

# ACT4SEND Facebook group meeting

25 May 2018, 10am-12pm, at St Mary's Church and Community Centre

**In attendance:** Parents (Shelley Eggleston, Natalie Brownell, Clare Jones, Melissa Simmonds, Deborah Woodhouse, Tracey Wild, Kirsty Hague), Jayne Ludlam (Executive Director People Portfolio, SCC), Dawn Walton (Director Commissioning, Inclusion and Learning, SCC), Tim Armstrong (Head of SEN, SCC), Robert Carter (Senior Commissioning Manager, Mental Health Portfolio, Sheffield CCG), Scarlett Milward (Children's Commissioning Manager, Sheffield CCG), Katie Monette (SPCF Chair), Anne Snowdon (SPCF Development Support Worker), Eva Juusola (SPCF Participation Coordinator, notes)

**Apologies:** Jeremy Spooner, Mark Wild

## Updates from officers

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**Communication:** Tim is continuing to publish monthly updates. In terms of individual cases, the team is working hard to get back to parents. It would help if parents could email their enquiries to [ed-sensupporteam@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:ed-sensupporteam@sheffield.gov.uk); the email should include their child's name and date of birth and any specific questions, so it can be triaged appropriately. Tim is looking at implementing a phone menu to route callers to the correct department.

**Request to assess:** The number of requests for EHC needs assessments continues to grow. Tim expressed concerns that parents are reporting that some schools are telling them to request an assessment, possibly to avoid the paperwork. There needs to be more consistency of decision making. April 2018 figures show that 58% of new EHCPs were completed within the 20-week timeframe, in comparison to 14% for the whole of last year.

**Quality of EHCPs:** The EHCP QA group, which checks a sample of EHC plans three times per year, has reported that quality overall is improving, but it is still not consistent. Tim advised that having a standardised advice template, e.g. for OT or SLT reports, will help to improve the quality of plans. A new EHCP format has been agreed and will be implemented for new plans from September.

**Funding:** The local authority is working with locality lead headteachers to review how locality funding has been used in the past, and to develop clear guidance and performance indicators going forward.

## Review of last meeting and feedback/actions

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**Action:** Jayne committed to extending her "open door" policy to parents of children / young people with SEND. She offered to hold one session per month, starting in April.

**Update:** There will be monthly sessions, starting in July, which will be led by Dawn Walton. Other officers will attend if relevant to their service area. Jayne explained that she would not be able to attend consistently, and that every director of service has to take responsibility for their area.

The sessions will be for cases where there is a need to escalate. They will be advertised through a range of channels, e.g. social media, Local Offer website, governors' newsletter, School Point etc. Parents will need to book in for the sessions.

**Action: Jayne to revisit the vision for Sheffield's Inclusion Strategy at her next meeting with parents and consider whether the LA is still focusing on the right priorities. Update:**

Parents briefly looked at the vision at the last meeting with Jayne and suggested some amendments. The vision is included in the Inclusion Strategy.

**Action: LA officers to look at themes emerging from the strategic review of SEN provision.**

**Update:** Covered under Item 3.

**Action: LA officers to develop clearer social care transition pathways. Update:** This is ongoing. The Children with Disabilities Team has a new service manager (Alison Gee), who will be looking at transition pathways. In addition, the LA is recruiting a Preparing for Adulthood manager, who will draw all the strands together and work across a range of organisations.

JL has raised concerns with the Department for Education about a lack of strategies for the SEND workforce.

**Action: Scarlett to consider how health can develop input into EHCP reviews and link into schools more effectively. Update:** This is ongoing. Scarlett is working to set up a single point of access. There is a need to decide which of the 3,000 EHCPs in Sheffield need health input for annual reviews. Scarlett is hoping to have a process by September.

## **Item 1 - Burning issues arising since last meeting**

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The issues below were collected via the ACT4SEND Facebook group, which has around 200 members, of whom around 50 are active contributors.

### **EHC needs assessments**

- **Parents had appealed against decision not to assess. In the LA's formal response to the SENDIST appeal, the SEN Team said that the LA will assess only to prove that the child does not need an EHCP, thus pre-empting the decision.**

Tim said that this statement should not have been made, as all decisions are made based on the evidence gathered at the assessment.

**Action:** Tim to investigate the specifics of these cases.

- **No acknowledgment, consideration or formal response to request for personal budget, e.g. to contribute to home education or specialist speech and language therapy**

Scarlett explained that all community therapy services are commissioned as block contracts, so the NHS cannot simply take money out of that contract to deliver something different. In addition, services are not well specified, and Scarlett is looking at this as part of the review of community therapy services delivered by Sheffield Children's Hospital.

Tim advised that, where a parent elects to home educate, they take on full responsibility for their child's education. This includes meeting the needs of the EHCP, and so no education personal budget would be provided.

**Action:** Scarlett and Tim to review information about Personal Budgets on the local offer website.

- **Parents were told that professionals had been contacted or referrals made, when this had not happened**

Not discussed.

- **Practice of taking cases to panel causes long delays in the process. Outcomes of panel meetings not communicated to parents. These are often about school placements.**

**Action:** Tim to write an explanation of the panel process for the local offer website.

### Health reports

- **Paragraph in Ryegate report was changed from stating the child needed an EHCP to saying their needs could be met from existing services. This was done at the request of the LA. Formal complaint made to SCC.**

Tim explained that the health practitioner's job is to describe strengths, needs and provision to meet those needs (training and treatment, NOT placement). They must not pre-empt the outcome of the assessment. There is a need to develop clearer guidance for clinicians.

- **LA not seeking assessments from health outside the services that the CCG commission**

Tim explained that the LA will only request reports from NHS services, but that parents are welcome to send in private reports. Parents asked whether Sheffield had stopped carrying out sensory assessments and providing sensory support? Scarlett explained that sensory assessments are part of the ASD assessment pathway, but are not offered as a standalone assessment at the moment. NHS Sheffield does not provide 1:1 sensory support – the only intervention currently available are parent workshops. Scarlett said that she would like to develop the offer for children with sensory needs, but any proposals (e.g. training for school staff) need to be taken through the NHS governance structure.

- **Problems with requesting reports from health services, e.g. request for assessment resulted in response "child not known to service"**

Not discussed.

### Placements

- **School named in EHCP which has conceded is not meeting child's needs**

See Item 3.

- **SEN Team not consulting with parents' preferred school**

TA said that the SEN Team is very good at consulting with schools requested by parents, but not always with alternative settings. This can delay panel decision. Parents do not always

understand the process. There is a need to explain to parents that the LA will consult with the parents' preferred school, but may also consult with alternative placements.

### Quality of EHC plans

- **Health and social care sections left blank despite identified needs**

This particularly affects statement-to-EHCP conversions, where information didn't come through. **Action:** Tim to look at specific cases.

Tim explained that the SEN team goes through the single point of access to request health reports. The SEN team does not have a list of children who are in receipt of children's social care services, as it is difficult to separate children with safeguarding needs, those in receipt of services provided under the CSDPA, and those with social care needs due to SEND. New plans will use revised templates to ensure that social care information is provided.

Jayne said that she would like to identify the most complex children with EHCPs and develop a one-stop shop for them, working closer with the CCG. There needs to be an integrated team, doing integrated assessments.

### Implementation of EHC plans

- **LA are not ensuring provision is in place within reasonable time frames**

Not discussed.

### Annual review

- **No LA input into annual review process, leaving it all to school**
- **Long delays in getting plans amended following annual review**

Tim acknowledged that annual reviews had not been a focus in the past. Now that the conversions have been done, the focus will shift onto annual reviews. It is lawful for the LA to delegate responsibility for arranging and holding annual reviews to schools. A triaging system is needed to establish when officer / professional attendance is needed.

**Action:** Tim to develop guidance for schools and parents around annual reviews. There is a particular need to develop a process for reviews at transition points – for 2 year olds, in Y4 and in Y9.

### Complaints

- **Failure to follow LA policy; no response to stage one or two complaints**
- **No acknowledgement of complaints, or long delay**

Parents reported that complaints made to Jayne get delegated back to service managers, who might be the person the complaint was about.

Officers explained that complaints made via the form on the council website (<https://www.sheffield.gov.uk/content/sheffield/home/your-city-council/make-complaint-council-service.html>) go to the Complaints Department, who usually pass the complaint on

to the relevant service manager (unless the complaint is about the service manager as an individual). For complaints about the SEN Team, the investigating officer would be Ben Allchin.

**Action:** Eva to put link to complaint procedure on Local Offer website.

#### **Right of appeal**

- **Final EHCPs issued with unsigned letter; parents concerned that this means they cannot appeal to the SEND Tribunal**
- **Wrong cover letter (draft) issued with final plan, delaying right of appeal**
- **Parents feel they need threaten judicial review to get EHCP finalised and obtain right of appeal**

Not discussed.

#### **Mediation**

- **Parents have been told that LA has a new policy that refusal to assess can no longer be overturned at mediation; officers can only agree to take the case back to panel. Concerns raised that this makes it impossible to resolve issues through mediation.**

Tim said that previously, decisions were made at mediation meetings without an accountable transparent process. Decisions should be made by a multi-agency panel based on the available evidence. Tim reiterated that officers attending mediation meetings cannot agree to assess; if there is additional evidence, they can agree to take the case back to panel. It is not necessary for parents to attend a mediation meeting to have additional information taken back to panel; all they need to do is email it to the SEN team and request that it be reconsidered.

**Action:** Tim to ensure that this is clearly explained to parents. The information needs to be available on the local offer website, from Collis, SENDIAS etc.

#### **Item 2 - Health reports**

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Parents expressed concerns about standardised health reports which are not specific to the child's needs. Scarlett asked parents to send her examples of this to identify where this issue comes from. Generally the feedback Scarlett had received was that health professionals are currently giving too much advice and recommending too many things, none of which were standardised.

Scarlett said that she is planning to provide training for therapists and consultants on how to write reports for EHC plans. CCG commissioners need oversight of EHC plans so that they know what provision needs to be commissioned to meet the needs of Sheffield Children.

**Action:** Invite new Designated Clinical Officer (Jill Taylor) to meetings with SPCF.

### **Item 3 - Mainstream inclusion**

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Parents raised concerns that some schools are not welcoming to children with SEND, that children's needs are not being met, and that exclusions are on the rise. They asked how the strategic review of SEN provision will hold schools to account?

Dawn acknowledged that these issues have been around for quite a while. There are gaps in specialist and mainstream provision. She reported that there has been a 21% rise in families taking children out of mainstream schools to home educate; this includes many children with SEN whose needs were not being met, or who were at risk of permanent exclusion.

There are specific barriers to inclusion, such as the curriculum, the Ofsted inspection framework, and resourcing issues.

LA officers are looking to reduce exclusions through earlier identification of children causing concerns, streamlining processes, and analysis and evaluation of use of funding by schools. There is a review of alternative provision going on. CAMHS professionals are working with schools through the Future in Mind programme and providing expert advice. There is a Primary Inclusion Panel and a Secondary Inclusion Panel which head teachers must (should?) consult with before excluding a pupil permanently. The LA has also requested advice from the DfE on dual registration, whereby a child would be registered with a mainstream and a special school; this would allow the mainstream school to dis-apply areas of the curriculum without affecting their results.

Parents said that outreach from special schools was helping to avoid exclusions. They advised that the LA should look at the needs of specific groups of children, e.g. those from a BME background, girls with ASD. Parents also suggested that there should be a central point for parents to go to if their child was at risk of exclusion.

Jayne agreed that there should be a self-referral system, which should run on a locality basis. She advised she has written to Education Secretary Damian Hind and Ofsted to express her concerns about exclusions. Jayne will visit schools with the Chair of the Safeguarding Board where there are concerns.

#### **Next steps**

This was the last in a series of four meetings, which were intended to establish a dialogue between parents of children with SEND, and officers from the local authority and the health service. There was general agreement that the meetings had been effective, and that some progress had been made. Officers thanked parents for giving up their time to attend.

However, more needs to be done, and the discussions need to continue. It was agreed that this could be done via the regular cycle of meetings. Going forward, Shelley will attend the bi-monthly meetings between representatives from parent support groups and Jayne Ludlam, to represent both Ray of Hope and the ACT4SEND Facebook group. Parents can also flag up issues via SPCF and other parent support groups who attend these meetings.