

Essex County Council welcomes the feedback provided by families using the Graffiti wall and Family Impact Surveys and we will use this feedback to inform our service improvement work.

Your feedback covered several key themes, including our Direct Payment Support Service, assessments for equipment, receiving a break from your caring role and receiving and being signposted to sources of advice and support.

You told us that the Direct Payment Support Service (DPSS) could be improved. In July we changed DPSS provider and employment advice and support and our payroll service is now being provided by Penderels. We are working closely with them to ensure that they provide a high quality service, but we ask that you bear with us as we work through some initial teething problems.

You also told us that our equipment assessment processes could be improved. We have just concluded a pilot where we created two Occupational Therapy Assistant (OTA) posts (one covering South/West, the other North/Mid) to identify and collect equipment no longer required, so that it can be refurbished and reissued, and to conduct reviews/ manage less complex cases, freeing up qualified OT time. The OTAs completed 156 reviews between Sept 22 and July 23, and this enabled a 13% increase in the amount of equipment allocated to children and young people. A decision has recently been taken for the posts to become permanent.

We acknowledge that there is an increased demand for an OT service, and we will continue to explore ways of maximising our resources to provide an improved service.

Caring for a child with SEND can place great pressures on a family and many of you contacted social care to request some form of respite or short break. Short breaks is a term which covers a range of support for children and their families, from clubs and activities, tickets and caravan and beach hut hire, to direct payments and overnight short breaks. You can access some of this without a social care assessment by registering with short breaks <https://shortbreaks.essex.gov.uk/>

You told us that if a Child and Family assessment was not undertaken many of you were not given information about other sources of support. The Children and Families Hub receive high volumes of requests for a service or advice and guidance from parents whose children have a wide range of needs. We recognise that for some families the specialist advice relating to their child's complex needs was not always targeted to their individual circumstances. We therefore recruited an experienced Senior Practitioner from the Children with Disabilities Team to work alongside the hub advisers to provide social care advice as part of the Education, Health and Care needs assessment process and to support advisors within the hub to increase their knowledge around children and young people with SEND and improve the advice being given at the front door. The local authority is also working to improve the quality of advice available via our local offer.

However we recognise that for some families there is still a struggle to get timely advice and guidance, and this remains an area of focus for the multi-agency network.

Whilst a Social Care Assessment of need may be necessary for some families, it will not be the only route for support dependant on your child's individual needs, and GP's, Health Visitors and other Health practitioners may also provide support or intervention. Your GP may refer your child onto specialist healthcare services if you are not already known to them.

Some of the family feedback spoke of difficult individual circumstances where the support provided by children's social care fell short of what we aim to provide. On occasions there may be a difference of opinion about an assessment or the current needs/impact/outcomes and plan of intervention and support, but we heard from the graffiti wall that some children or families felt that their Social Worker did not hear their concerns, or the intervention was lacking. Whilst the outcome of an assessment may not lead to the result a family was hoping for, we would never want to leave a child or family feeling they had had a poor experience. The graffiti wall is a brilliant source of feedback as we want to hear where we are doing well and where we can improve. Occasionally there will be a need to raise a complaint so we can look at your individual circumstances and the details for how to do so are below.

Gaye Cole

Director for Local Delivery South & Lead for Children and Young People with Disabilities

To make a complaint/ give a compliment please fill in the online form <https://www.essex.gov.uk/contact-us/complaints-and-compliments>

or contact our Compliance and Complaints team

Compliance and Complaints
Customer Services
Essex County Council
PO Box 11, County Hall
Chelmsford
Essex CM1 1QH