

**Report of the Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools**

I have been asked to Report as follows for Full Council on 8 December 2022:

1. By Councillor Aves as follows:

- What are we doing now in Devon to strongly encourage all our schools to be more inclusive, especially our secondary schools whether they are mainstream or part of a Multi-academy Trust?
- What are Devon County Council doing to really ensure government listens and supports our schools and colleges with enough funding to enable them to be inclusive for all children living in their local area?
- If we do not do this successfully the schools will not be able to give the support needed and cause some children to school refuse or to need an Educational Health and Care Plan due to their increasing complex needs not being addressed.
- How many of our children and young people aged 3-18 are there in Education Other Than at School?
- When will Devon prioritise timely support and early intervention for children and young people who are not going to school for whatever reason?
- Suspensions are happening and especially for those with SEND due to poor support.
- How many children are there suspended from schools and colleges, aged from 3-18, currently in Devon and how many of those have special educational needs and disabilities?

2. By Councillor Adams as follows:

- An up to date report on the progress so far on reducing the backlog of EHCPs. How long is the wait time for an EHCP at the present time?
- Are staffing levels sufficient at present to manage the backlog in the delivery of SEND services?
- How much progress has been made on the action plan in Children's Services? Where are the tangible areas of progress?

Since the recent transfer of Educational Services from Babcock LDP to Devon County Council can the Cabinet Member for Educational Services please report on:

- How the team are being managed strategically on a regular basis as a team?
- What support has been put in place to integrate the team into Devon County Council?
- What impact has been made so far by the two external CEOs, taken on as DCC Heads of Education covering Delivery and Strategy?

Responses

To Councillor Aves ref Inclusivity in Schools

Councillor Leadbetter will reply verbally to this request.

To Councillor Adams - Special Educational Needs progress

The new Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Improvement Board, that met in September, brought together senior representatives from schools, the NHS and children's services along with representatives from the Parent Carer Forum Devon and local Elected Members to start improving the experience of children and families across the county who need specialist help and support.

The aim of the Board is to ensure a strong local partnership where everyone is clear what good looks like and to oversee the implementation of co-produced action plans. It will also hold all partners to account for delivering on changes and improving outcomes for children and young people. Trevor Doughty took over as Chair of the Board this autumn from the interim chair Liz Davenport (Chief Executive of the South Devon & Torbay NHS Foundation Trust). Trevor has an excellent track record in Children's Services most recently he has been the Director of Sector Led improvement at the LGA and previous to that he was the Strategic Director for Children Families and Adults at Cornwall Council between 2018-2019. The most recent Board meeting was on 29 November 2022.

The service is working hard to reduce the backlog of Education and Health Care Plans (EHCP). There are 503 overdue plans. Children who are transitioning are allocated straight away for assessment, remaining children are currently waiting for 30 weeks.

We continue to work with significantly reduced staffing levels, but we have a rolling programme of recruitment to build capacity in a competitive market.

The Department for Education has reviewed the improvement plan which has been jointly drafted with health colleagues with input from the Parent Carer Forum. We are currently addressing some amendments that they have requested.

Some elements of the plan are already being progressed;

- an assessment panel for EHC referrals was established in Spring
- a sub-committee of the Devon Education Forum meets to discuss High Needs Schools
- a multi-agency placement panel has been established

The service is working very closely with the Parent Carer forum to develop our communications strategy to ensure that the voice of children, young person and families is at the heart of everything we do.

To Councillor Adams - Babcock staff to Devon County Council

Thank you, Councillor Adams for your questions about the in-housing of Babcock staff and services earlier this year. On 1 August 2022, 232 staff from Babcock LDP were in-housed into Devon County Council. A dedicated project management team was in place throughout the process. I am delighted that they prioritised communication and the well-being of the staff involved. The board was chaired by a school leader who is a member of the Devon Schools leadership Service to ensure that the project was delivered successfully.

On 22 July, 160 Babcock staff attended an event that the leader and I attended to welcome staff to Devon County Council. As well as introductions from members and senior officers, workshops were facilitated in the afternoon for staff to learn more about the Council.

Regular newsletters were sent to Babcock colleagues in the months leading up to the in-housing and drop-in sessions were offered as well as a call with the Chief Officer for Children's Services to answer questions.

For some staff there was a gap before they joined us in our offices due to term time working patterns. All staff received a full induction, everyone was offered a tour of the building that they were based in; and a buddying system was set up.

Staff have been integrated into the same work area as existing DCC staff for continuity and to provide support.

For the majority of staff, they have in-housed with their existing immediate line manager. All staff have regular team meetings and receive regular communication from their senior leader.

Staff now sit under the structures of Jackie Ross for Special Educational Needs and Rachel Shaw for Educational Delivery. Matthew Shanks is leading Education and Learning Strategy, focussing on the impacts of the governments white paper.

Senior leaders who have transitioned from Babcock have been fully integrated into the Senior Management team that meets fortnightly at County Hall.

All staff are involved in regular meetings to discuss current ways of working and the future direction of Education and Learning.

Rachel Shaw and Matthew Shanks have made a significant impact in supporting staff in-housing into the Council from Babcock, ensuring that staff understand their roles across teams. Their sector experience has enabled them to coordinate the academic position of all Devon schools, (maintained and other); creating strong partnerships with the Diocese and Regional Directors' office so that approach to school improvement is consistent and well-coordinated. They are well placed to support staff to deliver against funding requests and they act on the Chief Officer's behalf in liaison with Ofsted to manage complaints. They will continue to work with the wider council to ensure that the traded services that have been reintegrated with the Council, deliver good outcomes and value for money.

Andrew Leadbetter

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools