



# THE LOCAL OFFER, CHILDREN AND PARENTAL RIGHTS

A REPORT FROM THE CHILDREN'S  
SERVICES DEVELOPMENT GROUP

AUGUST 2016

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# FOREWORD

RT HON CHERYL GILLAN MP, MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR CHESHAM AND AMERSHAM, CHAIR OF THE ALL-PARTY PARLIAMENTARY GROUP ON AUTISM



As Chair of the All Party Parliamentary Group on Autism, I have too often seen children and their parents, young people, and adults with autism struggle to access the support they need to fulfil their ambitions. This can be for a variety of reasons such as stretched local government finances, a lack of provision nearby or poor awareness of what is available. The SEN Code of Practice introduced in 2014 sought to help address this by requiring each local authority to publish information clearly and accessibly on the care, education, health and leisure options available in their area and beyond.

The principles underpinning the local offer are fantastic. Having access to a comprehensive and up to date resource that tells parents and carers everything they need to know about local facilities will enable them to make informed decisions.

This welcome research has uncovered a very mixed picture across the country. This is concerning if the ultimate aim is to support children across the UK, wherever they live. The layout, detail, accessibility and level of choice presented by local authorities varies significantly. It is disappointing that some local offers are not even meeting their legal obligations. This means that access to specialist provision remains highly dependent on where you live, and remains a lottery.

There is a strong recognition from children's services providers, charities and parliamentarians that local authorities are under pressure to deliver services with limited resources. It is clear that the majority of authorities have done extremely well, under the circumstances, to maintain statutory services such as those for children and young people with autism. Looking ahead, a well maintained Local Offer could be both a vital tool for parents and could help streamline demands on local authorities and inform residents of what is available.

I hope that this audit, which will now be conducted on a regular basis by the Children's Services Development Group, will help to highlight good practice and target resource at areas that may require additional support. The report makes a number of achievable recommendations that I hope the Government will carefully consider as a way to improve local offers and outcomes for young people across the country.



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The local offer is designed to provide meaningful choice for parents, and to ensure children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) have access to appropriate support services in their local area.

Hosted by each local authority in England, the local offer is a list of education, health and social care services made publicly available in an online information directory for use by parents and carers of children and young people with SEND. The local offer is also intended to help local authorities identify gaps in provision, and to make sure these gaps are addressed.

As a tool designed to provide up to date, useful advice to parents and carers, it is important that the local offers provided by local authorities are both comprehensive and easily accessible.

This report from the Children's Services Development Group (CSDG) provides an assessment of the extent to which local authorities in England are discharging their statutory obligations as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014 in relation to the delivery of the local offer.

In particular, we wanted to understand:

1. Are people aware of the local offer?
2. How accessible is the local offer?
3. What support is in place for people wanting to access their local offer?
4. Does the local offer provide meaningful choice for parents and carers in terms of the types of services and provision it includes?

## FINDINGS

The report found that there are significant variations regarding the ease of use, accessibility and range of services included on local authority websites. In terms of regional variations, the East Midlands, and Yorkshire and the Humber saw some of the best performing local authorities, while the West Midlands and South West regions contained local offers that on average need the most improvement.

In particular, our audit highlighted the following:

- Whilst the vast majority of local authorities now provide a local offer, fewer than four per cent of local authorities have a named contact person offering help and support to parents in understanding the types of provision on offer and how to access it.
- Fewer than half of all local authorities listed independent specialist schools on their website, with one in ten providing no information on independent provision at all. This is despite a requirement in the

Children and Families Act for information on Section 41 schools to be signposted.

- There is currently an overreliance by local authorities on the information on specialist provision hosted on the Department for Education's (DfE) website, which includes only limited information about school specialism or location.
- Almost half of local authorities do not include information on specialist provision located outside the boundaries of the local authority at hand, despite a legal obligation to do so.
- Using our proxy measure, it is on average easier to access information on maintained schools than independent schools through the local offer.
- There is significant variation between where information on the local offer is located on local authority websites.
- Until independent schools are listed on a local authorities' local offer website, parity with maintained schools is not achieved.

This report makes a number of policy recommendations to address some of the outstanding issues with the local offer:

- **Best practice guidance for local authorities.**
- **A mandated template for the local offer.**
- **Awareness raising by government of the 'local offer' as a tool for parents.**
- **Ensure the DfE's Section 41 is re-organised and made fit for purpose, in addition to including information on school's specialism.**
- **Ofsted's inspections of local areas' effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND should issue ratings in line with the traditional four point scale.**

This report is intended to be used by policymakers and other external stakeholders wishing to understand more about the current functioning of the local offer, and how it might be improved in the future to ensure all children with special educational needs or disabilities can access appropriate, quality support that meets their needs.

We would urge the government to review the recommendations made above.

# INTRODUCTION

The ability of parents to access appropriate education, health and care services for their children is extremely important. This is even more so for parents of children with SEND, where access to clear, comprehensive, user-friendly and up to date materials is necessary for parents to make an informed choice about which available services can best suit the specific needs of their child. Given the changing landscape of service provision for SEND, access to such information has become even more important.

The local offer, introduced in the Children and Families Act 2014, was designed with this objective in mind – to provide parents and young people the information they need to make meaningful choice over the provision available.

The Act details that local authorities must publish a local offer, setting out in one place information about provision they expect to be available across education, health and social care for children and young people in their area who have SEN or are disabled, including those who do not have Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. In setting out what they ‘expect to be available’, local authorities should also include provision which they believe will actually be available. Provision that a local offer should provide information on includes:

- a) education and health care provision;
- b) other educational provision;
- c) other training provision;
- d) arrangement for travel to and from schools,
- e) post-16 institutions,
- f) early years education centres;
- g) provision to assist in preparing children and young people for adulthood and independent living.

Furthermore, a much broader range of provision outside the maintained sector should be included. A key component of the Children and Families Act is that parents and/or the young person can request that an independent special school be included in their Education, Health and Care Plan. Information on services lying outside the boundaries of the local authority at hand should to also be included. Access to independent and out-of-area provision is important for where a local authorities’ provision is unable to meet a young person’s specialist requirements.

Through requiring these services to be included, the local offer ensures young people are able to access the services they require, wherever they are provided by, and unrestricted by arbitrary authority boundaries.

Children and Families Minister, Edward Timpson MP, stressed prior to the passage of the Children and Families Act the local offer’s role of informing families about the services available to them:

“The most frequent complaint I have heard from parents about SEN is that the current system is opaque and inflexible, leaving children and families to battle for access to services in a fog of bureaucracy. By requiring local authorities to publish a clear and transparent local offer, families will, in future, know what support is available in their area and how to access it.”

On 1 September 2014, the date local authorities were required to provide a local offer, the Minister further stated that the reforms aimed to put an end to a “complex and fragmented system” and to ensure support fit in with children’s and parents’ needs “and not the other way round”. He also confirmed that the “vast majority of local authorities have told us they are ready” to implement the reforms.

“  
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However, in practice implementation of the local offer is extremely varied across local authorities. Some local offers are very clear, easy to access and arranged in a way that is useful to parents and service users. The vast majority, however, are not. Some separate the independent sector from the maintained sector, while some are arranged alphabetically with no indication of what services the setting provides, while some do not include settings which are out of area. Some simply link to the nationally approved list of independent special institutions. This is a list of independent educational institutions, independent special schools and post-16 institutions who have demonstrated they have regard to the SEN Code of Practice and cooperate with local authorities on arrangement for young people with SEN.

The National Deaf Children’s Society’s (NDCS) One year on: impact of changes to the special educational needs system on deaf children report (2015) found

that many local authorities are failing to include information on special schools in the area and only around a quarter of parents of deaf children said it was easy to find the information they were looking for in their local offer. The National Autistic Society's (NAS) 2015 School report also came to similar conclusions.

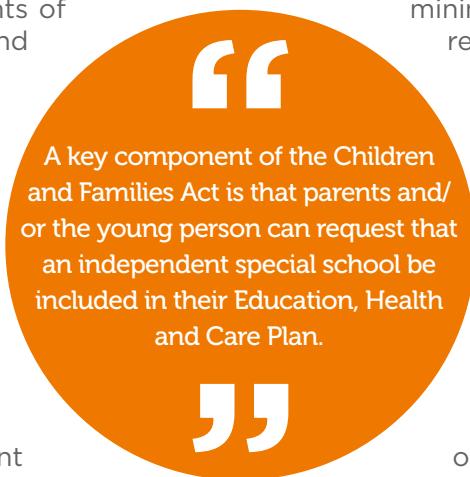
Based on the findings from their study, the NDCS has called on the DfE to consider a set format for the local offer to ensure that it is easy for parents to compare provision in their area. However, the DfE is resistant to the idea, insisting local authorities should be arranging their local offers in the way which best suits the needs of their local area.

Local authorities' implementation of the offer has not been a priority, with other elements of the Children and Families Act, the change to EHC Plans in particular, taking much of the focus. Additionally, budget cuts have limited the amounts local authorities' have to spend on developing, and keeping up-to-date, a substantive local offer webpage.

The most recent government statement on the implementation of the local offer came from Edward Timpson in January 2016. He said "local authorities have made good progress complying with the statutory special educational needs duties in the Children and Families Act 2014 since they came into force in September 2014" and that the DfE would "continue to monitor progress."

To better understand the reality of how, and to what extent, the local offer is empowering parents and carers to access a meaningful range of provision in their local area, the Children's Services Development Group has conducted a full audit of all local offers in England. The purpose of the research was to assess how effectively areas in England are meeting their legal obligations as set out in the Children and Families Act. This is focused on whether children and parents are given meaningful choice over provision through the local offer. The group wanted to understand whether the local offer is serving as the valuable tool to access services that government intended it to be, or whether further legislation, guidance or other intervention is required to strengthen the policy and provide meaningful choice to parents.

In conducting the research, all local authorities' local offer pages were audited from October 2015 – March 2016. Satisfaction of a legal obligation to provide a 'local offer', choice, and accessibility were selected as the most important areas for examination:



- Legal obligation - if 'local offer' was a term used by local authorities, and if they had at the minimum set out a local offer webpage, regardless of its quality of information.

- Choice - the level of detail local authorities' local offers provide to users.

- Accessibility - the ease of navigation to a local authorities local offer and to specific information contained within the local offer.

The complete methodology is outlined in Appendix A.

The questions asked in the areas of focus are as follows:

### Is there recognition of the local offer and support in place to use it?

1. Does the local authority provide a local offer?
2. Is the webpage called 'local offer', or something else?
3. Is there a named person that can be contacted for support or advice on the offer?

### Does the local offer provide meaningful choice?

1. Are Section 41 independent schools listed in the local offer's webpage?
2. Are independent schools (when included in the local offer) listed separately from maintained schools?
3. Does the local authority provide any information about the specialisms of either maintained or independent schools?
4. Are schools beyond local authority boundaries included in the local offer?

### How accessible is the local offer and the different types of provision?

1. How many mouse clicks does it take to navigate from the local authority's homepage to their local offer page?
2. How many mouse clicks are required to get from each local authority's home page to the main list of schools on their local offer website?
3. How many mouse clicks are required to get from each local authority's home page to the list of independent schools on their local offer website?

# KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings demonstrate that the ease of use, accessibility, and the range of services included in the local offer varies widely between local authorities. Whilst there was evidence of good practice, a high proportion of local authorities still have rudimentary local offers or rely solely on external websites to provide information on services.

One key finding was that the lack of a centrally mandated template for local offers has led to a huge variation in the ways in which local offer information is presented. A postcode lottery has emerged for parents, children and young people in terms of the range of services offered to them, how services are described, and how easy it is for parents to identify provision for different types of specialist care.

This report therefore recommends the government consider publishing additional guidance on the local offer to ensure standardisation across England. The government should also look at how best to encourage the sharing of best practice between regions which have informative local offers. This will help drive consistency, accessibility, ease of use, and ultimately sufficiency of provision.

The DfE Section 41 list is currently not fit for purpose, nor is it organised in any meaningful way to help parents and young people to make informed decisions over provision. Given the overwhelming reliance on the list currently, we recommend it is significantly revised. This would be achieved by re-organising the list according to local authority, and including information on a school's specialisms. By doing this the list will allow parents and young people to assess the suitability of schools with respect to their individual needs. This will vastly improve the local offer in the short term.

## FINDINGS

**Is there recognition of the local offer and support in place to use it?**

- 99.3 per cent have provided a 'local offer'.
- 99.3 per cent of local authorities have used the term 'local offer'.
- 3.3 per cent of local authorities provided a named contact person for people requiring help with a local offer.

Our findings show local authorities are fully aware of their obligation to provide a local offer through dedicating a website or webpage to the scheme. Furthermore local authorities use the term 'local offer' consistently regarding the provision information on services for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.



In order to satisfy our report's criteria of having a 'local offer', a local authority only needed to have a website or webpage dedicated to the scheme. This initial question allowed us to establish whether each local authority is fulfilling their basic legal obligations under the Children and Families Act of providing a local offer. This says nothing of the quality of the material provided, which is addressed later in the report.

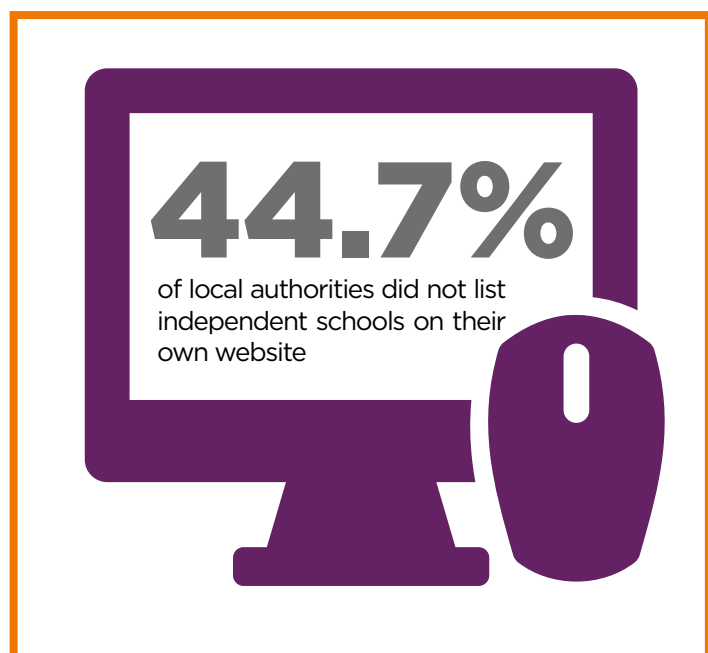
The consistency displayed by local authorities in providing a 'local offer' allows for its promotion to parents and young people across the country in order to effectively raise awareness of the scheme. CSDG recommends that the government should increase the onus on local authorities to make parents aware of the local offer as a vital tool for parents. In order for the



legislation to have the intended aim of offering parental choice, service users must first be made aware of the policy and where the menu of provision can be found.

Regarding the provision of a named contact for those requiring assistance with a local offer, very few local authorities have provided such information. This may discourage parents and young people from seeking further information from an authority on the services available to them. This is a particular problem for local authorities who have a poor local offer page.

CSDG recommends that the government should require all local authorities to have a single, named contact for queries relating to the local offer in order to help parents navigate the range of provision they can access, particular those who may be new to an area.



#### Does the local offer provide meaningful choice?

- 44.7 per cent of local authorities did not list independent schools (those on section 41) on their own website.
- 9.2 per cent of local authorities did not provide any information about section 41 schools.
- 36.2 per cent of local authorities rely on external websites to provide information about section 41 schools.
- 56.6 per cent of local offers do not provide information on the specialisms of independent schools on their local offer page.
- 56.6 per cent of local authorities did not list schools outside their boundaries as an integrated part of their local offer.

Our findings show that almost half of all local authorities do not list independent schools on their website and fewer than 1 in 10 local authorities provide or link to any information about independent provision. Over half of local authorities also fail to list schools outside of their boundaries as a part of

their local offer, restricting the choice of parents and young people.

There is a clear overreliance on the DfE's rudimentary list of approved Section 41 independent schools. This is despite the fact that independent special schools and free schools that have not been approved under Section 41 can be listed on the local offer. The DfE's list, which is hosted on the government's website, does not provide any information on a school's specialism, nor is it ordered by location in the country. It is therefore highly unlikely to be useful to parents, or assist them in making a decision over support for their child.



As well as displaying a preference for their own in-house services, local authorities not listing independent schools is deeply concerning as it prevents children and young people from accessing information on all provision available to them. Independent schools often provide highly specialist care and education that the local authority is unable to provide themselves, due to the low incidence of children with highly specialised needs in particular areas.

This has recently been echoed by Ofsted in their report *Moving Forward?* (2016) which explores the early implementation of the Children and Families Act 2014. Ofsted examined 20 local authorities' local offers and found that "local authorities' website content of the local offers failed to provide parents and young people with the range of information necessary to make informed choices in an accessible, easy-to-understand format".

In order to offer meaningful choice, maintained and independent schools should be listed alongside each other and only distinguished based on the specialisms they provide. Information on whether the school is single or mixed sex, or a specialist in a particular learning disability or condition must be prioritised over provider ownership.



Furthermore, local offers should include provision beyond the local authority's boundaries. This is to ensure children and young people are made aware of services that may better meet their needs despite being further from home.

### How accessible is the local offer and the different types of provision?

This part of the research aims to understand how easy to use, in terms of location and subsequent navigation of, a local offer is to service users. This was established by calculating how many mouse clicks it takes to reach the local offer from the local authority's homepage. We also explored whether there was any difference between the number of clicks to access maintained and independent provision. A high proportion of local authorities either rely on an external website to provide parents with information on independent schools or do not list them at all. As a result, averages calculated only apply to local authorities where independent schools were listed - 9.2 per cent of local authorities did not provide any information about section 41 schools.

- It takes an average of 3.2 mouse clicks to navigate from a local authority's homepage to its local offer.
- It takes an average of 5.4 mouse clicks to navigate from a local authority's homepage to its main list of schools within the local offer.
- It takes an average of 6.0 mouse clicks to navigate from a local authority's home page to its list of section 41 schools.
- If local authorities list section 41 schools on an external website, the average number of clicks it takes rises to 6.8. This falls to 5.4 where these schools are listed within a local authorities' local offer page.

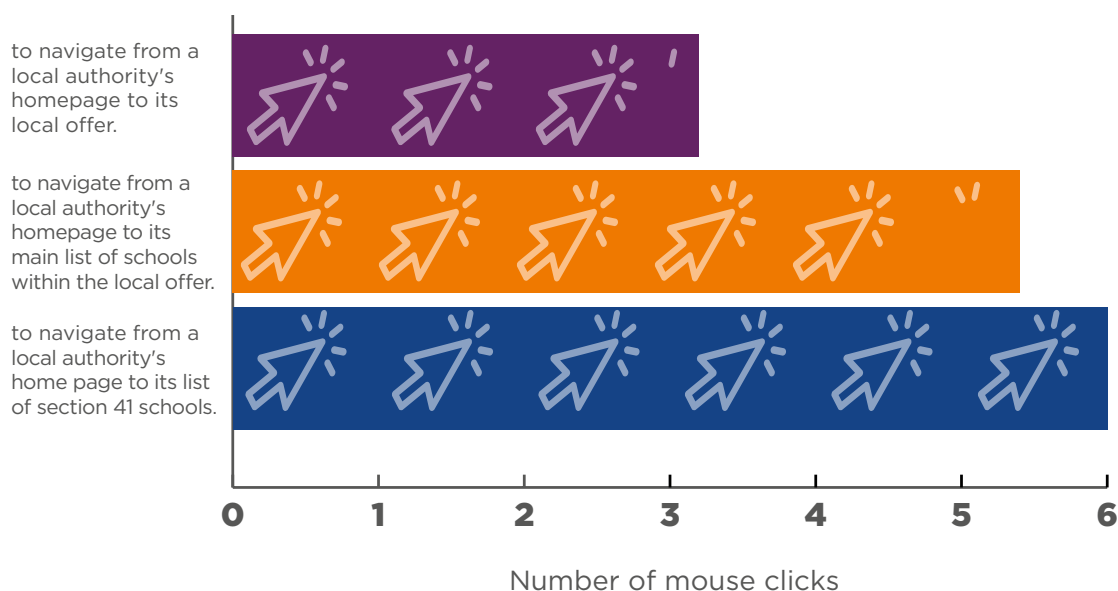
Our findings show that the average figure for navigating from a local authority's homepage to its local offer is reasonably low at 3.2 mouse clicks. This means that navigating to a local authorities' local offer should on average take a short amount of time.

However, in some cases the fastest route is through the A-Z directory, which does not help those already browsing the local authorities' SEND pages. In other cases the fastest route is through the 'children, young people and families', 'communities and people', or 'social care' pages which can be unintuitive due to the lack of specific reference to SEND. This means that the figure of 3.2 clicks may not be indicative of the amount of clicks website users will take to access a local offer page, with it instead being a higher figure.

Regarding the average number of clicks it takes to get from a local authorities' home page to the lists of maintained or independent schools, the figures do not appear to vary significantly, at 5.4 and 6.0 mouse clicks respectively. However, the range in the number of clicks required does widely vary between three and ten, suggesting an inconsistency in the layout of local authorities' local offer webpages.

While the average for clicks required to reach maintained and independent schools seem similar, when you account for the local authorities that list independent schools on an external website the average number of clicks rises to 6.8 mouse clicks. However, when the list of independent schools is contained within a local authorities' local offer website, there is parity in number of clicks with maintained schools at 5.4 mouse clicks.

This demonstrates that until independent schools are listed on a local authorities' local offer website, parity with maintained schools is not achieved. This poor accessibility and resultant lack of information makes it more difficult for parents to make an informed decision on the most appropriate services for their children.



# GOOD PRACTICE CASE STUDIES

## EASE OF ACCESS

In terms of the fewest number of clicks for accessing a local authority's local offer page and lists of maintained and independent schools, Gloucestershire is an example of best practice. It only takes two clicks for the local offer page to be accessed and a further one click for the list of maintained and independent schools:

[gloucestershire.gov.uk](http://gloucestershire.gov.uk)



Northamptonshire is another good example, also requiring only two clicks to access its local offer page. It does, however, take an extra click to access the list of maintained and independent schools compared to Gloucestershire, though this is due to the website filtering the results based on the age range or type of school that users are searching for. This is demonstrated by the below click map:

[northamptonshire.gov.uk](http://northamptonshire.gov.uk)



## Named Contact Provision

Calderdale and Halton are two local authorities that clearly provide a named contact person for their local offer. In the case of Calderdale, navigation to the named officials from the main local offer page is intuitive as the click map demonstrates:

[Calderdale local offer > Support for parents and carers > Contact SEND support](#)

Both a general email and phone number, in addition to the specific contact information for the whole SEND team is provided.

For Halton, the information is even simpler to access from the main local offer page:

[Halton local offer > Get in touch](#)

Three named contacts with email addresses and phone numbers are provided.

## Specialism Information

Blackburn with Darwen provides details of the provision of its special schools and independent special provision. From the Education section of its local offer page, either of the above two categories will take you to a relevant list. Services and schools provided within the local offer have a "LO" badge.

Selecting a school will provide the school's address and contact information. Whether referrals are required, the age ranged catered for and the specialisms of the school are also provided. In some cases, a named local offer contact for schools is also detailed. It should be noted some entries contain much more detailed information on the school than others.

Cornwall is an example of best practice for presenting information of a school's specialism. From the Education section of its local offer page, there is a separate links to both special schools and independent specialist provision (including out-of-county provision). Schools included in Cornwall's local offer are clearly labelled with a "LO" badge.

Selecting one of the schools will provide the school's address and contact information. Some pages also include the school's inclusion details in terms of need level, in addition to age ranges accommodated. Further information can be downloaded from the bottom of some school's specific pages, which provides detail on what the school's SEND offer is.

# POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the significant variation identified through this research, we have developed a series of recommendations for government and for local authorities to help improve the local offer.

## **1. Best practice guidance for local authorities.**

More information and guidance must be given to local authorities on what information they should be providing to parents and carers in relation to the local offer.

Information on a school's particular specialisms should be provided by a local offer as it is vital to help inform choice.

An individual school's latest Ofsted judgement should be linked to their specific local offer page, in order to assist parents and young people with making an informed decision.

Ofsted's inspection of local areas' effectiveness in identifying and meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND should issue ratings in line with the traditional four point scale. This will provide authorities with a quantifiable measure of the adequacy of its services.

Best practice across regions should be shared to help ensure consistency in the local offer, sufficiency of supply, and better coordination of placements.

## **2. A mandated template for the local offer.**

The postcode lottery that has emerged in the local offer, and hence access to services, must be combatted.

A mandated template should be developed by the Department for Education for all local authorities to adhere to, with input from parents, service users and children's services providers. The government should undertake an annual audit of local offers to ensure that the template is being used consistently. The local offer template should include a filter mechanism to help service users narrow down what provision is available to meet their requirements.

## **3. Awareness raising by government of the 'local offer' as a tool for parents.**

Given the vast majority of local authorities are adhering to the terminology 'local offer' as stipulated in the Children and Families Act, the government should increase the onus on local authorities to make parents aware of the local offer as a tool for parents.

There is currently limited awareness from parents of the local offer which means they are unlikely to use the service. If the local offer was understood and seen as a valuable resource by parents, this would also encourage areas to improve their offer and keep it regularly updated.

## **4. Ensure the Department for Education Section 41 list provides information on schools' specialism.**

Local authorities current rely on the Department for Education's website which lists Section 41 approved schools alphabetically according to the organisation's trading name. It is not organised in a meaningful way, such as by region, nor does it provide any information on the school's specialism, both of which would assist parents and young people in choosing provision that best suits their needs.

The current list is not fit for purpose given that just under half of all local authorities currently rely on it to provide any information on independent schools. The Department must significantly refine the list to provide more information in a way that is easily navigable and helps inform parent choice.

# CONCLUSION

The local offer implementation across local authorities has been inconsistent, and in many cases has severely limited the choice of parents and young people through the provision of little, if any, quality information on services provided by a local authority's local offer. The poor quality of online information has been compounded by over 95 per cent of local authorities not providing a named contact within their local offer page from whom parents can seek advice and guidance.

Choice is further limited by over 40 per cent of local authorities not listing independent schools on their own website, while over 55 per cent do not list schools outside their boundaries as an integrated part of their local offer; this is despite being legally obliged to do so by the Children and Families Act. Almost 10 per cent of local authorities even go as far as omitting independent schools completely from their local offer. Poor accessibility has further limited choice, with many local offer pages being complex to navigate.

These findings demonstrate that best practice needs to be shared between local authorities. Through this, local authorities can be made aware of the best-performing local offers, which provide the most easily accessible and quality information.

The Children's Services Development Group believes that a mandated format, developed by the DfE in partnership with parents, carers, service users and providers of children's services, is the best way to achieve a format that is easy to use and provides clear, accessible information about local provision.

The DfE's Section 41 list should also be updated to include school's specialisms and be easy to navigate by region given that almost half of local authorities rely on the list and do not provide further information on their own local offer webpages. The government

should also aim to raise awareness of the local offer as an important tool for parents, given that almost all local authorities use the terminology 'local offer'.

Through implementing the recommendations set out above, the local offer can become the effective and informative tool for parents and young people envisaged in the Children and Families Act.

# APPENDIX A: METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted between December 2015 and March 2016. The research aimed to assess the quality of local authorities' local offers through examination of their websites. In order to establish whether this is the case, several targeted research questions, organised into numerous categories, were asked.

The different areas covered in the study, their rationale, and how the data was obtained is below.

## SATISFACTION OF LEGAL OBLIGATION

### • Does the local authority provide a local offer?

In order to satisfy this criteria, a local authority only needed to have a website or webpage dedicated to the scheme. This initial question allowed us to establish whether each local authority is fulfilling their basic legal obligations under the Children and Families Act of providing a local offer. This says nothing of the quality of the material provided, which is addressed in latter questions.

### • Is this provision called a 'local offer' or something else?

The question, answered in a yes/no fashion, is aimed at identifying whether the local authority labels its local offer as something else or not. The question aimed to determine whether local authorities label the scheme in a similar manner.

## CHOICE

### • Are Section 41 independent schools listed in the local offer's webpage?

### • Are independent schools (where included in the local offer) listed separately from maintained schools?

### • Does the local authority provide any information about maintained and independent schools' specialisms?

### • Are schools beyond local authority boundaries included in the local offer?

The category examined the level of detail local authorities' local offers provide to users. The questions are all structured in simple yes/no format for clarity.

The first two questions target whether independent schools are listed in the local offer, and if listed, whether they are distinguished from maintained schools. The questions aim to discover the level of differentiation made between independent and maintained schools by the local authority and whether this is clearly signalled to website users.

The latter two questions target the depth and range of the local offer's information. In terms of depth, information on a school's specialisms was examined. For range, local authorities provision of information on schools in neighbouring local authorities was examined. An absolute minimum requirement was

enforced for both questions; if a single specialism was provided (even if multiple may exist) or a single school was listed outside of a local authorities' boundaries, the local offer was deemed to have satisfied the questions.

## ACCESSIBILITY

### • How many mouse clicks does it take to navigate from the local authority's page to their local offer page?

### • How many mouse clicks are required to get from each local authority's home page to the main list of schools on their local offer website?

### • How many mouse clicks are required to get from each local authority's home page to the list of independent schools on their local offer website?

### • Is there a clear person / official to contact regarding the local offer?

Accessibility of the local offer, in terms of the simplicity of navigating through a local authority's website, was examined in three scenarios. In all cases, the auditor aimed to find the shortest route from each local authority's homepage to their local offer, and from their homepage to both the list of main and independent schools within the local offer section. In some cases this involved using an A-Z webpage index. To maintain consistency across the study the number of mouse clicks it took to arrive at a local offer page, where the next click would lead to specific offer services, was the method used. It should be noted that the method does not stop counting at the first appearance of the words 'local offer'. An example of a click map from this study is as follows:

**Northlincs.gov.uk > Schools, Libraries and Learning > SEND local offer**

The map showcases the chain of pages navigated to before arriving at North Lincolnshire's main local offer page. Starting at the home page, a total of two clicks in this instance are required to reach the desired webpage. This method was then repeated for locating the list of main and independent schools, as seen below:

**Northlincs.gov.uk > Schools, Libraries and Learning > SEND local offer > Early Years OR Primary OR Secondary > Education**

**Northlincs.gov.uk > Schools, Libraries and Learning > SEND local offer > Early Years OR Primary OR Secondary > Education > Other Schools**

The click map shows that it takes a total of four clicks from North Lincolnshire's local authority homepage to reach the list of main local offer schools, and five clicks for the list of independent schools. It should be noted that the branching in selection between Early Years, Primary and Secondary are still counted as a

single click, due to the assumption that a user will have knowledge of which category's information suits their needs.

Regarding a clear point of contact, generic departmental email addresses and contact forms within the local offer page were discounted.

### **Limitations of the study**

Two limitations of the study exist. The first is concerning the length of time over which the research was conducted. Several local authorities state that they are in the process of constructing areas of their local offer website, while others will likely continually add information. Therefore, the study is only a snapshot of the state of all local offers. However, it can reasonably be assumed that any major restructuring of local offer pages will have been limited given that local authorities were required to have a completed such a webpage by 1 September 2014. This goes some extent to nullifying the 'snapshot' concern.

The second limitation, particularly in terms of navigation through mouse clicks, is human error of the auditor. For mouse clicks, the utmost care was taken to locate the shortest available routes to the relevant information. It may be the case that in some instances a click too many is recorded, however this is unlikely to skew the data to any significant extent.

Human error may also have occurred when attempting to locate information, for instance on the listing of independent schools on a local authorities' local offer website. Once again, the utmost care was taken to locate this information. While the few errors, if any, may be attributed to human error, it can be argued that the poor accessibility and structure of some local offer websites may play a role in this error. Users of the websites will themselves have to face any unintuitive and complex website structuring, only proving the need for a simple and uniform local offer template.

## **APPENDIX B: SOURCES**

BBC News, Special education needs reforms take effect, 1 September 2014

Department for Education and Department of Health, Special educational needs and disability code of practice: 0 to 25 years, January 2015

Hansard, 11 June 2013, Col 286

House of Commons, Special Educational Needs: Written question - 23321, 20 January 2016

National Deaf Children's Society, Advice to local authorities on making the Local Offer relevant to deaf children, young people and their families, August 2015

National Deaf Children's Society, Developing a local offer for deaf children, 27 August 2014

National Deaf Children's Society, One year on: impact of changes to the special educational needs system on deaf children, 1 September 2015

Ofsted, Moving forward?, March 2016

The National Autistic Society, School Report 2015, 4 September 2015



## Children's Services Development Group

The Children's Services Development Group is a coalition of leading independent providers of specialist fostering, special education and residential care services in England. CSDG members are Acorn Care & Education, Foster Care Associates, National Fostering Agency, Options Group, SENAD Group and Witherslack Group.

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