

Executive Summary of the early findings of the independent expert - September 2019 (Sharon Scott)

1. Introduction

1.1 An independent expert has been engaged by the London Borough of Sutton to undertake a review of the following;

- The progress of the local area's improvement plans and delivery.
- Practices within Cognus aligned to statutory Special Educational Needs (SEN) duties.
- Whether the arrangement between the Council and Cognus is the best possible operating model to continue to deliver education services.

2. Overall summary of findings

2.1 Good progress has been made in addressing the Written Statement Of Action (WSOA) with appropriate foundations being put in place to make further progress over the next two year period. This will lead to excellent services being provided across the local area for all children and young people with SEND. The local area has come from a non-compliant base in January 2018 to one that has now put in place building blocks to meet statutory duties. Partners are now working together in a more positive and effective way.

3. Findings against the three areas of the review as set out above.

3.1 Evidence supports the view that progress has been made in improving the coherence and joint working between the local area leaders and communication has improved between the local area leaders.

3.2 The triangulation of evidence demonstrates that from what was a non-compliant system across the Local Area at the time of the inspection (January 2018) significant progress has been made in putting building blocks in place to ensure that within the three year period allowed for improvement, the local area will achieve good outcomes for the children and young people in Sutton who have special educational needs and /or disabilities.

3.3 The 'stocktake day' which was held a year on from the agreed WSOA demonstrated that a comprehensive approach was being taken to address all twenty seven actions within the WSOA. There were presentations provided by all partners giving examples of initiatives and projects that are addressing and responding to the WSOA. All the actions are recorded in the WSOA Tracker and reported to the Children and Family Executive Board to ensure that all local area partners are aware of all the activity that is taking place. In addition a WSOA report is submitted to every People Committee and progress is noted by all Members.

3.4 Findings would support the view that progress has been made in addressing the poor oversight of quality and impact of Education Health Care plans (EHCP) in meeting the needs of children and young people. Schools, education settings and

some parents are also reporting that they are seeing improvements in the ways of working and engagement with Cognus and the Local Authority.

3.5 The third aspect of the review is at the planning stage of the activities which need to be undertaken to carry out this review. However, from the work undertaken so far there is strong support for the review of the arrangements between the Council and Cognus.

3.6 It has been recognised by partners that there is now a much closer and stronger professional working relationship between the Council and Cognus as a result of the new leadership and management within the Council.

4. Conclusion

4.1 From the non-compliant baseline in January 2018 and as evidenced by a WSOA, rapid and significant progress has been made.

4.1.1 The stocktake day evidenced that 63% of local areas who had had their local area SEND inspection by Ofsted and CQC 2018/19 had a WSOA and 50% retained the WSOA after their first re-inspection. This shows the Local Area is a typical local area when it relates to SEND issues and not non-typical as some groups believe.

4.1.2 However, the Local Authority acknowledges, there is still a way to go on the local areas improvement journey especially in bringing about the necessary cultural changes that are required throughout the local area and providing training opportunities for further professional development. Notwithstanding the journey still left to travel, there is strong evidence to support the view that the local area has made sound progress in implementing and delivering on its improvement plans and knows itself far more effectively than at the time of the inspection (January 2018).

4.2 From all the work undertaken to date as part of this independent review 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.

4.3 There is much stronger leadership and management within the Local Authority which is able to support the work and direction of travel for Cognus.

4.4 There is strong evidence of a much better working relationship between the Local Authority and Cognus. This is because strategic leadership meetings are in place, the number of contract and performance meetings have increased and the recent development of the Local Authority being represented on the Cognus Management Board have all supported a greater clarity and understanding of the issues on both sides which enables effective solutions to be found to address the issues that arise.

4.5 There is also strong evidence from the independent review to demonstrate that a line should now be drawn under the past and attention should be focused on the present and going forward in order to continue to develop both excellent services for

the local area and an excellent experience for the children, young people and their families in the London Borough of Sutton.

This page is intentionally left blank