



Essex Family Forum statement on the Essex Local SEND Reform Plan

Essex Family Forum welcomes the publication of the Essex Local SEND Reform Plan and the Department for Education's approval letter. Publishing both documents is an important step towards transparency, allowing families to see the commitments being made, the areas requiring further improvement and how progress will be monitored.

As Essex's Parent Carer Forum, our role is to represent the collective experiences of parent carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). We bring families' voices into strategic discussions across education, health and social care, working with partners to shape services and providing constructive challenge where improvements are needed.

We welcome the plan's recognition of Essex Family Forum as a key strategic partner, reflecting our involvement in shaping the reform programme so far. It acknowledges our contribution to co-production and engagement and sets out our continued involvement in planning, decision-making and review through partnership boards and workstreams.

We also welcome the approval letter's emphasis on the need to strengthen communication and engagement with parents, carers, children and young people. Families need accessible information, opportunities to ask questions and a clear understanding of how their feedback influences decisions.

To strengthen communication and create more opportunities for families to engage directly, Essex Family Forum requested termly meetings for families with Essex County Council, which we would facilitate. The first took place during the summer term, and details of the autumn term meeting will be announced shortly. We hope these meetings will give parents and carers opportunities to hear directly from the local authority about progress, ask questions and share their experiences. They will also allow EFF to explain how we are bringing families' voices into the reform programme.

We know that many families continue to face significant difficulties accessing timely and appropriate support. The approval letter recognises that further work is needed to strengthen partnership working and turn the plan's commitments into sustained improvements. For families, progress will be measured through their everyday experiences of support and the difference it makes to their children's lives.

We will continue to draw on feedback from our Family Impact Survey, our Graffiti Wall and our wider engagement with families to represent lived experience in our work with partners. Your feedback helps us identify what is working, where barriers remain and



what needs to change. The plan recognises EFF as a route through which family feedback should inform improvements, and we will continue to bring this evidence into discussions as delivery progresses.

Meaningful co-production requires families' feedback to influence decisions, alongside clear communication about how it has been used.

Please continue to share your views on the SEND Reform Plan and your own lived experiences through our Graffiti Wall. Your feedback helps us ensure that families' voices are heard and inform our work with partners.

Our focus remains on keeping the lived experiences of Essex families central to this work and ensuring that the commitments in the plan lead to better support and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.