

HEALTHWATCH RICHMOND UPON THAMES' RESPONSE TO THE UPDATED RICHMOND SEND FUTURES PLAN-MARCH 2021

The revised SEND Futures Plan aims to improve the quality of services for children and young people and reduce the deficit in SEND finances in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. The plan is ambitious in both of its aims and in embedding integrated working through governance structures and joint practices for instance work force. It makes important commitments with associated actions for instance on engagement and co-production, early intervention, therapy availability, transition to adulthood and workforce training. However, it also includes significant changes to the level and type of support likely to be provided to children and young people, particularly those under SEN support; and envisages decreasing numbers of EHCPs. Revisions to the original document of 2019 include a welcome focus in each Work Package on the views of young people, children and families and positive developments including progress made in engagement with families in Work Package 1 and the significant increase in investment in therapies. We welcome the opportunity to comment on the plan, identify issues that could be strengthened and foresee areas where Healthwatch Richmond expertise could be drawn on as the plan is implemented.

Healthwatch Richmond aims to understand the needs, experiences and concerns of people who use health and social care services in the London Borough of Richmond upon Thames. We analyse and report residents' views and undertake reviews of services to support improvements. Healthwatch Richmond has engaged with families and young people with SEND prior to and during the coronavirus pandemic. The SEND Futures Plan identifies many long-standing difficulties faced by families as they undertake the journey from assessment through transitions and to adulthood. Areas where Healthwatch Richmond's expertise is relevant or where we believe additional actions are needed are below:

Emotional wellbeing and mental health activities in Work Package 3, Local Provision

This Work Package includes actions to understand the needs and service requirements to improve the emotional and mental health of children and young people including mental health support in schools and CAMHS. Our engagement with families and stakeholders indicates there may be difficulties in provision of and access to CAMHS at Tier 2 (support services like Kooth, Off the Record and counselling in schools) and Tier 3 (Mental Health Therapies led by CAMHS) during the pandemic, as well as being previous areas of difficulty. The actions in the Plan align with Healthwatch Richmond's work priorities for 2021/22 and our expertise having carried out previous work on

CAMHS services in 2015 and most recently during the pandemic when it became clear that the volume of service at all tiers and methods of delivery have proved inadequate to meet growing and changed need. We would welcome engagement with partners involved in this area of the Work Package.

The actions also include the establishment of a digital youth steering group. Healthwatch Richmond's expertise is of direct relevance to this action, having worked in partnership with Healthwatch Kingston to support an engaged group of young people aged 13-18, Youth Out Loud! (YOL!). The YOL group is well established and research young people's health experiences and develop resources. They have recently undertaken a survey with 346 young people during the pandemic, asking about their emotional and mental health needs. YOL! identified particular challenges for young people with health conditions and/or disabilities, as the services they received seem to have deteriorated significantly. While exam stress has worsened throughout the year of the pandemic, frequent changes in guidelines have affected young people's resilience negatively. In response, YOL! has developed inclusive resources on mental health including a video on self-harm and signposting articles, widely promoted among young people in the Borough. Youth Out Loud! continues to meet twice monthly, one of which is joint with the Kingston & Richmond Youth Council (KRYC), to discuss how young people's needs change throughout time. Currently, they are working together to release a podcast on mental health, which will be released on the occasion of May's Mental Health Awareness Week. YOL! is open to establish further collaborations with local organisations.

Missing from the actions in this Work Package is support to parents and carers emotional wellbeing and mental health. In previous years, families have told us of the difficulties faced for instance, in identifying the right support, filling gaps in communication and the strains of trying to navigate their SEND journey. During the coronavirus, we held online engagement sessions where families told us of difficulties they were experiencing and challenges to emotional and mental health were prominent, exacerbated by the lack of respite available. Current carer support services predominantly support carers of older adults. Stakeholders have told us parent carers of children and young people do not feel the services meet their particular needs, in part due to the very different circumstances of the other carers. We consider it important to include an action to increase access to formal emotional wellbeing and mental health services focused on the needs of parents and carers, as well as options for respite.

Communication with parents

The need to reduce costs is clearly made in the plan, in line with commitments made in the recent Safety Valve Agreement with the Department of Health. Actions with associated KPIs to make significant reductions to forecast expenditure include expected reductions to the numbers of EHCPs assessed and agreed and reduced placements out of borough. Marketing to parents of in-borough school placements and alternative support strategies is included in the Plan. These planned changes should be carefully communicated to families and outcomes monitored, to gain parent carer trust and to reduce fears around accessing and maintaining support, an important part of the emotional and mental health burden of parents and carers. Opportunities to develop a positive dialogue with families could include community engagement events and messaging to the SEND workforce.

Budget, dependencies and Key Performance Indicators

As a member of the Health and Wellbeing Board, tasked with overseeing progress of the plan over the period of five years, more detailed information on planned financial investment to the elements of the plan, baselines for KPIs and dependencies would be welcomed. At present the investment plan (included in the Achieving Value for Money section of the July 2019 version of the Plan) and KPI dashboard are not included. The summary of the Plan circulated to the Health and Wellbeing Board notes significant increases in financial commitments to therapy services over three financial years to 2022/23 but there is no other information about the balance of resourcing in the plan. The risk register highlights high risk deficit reduction elements such as reduced use of out of borough and independent schools. Planned financial investments and dependencies, as well as baseline KPIs would be helpful tools, particularly to understand the balance struck between service improvements and deficit reduction.