SEND

- 4.2.3. Regarding progress that has been made in reviewing the arrangement between the council and Cognus

- This aspect of the review is at the planning stage

- 4.3. It is expected that the final report will be available at the time of the next People Committee.

5. Options Considered

- 5.1. This report is for information as requested by the People Committee. Therefore there are no options to consider at this point.

6. Impacts and Implications

Financial

- 6.1. There is an estimated budget of £35k for the independent expert in 2019/20, to be funded corporately from the risk reserve.

Legal

- 6.2 None for the purposes of this report.

7. Appendices and Background Documents

Appendix letter	Title
A	Executive Summary from the Independent Expert
B	Early Findings from the Independent Expert
C	Resume of the Independent Expert

Background documents
None

Audit Trail		
Version	Final	Date: 26 September 2019
Consultation with other officers		
Finance	Yes	Sue Holmes
Legal	Yes	Sarah Willis
Equality Impact Assessment required?	No	N/A