

North Northamptonshire Local Area – SEND Peer Challenge Report

Held: 21st & 22nd October 2022

North Northamptonshire Council (NNC) is a relatively 'new' local authority area, coming into being in April 2021, with a shared Integrated Care-Board (ICB) and Northamptonshire Children's Trust (NCT) with neighbouring West Northamptonshire. NCT has been in existence for approximately two years, and Integrated Care Northamptonshire (ICN) commenced from 1st July 2022.

Methodology:

Over two days, a team of three SEND leaders from within the East Midlands challenged the area, with a focus on Coproduction, a central plank of all SEND/Inclusion strategies and the lived experiences of families.

Over 90 people were interviewed from a range of backgrounds- parent/carers; young people; practitioners and leaders from health providers/health commissioners/school leaders including SENCOs/leaders and practitioners from the Children's Trust for social care/leaders and practitioners from the Local Authority (LA)/ Voluntary & Community Sector (VCS) providers.

Peer reviewers met with focus groups of practitioners, leaders and parent/carers and young people over the two-day challenge period. In advance of the meeting, key documentation and information was sent to establish the evidence base for the key line of enquiry, coproduction.

Focus/Key Line of Enquiry:

A Peer Review Planning Group consisting of representatives from NNC, Northamptonshire Parent / Carer Forum Group (NPPFG), NCT, and ICN met in July to discuss the possible focus for the Peer Review and support preparation for the Peer Review. The group were mindful that the Peer Review is mainly over one day, and of the consequent need to be very focussed to get the most from the process.

A range of options were considered, and the peer review planning group suggested the following focus:

- The impact of the work being undertaken to develop true partnership working and improve co-production at:
- An individual level (child and family)
- An operational level (services and schools / settings with children and families)
- A strategic level (collectively agreeing the issues and challenges and co-designing the next steps at a strategic level).

Findings

SECTION 1

Key Line of Enquiry- KLOE 1

Individual Coproduction / partnership working

Strengths

- 1.1 A growing shared understanding of personalisation and the collaboration required to ensure a Preparing for Adulthood (PfA)/wider outcomes focus is developing across this relatively new local authority area, shedding the legacy of the previous LA boundary
- 1.2 Parents told us about some schools which offer a 'gold standard' of inclusion and support, identifying needs at an early stage and making appropriate adjustments, whilst communicating effectively with families- this hugely improves lived experiences and outcomes
- 1.3 Parents told us of positive experiences with multiple health provision from birth to year 6, starting with Sure Start support and referrals / input from Community Paediatricians, neurology specialists, geneticist, orthopedics, Occupational Therapy, and Physiotherapy
- 1.4 New Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) [issued in 2022] and the emerging Annual Review practice within special schools, are improving the quality and person centred focus within section A of the plan
- 1.5 The multi-agency QA process has initiated joint QA and action planning for improving the Quality of EHCPs
- 1.6 The offer from Action for Children, commissioned by NCT, enables short break support for families to access without EHCPs and during the assessment process, which families value highly

- 1.7 Young people in specialist provisions are optimistic about their current provision and their preparation for adulthood
- 1.8 We found pockets of good practice in schools within the Annual Review process, including updating pupil views, interests and aspirations (Section A of the Plan) and particularly in primary and special schools

Areas for development

- 1.9 Improving the quality of the 'backlog' of older EHCPs and some independent moderation/QA – there is a 'lag' in the overall perceptions and experiences of families regarding the quality of older plans and previous Annual Reviews
- 1.10 Not all schools use a person centred approach to assessing the strengths and interests of children and young people; not all schools have a clear Graduated Response to meet individual needs and this variation is significant in creating dissatisfaction for families and poorer outcomes for children and young people. The current work to co-develop graduated approach guidance will support clarity of expectations and best practice across the area.
- 1.11 Parents felt in some cases, that their views were not taken account of in some school Annual Reviews
- 1.12 Some parents that we met wanted the LA to be more flexible regarding EOTAS- Education Other Than At School. Some good examples of practice exist within the region in other LAs which we can link the area to, if desired
- 1.13 Some parents noted the need for clear accessibility for families where English is not the community or home language of the parent/carer
- 1.14 There is a 'lag' in developments rolling out to all families, and there continue to be reports from some parents, of poor quality in timeliness and quality of EHC assessments and plans on social media, which adversely affects confidence in the area's progress

Recommendations

- 1.15 The region could assist with a specific triad or paired moderation of EHCPs to corroborate the quality assurance processes within the area
- 1.16 Consider person centred workshop/s for school SENCOs to improve the consistency of practice in hearing voice as the starting point of a strengths-based approach to

assessment and planning (in Assess, Plan, Do, review cycle), building upon the successful relaunch of the SENCO networks

- 1.17 Consider developing a template for children, young people and their parents/carers to make on-going contributions to the Annual Review cycle
- 1.18 Consider using the refreshed Local offer, when it is available, to show short film clips of the good practice that we heard about in some schools, and parental views of the newer plans

KLOE 2- Operational Coproduction / partnership working

Strengths

- 2.1 The timeliness of EHCP assessment completion is improving and is significantly above national current levels
- 2.2 We found evidence of improved communications at practitioner level- EPs/locality assessment officers- Meet the Team approaches are valued by providers as they forge closer links with staff
- 2.3 The Newsletter/SENCo network refresh and workshops in localities are valued by schools and are developing partnership and confidence
- 2.4 Northamptonshire Parent Forum Group, NPF, is growing membership and knowledge across a wider range of parent leaders
- 2.5 Mental health and well-being services are available through Northamptonshire Healthcare Foundation Trust (NHFT) and the voluntary sector and the REACH collaborative , with a positive partnership across agencies, and a suitable navigation within the Local Offer from health partners and schools to support individual children/young people- a video of young people describing their interviewing for practitioner posts indicated their coproduction involvement and their sense of achievement at doing a good job
- 2.6 Young people engagement/involvement in specific areas, such as YAAP- Young Person Autism Advisory Project/Shooting Stars/Young Inspectors in social care- empowers young people to make a significant contribution to codesign and coproduction via these positive enablers

- 2.7 Work on the Single Front Door for families is underway- and would benefit from feedback during initial roll out to check with parent/carers that it is indeed, reducing the need to tell their story many times
- 2.8 Preparing for Adulthood activities within the VCS has several strengths- Bewitched Cafes, Youth Counselling support, and Care Leaver apprenticeships reflect some of the positive practice emerging within the county

Areas for development

- 2.9 Some health providers noted that the changes to the ICN/ NCT and two separate LAs, have impacted operational partnership- for example, the increased number of EHC decision making panels in North Northants and other multiagency meetings can impact on practitioner time for face to face work
- 2.10 Not all schools are as inclusive and welcoming as the 'gold standard' schools cited by parents- some do not welcome and include, nor make reasonable adjustments. In the SEND Green Paper this is to be tackled potentially, through the Local Inclusion Plan, and it would be advantageous for school leaders to contribute to this process ahead of what will be wide-ranging legal changes
- 2.11 Parent/carers raised issues regarding their ability to access section 17 social care assessments, and some practitioners noted the gap between Direct Payments (DP)/short breaks available to some families but not seemingly available to all. Issues about thresholds and eligibility were described in several meetings with parent/carers as unclear and opaque
- 2.12 Workforce turnover- as an emerging new LA, staff churn has had an impact upon families and the people that they link with- the LA and ICB are largely in place with staffing, and Meet the Teams has helped develop relationships both ways, but retention will be a determining factor in further progress in SEND/Inclusion in the county
- 2.13 Schools told us that they would like to have wider representation across the SEND/Inclusion workstreams across the area
- 2.14 The Local Offer is historic- a legacy from the preceding county area, and schools told us how important it is to update and revise the Local Offer, which the LA is undertaking having implemented a mystery shopper exercise.

Recommendations

- 2.15 Develop the locality data dashboard to share with areas, and consider an individual 'scorecard' for schools to facilitate a structured conversation regarding inclusion
- 2.16 Further develop the Coproduction Charter –in a similar manner to the Genuine Partnership (Rotherham) model, this could include indicators for services and schools to achieve a North Northants Quality Inclusion mark, which parents and young people play a part in monitoring
- 2.17 Consider work with the regional Young Researchers and University of Derby to develop a more cohesive strategy for young people's coproduction, which builds upon existing pockets of good practice and weaves this together across the area- we gave the example of the collective Drop Box used by all partners in one local area, from the ICB, LA and VCS, to collect the views and suggestions of young people – in order that we do not keep asking the same questions from different services, but have a sound body of evidence about the views and aspirations of our young people and children
- 2.18 North Northants could consider a 'next steps' meeting when the LA refuses to assess- this has the benefit of schools hearing from the LA about why the assessment was refused, what the school can do to offer a further graduated response- an approach such as this is used in Derbyshire, contact alex.howlett@derbyshire.gov.uk for further information
- 2.19 Staff turnover- some areas have a clear SEND induction online training for new staff and could share this with North Northants, as parents that we met felt that this would consolidate consistency of practice including knowing the legal duties of SEND

KLOE 3- Strategic Coproduction / partnership working

Strengths

- 3.1 The commitment, honesty and desire for change which is evident within the new strategic leadership team in the new LA is a huge development and has the potential to really change the prevailing culture of the area
- 3.2 A commitment to take time to genuinely improve coproduction, which can take more time but deliver a longer lasting improvement in culture and relationships between families and practitioners and between agencies

- 3.3 The Coproduction Charter, which is almost completed, and the workshops/processes which have developed it, as they have been equally important in sharing thinking and values
- 3.4 The SEND data dashboard has the potential to provide a strong platform for improvement, planning and joint commissioning utilising the Power BI system
- 3.5 The Learning Disability and Autism Key working programme is an example of a powerful and effective coproduced and codesigned service, including the positive development of those with lived experience in North Northants, embracing the VCS as delivery partners- Barnardo's and ENFOLD. Young people have also made a significant contribution to the development of this service, which is in its infancy, but based on very firm codesigned and coproduced foundations. This practice sets a high standard for other services to emulate
- 3.6 The development of Family Hubs has been codesigned with families, and the Hub will have a parent-carer coordinator within it
- 3.7 Outcomes based approaches are being utilised in joint commissioning approaches, such as Adult Short Breaks (which affects some of the 'older' young people with EHCPs) and emanating from the Autism Champions group. This group has over 400 members, and has contributed to developments such as the commissioning for brighter futures approaches

Areas for development

- 3.8 The completion of the SEND SEF/JSNA/Joint Commissioning strategy will enable the area to be prepared for the new inspection cycle for SEND which commences from January 2023
- 3.9 Whilst coproduction is developing strategically, parent/carers and young people need as much notice as possible of events/times to be able to fully participate, and good communication both about the events and the results (You Said, We Did) to be fed back to participants who have given their time and energy to make improvements happen

Recommendations

- 3.10 Develop a Coproduction Action Plan alongside the Charter, to monitor progress and develop confidence
- 3.11 Consider paired working with e.g. Lincolnshire, who have a strong SEND SEF and an excellent recent inspection outcome, to corroborate the emerging strategic planning materials

3.12 Consider apprenticeships and Supported Internships to develop a Young People's office, which brings together the positive practice of groups such as the Young Inspectors/YAAP and Shooting Stars, and takes it one step further. This could link with the regional research approach that the East Midlands region has commissioned, if of interest- contact pat.bullen@sdsa.net and Professor Debs Robinson, D.Robinson@derby.ac.uk

Summary:

North Northamptonshire has developed a new and fresh identity as a new local authority area, building on the cultural changes which the Children's Trust and ICN have commenced. The clear commitment and honesty of the Director of Children's Services, sets a standard and a high expectation of the codesign and coproduction values of the area, which are evidenced in activities such as ongoing locality workshops to meet parents and carers; the focus on developing further the voice and role of young people, and the codesigned Key Working service.

There is a 'lag' in the experiences of some families, as the area seeks to address a backlog of ARs and less well developed EHCPs from the inherited past, and families will need to maintain confidence that this is being addressed and reported, through clear and frequent communication to them.

Working with schools has begun a refresh, and schools that we met evinced confidence in the leadership of the LA to facilitate change. It is imperative to engage with all providers across the area, to ensure more individual coproduction and positive satisfaction in the outcomes and experiences of children and young people experiencing SEND.

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