



Essex Family Forum is Disappointed with the Deferral of Local Area SEND Inspection

Essex Family Forum is deeply disappointed that the announced local area SEND inspection—due to begin on 2nd June 2025—has been deferred at the request of the local area partnership. (This partnership includes Essex County Council and the three NHS Integrated Care Boards (ICBs): Herts and West Essex, Mid and South Essex, and Suffolk and North-East Essex.) We are also disappointed that Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) have agreed to this deferral.

We understand that the ICBs are currently undergoing significant restructuring and that changes to their geographical coverage across Essex is imminent. While we recognise the complexity of these transitions, we believe that the ongoing transformation of NHS structures should not delay the vital process of reviewing and holding accountable services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

Families across Essex continue to face considerable challenges in accessing timely and appropriate support. These include time scale busting long delays in Education, Health and Care (EHC) plan assessments, exceedingly long waits for neurodevelopmental diagnoses, and limited access to essential therapies such as speech and language and occupational therapy. Mental health support for children and young people with SEND also remains a very significant concern and barrier for many families.

The planned inspection represented a vital opportunity for families to share their experiences and contribute to a comprehensive review of local services. While we recognise that some challenges stem from broader systemic pressures, we believe that listening to families and ensuring accountability are essential steps toward impactful and urgent improvement.

We encourage all partners—Essex County Council, the ICBs, and associated agencies—to continue prioritising the needs and voices of children and young people with SEND. We also hope that Ofsted and the CQC will continue to treat inspection deferrals as exceptional, ensuring that the momentum for progress is maintained even during periods of organisational change.

Management Committee

Essex Family Forum

12/6/2025