



Monday 11th June 2024

Dear Katie,

Response to Sheffield Parent Carer Forum State of Sheffield survey

Sheffield City Council (SCC) and South Yorkshire Integrated Care Board (ICB) would like to thank Sheffield Parent Carer Forum for undertaking the comprehensive survey of parents and carers of children with special educational needs and disabilities in 2023.

We, jointly, would also like to apologise for the speed in response to your thoughts on where we are as a City in our response to issues and our impact on improving outcomes for our children and young people with SEND.

Identification and Assessment of Need

Survey recommendations

Whilst we recognise that there has been a significant increase in referrals since the pandemic, key health services - particularly the Neurodisability service - should be prioritised to create additional capacity to work through the backlog and reduce waiting times for assessments.

Children and Young People with Neurodiversity is a priority for Sheffield Health and Care Partnership over the coming year. A diagnostic of the waiting list is soon to take place to support families waiting. The ICB and SCC are committed to linking support to the graduated response and ensuring that SENCOs and school staff are supporting children and families prior to any clinical diagnosis. Work is being led by Learn Sheffield to look at a model that supports early identification of need and early interventions to support children and families with strategies to support learning in their local school. This includes looking at a model that increases support at early stages and reduces need for clinical assessment to meet need. We are also promoting the use of Neurodiversity as our language rather than neurodisability. We are committed to meeting need early but also know this is a long term piece of work. We are working with all partners including Sheffield Parent Carer Forum (SPCF) to ensure we get this right.

Too many services still require a formal diagnosis as a precondition for accessing support. Sheffield City Council and NHS South Yorkshire Integrated Commissioning Board (NHS SY ICB) - Sheffield Place should carry out a review of eligibility criteria and replace diagnosis requirements with needs-based criteria, where possible.

Both SY ICB and SCC fully agree with this and will be working to address this over the coming year with an aim to have reviewed our eligibility for some provision by December 2024.

We acknowledge that efforts have been made to mitigate the impact of the waiting list crisis by contacting families of children on the waiting list for Neurodisability assessments, improving the information on the Sheffield Children's Hospital website and funding SPCF to run a Peer Support Service. These initiatives should be maintained and expanded to further improve pre- and post-diagnostic support for parents. Commissioning must become more responsive to needs. Whilst efforts have been made to increase support for children with sleep problems and sensory processing issues, there are still significant gaps in provision around behaviour support, mental health issues, and problems with eating or drinking – particularly where these issues do not yet meet clinical thresholds for services like CAMHS.

We are working with Sheffield Children's Hospital to review children on the waiting list to look to provide more targeted support. The intention is that we will complete this in the Autumn of 2024 and use this to ensure support outside of SCH is being offered to those waiting.

Over the next year we will improve our joint commissioning between SCC and ICB by recruiting to a joint commissioning post. We intend this person to be in post by January 2025. We will, as a Children and Young People's Delivery Group/ Local Area SEND Partnership, review what we do commission and gaps in provision and work with providers, such as Sheffield Children's Hospital, to review and recalibrate provision to meet needs in the community and address gaps. We do that on a regular basis and are currently looking at Social Emotional and Mental Health provision across Sheffield.

Social Inclusion

Survey recommendations

Mainstream leisure providers (e.g. leisure centres, cinemas, theatres, restaurants, sports clubs) should invest in disability awareness training and work with disabled children, young people and their parents to identify and eliminate barriers to accessing services. This could include putting on disability-friendly events and/ or providing additional support for families with disabled children.

SCC is revising its leisure strategy which looks to meet the need of all in the community. We will work as partners to encourage all in the City to undertake disability awareness training. We are also looking to roll out our sensory aware youth provision and use this as a positive benchmark in the City. We will continue to provide and signpost to disability friendly events.

Schools should apply learning from initiatives such as the Autism in Schools project to improve communication between staff and parents and help families of children with SEND feel more included within their school community.

SY ICB and SCC are committed to continuing and increasing the autism in schools project linking to the Autism and Social Communication team. We are committed to supporting families and commissioning our voluntary and parent groups to support our Belonging agenda.

Impact on Siblings

Survey recommendations

Although there are some local organisations that provide support and activities for siblings of disabled children (such as Sheffield Young Carers or the SIBS project at the University of Sheffield), many families are not aware of this offer. Information about sibling support should be made more widely available, e.g. via the Local Offer, education providers, social care services and healthcare professionals. Short break services provide parents with a valuable opportunity to spend quality time with their non-disabled children. These services should be better publicised and easier to access.

We are committed over the next year to improve our communication and information sharing with practitioners and families to improve awareness about what is available in Sheffield and in the local community that families live in. We will be working with SPCF to do this together.

Impact on parent wellbeing

Survey recommendations

Sheffield City Council should promote short break services more widely to parent carers, using a range of communication methods. Sheffield City Council should review the eligibility criteria for short break services. Given the long waiting times for Neurodisability assessments, the requirement for children to have a formal diagnosis should be dropped. Sheffield City Council should ensure that the needs of parent carers are considered through a distinct carer's assessment which considers their need to work and to access education, training and leisure activities. NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should commission specialist counselling for parent carers.

We will work to improve our communication about services and provision by drafting a Communication Strategy that will be co-produced with SPCF – this will be done by the end of the year. We will review our eligibility criteria for services by December 2024. Sheffield will carry out a carers assessment that is included in the holistic assessment of the family and children this is called a single assessment. This will consider the parent carers needs individually. We recognise that more training is required so that all teams across children's are aware of this and this will be undertaken over the next year. SY ICB understand the concerns raised through the survey about the emotional health and well-being of parents and carers of children with special needs. Over the coming year this will be investigated more fully, and recommendations made to the ICB.

Training for parents

Survey recommendations

There is a disconnect between the training currently on offer, and the training that parents say they want. A review should be carried out to ensure that the training offer meets parents' needs. Training should be more widely publicised, particularly to parents of children waiting for an assessment, and at the point of diagnosis.

Both SCC and SY ICB (Sheffield) agree to work with SPCF to review parenting programmes and availability at different points in the parent and child's journey to independence. We will do that over the coming year.

Support from social care

Survey recommendations

There needs to be a sustained effort to attract more people into PA roles, and to support families with the recruitment, training and retention of PAs. Families should be enabled and supported to use Direct Payments more creatively and flexibly, i.e. not just to employ PAs. Sheffield City Council should carry out a review of overnight respite to ensure that there is sufficient capacity for emergency placements, to avoid any closures of children's respite care homes in the future. Sheffield City Council should carry out a review of SNIPS clubs to ensure that these are accessible to all eligible children, with more choice. The diagnosis requirement for SNIPS clubs should be dropped. SNIPS should work with a wider range of mainstream clubs to make them more accessible for disabled children. The short breaks offer should be publicised more proactively and in a way that is easier for parents to understand.

We will work with our commissioning partners to look at how we increase the clubs that we offer and how we work to ensure that mainstream clubs and provision is also accessible. The review of SNIPS is taking place over the next 6 months. We are also reviewing the early help offer so that children and families needing support get the appropriate help at the right time.

We will continue to look at ways of recruiting PAs. We would like to work with SPCF to find new ways to do this.

SCC is currently undertaking a review of residential care for our children in care to look at how we increase our sufficiency and to ensure we can also meet our overnight care.

We will also be looking at Direct Payments and how there is continuation into adulthood where appropriate.

Mental Health and emotional well being

Survey recommendations

NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should develop an adequate mental health support offer for children and young people with SEND, as well as their parents and siblings – particularly for those who do not meet thresholds for clinical services like CAMHS. The existing offer, though limited, needs to be better publicised to families. Schools should make sure that both pupils and parents are aware of any mental health support they offer, e.g. through assemblies, newsletters, their websites and SEND information reports. This applies to all schools, but particularly Healthy Minds schools. Services should work in a multi-agency way in relation to mental health and SEND. This could be through the Children and Young People Delivery Group and the Mental Health and Learning Disabilities, Dementia and Autism Board. Sheffield City Council and/or NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should offer training to parents on how to support the emotional wellbeing and mental health of their child with SEND.

SCC and SY ICB (Sheffield) have agreed that mental health provision for children up to 18 will sit with the Children and Young People's Delivery Group – the local area's SEND Partnership Board. We will collectively review the current provision and also the work within schools to support children and young people between now and 2026. That review has started.

Work and Finances

Survey recommendations

Sheffield City Council should commission a range of services to provide benefits information and advice to parent carers and support them with form-filling. Sheffield City Council should extend the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme to include children with EHCPs who are not in receipt of means-tested free school meals and offer more SEND-specific activities. Sheffield City Council should commission sufficient special school places and increase both the level of challenge and the support provided to schools in relation to part-time timetables and exclusions of pupils with SEND. Sheffield City Council should widen the offer for young people with SEND who are leaving education, particularly for those who do not meet the threshold for support from adult social care.

Support around benefits information is available from local family hubs and we will ensure better communication of this to parents. The HAF programme is a central government initiative and has a finite period of time to run. Consideration will be given to the SPCF recommendation if this programme is taken forward by SCC.

Commissioning of new special school places is by the Department for Education (DfE) – SCC will continue to work with DfE to ensure that there are a range of places available to children with special needs with a focus being on ensuring children can access their local school and feel they belong.

SCC is committed to working with partners to ensure a clear post-16 strategy and also with SY ICB (Sheffield) a focussed Preparing for Adulthood Board co-chaired with SPCF.

Childcare

Survey recommendations

Sheffield City Council should better publicise the Disability Access Fund (which provides inclusion funding to childcare providers for eligible 3- and 4-year-olds), to both childcare providers and parents. Take-up of this fund is low, which may be due to the fact that children must be in receipt of Disability Living Allowance to qualify (see also page 11). Sheffield City Council should use the annual Childcare Sufficiency Assessment to identify gaps in childcare provision for children and young people with SEND, and work with parents and providers to develop strategies to plug those gaps. Sheffield is one of 16 local authorities chosen to pilot the Government's plans to provide wraparound childcare for primary school aged children. It is essential that this work considers children with SEND, and particularly those who attend special schools, from the outset

SCC are committed to promoting the Disability Access Fund and childcare and early education places for children with special needs and disabilities.

We will continue to work in partnership with the Sector, SSENDIAS (Sheffield SEN and Disability Information, Advice and Support) and the Sheffield Parent Carer Forum to understand demand from families of children with SEND/additional needs and issues with accessing current Wraparound provision. We will support providers in ensuring their provision is inclusive and has considered the needs of all children.

Education

Survey Recommendations

Sheffield City Council should continue to fund initiatives that can evidence a positive impact on enhancing inclusion in mainstream schools, such as the Autism in Schools project and the Inclusion Taskforce. It should be compulsory for all school staff to attend SEND training as part of their continuing professional development. Sheffield City Council should develop a robust sufficiency plan to ensure there are enough

special school places / specialist provision over the next five years, setting out the steps needed to achieve this. Schools should proactively review their policies and be open to making reasonable adjustments to accommodate the needs of children and young people with SEND. This is in line with the Sheffield All-Age Autism Strategy, where one of the priorities is to “Ensure all schools provide neurodiverse accessible environments, with commitment and improved awareness and acceptance from all school leaders”

SCC are committed to working with all education providers to ensure they are inclusive. This includes providing training opportunities for all staff. SCC is working on a comprehensive Sufficiency Plan for all school places in the city including early years and post 16. This will be taken to committee setting out the key steps and milestones required. Learn Sheffield leading for the school system is drafting a continuum of provision to bring clarity to the different provision schools can and are providing for children – this is linked to the graduated response. Commissioning of new special schools sits with the Department for Education and two new special schools have been commissioned for Sheffield. We will continue to lobby and plan to ensure that the right resource both revenue and capital is available for our children.

SCC and SY ICB (Sheffield) have commissioned Learn Sheffield to review the Neurodiverse model in Sheffield which will support more children being able to access education in the local community and in their local school. We are working hard to ensure that needs of a child are met without requiring a diagnosis or assessment.

EHCP

Survey recommendations

We are pleased to see some improvements with regard to EHC needs assessments and SENDSARS, but there is clearly still a long way to go. At the time of writing, an independent review of SEND services, commissioned by the local authority, was taking place. We look forward to seeing the recommendations from this review and expect that they will be implemented in full.

This review has been completed and the recommendations are being taken forward. The review has formed the basis of the SENDSARS Improvement Plan.

Annual review paperwork should include a question to establish whether the provision described in sections F and G is being made. SENDSARS should follow up on any reports of non-implementation with relevant providers.

We are committed to improving the quality of annual reviews. This includes delivering on going training through the citywide SENCOS which highlights the importance of discussing provision, whether outcomes have been met and recording this information. We are reviewing the SEND statutory assessment and review service to ensure there is

sufficient capacity to offer further support and contacts with schools, and to provide a response when provision is not being delivered.

SENDSARS should develop a document setting out when an EHC plan will / will not be amended. This information should be available on the Local Offer website.

We are committed to improving our communication with families. We will be working with SPCF to co-produce a guide to assessment, EHC Plan issue, and annual reviews, including when amendments should and will be made. This will be completed by December 2024 and published in the Spring of 2025. We are committed to working with SPCF on further work to embed the graduated response and meet children and young people's needs at the earliest point.

Parental Satisfaction with Services

Survey recommendations

Sheffield City Council and NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should review the funding, caseloads and service models of specialist SEND support services, to establish whether higher-performing services share specific characteristics which could be adopted by other services. Sheffield City Council and NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should increase the capacity of services that are currently unable to meet demand. Sheffield City Council and NHS SY ICB (Sheffield Place) should publish clear information about eligibility criteria, access routes, target response times, service standards and complaints procedures for all specialist services on the local offer

A review of all areas of work will be undertaken over the next two years to ensure that we are meeting need at earliest point for children, their local school and local community. We will work with SPCF to deliver these changes in co-production with parents, children and young people. We as ever are lobbying Central Government for additional resources to be focused on children and young people particularly with a special educational need or disability.

Transitions

Survey recommendations

Transition must remain a top priority when the Accelerated Progress Plan ends. To maintain the momentum gained, a strategic role should be created to oversee and drive forward the Preparation for Adulthood agenda across education, health and social care. We welcome the creation of a dedicated social care transitions team. However, the fact that 63% of respondents rated this team "poor" or "very poor" is concerning. Improving the service provided (e.g. through easier access, improved processes, more training,

better leadership) could have an immediate impact. Ensuring a good transition to adult services is not just about the process of transition but also about the quality and range of services that young people are able to access. Work on expanding the range of available options has only just begun and needs to be accelerated further. It is vital that commissioners are aware of, and responsive to, the interests and aspirations of the young people coming through the system. We are pleased to have co-produced a new transitions guide for parents with the local authority. This guide must now be promoted widely, e.g. via the Local Offer website, SEND Facebook group, SEND bulletins, health communication channels and SENCO briefings. All settings and services should refer to the transitions guide as their go-to resource for helping parents navigate the transition process. Young people with health needs should have a detailed health transition plan put in place, well in advance of moving from children to adult services

It has been agreed that a new Preparing for Adulthood Board will be established that will ensure that we commission our services to support a smooth transition between all children and adult services but also focus on supporting our children to become independent. This Board will be running by September 2024. The co-chairs of this Board are Katie Monette from SPCF and Cllr Dawn Dale who is Lead Member for Children's and chair of the Education, Children and Families Committee.

Communication and Information

Survey recommendations

The fact that 57% of respondents rated communication with social care services as "poor" or "very poor" gives cause for concern. There has been little improvement since 2019, when this figure stood at 60%. The issue should be addressed by co-producing and implementing a set of communication standards for social care services. Whilst the improved feedback on the Local Offer website is encouraging, there is still a long way to go to turn the site into the central information point it was intended to be. A marketing campaign is needed to raise awareness amongst parents and professionals.

Establishing a continuous feedback loop with parents is vital; this includes the feedback gathered by organisations such as SPCF and SSENDIAS and posts in the new SEND Facebook group. All this feedback should be used to fill gaps in information and ensure that the Local Offer is relevant and up to date. SSENDIAS is clearly valued by parents, and it is vital this service is adequately funded to ensure it can meet demand. Family Centres have been transformed into Family Hubs and should be the place to access information in local communities. However, these hubs need to build upon the existing services that are in place to be able to truly support families from pregnancy through a child's early years until they reach adulthood. This includes working closely with community youth services and clearly communicating the offer to families

As previously stated we are clear that communication needs to be improved and we are working on a co-produced Communication Strategy which will include how we engage parents in this work. SCC will also review communication by social care services with families with children with special needs or disabilities to improve the current view of the service. We will work with Sheffield Parent Carer Forum to improve the communication we have with all families. This will be completed by September 2024.

Complaints

Survey recommendations

Services should publish clear and easily accessible complaints procedures on their websites and signpost to this information from any relevant correspondence.

Complaints should be investigated by an impartial and independent individual or service.

Both SCC and SY ICB(Sheffield) will review publication and accessibility of complaints process. It is both organisations expectation that any investigation is impartial and independent. We will also ensure that an annual compliments and complaints review is published to set out what are the common themes and what we have done to address these issues. This will be in place from June 2025.

What works

When describing the positive contributions made by these individuals, parents repeatedly mentioned a number of key traits:

- Communicates thoroughly and regularly*
- Proactive*
- Supportive*
- Listens without judgement*
- Values parental expertise*
- Honest and clear*
- Caring*
- Goes above and beyond*
- Does what they say they will*
- Consistent approach*
- Involves children and parents*
- Willing to adapt to the child, review strategies and make adjustments*
- Accessible*
- Knowledgeable*
- Involves other service*

The positive traits observed through the survey will be shared by the co-chairs of Children and Young People's Delivery Group – the local area SEND Partnership, to ask all organisations to review their provision based on this.

We look forward to continuing to work with SPCF and SENDIASS to hear the views and concerns of parents and work together to improve the system and outcomes for children and young people.

Yours sincerely,

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