



Salford City Council Idox's EHC Hub gives Salford City Council greater transparency, collaboration and efficiency

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Geoff Catterall

Head of SEN and Complex Needs
Salford City Council

Background:

A clear vision and strategy to support individuals aged 0-25 with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

Salford City Council's vision is to create 'a fairer, greener and healthier Salford'. As part of its 'Great Eight' priorities to achieve this vision, the Council has been working on a strategy of improvement for supporting children and young people aged 0-25 with SEND to achieve their full potential. The Council currently manages about 2,700 Education, Health and Care plans (EHCP) compared to around 1,700 in 2018, an increase in demand seen consistently across England according to the Department for Education.

Challenges:

Inefficient and lengthy manual processes and legacy systems for managing EHCPs

The Council had primarily been using manual processes to manage its EHCPs, which were proving to be outdated and inefficient. Case workers found the existing case management system cumbersome and unreliable, which prevented its effective adoption.

According to Geoff Catterall, Head of SEN and Complex Needs, Salford City Council, "Caseworkers found it easier and faster to use their manual standard email templates and letters rather than using the case management system." However, with the number of EHCPs significantly increasing, the volume of cases and workload became unmanageable, so the Council was looking for an alternative solution.

Salford City Council had also entered into the Safety Valve relationship with the Department for Education, a programme to help local authorities with significant deficits in SEND funding. One of its goals for sustainable change includes reviewing processes and protocols for EHC needs assessments.



Solution:

Idox's EHC Hub – a transparent, accessible, digital portal for all stakeholders

Already familiar with Idox's EHC Hub in a previous role, Geoff was keen to champion the use of the Hub when he joined Salford City Council. Idox's EHC Hub is an innovative digital platform developed in collaboration with local authorities, families and professionals across education, health and social care to support the engagement, contributions and collaboration on EHC assessments, plans and reviews. It provides a transformative approach to the way children and young people are supported by providing transparency, easy collaboration and targeted communication at every stage of the process for all key stakeholders.

The concept of changing ways of working from manual processes to an automated system represented quite a leap. "We have a designated medical officer for SEND, a lead paediatrician, educational psychologists and a lead speech and language therapist, who is the designated Clinical Officer. With so many stakeholders integral to the process, it was important to bring them on board right at the beginning. Agreeing on the principles upfront enabled us to understand more about how the product could work for us. The concept of the digital portal was a big change, but we could see how a different level of transparency and collaboration would vastly improve the process and interactions," explains Geoff.

It wasn't just the transparency for parents that was appealing. There were several benefits we could see. "The ability to automate many EHCP processes was a key selling point of the EHC Hub. It meant significantly reducing the volume of paperwork that had to be done manually by caseworkers. Schools were particularly keen because they experienced first-hand the volumes of paperwork involved. Partners contributing advice towards EHCPs liked the idea of being able to submit advice that maps directly into Sections B and F of the EHCP."

Outcome:

Transparency for stakeholders, operational efficiency and improved productivity for the SEND team

"From my perspective, the biggest benefit of the EHC Hub is the co-production and transparency that the system provides to SEND families. We've wrestled for years with how we can improve, as this process can be very overwhelming and challenging for parents. Being able to access all the information about their child, see professional reports at the earliest opportunity and for them to be able to see the EHCP being crafted is fantastic. It creates a far more collaborative process, with better outcomes for all involved," Geoff explains.

Compared to previous ways of working, Geoff believes the EHC Hub delivers transformational benefits including reduced workload, operational efficiency, and time savings. "The Hub also gives me greater management oversight as a Senior Manager. It's easy for me to use the reporting mechanism, or see, at-a-glance, the status of an individual case which wouldn't have been so easy for me to do in our old system. I am often speaking with Head Teachers who have questions, and I can access the system easily whilst they are on the phone and answer their queries immediately.

"Our professionals also immediately get the bigger picture", he adds. "They can see how their contribution informs the EHCP and what it means for families".

Digitisation remains a key focus for Salford City Council and the EHC Hub is part of that strategy. "That was something we felt was important to prioritise in our plans as part of our Safety Value relationship," Geoff confirms. Speaking about recommending the Hub to other councils, he says, "I would, without a doubt, encourage other local authorities to take a look at the EHC Hub. I am very open to sharing how we are using the system at Salford, the benefits that we've seen to our ways of working, and the positive impact the portal has brought to our families."

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