

SEND inspection comms

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Setting the scene

- Only fourth authority to be inspected under the new framework – created anxiety and uncertainty
- Full inspection took place from 6th to 10th March 2023
- SEND a hugely contentious issue in Southend with passionate parent groups
- Also, very politically sensitive (current Leader has SEND in his portfolio)
- Service and staff faced major scrutiny over five years prior – including peer reviews, internal reviews, councillor-led scrutiny projects and social media attacks – this had taken its toll

Timeline of scrutiny

- October 2018 – Local area SEND inspection
- July 2019 – Children’s services inspection
- 5 May 2021 – Local area SEND inspection (one of the first following Covid-related restrictions being lifted)
- March 2022 – Children’s services focused visit
- March 2023 – Area SEND full inspection
- May 2023 – Children’s services focussed visit

Lesson learnt/reflections

- Preparedness – internal and external
- Working with/knowing your stakeholders
- SEND staff support – wellbeing and morale and giving them the care they need
- Wider staff communications – building awareness around work demands for SEND colleagues
- Managing expectations around ‘controlling the narrative’ and knowing when to jump in on socials
- Release and timing of reports – media and stakeholder briefing

Summary

- SEND a very difficult topic to 'do comms' on – manage expectations internally – SEND critics have emotive/newsworthy stories
- Inspection framework is difficult due to being joint but not equal
- Be as honest as you can/consider timings and use your professional relationships to ensure correct messaging/accuracy

Questions?