

16. Parent carer evaluation of our strategy

Consultation was held between 19 October and 8 December 2017, where options to increase our specialist educational provision school capacity for children and young people with SEND and the SEND Draft Strategy 2017-2020 were consulted on. Five public events were held from Berwick to Hexham with online and paper forms of consultation available. These events were well attended, by parents, carers, students, education and health professionals who attended to find out more detail and express their views. As a result of this consultation we received 206 written responses.

There were two key aims of the consultation, they were to seek views on:

- Our vision and strategy for the local area in supporting children and young people with SEND between 2017-2020.
- Gaining views to develop a draft place planning strategy to grow specialist provision within Northumberland to ensure children with SEND are educated close to home in high quality education establishments, giving greater opportunity for social inclusion within the communities in which they live.

The outcome of the consultation in relation to the vision and strategy, was very encouraging in that the vast majority of respondents were in broad agreement that the key strategic objectives within the draft strategy were suitable to drive the improvements necessary to ensure that the code of practice was fully implemented. The following key themes were identified.

Capacity, Funding and Resources. This was the most frequently raised issue within the consultation. Where views expressed agreement with the statement, they were often followed by concern that funding issues may affect its achievement. In addition there were many comments around the fact that meeting SEND effectively in our schools is at present compromised by lack of resources and/or inequalities in funding. Concern about lack of a continuum of support was frequently raised; a lack of places in specialist provisions combined with the geographical challenge of the county. Suggestions were made about additionally resourced provisions being established to meet need

Training and Workforce Development. Developments suggested focussed on the perceived urgent need to develop skills and knowledge around supporting children and young people with SEND in frontline education and health staff. This would promote more inclusive schools and enable children and young people to remain in schools close to their communities. Training and workforce development would also further promote early identification and support staff to be more confident in meeting identified needs. There were a number of responses which suggested that there is significant mainstream provision which is not inclusive in its philosophy. The council is reviewing its service level agreement with schools and the SEND Support Services as part of this work.

Listening to children, Young People and Families. There were strong responses from parents/carers whose experiences had clearly been difficult, but the widespread view was that the voice of learners and their families should hold higher value than it

currently does. There is a need to ensure that the voice of the child or young person and their family is central to all decision making about services, their provision and their development.

Communication, collaboration and multi agency working. Developing joined up working across health, education and social care was identified as being a priority throughout the consultation. Communication between agencies including schools and other professionals and between professionals and parent/carer/learner was often perceived to be inconsistent. The communication of information to parents and children/young people in accessible formats was raised a number of times.

Timeliness. Time taken to identify needs, response time following referrals (particularly to CYPS) and delays associated with unclear pathways were all frequently cited as areas for development. It was referenced in questions relating to early identification, school aged SEND provision and for post 16.

Preparation for Adulthood. The need for clearer pathways into adulthood was identified alongside greater clarity over provision available and how to access it was cited by parents as an area for improvement.

In addition to the above key themes, there were other common themes within the consultation. These included:

- **Joint commissioning** and the need to develop more joined up commissioning between education, health and social care.
- **Increased accountability** within the system to ensure equitable allocation of scarce resources. This covered internal LA (Local Authority) data systems and those for additional fund allocation (EHCP and top up) and also systems by which schools could be held to account to ensure the appropriate use of funds to effectively meet need.
- **Sharing best practice** between some of the highly inclusive mainstream settings in Northumberland. Delivering a curriculum which suits individual learners in specialist and mainstream provisions.

There was considerable positivity about the vision statement reflecting that the respondents felt it to be 'ethical and inclusive', representing that it presents a coordinated approach to SEND services across the county. There was also evidence that multi-agency working is being established and developing well, for example, the early intervention hubs, the Children's hearing Services Working Group. Some individual schools noted that aspects of SEND support have been readily available. Positive comments were also made around provision for SEND in first and primary schools in particular e.g. 'My experience is that the majority of first schools meet the goal of being welcoming, accessible and inclusive'.

As a result of these key findings of the consultation a revised Vision and Strategy for the local area in supporting children and young people with SEND 2017-2020 has been produced.