

Children and Families Committee

Date of Meeting:	20 March 2023
Report Title:	Educational Psychology Service progress update
Report of:	Deborah Woodcock, Executive Director of Children's Services
Report Reference No:	CF/24/22-23
Ward(s) Affected:	There are no direct implications for individual wards

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1.** To provide the Children and Families Committee with an update on the Educational Psychology Service.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1.** The Educational Psychology Service has clear priorities and aspires to develop an innovative programme of support through a sustainable Educational Psychology Service which can meet both statutory demand and provide early intervention support through a traded service. Traded service aims to promote positive outcomes for children and young people. The above, alongside other developments across the SEND partnership, will provide timely support for children, contribute to the reduction of education, health, and care needs assessments (EHCNAs), and consequently, minimise the current high reliance on external locum educational psychologists.
- 2.2.** The Educational Psychology Service has developed an innovative recruitment and retention plan; a 'grow your own model' through recruitment, training, and development of assistant educational psychologists and trainee educational psychologists who progress to become fully qualified educational psychologists, over a five-year period. Thereafter, they will remain with Cheshire East for three years post-qualification which is built into their employment contract.

3. Recommendations

Children and families committee should

- 3.1. Note the development and achievements of the Educational Psychology Service
- 3.2. Support the continued recruitment and retention programme and plans to develop a stable and sustainable Educational Psychology Service in line with demand and budget which can:
 - Fulfil all statutory related duties.
 - Provide an adequate and balanced range of evidence-informed prevention and intervention work through an educational psychology traded service.

4. Reasons for Recommendations

- 4.1. To assure members of the development of the Educational Psychology Service and the progress being made in terms of good practice and impact.

5. Other Options Considered

- 5.1. We provide a statutory-only service which will therefore serve to increase statutory demand and elevate cost. This will meet children's needs neither effectively, nor in a timely way. Additionally, this way of working would not be attractive to the recruitment or retention of educational psychologists.
- 5.2. We do not progress with a recruitment and retention programme. This would result in increased costs with high reliance on locum educational psychologists and difficulties in quality assurance and timeliness of locum reports.

6. Background

Summary of the priorities of the Educational Psychology Service.

- 6.1. The development of the Educational Psychology Service is being led by our principal educational psychologist who took up post in May 2022, albeit work started in her previous role as a senior educational psychologist. The priorities of the service are:
 - To ensure all statutory advice provided is of high quality and within statutory timelines leading to improved positive outcomes for children and young people.

- To develop an early intervention offer through a traded service arrangement to build staff capacity, confidence, and skills in staff across all settings from early years to post-16 to able them to better meet children's education and SEND needs.
- 6.2.** The impact of the service, in collaboration with partner services, will be measured over time and demonstrate a reduction in needs assessment requests being received. This will be as a direct result of settings and schools being more confident and skilful in the use of the SEND toolkit and in implementing appropriate strategies and support; therefore, becoming more equipped to meet the needs of children without an education, health, and care plan.
- 6.3.** We will measure service impact over time, related to:
- Increase in the number of children and young people with their needs met at SEN support, which will result in a reduction in needs assessment requests.
 - Schools increasing confidence and skills in adopting inclusive practices and meeting the needs of children within mainstream school will be demonstrated by a reduction in the number of change of placement requests.
- 6.4.** Critical to the development of the service is the recruitment and retention of educational psychologists. This will enhance the service capacity to implement the above measures and reduce the use of locum educational psychologists.

Baseline position in 2018

- 6.5.** The timeliness of educational psychology reports for education, health, and care needs assessment in September 2018 was 0%, with many assessments waiting over 12 months. As a result of our improvement plan post-Ofsted inspection, this improved from November 2020 to November 2021. At this time, there was a service issue which resulted in a dramatic drop in progress. This issue has now been addressed. A new principal educational psychologist was appointed in April 2022 and significant work has taken place to address timeliness since. The Educational Psychology Service is now back on track (see Appendix 1 Statutory Timeliness data), and plans to ensure that this is sustained are being developed.
- 6.6.** Initial timeliness in 2018 was the result of there being limited capacity to provide direct educational psychology involvement with children in their education settings. Little, if any, prevention and intervention work was offered. The new approach will now ensure that statutory/legal compliance is maintained, and education, health, and care needs assessment demand is reduced through building educational psychology staff capacity to provide

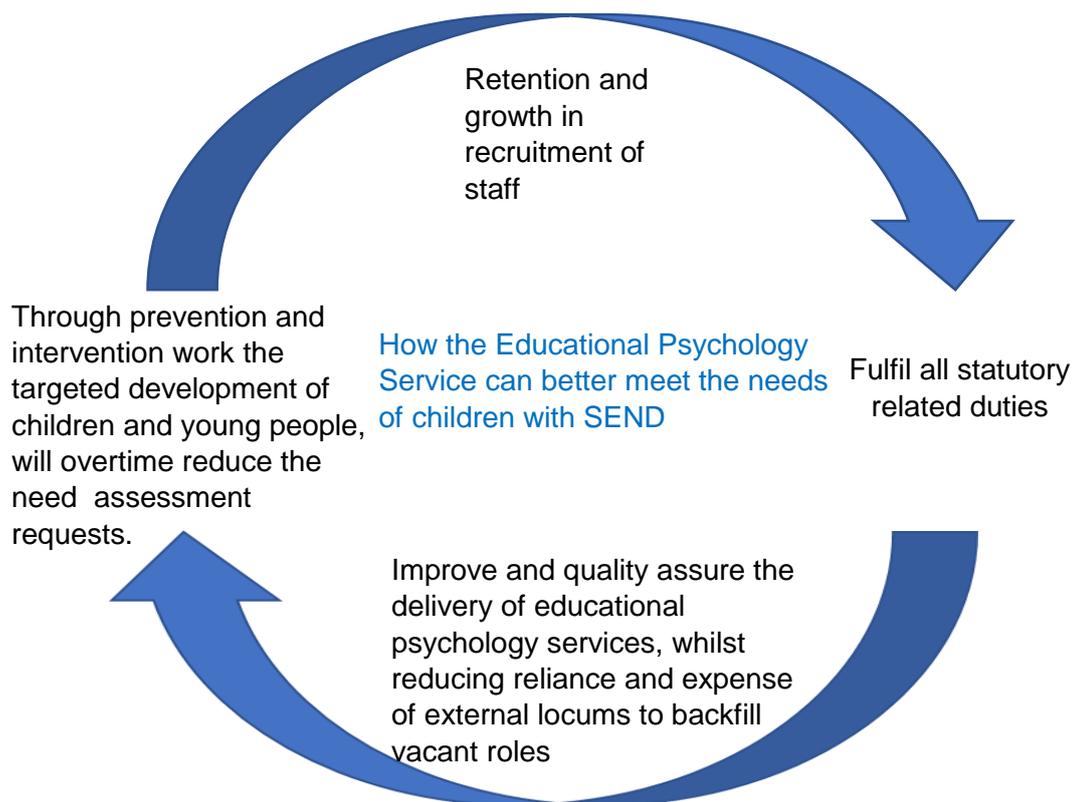
direct prevention and effective early intervention work within settings alongside other partner services.

- 6.7. Education settings were buying in the services of private educational psychologists at a significantly elevated cost to consult, provide formal assessment, psychological reportage and training.
- 6.8. The Educational Psychology Service held a poor reputation, being regarded as a statutory saturated service, and consequently, struggled significantly to recruit and retain staff.
- 6.9. The professional development of educational psychologists required updating in order to enhance their knowledge and skills to inform their involvement in promoting best outcomes for children.
- 6.10. There were very few locum educational psychologists commissioned to bring additional capacity to the Educational Psychology Service to support the reduction in the education, health, and care needs assessment backlog.

Transformation to date

- 6.11. By 2020, additional educational psychology capacity to provide statutory advice was achieved through building a bank of locum educational psychologists. The service successfully commissioned 31 locums to backfill educational psychology staffing shortage. By November 2020, the Educational Psychology Service achieved 100% timeliness and maintained an average of 91% until November 2021.
- 6.12. During November 2021 to mid-January 2022, there was a change in the management oversight of the educational psychology assessment tracker. During this period, timeliness fell, requiring considerable efforts to get this back on track.
- 6.13. Due to a persistent chronic national shortage of educational psychologists, most councils hold vacancies, and consequently, every council is seeking to competitively recruit to their workforce. This caused considerable retention and recruitment pressures, with the cost of procuring locum educational psychologists escalating. It is through the 'grow your own' plan, aligned with retention and recruitment, that we have successfully employed 5 trainee educational psychologists (providing two Educational Psychology Service days) and 5 full-time assistant educational psychologists, supporting prevention and early intervention work. (See Appendix 2 – Recruitment and Retention programme, Appendix 4 for Current Educational Psychology Service structure and Appendix 3 for Impact Data and Evaluation of Training)
- 6.14. The 'grow your own' model of educational psychology will achieve the following over a five-year period:

- Bring highly engaged employees through the Educational Psychology Service who are more likely to provide discretionary effort and remain loyal advocates of the service
- Fulfil their statutory duties, providing psychological advice for education, health, and care needs assessments on time and ensuring greater control of the quality assurance of advice and reports
- Reduce financial pressure through growing internal staffing capacity which will consequently, over time, lessen the reliance on expensive locum educational psychologists
- Expand prevention and intervention work, which will gradually contribute to a reduction in education, health, and care plans
- Provide sufficient educational psychologists to support non-statutory SEND related activities e.g., direct involvement to support schools and children linked with the graduated approach, support of change of placement requests, and tribunal work



6.15. A comprehensive supervision and continuous professional development (CPD) model has been developed to deepen and strengthen educational psychology practice and align prevention and intervention work with the aim of promoting positive outcomes for children and young people. This will, over

time, go some way to reduce the number of education, health, and care needs assessment requests.

6.16. Strong relationships have been forged and maintained with course directors of educational psychology doctoral training courses. There is a strong confidence from these university providers in the leadership of the Educational Psychology Service and its transformational aspirations. This has resulted in our council successfully recruiting trainee educational psychologists and Cheshire East being an authority of preference for trainees. We have 7 out of 10 of the 2023 cohort requesting placement with us.

6.17. Development of prevention and intervention

6.18. A pilot phase of prevention and intervention was introduced in the winter of 2021 which has been gradually developing, with a growing evidence base of impact.

6.19. The Educational Psychology Service has delivered nationally recognised, evidence-informed prevention and intervention training to parents, school staff, and Cheshire East colleagues. This includes Emotion Coaching, Emotional Literacy for Support Assistants (ELSA), and Attachment and Trauma, with all receiving excellent feedback.

6.20. Post-training evaluation clearly demonstrates the confidence, knowledge, and skill of staff in schools to use these approaches. (See Appendix 3 – Impact Data and Evaluation of Training)

6.21. Emotional Literacy for Support Assistants training includes additional time to support delegates in embedding new skills through coaching, mentoring, and problem-solving opportunities, with supervision requirements each year. This ensures that children are getting the best possible intervention, at the right time. In addition, positive impact is demonstrated by every child making progress when supported by a qualified ELSA delegate. (See Appendix 3 – Impact Data and Evaluation of Training)

6.22. ELSA delegates have contributed to a national research project to evaluate this programme, with excellent outcome data to inform best practice guidelines.

Continuation of transformation

6.23. There is an assumption that the recruitment and retention policy will continue, within budget, to build educational psychology capacity whilst striving to reduce the financial pressure caused by the use of expensive locums. This will enable educational psychology statutory work to be more robustly managed. This is to ensure consistent practice, enhanced connection and collaboration with parents / carers, thereby reducing the potential of complaints and tribunal cases.

- 6.24.** The 'grow your own' model from assistant educational psychologist to trainee educational psychologist which will then lead onto qualified educational psychologist posts being filled and also offer gradual progression into specialist practitioner educational psychologist and senior educational psychologist posts. As trainees qualify and graduate into educational psychologist posts, recruitment payments and lengthy induction periods will not be required. This provides a cost efficient, sustainable workforce across all statutory duties and also the much-needed prevention and intervention work for the children and young people.
- 6.25.** The Educational Psychology Service will build on their existing prevention and intervention offer, informed by the needs of education settings, and deliver better value. This is focused on academic achievement, social, emotion and mental health / wellbeing. The offers include:
- Mediated Learning for Support Assistants (MELSA) - targeted support to develop children's cognitive and learning skills
 - Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT) - a therapeutic intervention for children to support a range of emotional and associated behavioural needs
 - Restorative Practice - to support those whose emotional distress is externalised as challenging behaviours
 - Emotionally based school non-attendance training, informed by national research and best practice.
- 6.26.** The prevention and intervention offer to schools and settings will continue to develop over a 5-year period, enabling access to direct educational psychology support to schools and settings through a traded services offer.

7. Consultation and Engagement

- 7.1.** The principal educational psychologist will continue to consult and engage with all key stakeholders as changes are made and co-produce new intervention arrangements.

8. Implications

Legal

- 8.1.1.** Recruitment of trainee educational psychologist requires Soulbury Terms and Conditions. Contractual arrangements align with DfE and university salaried arrangements.

Finance

- 8.1.2.1** The Educational Psychology Service has a budget for 2022/23 of £1.1m which is under significant pressure and growth of £0.6m has been approved for 2023/24 to help the service to deliver their strategic plan.
- 8.1.2.2** This will give an updated budget of £1.7m for 2023/24 onwards.
- 8.1.2.3** This is based on the estimates of the directly employed staff less income expected to the service at the time the MTFs was finalised. It assumes a

certain level of needs assessments. If demand increases, there will be additional pressures on the budget.

- 8.1.2.4 The growth in directly employed staff will allow the service to deliver their plan to reduce spend on more expensive agency staff. If that does not happen, then further spending pressures are likely.
- 8.1.2.5 The service is generating income from trading with schools. A £25,000 income target was set for 2022/23 and this is being achieved. A further £75,000 target is being added in the MTFs for 2023/24 to help the overall service budget. The service is over delivering on the £25,000 target and is confident the further target can also be met. The budget and pressure will be reviewed during 2023/24 and 2024/25 to check the strategy is having the desired effect and what budget levels are needed for 2024/25.

8.2. Policy

- 8.2.1. The development of the Educational Psychology Service needs to be in line with the SEND Code of Practice and Association of Educational Psychologist guidelines.

8.3. Equality

- 8.3.1. Building educational psychology capacity to support our education settings will promote education staff knowledge and skills, and promote inclusion, thereby reducing the number of education, health, and care needs assessments. This, in turn, will ensure that all children with special education needs receive appropriate education and services in a timely manner.

8.4. Human Resources

- 8.4.1. Nationally, educational psychologist recruitment is a challenge. The steps taken in the Educational Psychology Service to recruit trainee educational psychologists (whilst studying) has given CEC a competitive advantage nationally to grow our own. In addition, those recruited have given a commitment to remain with the council after qualifying. This approach will support innovation and will enhance the reputation of the council and Educational Psychology Service.

8.5. Risk Management

- 8.5.1. If the council does not develop this plan, then it will continue to have difficulties in recruiting, leading to continued use of high-cost locums and budget pressures. In addition, it will remain vulnerable in being able to fulfil statutory requirements.

8.6. Rural Communities

- 8.6.1. There are no direct implications for rural communities.

8.7. Children and Young People/Cared for Children

8.7.1. The Educational Psychology Service prioritises support to the virtual school for cared for children, contributing to positive outcomes for our cared for children through advice on appropriate interventions and strategies.

8.8. Public Health

8.8.1. There are no direct Public Health Implications

8.9. Climate Change

8.9.1. No direct Climate Change Implications

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	A1 - Statutory Timeliness Data A2 – Retention and Recruitment Programme A3 - Impact Data and Evaluation of Training A4 – Educational Psychology Service Structure

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