REVIEW AND FEEDBACK ON LOCAL OFFER

CROYDON’S LOCAL OFFER OF SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES
Croydon’s Local Offer was developed in consultation with parents and carers of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the young people themselves. In autumn 2013 through to spring 2014 focus groups were held around the community; in primary and secondary schools (mainstream and special) and in Croydon College. A questionnaire was provided online and was also circulated via email and in hard copy with the help of schools and the parents’ forum, Parents in Partnership.

The focus groups and questionnaire homed in on the essential elements to be included in the Local Offer as well as the preferred format. The Local Offer was published online on the Croydon Council website in August 2014. A set of downloadable leaflets was developed as parents had told us that they did not want the information to be solely web-based. The leaflet design was chosen by parents from a range of options. A young person’s leaflet was also developed based on a mixture of preferences from young people.

HOW WAS THE LOCAL OFFER DEVELOPED?

WHAT WERE WE ASKED TO INCLUDE IN THE LOCAL OFFER — AND WHAT DID WE DO?

The SEND Code of Practice was quite specific about the information to be included in the Local Offer. However, the consultation was used to have wide ranging discussions about the potential content of the Local Offer. The results include the following:

• For Education there was a clear demand for information on local schools and the support they offered. The council has worked with schools to ensure that SEND reports are easily available on websites and that the reports include the different types of support provided for pupils. Currently the majority of Croydon schools are displaying their SEND report and links to Croydon’s Local Offer. Work is ongoing with the SENCO Forums for primary and secondary schools to share best practice and maintain the quality of the information provided.

• There was concern about the new Education Health and Care Plan process and the Transfer from Statements. A timetable was published for transfers and the SEND team worked collaboratively with parents to improve the Education Health and Care Plan documents listed on the Local Offer site as they reported that the original documents were ambiguous and unhelpful. There was positive feedback received from schools that the documentation was much clearer and easy to use. Sources of support – such as the local SENDIAS and the parents’ forum - were highlighted on the Local Offer site and in the Local Offer leaflets. A series of short training sessions for parents and professionals were held on SEND reform generally and the Education Health and Care Plan process.

• College provision was another area where more information was required. Links were made to college sites showing what was being offered for students with SEND. Local colleges have been invited to attend the Secondary SENCO Forum so that they can work closer with schools as students approach transition. A post-16 project is being piloted to identify pathways for education and employment for young people with SEND. The results of the pilot will be added to the Local Offer site and will inform future plans.
Requests for Social Care provision centred around the need for information on respite care and short breaks. The Local Offer contains links to the short breaks policy and services, and also information on specialist equipment and toys – as requested by parents. Croydon Council has started a review of the ‘short break’ services it provides to children with disabilities aged 0-18 in the borough. As part of this review, the Council wants to consult on a number of options with parents, carers, children and young people as well as other organisations (Croydon Mencap, NAS) to help shape the future development of these services. For more information or to get involved please look at PIP’s summer newsletter available on the ‘What’s New’ page at: www.croydon.gov.uk/sendoffer

Parents asked for details on the individual Health services available across the age range and also asked for waiting times to be published. The Local Offer provides information on health services generally – where to find a GP, a dentist/optician, emergency services etc. There is also specific information on services for children and those for adults. Information on puberty and sexual relationships was requested, as was information on specialist dental services for people with learning difficulties and disabilities – this has been provided. We have also provided details of unflavoured toothpaste for those sensitive to the taste of mint. A link has been given to the Advocate for Health website which provides health and well-being information for people with learning disabilities. There is also a link to the NHS health passport for learning disabilities site. Waiting times will be published when they are made available.

A wide variety of activities was requested for Leisure opportunities. The original information published has been expanded, based on feedback, to include details of cadet groups, specialist cinema screenings and museum events. Leisure information has been divided into under 18 and over 18 although of course there is a cross-over around the 14 - 19 age range. The leisure activities information also includes details of accessible holiday opportunities. The ‘What’s New’ page contains current information on summer activities such as RAP sports, summer schemes and the Learning Difficulties and Disabilities (LDD) Youth Club information. Unfortunately it is not always possible to source specific types of activities that have been requested, such as a local amateur boxing club.

Transition raised a lot of requests for information covering each stage. The Local Offer is therefore divided into year groups and explains how Transition should be managed for each cohort. This section is included within the Preparing for Adulthood element of the Local Offer.

The Independent Living element provides information on housing, employment and community involvement opportunities. Details of apprenticeships, supported living and community groups will be found here.

Families asked for eligibility criteria and application details for Transport support as well as information about options/services available and a large number wanted travel training information. Current transport policies are provided for children and for post-16. There are plans to extend the range of travel training opportunities and these will be added to the Local Offer once they are in place. Details of accessible public transport have been provided as well as door to door transport, driving support and claiming for costs incurred when travelling to hospital.

In order to provide the most useful information on sources of Advice, Help and Guidance families were asked to suggest organisations that they had found helpful. So for instance the Local Offer includes details of support groups for young people who self-harm and also Syndromes Without A Name (SWAN) which may otherwise not have been identified for inclusion in the Local Offer. The information is divided into national organisations, local organisations and the more specific organisations centred on specific needs. The section also includes sources of support for advocacy.

The Money section includes benefits and welfare advice and also details of organisations that provide grants to support families with equipment, travel, holidays etc. A link has been given to BILD’s website for people with learning disabilities to manage their money.

The Young People in Custody section was refreshed in line with the changes in the Code of Practice.

Eligibility criteria and contact details have been provided as standard information for entries.

The opportunity to leave feedback is provided on every web page and there is a Feedback section in the Local Offer site.
Feedback has been encouraged via the Local Offer web pages, in communications to schools, at face to face meetings with parents and via Parents in Partnership.

The main criticism has been that the website was not easy to use as it was too linear. The council has since changed the look of the website so that all the elements of the Local Offer e.g. Health, Social Care, may be seen on one page. The website is also easier to use with a tablet or smart phone.

The Local Offer site has also been described as being too dull and too wordy. There are plans to add photographs to brighten web pages. Some web pages have been re-written to break up large chunks of text.

There was disappointment that other media had not been used — videos and flowcharts were specifically mentioned. Flowcharts have been sourced and added to illustrate the EHC Plan process. An anti-bullying video, made in partnership with a local special school has been added to the website.

The Education Health and Care Plan documentation was amended on the advice of parents to make it easier to use and less ambiguous. There are plans to review documentation next year — it was felt that after the initial re-write that the current documentation should remain as constant changes could cause confusion over different versions in circulation.

Parents noticed that the section on Children Looked After had been amalgamated with Young People in Custody and asked for the sections to be separated. This has now been done.

Information on specific needs was requested. A leaflet on Autism was developed and linked to work being undertaken on developing a dedicated Autism page on the council website, under the aegis of the Croydon Autism Champion, Councillor Rendle.

There is little information on habilitation for children and young people with sensory impairment. This work will be a priority — to develop a web page and also a leaflet on sensory impairment.

The Parents Forum looked at every page of the Local Offer and suggested where improvements — such as those described above — could be made. A ‘What’s New’ page has been added to capture time-limited but useful information — such as training opportunities, holiday schemes, voting information for young people with learning disabilities.

Training on SEND reform and the Education Health and Care Plan process was provided to parents and professionals. It was well-received, as was training on autism awareness.

Although feedback suggests that there are still a lot of improvements to be made there were also positive comments on information being made available. It was very pleasing that a local pupil was successful on Autism’s Got Talent after his mother found the information in the Local Offer. The leaflets have been particularly popular and are regularly reviewed and refreshed. They are downloadable from the website but parents are encouraged to ask for hard copies to be posted or emailed. Leaflets are sent out on a regular basis.
WHAT ARE WE PLANNING TO DO?

YOUNG PEOPLE
The information aimed at young people is limited and needs to be refreshed. A young people’s web page on the Local Offer will be developed in partnership with young people via local schools, colleges, Young People’s Forum and youth groups. The aim is to develop a wiki-based Local Offer for young people provided in a multi-media format.

CASE STUDIES
Case studies will be developed, based on local experience – these could also be provided in a wiki multi-media format.

COMMUNICATIONS
A lot of families still do not know what the Local Offer is. Communications will continue to be provided to schools, parents forum etc. There is a project to develop personal wikis for young people with SEND in Croydon and part of the communications for the project will be highlighting the Local Offer and how it can be used.

SPEECH LANGUAGE AND COMMUNICATION NEEDS
A leaflet on speech, language and communication will be developed – as there is a high level of children and young people in Croydon with this primary need.

AUTISM AWARENESS
An e-learning package is being developed on autism awareness which will be made available to all who live and work in Croydon. There will be a focus on the training being used in businesses in Croydon with the aim of the borough achieving Autism Friendly status. A link will available on the Local Offer site.

CONSULTATION
Before the Local Offer was published there was consultation with parents using these two questions:
• How easy has it been to find information on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities?
• How satisfied are you with the quality of the information provided?

The result in summer 2014 was 40% for both questions. These questions are again being used with parents to gauge the success of the Local Offer. The results will be published at the end of the year.

Croydon is also taking part in the Personal Outcomes Evaluation Tool (POET) with In Control to gain the views of young people and parents on SEN Reforms. This information will be used to further improve the Local Offer.

TRAINING
In response to requests from parents/carers and professionals there will be further additional training sessions in the autumn. Details will be available nearer the time through Parents in Partnership @ www.pipcroydon.com and on the Local Offer ‘What’s New and Useful Information’ page available at @ www.croydon.gov.uk/sendoffer

COMMISSIONING
Croydon is developing an All Age Disability Service that will cover children, young people and adults up to the age of 64, when Outcomes Based Commissioning will take over. Feedback received on the Local Offer will be part of the information used when commissioning services – particularly across the transition age range.