

Bristol City Council

SEND Data Independent Review

July 2019

SF INDEPENDENT SPECIALISTS LIMITED

Contents

1. Background and Scope	4
1.1 Objectives of the Review	4
2. Methodology	4
FINDINGS	5
3. Systems and Reporting	5
System Questions	5
3.1 Question 1: What has gone wrong in the development of appropriate performance processes to meet the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review and Service / Inspectorial requirements?	5
3.2 Question 2: What are the limitations of the current data / performance mechanisms?	6
3.3 Question 3: What were the underlying issues which resulted in problematic migration of data to the Liquidlogic System?	6
3.4 Question 4: What are the barriers to improving or understanding the current data / performance system?	6
3.5 Question 5: What could reasonably be expected from officers in the delivery of data in the absence of high-quality performance data being available digitally?	7
3.6 Question 6: Has the role undertaken by the Case Record Provider Liquidlogic, in relation to data and performance reporting, been as could reasonably have been expected?	7
3.7 Question 7: In relation to Strategic and Operational performance management information, is it fit for purpose and have service subject experts supported development effectively?	7
4. Operational Reporting	8
Operational Reporting Questions	8
4.1 Question 8: Have products been developed to facilitate operational and management engagement and oversight?	8
4.2 Question 9: Are difficulties in migration and consequent impact on reporting of data now being overcome?	9
4.3 Question 10: Should the authority develop a manual (ie Excel-based) tracking system for statutory processes in SEND to support planning and oversight of day to day work?	9
5. Strategic Performance	9
Strategic Performance Questions	9
5.1 Question 11: Have products been developed to facilitate strategic engagement and oversight?	9
5.2 Question 12: Is there Information available to fully understand the effectiveness of services and their impact on outcomes	10
5.3 Question 13: Does the dashboard enable Performance Clinic / Board and LASSPG oversight?	10
5.4 Question 14: Is there more that senior management could have done in challenging performance data and progress	11
6. Capacity in Delivering the Assessment Process	12
7. Conclusion	12
8. Recommendations to inform action planning and performance management	13

8.1	Strategic Overview proposed actions to resolve:	13
8.2	Mitigation	13
8.3	Recommendations: Operational level reporting	14

1. Background and Scope

The Political and Directorate Leadership of Bristol City Council have commissioned an independent review on the reporting of SEND data.

The disparity in reporting of SEND data following implementation of a new SEND case management system, lead to unknown levels of poor performance in delivery of statutory timescales and team outputs.

1.1 Objectives of the Review

- To understand and report on:
 - factors contributing to the declined performance in statutory assessment and review of SENs, focusing on timeliness of assessments and processing annual reviews
 - the suitability of performance data and the processes undertaken to manage the change from the old system to the new
 - Management processes and mitigation of risks
- To link with previously commissioned audit work on SEND business
- To make recommendations to ensure compliant and significantly improved operational performance and secure performance reporting, on which officers and members can rely.

2. Methodology

The review of special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) performance and data management included:

- Diagnostic review of systems and performance outputs including data accuracy
- Presenting and accessing data
- Governance and communication
- Workforce and capacity
- Recommendations to inform action planning and performance management

The review was carried out over five days in July 2019, by Sam Freeman who has experience of systems and performance management in Children's Services. The findings and recommendations of this review are based on interviews with Bristol City Council managers involved in the SEND process, system, and performance. Readily available documents and data were supplied as part of this review.

The review did not track individual cases through the SEND process.

FINDINGS

As part of the review a set list of questions were included.

3. Systems and Reporting

Until March 2019, the Bright system was utilised for recording SEND information. This included management information from the inbuilt reports and populated the SEN2 (DfE statutory return). Liquidlogic's Early Help Module (EHM) went live in April 2019 as the new SEND case management system, with the Bright system then de-commissioned.

The new SEND case management system was part of the EYES Project (replacement for the Education case management system) which started approximately 3 years ago with Liquidlogic and the Council and ended in March 2019.

The EYES Project Plan was requested, as part of this review, but due to changes in personnel, it was reported documents were not available.

This review concluded there was not a written migration plan for the new SEND case management system.

This review focused on the migration process from the old legacy system (Bright) to the new SEND case management system (Liquidlogic) and performance reporting.

System Questions

3.1 Question 1: What has gone wrong in the development of appropriate performance processes to meet the recommendations of the LGA Peer Review and Service / Inspectorial requirements?

3.1.1 The LGA Peer Review in November 2018 outlined the paucity of good quality performance processes and reporting for SEND: *"... Poor performance has been tolerated and data quality has not been challenged by local area partners Tolerance of inaccurate data and poor service delivery which might be historical, yet the same problems remain ... performance data is not effectively used to inform, or measure improvement priorities."* Having reviewed documents and discussions as part of this review this has not yet been achieved and needs to be improved.

3.1.2 This report highlights what has gone wrong in the development of appropriate performance process.

3.1.3 The July 2019 SEND self-evaluation includes data and intelligence as a key area for development. This is addressed through the local area SEND action plan, which is being delivered by the Local Area SEND Strategic Partnership Group (LASSPG).

3.2 Question 2: What are the limitations of the current data / performance mechanisms?

- 3.2.1 The quality of some of the data fields in the new SEND case management system are missing or incorrect, which in turn impacts on the performance outputs. Solutions around the reporting outputs are currently being developed to overcome these.
- 3.2.2 The reporting outputs are from a data warehouse, which requires a “data dictionary”, at the time of this review it was not available, made progress slower than usual.
- 3.2.3 A separate Excel spreadsheet is currently in place to track day to day management of cases but due to the nature of a spreadsheet this is very limited. The maintaining of this tracker is duplicating recording which is also being undertaken on the new SEND case management system and therefore staff time. It is essential in the absence of operational and management reporting from the new SEN case management system that this tracker remains, albeit as a short-term solution.

3.3 Question 3: What were the underlying issues which resulted in problematic migration of data to the Liquidlogic System?

- 3.3.1 From discussions during this review it was reported by the project team that a complete technical migration was not possible, due to the nature and quality of data in the old legacy system (Bright). There was no written migration plan to understand what the process was for cleaning and checking the data prior to migration.
- 3.3.2 From documents supplied and discussions during the review, tracking of cases between systems was in place, although this was limited to individual cases. The document did not give an overview of how the project was progressing and risks identified.
- 3.3.3 This review highlights the lack of overall processes around the migration of data from the old to the new SEND case management system. This is evidenced by no written migration plan.

3.4 Question 4: What are the barriers to improving or understanding the current data / performance system?

- 3.4.1 Until the full extent of the data quality is known, it will continue to have an impact on the performance system.
- 3.4.2 The new SEND case management system has significantly more functionality than the previous system and with it comes the ability of enhanced management information. This change in performance management culture will need to provide

support and training to staff in order to understand their roles and responsibilities around performance management.

- 3.4.3 Performance surgeries are held in other areas of Children’s Services with successful outcomes in monitoring areas of poor performance early and the SEND service would benefit from a similar format.

3.5 Question 5: What could reasonably be expected from officers in the delivery of data in the absence of high-quality performance data being available digitally?

- 3.5.1 Using the SEND case management system for management information, to track cases and timescales and manually review workload and priorities.
- 3.5.2 Officers recording casework in a timely way, ensuring information is recorded in the correct data field, enabling the reporting outputs currently in development to accurately reflect performance and timescales.
- 3.5.3 The continuing use of Excel spreadsheet is used to track cases as a short-term solution to report on performance, until the availability of “real time” operational and management reporting from the new SEND case management system.

3.6 Question 6: Has the role undertaken by the Case Record Provider Liquidlogic, in relation to data and performance reporting, been as could reasonably have been expected?

- 3.6.1 The specification requirements of Liquidlogic of data and performance reporting in recent years, has been difficult to establish during this review, due to a lack of documentation supplied.
- 3.6.2 An older document from 2016 relating to the EHC Plans of the EYES Specialists Services Requirements Specification V0.2 did not have a provision for SEND performance reporting within the specification.

3.7 Question 7: In relation to Strategic and Operational performance management information, is it fit for purpose and have service subject experts supported development effectively?

- 3.7.1 The performance management seen during this review did not give a clear picture strategically or operationally of SEND.
- 3.7.2 Following migration of the SEND case management team, the Information, Performance and Intelligence team (IPI team) started work on the reporting requirements with the SEND team, producing a SEND Dashboard.

- 3.7.3 At a strategic level, the SEND dashboard provides high level key performance indicators and there are plans to review and include monthly performance of the key performance measures.
- 3.7.4 The current strategic and operational management information for SEND are being developed as a “real time” self-serve. The development of these is between the SEN team and the IPI team.
- 3.7.5 There appears to have been a disconnection with the IPI team in the development of the SEND case management reporting around the time of migration. The IPI team were pivotal in the development of the EYES Project for the education system.

4. Operational Reporting

At the time of the review the level of operational reporting was limited. As a temporary measure, an Excel tracker is used to track cases and report on activity including timescales, although this requires manual inputting by staff, duplicating work.

Work is currently in progress on the development of a suite of operational reporting from the new SEND case management system to provide “real time” self-service reporting. The development of these reports being overseen by the SEN Team Manager, working with the IPI team.

Operational Reporting Questions

- 4.1 Question 8: Have products been developed to facilitate operational and management engagement and oversight?
 - 4.1.1 The current products are limited and do not provide “real time” case work activity, compliance data and throughput in order to achieve robust management oversight.
 - 4.1.2 The current Excel tracker has been designed as a short-term solution to manage the SEN process and is able to provide management oversight.
 - 4.1.3 During the review the Insight, Performance and Intelligence team (IPI team) had started work on the development of “real time” operational and management reporting from the new SEND case management system, enabling tracking of the statutory process. The first draft of these reports included comparison information at team, caseworker and casework level, due deadlines and trends over time to identify if performance is improving. The first phase of these reports is anticipated to be available by end of August.

4.2 Question 9: Are difficulties in migration and consequent impact on reporting of data now being overcome?

- 4.2.1 The absence of a manual migration plan and the correct levels of manual migration activity has definitely had an impact on the accuracy and quality of data in the new system, and on reporting. Solutions are being worked on using a number of reporting outputs from the SEND case management system to identify the data quality issues raised from the migration.
- 4.2.2 Floor walkers are supporting the SEND caseworkers in resolving migration issues in the new SEND case management system, together with a comprehensive guidance document on the SEND process recording.
- 4.2.3 Reporting outputs are exploring options to “work around” some of the migration issues, by using data extracted from the legacy system (Bright).

4.3 Question 10: Should the authority develop a manual (ie Excel-based) tracking system for statutory processes in SEND to support planning and oversight of day to day work?

- 4.3.1 A manual Excel tracking system was in place at the time of this review, which is enabling management oversight of the SEN process. Until the completion of the operational and management reporting from the new SEND case management system, it is advised the Excel tracker is maintained. No new workarounds are required.
- 4.3.2 It is acknowledged this is a short-term solution until the information held on the SEND case management system is available via live reporting outputs.

5. Strategic Performance

The strategic performance monitoring is reported from SPAR.NET the Council’s reporting platform and includes a number of SEND performance measures reported quarterly. This is very limited and does not provide a strategic overview of information required to provide a clear picture of the SEND process.

Strategic Performance Questions

5.1 Question 11: Have products been developed to facilitate strategic engagement and oversight?

- 5.1.1 The current products are limited and are difficult to fully understand performance and impact on outcomes and how these link to plans and strategies.
- 5.1.2 A SEND dashboard provides a summary of EHC Plan completed within 20 weeks quarterly and would benefit from monthly trends, targets and benchmarking.
- 5.1.3 Strategic engagement and oversight would benefit from implementing a SEND performance management framework, giving managers support and tools to make systematic, continuous improvements for children with special educational needs and disabilities. It would support achievements of better outcomes for children, young people, parents and families. It would also enable the service to be accountable for its performance

5.2 Question 12: Is there Information available to fully understand the effectiveness of services and their impact on outcomes

- 5.2.1 This migration raised questions around the quality of data and completeness of data fields in the old legacy system (Bright) which questions the confidence previously in data and performance outputs.
- 5.2.2 The strategic performance monitoring is quarterly via the SPAR.net which includes SEND key performance indicators and there are clear pathways for the oversight and sign off for these indicators. The presentation of these key performance indicators could be strengthened with the inclusion of a summary page on what is going well, areas for improvement and linking to plans and strategies.
- 5.2.3 The SEND Dashboard is in place, although this is limited, in providing impact on outcomes, as it includes process measures.
- 5.2.4 The current developments of the operational and management reporting and improvements to the SEND dashboard need to link in with triangulating a range of evidence (parent feedback, audits, complaints, SEN tribunals) to understand “how we are doing?”.
- 5.2.5 Focus on the improvement of recording, quality of data and reporting outputs, will enable greater confidence in the improved effectiveness of services and their impact on outcomes.

5.3 Question 13: Does the dashboard enable Performance Clinic / Board and LASSPG oversight?

- 5.3.1 The SEND dashboard is limited in providing oversight and would benefit from improvements as referred to in Question 12.

- 5.3.2 The SEND dashboard is used by the Local Area SEND Strategic Partnership Group (LASSPG) and at a recent meeting the issue around migration was raised, although it is not possible to determine if it was raised as a separate agenda item or from the presentation of the SEND dashboard.
- 5.3.3 The Performance Clinic requires additional strategic overview information as the SEND dashboard is limited, it is anticipated with the development of the “real time” reports that this will be met.

5.4 Question 14: Is there more that senior management could have done in challenging performance data and progress

- 5.4.1 There were not sufficient systems and processes in place to achieve a successful migration, contributed by no written migration plan.
- 5.4.2 The review was not able to establish the detail behind why an implementation took place without the correct governance and processes in place. It is strongly recommended that this is followed up by the Council’s Internal Audit, to give assurances to senior leaders.
- 5.4.3 The current interim Director of Education came into post during the implementation and migration of the new SEND case management system. This review has established that there was a delay in recognising their strategic oversight responsibilities earlier on in the implementation.
- 5.4.4 Although there was regular contact between the project lead of the new SEND case management system and the strategic lead, there was no project board in place. This has led to a lack of understanding the risks associated with the migration.
- 5.4.5 With a project board in place and the strategic lead, as the chair, would have enabled clear oversight of how the project was progressing and ensuring a successful conclusion.
- 5.4.6 In March 2019, the strategic leadership team commissioned work around understanding the SEN process and the issues the migration had started to raise.
- 5.4.7 A recent management change has taken place, with a dedicated manager holding responsibility of the SEND process, reporting directly to the strategic lead.

6. Capacity in Delivering the Assessment Process

The SEND casework team are under considerable pressure in managing the volume of work, generated by the increase in requests for assessments from 442¹ in 2017 (calendar year) to 607² in 2018 (calendar year). In addition, there are a high number of education, health and care plans in place and subject to review.

The new SEND case management system has contributed to the increased workload due to confidence in the new system and keeping separate systems to monitor tracking of cases creating a duplication of work.

It is clear all involved in the SEND process understand and welcome the focus to improve which has had a recent change in management and the SEND casework team now have a dedicated manager, with responsibility of the SEND process and accountability for improvements.

Recently commissioned work to understand the challenges of the SEND case management system have started, or are due to start, which will improve the SEN system and processes, getting them to where they need to be.

7. Conclusion

There is strong evidence that the migration planning was not effective enough, causing a lack of operational and management reporting, impacting on the inconsistency of data and actual performance levels.

Performance reporting needs to be given a high priority. The operational and management reporting in development, would be strengthened further with a SEND performance management framework. A framework would give managers support and tools to make systematic, continuous improvements for children with special educational needs and disabilities.

The SEND case management system has outstanding developments to be delivered and in order to implement these successfully, a project board will be required giving governance and accountability.

The senior leadership team (SLT) have commissioned other work or work in progress to support changes required in the current situation and are confident they are committed to the improvements required.

¹ Statements of SEN and EHC Plans: England 2018, National and Local Authority Tables: Table 7, Department for Education, May 2018; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/769586/Statements_of_SEN_and_EHC_plans_2018_Main_Tables.xlsx?_ga=2.80260375.1683560135.1566736715-1638025445.1566736715

² Statements of SEN and EHC Plans: England 2019, National and Local Authority Tables: Table 8, Department for Education, May 2019; https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805016/SEN2_2019_tables.xlsx?_ga=2.110739717.1683560135.1566736715-1638025445.1566736715

This review took place over five days and is an overview of the current situation. If may be, further investigation is required, to ascertain whether all the information is complete and accurate.

8. Recommendations to inform action planning and performance management

8.1 Strategic Overview proposed actions to resolve:

- Strengthen governance of SEND at a strategic level for data and performance
- Improve data and management information and processing as soon as possible
- Help services achieve benefits from SEND case management functionality
- Data flows and interfaces between systems is mapped and implemented
- Strengthen governance of the SEND case management system

8.2 Mitigation

On-going engagement and clear plan of action, where all services understand the requirements that will impact on their service and resource demands to deliver change.

8.3 Recommendations: Operational level reporting

Recommendations:

- Complete a data cleansing exercise of records
- Review the Education, Health and Care Need Assessment / Plan annual review process from start to finish
- Detailed review of all Excel and Word documents in use with a plan to decommission these documents being used to bridge confidence gaps in data
- Review reporting needs of operational and management level to support day to day management information, performance data and KPIs
- Provide training to fill current system knowledge gaps
- Implement other modules of the IT system within BCC
- Connection to online customer portal
- Implement a SEND performance management framework to make systematic and continuous improvements to the SEND process and improving outcomes for children.

Requirements:

- Accurate and “real time” data sets
- Reporting can be managed locally by the team
- Use of alerts matched to statutory timeframes to enable effective monitoring
- Case management functionality to link detailed file information across internal system

Stakeholder analysis:

- Confidence in data and system performance is low but recognise the value in having a system that meets needs.
- Gaps regarding the system being used and so there is a need for focused training and to embed the skills for use in the team.

Reporting Needs:

- Wide range of operational and management reporting requirements
- Exception reporting
- Statutory reporting of the DfE special educational needs survey, commonly known as SEN2

Success criteria:

- System stability and performance
- Reduced effort to create and maintain records
- Accurate data
- Improved management information and ease of reporting
- Improved system performance
- Reduce the overall administration effort of the process
- Improved data sharing across systems
- Staff are well trained and competent users of the system
- Enable the service to work smarter and faster
- Better shared knowledge and skills across the team in the use of the system
- Improved management oversight