

Report to the Schools, Children and Families Overview & Scrutiny Committee

21st September 2016

Inclusion Commission

Purpose of the Report

To brief the Committee on the establishment of an Inclusion Commission.

Recommendation

That Members note the information contained in this report

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Purpose of the Inclusion Commission

The purpose of the Inclusion Commission is to establish a roadmap and pathways for all children and young people who have special educational needs in Birmingham from 0-25 within a framework of sustainable inclusion. The Inclusion Commission will review the current arrangements we have in place, focus on the burning issues that we hear from our families and partnership support groups and plan a delivery for improvements and change. The Inclusion Commission's focus is to enquire into what is currently working well with special educational provision and what needs radical improvement.

The Inclusion Commission will provide a governance role with the ability to request detailed analysis and performance information on key issues the Commission wishes to address and will utilise knowledge, insight and experience by calling on specialist witnesses for example from, higher education, local communities, national SEND bodies and undertake learning journeys to Local Authority areas that are considered highly effective for SEND. The Inclusion Commission will provide the long term vision and strategic direction for the future SEND agenda in Birmingham, producing a report and SMART action plan which will be made available to the public on its release.

Background

In line with legislation from 1 September 2014 Birmingham City Council (the Council) no longer issues a "statement of SEN" to a child but instead issues an "Education, Health and Care Plan" which aims to meet all of the child's educational, health and social care needs in one integrated plan. The agenda focuses on supporting those between 0 to 25 years. In addition since 2013 Local Authorities have new commissioning duties with 16-25 educational providers and the allocation of their funding to support those with high needs. The additional burden on Local Authorities as a result has been significant and the implementation of the SEND Code of Practice 2014 had initially resulted in problems with performance in meeting the statutory 20 week deadline. In recent months, all new requests have been completed within the 20 weeks deadline and the backlog of old requests is being cleared

The spotlight on special education still remains, bringing together issues in relation to EHC plans, children with special educational needs not in school or receiving education and travel assistance for our children and young people to get to and from educational provision. These are matters of urgent local concern which are highlighted by parents and carers to the service, parent carer forums and via local Councillors and MP's.

It was through this current position and climate that at the request for Councillor Brigid Jones, an Inclusion Commission for Birmingham is being established.

Membership

Progress to set up this Commission has already been made by the agreed appointment of the independent chair: Professor Geoff Lindsay, Director of the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) of the University of Warwick (see attached appendix). Prof. Lindsay has significant practitioner experience, both as a teacher and as an educational psychologist (EP). His main research areas are special educational needs (SEN), particularly speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), early intervention, and the evaluation of government initiatives. Prof. Lindsay was consultant to the Lamb Inquiry into parental confidence in the SEN system and was Specialist Adviser to the House of Commons Select Committee for scrutiny of the Children and Families Bill.

The Executive Director for Education will act as the principal professional adviser to the Commission with support from specialist officers from Birmingham City Council and Health as required.

Key Issues

To ensure that membership of the Inclusion Commission represents stakeholders across the SEND agenda in Birmingham, engagement is currently in progress to source membership from health, parent carer and young person representatives, school/college representatives' from early years, primary, secondary, special and further education and a governor's representative. Cross party representation is being personally sought directly by Councillor Jones.

Conclusions

1. An Inclusion Commission will be established for Birmingham, which will provide a strong strategic vision and direction for SEND, establishing a roadmap and clear pathways across the agenda.
2. The first Inclusion Commission will be held on 6th October 2016. This meeting will discuss the purpose of the Inclusion Commission and agree its Terms of Reference.
3. The independent Chair, Prof. Lindsay has been appointed. Prof. Lindsay has significant practitioner experience, both as a teacher and as an educational psychologist.

List of Appendices

Chair of Inclusion Commission; Professor Geoff Lindsay – CV
Inclusion Commission – Draft Terms of Reference