



21<sup>st</sup> May 2020

Dear Vicky Ford,

[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/37-million-to-support-children-with-complex-needs?utm\\_source=cd2ccf5f-e4da-48c3-9c73-a37a60f53cd8&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm\\_content=immediate](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/37-million-to-support-children-with-complex-needs?utm_source=cd2ccf5f-e4da-48c3-9c73-a37a60f53cd8&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications&utm_content=immediate)

I would like to introduce Essex Family Forum, to you. Essex Family Forum is the Parent Carer Forum for Essex.

I am writing to you regarding the aforementioned press release which you jointly issued on 19th May. Whilst the additional funding good news and will be welcomed by many families, we as a parent carer forum have concerns regarding its viability and effectiveness, which I would like to draw your attention to;

1. Can families, who applied within the previous 9 months re-apply?

Normally families are limited to one application every 9 months. Families could have applied prior to this pandemic and therefore may not be able to benefit from the "vital equipment to make their lives easier while implementing social distancing measures, including computers, specialist equipment, and educational toys". Will exceptions from the normal application process be made for vulnerable families in light of this pandemic?

2. The application requires supporting paperwork. It could be difficult for families to gather supporting evidence, given current circumstances, or they could experience delays in obtaining the supporting evidence. In fact, families are asked to "provide details of someone we can speak to such as a health or medical professional, SENCO, advocate or a teacher who knows your child well". As we know many professionals are working differently, undertaking different roles, which could hamper the ability to contact them, thus creating further delays.

3. Family Funds website states "We are working hard to process your grant award as quickly as possible and you will hear from us within at least 10 weeks of us receiving your application". With all due respect, this would mean if an application were submitted now, it could be august before a parent may benefit from what is described in the press release as "vital equipment" needed during this pandemic.

I feel that the points I have raised will create barriers in parents seeking support for vulnerable children during this time of crisis.

I look forward to your response.

Jo Harrison- Participation lead

On behalf of Essex Family Forum