



Statement from Essex Family Forum

There is a clear expectation that the local area should, by now (2019), be fully delivering the SEND reforms as set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. Between 30th September and 4th October 2019 OFSTED & CQC carried out a Joint Inspection of the local area of Essex and the findings have now been published on Essex CC's Local Offer website and OFSTED's website.

<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50141698>

Prior to the Inspection the Local Authority and the Clinical Commissioning Groups had begun work more closely to improve services but the pace of change has not been quick enough and the improvements made over the last two years has not yet made the required difference to parents, carers and, most importantly, the children themselves.

However, we are appreciative that Essex County Council and the Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) ensured that Essex Family Forum were present throughout the entire Inspection process, representing parent and carer views at eleven focus groups, which sometimes meant giving a very different view of services to that of Local Authority officers and Clinical Commissioning officers. We would like to thank the parents and carers that attended the two meetings with Inspectors, held in separate locations across the county, to give their views and all those who were also to respond to the inspection through on-line webinar. The Inspectors also spoke to Essex Family Forum in our capacity as the parent carer forum for Essex.

The Inspection identified significant areas of weakness in the local area's practice across the Local Authority and the area's five Clinical Commissioning Groups and therefore they will be required to produce and submit a Written Statement of Action to OFSTED, which we have been asked to co-produce.

The findings outlined in the report will come as no surprise to parents and carers and they largely reflect the feedback we received from parents who attended our workshops in May 2019 as well as the, often heartbreaking and frustrating, stories we have heard from parents at the various events and coffee mornings we have attended since our formation in early 2018.

In summary the Inspection found that Education, Health & Care Plans are often of poor quality, and the specialist provision with the EHCPs is not being provided. One Planning is not working well. The SENDIASS service is overwhelmed and the number of Tribunals is high and increasing. There is considerable variation regarding accessing services such as therapies, with unacceptable waiting times being experienced across all services. Families' experiences are often dependent on individual professionals rather than consistency of a high-quality service. Services are not sharing information with each other in a timely way.

ECC and the CCGs have stated that they fully accept the findings of the report and see it as a constructive part of their journey. The report recognised that they have an honest and broadly accurate picture of the current strengths, weaknesses and complexities of practice across the local area. We will carry on our work with ECC and the CCGs to ensure that improvement to services meet the needs of our children and young people, resulting in measurable, meaningful outcomes and making a positive difference to families in their day-to-day experiences.

As a forum we know that not all the challenges our families face have been mentioned within the report and some findings may not reflect the true experience of families around some services. We know that accessing the Emotional Well-being and Mental Health Service (EWMHS) continues to be an area of concern for parents and carers, in particular with regard to the meeting the needs of those children with ASD. We have already started to engage with the local authority and will be holding a coffee morning in February to explore parents' views on this further, with representatives from the local authority in attendance.

If any parents, carers, family members or organisations would like to be involved in improving services for children and young people, please do contact us via our email address: hello@essexfamilyforum.org You can also find us on Facebook and Instagram.

Essex County Council and the 5 Clinical Commissioning Groups in Essex fully accept the outcome of the inspection, and their full statement can be found on the Local Offer <http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/Ofsted-Briefing-for-Parents.pdf>