

Reply to the parents and carers who completed the Family Impact Survey (October-November 2020)

Thank you

Firstly, we would like to thank every parent and carer who took the time and effort to complete the Family Impact survey (Oct./Nov.2020). We recognise that it will have been particularly challenging for many families, during a third national lockdown, while juggling the pressure of looking after children with additional needs, trying to manage home learning and without the usual supports from family, friends and community groups. We hope that things are starting to ease for you and your children, and that as restrictions lift, families and friends will once again be able to spend more time together and more opportunities will reopen to make life a little easier.

The Essex Family Forum have shared your comments and thoughts widely and leaders in Education, Health and Social Care have taken time to read and digest your experiences. Leaders of all services have read each and every comment that was written and have spent time discussing the themes and challenges that were highlighted in the survey. As a Local Area we very much need family feedback in order to plan and make changes, and we are delighted that 655 parent carers took part in this first Family Impact survey.

Where there were individual concerns about a service for a child, and where consent was given to share details, services and teams have been notified and follow up conversations have taken place. For example, *“The situation regarding the home tutoring arrangements not being in place has already been flagged to Essex County Council and needs some further exploration.”* SEND Operations have identified the young people and are working with the families to ensure tuition is in place.

Who is providing this response?

This response is being written on behalf of the SEND Improvement Board. One of the recommendations of our Local Area Inspection (September 2019) was to establish stronger joint governance to oversee and drive the improvements that are needed across our Local Area for children and young people with SEND. The SEND Improvement Board, with leaders from Education, Health and Social Care is now in place to make sure that changes happen and that children, young people and families experience a better service.

The Challenges

Before answering the challenges that the Family Impact survey raised, we want to be able to give a little bit of context of where we feel we are at as a Local Area. By Local Area we mean Essex County Council Education teams, Essex County Council Social Care teams and the five Clinical Commissioning Groups that cover Essex.

Firstly, SEND and inclusion are at the top of our joint agenda. You will probably be aware that we had a Local Area Inspection (September 2019). The result of this was that we, the Local Area, were asked to produce a Written Statement of Action. This statement had to set out how we would address three main areas for improvement. These links will take you straight to the letter from the [Inspection](#) and the [Statement of Action](#).

The inspection team (Ofsted and CQC) felt that the Local Area had an honest and broadly accurate picture of our current strengths and weaknesses, but concluded that the pace of change across education, health and care services had not been quick enough since 2014. The team were satisfied that the actions that we had started would move us in the right direction.

We acknowledge and accept that we are not yet where we want to be and we will continue to work together to improve the SEND provision and services that we offer to your children and you as families. The inspection team will return later this year to assess our progress. We do not yet have the date for the re-inspection.

For us, the reassuring news was that the challenges raised, by you, in the Family Impact survey (Oct./Nov.2020) are very similar challenges. There were no new areas of concerns raised. This means that we are able to share with you some of the work that is already in progress.

For each challenge, we have shared what the Local Area is already doing to improve the experience for children, young people and families. We have kept the explanations and developments brief but we would be very happy to

share more information with you. Please contact SENDstrategy@essex.gov.uk with any requests for more detail and we will be happy to help.

We would also like to acknowledge that at the moment you may not be seeing or feeling the changes on the ground. We hope that soon you will begin to see changes and that your experiences will reflect some of the work that is underlined below. For example, a brand new Local Offer, or a Care Coordinator to help your family through a diagnosis, or an information pack written by families for families. We hope that you will see changes in the way we work to make sure that every child's voice is included in their planning and support. We hope that more families will feel fully supported during the twenty week EHC Needs Assessment process.

We will be monitoring all these changes alongside the Essex Family Forum over the next terms to see the difference and impact for children, young people and their families. We will continue to evaluate and improve what we offer as a Local Area, and we will continue to ask you as parent carers to let us know what is working well and what needs to improve.

The Family Impact survey is important in that process. We, the SEND Improvement Board, will continue to monitor the results of this survey in subsequent years to see what positive changes occur and what further improvements are needed. Please do continue to take part in the Family Impact survey and encourage as many parent carers as possible to share their experiences and thoughts

The Challenges

Our response is organised by the challenges that were raised in the report. These are in no particular order and the numbering does not reflect a priority or importance.

- Challenge 1: Children and Young People's voice
- Challenge 2: Navigation of the SEND system
- Challenge 3: SEN support
- Challenge 4: One Planning
- Challenge 5: The Essex Local Offer
- Challenge 6: EHC Needs Assessments and EHC Plans
- Challenge 7: Annual Reviews
- Challenge 8: Provision in Education, Health and Care plans
- Challenge 9: Communication
- Challenge 10: Home Education
- Challenge 11: Appeals

Challenge 1: Children and Young People's voice

From Family Impact Report 2020: Children and young people were not considered to have participated in reviewing and setting their outcomes: 53% parents felt involved but only 11% felt their child was involved. Most parents felt involved in the Annual Review but felt only 10% of child involved in Annual Review. 70% of parents felt involved with One Planning; but only 30% felt their child was involved.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

Essex takes part in a national survey, called the POET survey (You can watch a video [here](#) about the POET survey.) The results from this survey in 2019-2020 highlighted the same issue – that not enough children and young people know their outcomes and feel fully included in setting their outcomes. You can read the summary results of the Essex POET survey from [children and young people](#) and from [parents and carers](#) by clicking on the links.

A group of young people in Essex looked at the POET feedback and chose three things that felt needed to change first – they called this the Young People's POET challenge 2020. The young people staged a 'Take Over' at the SEND Governance Group and presented their challenge to the Local Area. Watch the Young People's POET Challenge for yourself [here](#).

The Young People's POET challenge is now being watched by all Essex County Council staff, across Education and Social Care and practitioners are making pledges to ensure they rise to the young people's challenge. Health colleagues are also taking part and making their own pledges to the young people. The challenge is due to be shared

with all schools, colleges and educational settings as soon as all children and young people have returned to school and have had chance to settle back into school life.

The pledges and the impact that they make will be shared on the Essex Local Offer over the coming months. The POET survey will be repeated in the coming year to see if the challenge has made a difference. Watch out for your invitation later in 2021!

Challenge 2: Navigation of the SEND system

***From Family Impact Report 2020:** Parents describe feeling overwhelmed by the “system” itself which can be so complex that families often feel unequipped to navigate alone. At the beginning of their journey and, indeed, at many different points throughout their child/young person’s life, SEND parents find themselves in a world they are unfamiliar with, have received no prior training for and have no colleagues to lean on for support and guidance.*

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

One of our priorities in the Local Area is to make the experience of the ‘system’ much easier to navigate. Pieces of work are happening across Education, Health and Social Care to remove unnecessary bureaucracy and to simplify and improve all our systems. The Essex Family Forum are included in these pieces of work to represent the views and thoughts of parent carers, and the Multi-Schools Council are included to make sure that the experiences of children and young people are always heard.

Both Education and Health are looking for additional ways to help families navigate the system. Essex County Council have employed SEND Navigators to further help signpost and support families who feel they are overwhelmed by the system. If you need support, please email TheSENDNavigators@essex.gov.uk The Navigators will be able to point you in the right direction and make sure your question reaches the right person.

In Health, there is a new Care Coordinator role to support parents and carers who have children in the NE neurodevelopmental pathway. The Care Coordinator will be able to support families and make sure parents and carers have all the information they need as they progress through the assessment and diagnosis pathway. Alongside this the Essex Family Forum have also been commissioned to produce an information pack – written for parents, by parents - to help parents at the start of their journey.

The Local Area have also introduced a weekly ‘virtual drop-in’ session during the national lockdown for all voluntary groups who support parents and carers of children with SEND across Essex. You can see which support groups attend [here](#). Representatives of the groups bring along the questions and queries from the parents and carer they support, and together we find the answers or are able to signpost to things that may help. After each drop-in, a pinboard is created to support parents and carers. Please take a look at the most recent [pinboards](#).

SENDIASS are also always available to help and support families in need of advice.

<http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SENDIASS-Leaflet-for-Parents-and-Carers.pdf>

Work on the future design and delivery of independent advice and support for parents and families of children and young people with SEND will take place over the course of the summer term as one of the joint commissioning workstreams. We will work with the Essex Family Forum to ensure that the design is co-produced. The intended launch date for the new model is April 2022.

Challenge 3: SEN Support

***From Family Impact Report:** The majority of families reported that Teaching and Support Staff in schools and settings understood their child’s needs, well or very well and had good or excellent knowledge and training in effectively supporting the child/young person. Only 27% of parents reported feeling not well supported or not supported at all by their child/young person’s teaching and support staff.*

***From Family Impact Report 2020:** The largest number of individual comments we received were in the SEN Support section and paint a sometimes worrying picture, when the majority of children with SEND do not have the legal protection of an Education Health and Care Plan and need to rely on high quality teaching and arrangements at SEN Support to remove their barriers to learning*

and plan and achieve high-quality outcomes. Our survey respondents report that schools are sometimes unsure of, unable or unwilling to support the needs of their children and young people with SEND.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

We are pleased to see that so many parent carers feel well supported and that the majority of parents feel their school or setting understand the children's needs well. However we acknowledge that this is not the case for all children and all families.

There are some new and exciting initiatives that are due to begin in schools and colleges across Essex next year. These initiatives are all being put in place to support teachers to feel confident to meet the needs of all children in their classes or groups. In the coming months we will be sharing information around the new initiatives, "The Inclusion Framework" and the "Ordinarily Available". Both of these initiatives will provide support to schools and colleges to plan for children and young people who may need a little extra help at the earliest point.

The Inclusion and Psychology Teams are continuing to work with all Early Years settings, schools and colleges each term to plan how to meet children and young people's needs. The new teams and structure came into place just before the first national lockdown began, so the teams are looking forward to being able to return to face to face work soon. You can watch the video about the way the Essex County Council Teams work [here](#).

Challenge 4: One Planning

From Family Impact Report 2020:

*School not providing support outlined in plan or following external advice.
Poor quality of One Plan (outcomes not measurable, provision not specific)
External Professionals not involved.*

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

One Planning is the Essex approach to the cycle of Assess- Plan- Do- Review for all children and young people with SEND. The Local Area is committed to making sure that all practitioners who work in Education, Social Care and Health who support children with SEND, have received training in One Planning. Training is happening in all teams at the moment to make sure practitioners understand their role in One Planning and to improve the quality of One Plans for children and young people.

The Essex Family Forum are also in the process of producing a guide to One Planning for parents. This is being coproduced by the Essex Family Forum and practitioners in Education and Social Care. The full guide to One Planning can be read [here](#).

The section on the Local Offer has also been recently updated with help from a group of parent carers and the Essex Family Forum Family Champions. Please take a look [here](#). The Local Offer team always welcome feedback and suggestions if there is something that you would find useful to help with One Planning. Please email the team at Essex.LocalOffer@essex.gov.uk

Challenge 5: The Essex Local Offer

From Family Impact Report 2020: *54% are aware of the Local Offer and have used the Local Offer. Of those that have used the Local Offer, 59% were able to find the information and the vast majority reported that the information that the information was up to date and useful. Most common themes running through the comments: that the site needs to be easier to navigate; some parents would rather speak to a person; there were parents who had no knowledge of any of the support groups or how to contact them.*

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

The exciting news is that there is going to be a new Essex Local Offer! Work is already underway with the technical team to make sure the new site is much easier to navigate and to find information quickly and easily. We hope to have the new website in place later in 2021. Until then, please bear with us, and remember, if you can't find what

you are looking for, you can always email the Local Offer team who will be happy to point you in the right direction: Essex.LocalOffer@essex.gov.uk

The Essex Family Forum are working with the Local Offer Team to make sure the information about support groups is accurate and displayed in a way that works for families. The information can be found here:

<http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/?s=&category=parent-carer-support-groups> We want to make sure the information includes every group, however small or however new. If you belong to a support group that is not included on the Essex Local Offer, please email Amy at Essex.LocalOffer@essex.gov.uk

If you would rather speak to someone for information or advice, there are always options available. You could contact the SEND Information, Advice or Support Service <http://www.essexlocaloffer.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/SENDIASS-Leaflet-for-Parents-and-Carers.pdf> or email the SEND Navigators for signposting TheSENDNavigators@essex.gov.uk

Challenge 6: EHC Needs Assessments and EHC Plans

From Family Impact Report 2020: *The majority of parents felt that either all or most of the outcomes were clear, measurable and achievable. 72% of parents say that the plan accurately reflects their child's education, health and care needs. However, parents stated that provision, support, and outcomes outlined in EHC Plans were not specific and that the language contained within the plans need to be simplified.*

From Family Impact Report 2020: *It is apparent from the survey figures and comments that parents and carers find the EHC process an extremely stressful and overwhelming experience, even when they feel supported by Schools/Settings, SEND Inclusion and SEND Operations Teams. Although parents said they felt supported during the process, their overall experience was not particularly positive, with 59% reporting it was just OK or Poor.*

From Family Impact Report 2020: *Only 38% of parents report being offered Way Forward Meetings. Timescales are not met.*

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

This is a high priority for the Local Area.

Essex County Council has commissioned an external organisation, ISOS, to conduct an end to end review of the EHC Needs Assessment process in Essex. Their work has been focussed on six points:

- Improving the decision making for EHC Needs Assessments, making sure the Local Area has clear criteria that are applied consistently across the County
- Making sure the decision making panels are working well and fully include Health and Social Care
- Developing an Essex version of Ordinarily Available (the standard that is expected of all schools and colleges)
- Looking at ways to access support for children and young people with non-SEN health needs
- Quality assurance of EHC plans and making sure that outcomes are SMART and provision is specific in plans.
- The Essex approach to Annual Reviews.

Education, Health and Social Care are currently working with ISOS on their recommendations

The Essex Family Forum are also coproducing a way of gathering feedback on the experience of all children, young people and their parent carers at the end of the twenty week process. This information will help the Local Area understand what is working and what needs to improve on a monthly basis.

Challenge 7: Annual Reviews of Education, Health and Care plans

From Family Impact Report 2020: *Overall experience of the Annual Review was thought to be Good or OK by 66% of families. Attendance/contribution from professionals is 50%; 50% response in 4 weeks from Local Authority; excessive delays to or non-issuance of revisions/amendments*

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

We are pleased to see that the experience of families is mainly positive. The next step for the Local Area is to make sure that we have the right input from the right practitioners at Annual Reviews. There will shortly be revised guidance for all schools, colleges and Early Years settings with new ways of working that has been agreed by Education, Social Care and Health. We aim to introduce this in the Autumn term and hope it will make it easier to get the information and input that is needed at Annual Reviews from all the practitioners working with a child or young person. We will be tracking the improvements over the coming months and years.

The Local Authority is also currently looking at the best way to ensure that Education, Health and Care plans are revised and amended more promptly so that plans stay up-to-date. This is an ongoing challenge for the SEND Teams at Essex County Council so will be one of our key focus going forward to improve.

Challenge 8: Therapy Provision in Education, Health and Care plans

From Family Impact Report 2020: High number of parents reporting that provision outlined in the plan is not received: therapies not being delivered, failure of school and therapists to work together, provision not being specific in the plan, schools not delivering the provision. Only 26% report that their child receives all of their provision.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

This has been a particular challenge for therapy teams over the last twelve months and we acknowledge the incredibly difficult time that the pandemic has created, both for families and for NHS staff.

The COVID pandemic has proved an unprecedented challenge for all health teams and in particular some of the therapy teams. In accordance with the NHS prioritisation plan and national guidance, health professionals were required to respond to the COVID pandemic and many services faced delays in assessment and treatments. Health services have been working closely with partners to ensure that services return as quickly and as safely as possible, ensuring all changes and developments are communicated effectively with families.

We are communicating with the local therapy teams to understand the ongoing pressures that they continue to face and we are working together to ensure all provision detailed in your child's plan is delivered in a timely and safe way.

There are a set of principles that all therapy teams in Essex work to at the present time. This is available on the [Local Offer](#).

We had also begun working, before the pandemic, to improve the way that therapy services are delivered in Essex. The last year has understandably slowed us down, but the work is now moving forwards once again. Education and Health are working with an external organisation 'Better Communication' to help us understand, design and deliver improvements to the ways we deliver therapy both in schools and by therapy teams. We are working closely with the Essex Family Forum and are about to launch a series workshops/webinars and surveys for families to help inform the future ways of working. Please watch out for the invitations to get involved on the Local Offer and through the Essex Family Forum.

Challenge 9: Communication

From Family Impact Report 2020:: At the simplest explanation, communication appears to be the key component which is felt by many families to be currently missing. There is poor communication reported at every level, from between individuals within a school setting, between services, and all the way up to strategic level.

From Family Impact Report: 35% of parents do not feel that the professionals involved with their child/young person communicate well with each other.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

Communication is a cross-cutting theme that impacts on every element of a child, young person and parents' experience of the SEND system in Essex. It also extends beyond services delivered and commissioned by Essex County Council and Health and into all settings. The solution needs to be co-produced with parents and families and we intend to begin this work with the Essex Family Forum in the summer term 2021.

Challenge 10: Home Education

From Family Impact Report 2020: There is clearly a need to gain a better understanding of the challenges faced by parents who decide to home-school their child/young person, as well the reasons that led to that decision, given the high proportion of parents that feel there is no alternative option. 81% of parents who home school their child/young person stated they do so because they have no choice.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

Essex County Council have a dedicated team, the Elective Home Education (EHE team) to support families who chose to home educate. During the pandemic, there has been a huge increase in families choosing to home educate - between September and December 2020, 975 children have been removed from an Essex school to be taught at home. These were equally split between primary and secondary age. 4% of these children have an EHC plan.

The EHE Team have made contact with all families who have made the decision to home educate to discuss the reasons and understand what support the family may need. This will continue. Enough staff have been put in place to make sure that it is possible to contact all families who elect to home educate to understand the triggers and make sure that it is a positive choice to electively home educate, as opposed to a position of 'no choice'.

Challenge 11: Appeals

From Family Impact Report 2020: Perception among parents that it is a deliberate test of parental determination by the Local Authority in a bid to save money as many parents will accept the Local Authority's initial decision. What seems particularly incongruous is the number of tribunal cases that are conceded before the hearing. As the parent carer forum for Essex, we are concerned about the significant negative impact this must have on the well-being of families that reach this stage of the process. We would like to explore further how learning from these cases is shared with the SEND services within Essex and how it influences future decisions.

What are we doing about this – what is already in motion?

Essex County Council intends to commission an independent review of the tribunal process and system in Essex to analyse the current system and make recommendations about the structural issues. Essex County Council will fully engage with parents to examine how we can enable more positive experiences. The work will take place over the summer term 2021 so that any changes can take place as soon as possible.