

The first year of EHC planning in B&NES – evaluation

This paper sets out –

- The process of evaluation of EHC planning
- Findings and conclusions
- Recommendations for year 2 of the transition plan.

Appendices include –

- Quantitative data from the parent carer and practitioner feedback questionnaires
- Transcripts of the comments from the questionnaires
- Feedback gathered at the final evaluative EHC planning practice workshop
- Working draft EHC plan audit tool.

Anonymised transcripts of the interviews with parent carers and young people will also be made available to members of the SEND virtual leadership team and can be made available to others on request.

The process of evaluation of EHC planning

The evaluation of the first year of EHC planning in B&NES set out in this report is based on the following –

Feedback questionnaires

128 questionnaires were sent out to all parent carers, young people and practitioners (across education settings and other services) named in one or more completed EHC plans gathered from SEND practitioners by Becky Claridge up to early July 2015. Becky sent out the questionnaires, and has collated and analysed those returned.

We originally intended to use questionnaires developed by In Control, the POET – Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool. However when we obtained and looked at the pilot version of these questionnaires we felt they were both too long and not well designed, particularly for young people. The improved version of the POET was not due to be released before we wanted to start work, so Kay Sibley devised a set of questionnaires on behalf of a small task group which were shorter and clearer.

A total of 15 practitioner, 5 parent carer and 2 young person questionnaires were received back. This is a poor rate of return for parent carers and young people. Asking people to complete and return a paper questionnaire is likely always to be a challenge and the questionnaire is still quite long although significantly shorter than the POET from In Control.

However the questionnaires returned by practitioners and parent carers in particular have provided valuable feedback which has both supported and enriched the feedback obtained through other channels. Questionnaires were received from one 4 year old and one 16 year old. The 16 year old knew/understood little about his plan or the planning process, but appreciated the support received in school and showed some future interest in finding out about personal budgets. The 4 year old did not add significantly to our understanding of his experience.

Interviews with parent carers and young people

A sample of the parent carers named in completed EHC plans were contacted and offered the opportunity to give more detailed quantitative feedback by either face to face or telephone interview. This included an offer of an interview for their young person. These interviews were carried out by Ben Harrington (social work student in Disabled Children's Team) and Kay Sibley.

In total 14 parent carer and 1 young person interviews were completed and have informed this evaluation. These have provided very valuable information about the experience of these families.

Evaluation of completed EHC plans

A number of members of the SEND virtual leadership team evaluated (anonymised) completed EHC plans using the working draft audit tool (attached). The auditors were Annie Carpenter and Marianna Zatkova (parent carer reps), Tracey Pike (Youth Connect Service Manager), Nora Ryan (DCT Manager), Julie Knight (PfA Coordinator) and myself. A total of 22 audits were completed. I was able to cross-reference a few of my audits with parent carer/young person interviews. In addition I have read all of the EHC plans audited by colleagues and a number of the other completed EHC plans I have received.

EHC planning practice workshops

We have held a series of 5 practice workshops through the year, to support the development of EHC planning practice. This has included regular slots to consider what is working/not working and the final workshop was mainly focused on evaluation. Feedback from this workshop is attached.

SEND Virtual leadership team meetings

This group meets termly ('new' terms) bringing together managers of the key Council, Sirona and other health services involved in EHC planning together with parent carer reps. Each meeting has included the opportunity to share what is working/not working in respect of EHC planning, and the final term's meeting was entirely set aside for evaluation.

Other feedback from parent carers, young people and practitioners collected through a variety of channels

These have included particularly –

- Termly ('new' terms) liaison meetings with the B&NES special school headteachers, together with the senior leadership of the SEN team and PfA coordinator
- The B&NES SENCO conference on May 5th organised by Fosseyway teaching school with input from key teams and services
- Various other events and meetings through the year which provided opportunities to meet parent carers and practitioners from across services, including those providing information, advice and support/IS/advocacy.

I have missed no opportunity to ask parent carers and practitioners for their feedback, and indirectly through them the views of parent carers, young people and colleagues that they were picking up. It is hard to capture and quantify this informally gathered feedback; however it has played a significant role both in indicating issues to explore further as well as adding to our understanding of what the first year experience has been.

I would like to acknowledge the significant contribution made to this exercise by those named in the above.

As well as a wealth of information about the experience of EHC planning and the quality of plans locally, this evaluation is also informed by some indications of the national picture including particularly information from –

- The CDC conference in London in March
- A presentation at our SENCO conference in May from Pat Bullen of NASEN & Leicester City Council
- Linda Jordan and Carol Robinson of NDTi through their current support for work here in B&NES
- Regional events and meetings with other SEN teams attended by Chris Jones and SEN team colleagues.

Findings and conclusions

The family experience of the process is significantly improved. This is generally better for fresh needs assessments than for transfer reviews. Key elements contributing to this include the face to face meetings, use of person centred tools (including My Future My Choice, Preparing for your Assessment and One page profiles), outcomes meetings and the quality of support and coordination provided by SEND practitioners.

SEND practitioners and face to face meetings helped by making the process clear. Some parents reported SEND practitioners keeping outcomes meetings focused on the child and on outcomes, when other participants had a different focus, and helping to improve outcomes proposed by schools, and to chase up action arising from plans when schools did not seem to be following the plan after it was issued. The words 'amazing', 'excellent' and similar terms occur often in relation to both SEND practitioners and the face to face and outcome meetings. Some parents felt heard for the first time and that professionals were on their side.

Practitioners were positive about the new approach promoting putting the child at the centre, partnership working, preparation for adulthood and reflecting holistic needs. They were less positive about it helping to provide clear information and advice to parents or meeting deadlines. These experiences are broadly consistent with the parental and other feedback we have. Parents were often not clear when the EHC plan was complete who the key worker/lead professional was, and we will need to ensure this is made clear when all plans are completed.

Outcome meetings appear to have been most effective when all key professionals have been able to attend. Achieving this has been difficult, and inevitably meetings have had to take place without all key participants in some cases. Again, meetings appear to have worked best when a person centred process has been followed and participants with other agendas have been helped to focus back on the child. Transfer review meetings have been more mixed in their quality, reflecting the diversity of approaches from different schools, although some schools have reported becoming more confident through the year.

Threeways have established dedicated review coordinator roles to facilitate person centred review meetings, and this appears to lead to many positive experiences although one parent reported the meeting feeling quite rushed as a result of which she did not feel heard. Fosseyway look to all tutors to lead reviews, not all of whom had had person centred training. Julie Knight has provided some whole school training at Fosseyway to address this. Both parent feedback and audits of EHC plans suggested some good experiences leading to some good quality EHC plans from tutor led reviews at Fosseyway. Many SENCOs across B&NES have attended EHC planning practice workshops, or other training on SEND reform; however more work is required to train more school staff in holding person centred reviews across the mainstream schools. Some primary schools have started doing one page profiles with all pupils regardless of need.

While many parent carer comments were favourable about timescales, we know from the whole of the feedback that there have been negative impacts of the significant delays that have built up in issuing EHC plans following transfer reviews in particular, and the SEN team have reported a backlog building up as the number of fresh assessment requests has taken off following the Xmas break. I have not had figures in compiling this report, however they will be available to the steering group

and it has been clear that there have been significant capacity pressures on the SEN team in particular, as well as the EP service and SEND partnership service.

The transfer plan was ambitious in the number of transfer reviews we set out to do, and not all have been achieved, and there have been significant delays in some of those that have been achieved. Practitioners across the system have been under great pressure as the process is new, and this has shown in some of the lack of clarity and uncertainties reported by parents in respect of the transfer review process. We will need to work with education settings, and look to some of the other key services to take the lead on transfer reviews and on support planning for young people, and to improve the quality of their contribution to the process both to help with the capacity pressures and to achieve the quality of family experience and EHC plans for more transfer reviews as well as fresh needs assessments.

EHC plans are almost always seen as better than statements by parents with experience of both. One parent commented that anyone suggesting an EHC plan is not better than a statement should be shot. Most parents of young people with EHC plans following a fresh assessment are pleased with it. Key elements contributing to this include the personalisation (use of photos of young people, one page profiles, the family profile), the holistic picture of the young person (including positive appreciation and information that is about much more than just education) and the fact that provision and support set out in the plan is generally seen as likely to meet the young person's needs. Young people appreciate the support they receive in school as a result of statements and EHC plans. One parent was very impressed with the plan when she received it, from the photo on the front all the way through; it was all about her child.

Some parents also felt the EHC plan was longer term and more holistic in its thinking than just about SEN. When I was able to cross-reference plans with feedback, this was borne out in the presence of more holistic/plain English outcomes and plans addressing long term aspirations, at least in respect of employment, and issues relating to emotional and social well-being, independent living skills and sometimes health and care issues.

However the majority of EHC plans read and audited were much closer to our aspirations for them in the first parts (one page profiles, family profiles, holistic descriptions of young people, their abilities and needs) than in the second part (where many plans were mostly or entirely focused on meeting SEN in school). This also fits with the observations of some practitioners in other services who commented that EHC plans they have seen look like statements in a new format.

While all plans contain one page profiles, they did not always contain all of the necessary headings – 'like and admire' (the positive appreciation) was sometimes missing, as were other key headings. The depth and quality of the information was also variable, and sometimes information that could have been included in the one

page profile was then in the family profile or the description of the child. Some one page profiles appeared out of date.

There were some excellent family profiles – some clearly written by families themselves, others presumably either by SEND practitioners (for fresh assessments) or school staff (in transfer reviews). There were also many excellent holistic descriptions of children and their needs, often clearly written by SEND practitioners.

A social worker described submitting the social care plans for inclusion in the EHC plan, and receiving back a draft plan with most of the social care outcomes missing. In many cases plans appear to be largely focused on SEN because the main professional inputs have been from education professionals. Short break services reported not always being invited to transfer reviews by schools, and then not receiving copies of plans, although they are making a significant contribution to the work with the young person, and would be able to help develop some of the outcomes other than education in the plan if they were included.

It was clear in some plans that there were significant health issues, but no health plan set out. Not all health issues necessarily require health service provision; however the young person's health outcomes should be included together with whatever the young person, their family, education setting or other support services may be doing to help with them.

FE colleges (both Bath and Bristol) have engaged well, however both they and the SEN team have been on a steep learning curve with respect to developing EHC plans for young people going to college.

When SEND partnership service, advocacy service or KIDS have provided support to families, this has been appreciated by families, settings and other services, and appears to have contributed to more positive experiences and to be associated with plans that are broader, more holistic and address more than educational outcomes. Many parents reported either that the SEND practitioner, independent support or both helped to make the process clear and work well for them. Occasionally this experience of clarity and support was also reported in relation to SENCOs, but in many cases less positive experiences of the process were associated with transfer reviews led by schools and little or no information and clarity about the process or the purpose of meetings.

While all parents were told about the support available in letters about fresh assessments, this information was sometimes not provided (or not heard/read?) in respect of transfer reviews, and sometimes forgotten (one parent commented if she had remembered this had been offered, she would have taken it up part-way through the assessment). Many parents reported not knowing about either the local offer or rainbow resource (the searchable part of the local offer in B&NES). Some said more information about support available would have been helpful. We need to ensure that

families are frequently told and reminded about both the independent support available and about the local offer/rainbow resource.

A recurring theme through the year has been difficulty in getting to grips with outcomes. Time has been focused on this at several of the EHC planning practice workshops, however it will need more work. This is borne out in reading the plans. While a few plans contain some very holistic, person centred outcomes, often the outcomes set out are primarily or only about SEN, and sometimes appear to be targets or objectives rather than outcomes – the difference a provision or action will make to the child.

Local experiences have been broadly consistent with what we have heard about the picture nationally. This is particularly in respect of

- The quality of EHC plans starting good, and becoming more like a statement/SEN focused in many (but not all) cases towards the end
- The very positive family experience of the new approach expressed by many
- The difficulty for all involved in understanding and developing SMART person centred outcomes in plans.

The final pathfinder evaluation found that parent's experience was consistently better when parents knew clearly who the key worker/lead professional was. There is no evidence yet of improvement in outcomes (nationally or locally), and we would not necessarily expect this. However we will need to continue work to develop our ability to measure outcomes in line with the paper on accountability for SEND published by DfE in March.

Local schools, in particular but not exclusively our special schools, while raising many teething problems have also emphasised that on the whole they strongly prefer the B&NES approach to that of any neighbouring authority with which they work (including Wiltshire, one of the pathfinder authorities).

Recommendations for year 2 of the transfer plan

(All actions for CW and SEND VLT unless otherwise stated)

1. The transfer plan, which is a statutory requirement, should be updated in the light of this paper and become the main vehicle for taking forward operational delivery of EHC planning (CM & CW)
2. The SEND Virtual Leadership Team to take ownership and drive the transfer plan, providing a strategic lead to operational services and education settings to promote integrated EHC assessment, planning and review grounded in the B&NES SEND reform principles
3. Continue to hold regular liaison meetings with special school headteachers (CW, SEN team and PfA coordinator)

4. Hold regular SENCO briefings and attend SENCO cluster meetings (CW, SEN team and PfA coordinator)
5. Establish a SENCO best practice forum to develop the quality of person centred review in schools and their input to EHC planning
6. Adopt the PfA transfer review toolkit published January 2015 as the model for the transfer review process going forward
7. Work with, support and train advice givers including education settings and other services to improve the quality of advice provided for EHC needs assessments and transfer reviews
 - Working to the B&NES SEND reform principles
 - Providing advice about all 4 life outcomes, long as well as short term, family and community inputs as well as statutory provision
 - Supported by developing exemplars of good quality advice and EHC plans
8. Support education settings to lead the transfer review process to include
 - Establishing a broad/holistic and complete (not just education focused) team around the child/YP and identifying the lead professional
 - Identifying and commissioning any fresh assessments required
 - Making families aware of the local offer/rainbow resource and the sources of information, advice and support/IS/advocacy
 - Holding person centred review meetings
 - Ensuring all 4 life outcomes are fully considered in drawing up outcomes
9. Key services (to include DCT and Youth Connect, working closely with education settings and with input from transition social workers and/or PfA coordinator as required) to coordinate and lead on drawing up single support plans for young people awaiting transfer to include the elements set out in (6) above
10. Working with adult service commissioners and providers ensure reliable provision of adult service advice for EHC planning both pre and post 18
11. Support education settings to ensure annual reviews of EHC plans drawn up in year one include all of the elements set out in (6) above and when necessary improve the quality of EHC plans to be more holistic and aspirational/long term
12. Set and communicate clear quality standards for EHC plans based on the B&NES principles for SEND reform and the statutory requirements
13. Develop and apply a simple QA process for EHC plans based on these standards
14. Develop and implement systems to routinely collect feedback from young people and parent carers as part of the EHC needs assessment and transfer review processes
15. Review SEN team processes and systems to free up SEND practitioners for person centred practice focused on the quality of EHC plans including admin

support, the use of IT systems and the linking of SEND practitioners with young people, families and education settings (CW, Andrew Sandles, SEN team leadership)

16. Develop a performance management framework for SEND (CM, CW, Andrew Sandles)
17. Simplify the process for gathering family and practitioner feedback for year two including an online element (CW, SEN team, Becky Claridge)
18. Review and update the EHC planning and review paperwork in the light of year one experience (SEN team with input from SEND VLT members)
19. Review the EHC plan format to include ensuring –
 - Consistent use of one page profile headings
 - All 4 life outcomes are more consistently addressed and that outcomes and actions are SMART
20. Provide training to settings and services on EHC planning practice to address
 - Expectations of all those inputting to plans and review/outcome meetings including the quality of advice
 - Understanding of drawing up SMART outcomes covering all 4 life outcomes and including education, health, care, other service and family/community provision and actions
 - Person centred thinking, planning and review meetings
 - Team around the child/young person, lead professional
21. Publish this report together with the updated transfer plan to share the findings widely.

Charlie Moat

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