

Response to the 2023 Suffolk Parent Carer Forum Survey

Dear SPCF,

Thank you to you and your team for all your hard work in creating the 22/23 Annual Suffolk Parent Carer Forum Survey, and for your diligence in analysing the feedback received.

We take feedback from families seriously; and we are also grateful to the 114 parent carers who took the time to respond. Please find below our response to some of the major themes raised in the survey, so that you and all those who responded can see what we have already done, what is currently underway and what else we plan to do to address each area. There are some areas not responded to in this document as work is ongoing on them - we will write to you again later in the Autumn term to respond to these areas.

1. Profile of needs

The biggest areas of need raised by the families who responded to the survey were in the areas of

- Autism
- Sensory processing difficulties
- Language and communication, and
- Social, emotional and mental health needs.

This ties in with what families, schools and settings are telling us as well via other routes.

What have we done so far?

- In 2019 we launched our ambitious [SEND Capital Programme](#) to develop our specialist educational provision in Suffolk, creating hundreds of new specialist places around the county catering for children with all four broad areas of SEND (Cognition & Learning, Communication & Interaction, Social, Emotional & Mental Health and Sensory/Physical Needs), as outlined in the [SEND Code of Practice](#).
- We have continued to invest in our [school-based Mental Health Support Teams](#). These workers support individual or groups of young people directly, and also support schools to develop a 'whole school approach' to mental health, including staff training, workshops, drop-in sessions, support for parent carers and the delivery of evidence-based mental health interventions.

- We have also developed our [Mental Health Leads network](#) to support school staff to develop in their practice and enable better support of students with needs in this area.
- In September 2023 we launched an [Inclusion Support Line](#), for education setting staff to get quick advice and guidance on any matters relating to SEND and inclusion.
- We have redesigned the way our [Specialist Education Service](#) works – from 2024, rather than needing to refer individual children, every school will be allocated a Specialist Teacher who will visit them on a termly basis to talk through provision for children and young people with SEND and provide advice on how schools can most effectively meet those children's needs.
- We have also created a [new Neurodevelopmental \(NDD\) Pathway](#) for families living in East and West Suffolk. This pathway aims to provide support to families of children and young people with concerns about Autism, ADHD and/or distressed/challenging behaviours, with or without a diagnosis. Family Action continue to provide pre-diagnostic support for families in Waveney; a service commissioned by Norfolk and Waveney ICB since 2020. From April 2023/24, a waiting list initiative to reduce waits to assessment was introduced directly impacting children who have waited the longest.
- Our [Psychology in Schools team](#) run a programme of online workshops for parent carers on topics including:
 - Anxiety in Adolescence
 - Low Mood
 - Tools to Manage Uncertainty
 - Supporting young people with eating difficulties
 - Understanding the teenage brain
 - Supporting young children and adolescents with sleep
 - Building resilience
 - Supporting your child to manage their big feelings
 - Supporting your young person with challenging behaviour
 - Managing exam stress
 - Understanding young people's self-harm
 - Getting the best of your relationships with our young person
 - How to get what you want: adolescent workshop
 - Supporting your child to attend or get back to school
 - How to talk to your young people about the war in Ukraine
 - Supporting your child with Tourette/Tics
 - Understanding trauma
 - Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- We also continue to invest in our direct access / online emotional wellbeing and mental health support, including [online mental health support and/or counselling via Kooth](#), suicide prevention training, a refreshed [Source – Suffolk County Council's website for young people](#), with a new section specifically for young people with additional needs, and resources published for families and schools via our [Wellbeing in Education pages on the main Suffolk County Council website](#).

- VSEND has been introduced as part of the [Suffolk Inclusion Toolkit](#). This provides schools with an overall picture of the needs of the children on their roll and the support they require, against the school or setting's readiness to meet these needs.
- Recruitment is underway for a new Sensory Occupational Therapist to work across the county, giving greater access to support for children and young people with sensory needs. The post has been commissioned by SCC Inclusion Service and will be managed by Health. For Norfolk and Waveney, following a formal review of Occupational Therapy services in 2020/21, the system secured national funding to deliver a system wide transformation programme. A digital library for professionals is live on Just One Norfolk to be expanded for parents and carers in Autumn 2023/24. This complements additional funding for more therapists and masters level training for Sensory Interventions. A SENCO toolkit, containing advice and guidance on a range of topics will be shared across schools in the Autumn.
- We have created a specific pathway for early intervention for children with speech and language needs, including recruitment of Speech and Language Therapists working alongside Specialist Teachers to provide schools with accessible support at the earliest point. For Waveney, additional investment by Suffolk County Council into EHCP SLT provision was agreed with Cambridgeshire Community Services, enabling young people with needs for an enhanced offer to access support.

How well have we done it?

- The capital programme is ongoing, and so far we have invested £45m to create over 800 additional specialist places across the county, including 357 places in specialist units and schools for children with communication and interaction needs, 80 places in schools for children with social, emotional and mental health needs and 272 places in specialist units and schools for children with cognition and learning needs.
- 50% of schools in Suffolk (including Waveney, although this is currently only Lowestoft) now have a linked Mental Health Support Worker, and feedback from schools and families is positive.
- The Inclusion Support Line have taken just over 580 calls, over 200 of which related to a child with social, emotional and mental health, sensory or communication and interaction needs. Of those who responded to the post-call feedback survey, over 99% said they felt the line had been useful in helping them support children and/or families.
- From April 2022 to May 2023, 356 families have been supported through the East and West Suffolk NDD pathway. However, we recognise that the pathway has been under an overwhelming level of demand which has led to delays accessing support. This demand is also reflected within the Norfolk and Waveney pre-diagnostic support service, which receives over 200 referrals per quarter.
- In total, 8657 people have accessed the webinars run by the Psychology in Schools Team (6449 views online and 2208 attendees of the workshops live).

- 100% of young people who have accessed online counselling via Kooth say they would recommend it to a friend.
- We have increased funding to our arms-length Independent Advice and Support Service SENDIASS, enabling them to recruit an additional member of staff to deal with their increase in referrals (14% increase Sept 21- Aug 22).
- There were nearly 18,000 views of the resources on the Wellbeing in Education pages in 2022, by just under 12,000 visitors. 11,000 of these views were of the Emotionally Based School Avoidance resources pages.
- Over 264 schools have been trained in the use of VSEND, with 156 setting readiness assessments completed. So far, 333 pupil records have been completed on the VSEND system, with more to come.

What will we do next?

- Phase 3 of the capital programme now underway, with an additional £10 million of investment from the DfE and the County Council. This is set to create another 200 places in specialist units attached to mainstream schools around the county, as well as the build of three new special schools.
- We will introduce two further Mental Health Support Teams in 2024 across Suffolk and bid for additional funding from NHS England to further increase our coverage of the county. The current MHST team in Waveney covers the Lowestoft area only – our colleagues in Norfolk are expanding teams in other areas of Norfolk next, and so any further Waveney expansion is likely to be after 2024/25.
- The Inclusion Support Line have recently opened up to colleagues from Health and Social Care as well as Education and is now also available via webchat.
- Our Specialist Education Service are working with schools to develop the Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework – a resource outlining the structures, support and interventions we would expect to be ‘ordinarily available’ to all children and young people in mainstream schools in each area of need. This will launch later in 2023.
- NDD Pathways and Support: Over the last six months the Integrated Care Board have been monitoring and reviewing the East & West Suffolk NDD Pathway. We acknowledge that the pathway came under pressure due to demand and capacity, and so in our ongoing commitment to provide better care and support for children and young people (CYP) with neurodevelopmental conditions, and their families, we have developed a recovery plan to address this, including the redesign of the referral forms, investments in partnerships with other organisations to tackle the lengthy waits, a focus on speeding up the referral and triage stages of the pathway, and [updated information on the Local Offer website](#) to ensure that professionals and families can understand what the pathway is for, who should refer in to it and how it should work. The development and success of the pathway remains a top priority for the ICB. Following an engagement event in Lowestoft, Norfolk and Waveney ICB are reviewing the resource pack for parents and carers and updating the professional toolkit

which offers advice and guidance on the assessment and support pathways available to families in this area. A formal review is expected across Norfolk and Waveney in the next 12 months which will also include an evaluation of the current waiting list initiative.

- We have received funding from the Government to take part in the “Delivering Better Value” programme, which aims to support schools to identify and implement targeted interventions best suited for each individual child or young person. Recruitment for the staff to deliver this project is currently underway.
- VSEND: the Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment team are supporting and encouraging all schools requesting EHCNAs to complete VSEND profiles for children and young people. A new governance board was created in July 2023 to provide strategic advice and governance to monitor the progress of VSEND and the whole Suffolk Inclusion Toolkit. This group will ensure that schools are actively engaged and using this new tool.

What difference will this make to families?

- The continued expansion of the capital programme will mean that more children with higher levels of need will be able to access specialist provision, and waiting lists for this type of provision will fall.
- The growth of the Mental Health Support Teams will enable more children and young people around the county to access specialist support at an earlier level in their mental health needs journey and in the familiar surroundings of their local school. The work of the team will also ensure that all our schools are safe, supportive spaces for anyone facing mental health difficulties. Any schools that are not supported by MHSTs will have access to the Primary Mental Health Worker Service. For Waveney, a new integrated front door is available for children and young people with emerging mental health needs. The formal launch is expected in the Autumn 2023.
- The growth of the Inclusion Support Line will mean that practitioners across Education, Health and Social Care can quickly access up to date information and advice, leading to fewer delays for families and children being supported appropriately as quickly as possible.
- The redesign of the Specialist Education Service and introduction of our new Whole School Inclusion Team has, alongside our existing Inclusion Support Meetings and Solution Circles, given schools much quicker access to specialist support and promoted inclusive practice across all areas, thereby enabling earlier intervention.
- The Suffolk Mainstream Inclusion Framework will help to ensure that our practices and standards are consistent across the county, so that children and young people with all profiles of need have consistently high-quality teaching and support.
- Schools who are using VSEND are reporting that it is improving their ability to assess their setting readiness, both at a whole-school level as well as enabling them to understand how they can support individual children with SEND.

2. Statutory Assessment and monitoring of needs

We were encouraged by signs of improvement in some areas from the survey responses, including an increase in the number of survey respondents involved in producing their child's EHC plan and the nearly 70% of respondents who were happy with the contents of the plan, but we continue to strive for improvement in all areas of our statutory work.

We noted that parents who completed the survey:

- were not always confident that the provision specified in their child's EHC plan was being implemented, and
- reported that not all Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments, Annual Reviews and Phase Transfers were being completed on time.

What have we done so far?

- Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments: we have created a new dedicated EHCNA team to manage the initial six-week stage of the EHCNA process, to ensure this is completed within statutory timescales.
- Annual Reviews and Phase Transfers: we have refreshed our staff training on the processes and timelines around annual reviews and phase transfers, have issued guidance to schools and SENCOs about their responsibilities in this regard, and have moved our phase transfer decision making panels to earlier in the Autumn term. We have also created a dedicated Annual Review team within our SEND Family Services Department, to ensure that Annual Reviews are processed more quickly.
- Concerns about provision: We now include a link and QR code in all the letters we send to families with finalised EHC plans from our Liquid Logic system that gives them access to an online form where they can let us know their concerns directly. Each case is then addressed with the setting by a member of Inclusion Services to resolve any barriers or misunderstandings and enable provision to be fully put in place.
- We have agreed to invest an additional £1.8 million to support our capacity to respond to families. The majority of this increased capacity is within our Family Services team.
- We have moved our case management to an online portal based system, to enable better communication between families and workers and to ensure consistency of practice across the county.

How well have we done it?

- Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs): we are continuing to strive for improvements in the timeliness of our EHCNA decision making. Since the creation of the new EHCNA team (June 2023), all but one initial EHCNA decisions have been issued within the statutory 6 weeks.

- In the academic year 22/23, we completed 93% of Early Years / Primary / Secondary Transfer phase transfer annual reviews on time, and 53% of post-16 phase transfers. We continue to streamline our process and strive for further improvements in future years.
- Although we have received some responses through our new notification system regarding provision not being in place, we know some families are still not aware of this system. This has been further brought to our attention by SPCF. Where we have been notified, our coordinators have worked with schools and families to support and resolve issues.
- 89% of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks in 2021, however a shortage of Education Psychologists (EPs) led to this falling to 21% in 2022. This is a national shortage – at current demand levels we need 13 additional EPs. Following recruitment, the EP service is now in a recovery phase and we are beginning to see an increase in the timeliness of EHCPs being issued within 20 weeks again. At the time of writing, the number of plans being issued on time had increased by 12%.
- The case management system has enabled staff to access information and provide improved communication on responses. We know this has not yet been felt by all families at a local level, however we continue to work on this until all families feel the benefit.

What will we do next?

- The EHCNA team will be resourced with permanent staff to ensure that these improvements are sustained, and we will continue to strive for 100% of EHCNA decisions within 6 weeks.
- We will build on the improvements of the Phase Transfer Processes from 2021 and 2022, increasing the number that are held and processed on time to ensure that children and young people are able to be placed in an appropriate setting in good time and have a supported and successful transition.
- We will increase visibility to the online feedback form to ensure that parents and carers know how to advise us if provision is not in place, and continue to work with children, young people and their families and school to ensure provision is in place.
- We have a further 7 Educational Psychologists starting at all levels within the Service in September 2023, and continue to recruit for the remaining vacant positions. We are also using locum EPs and Psychology Assistants where appropriate.
- We will move the Annual Review paperwork process across to our new portal in March 2024, to further improve efficiencies in this area.

What difference will this make to families?

- Assessments and reviews will be completed on time, so families will know the outcome and the provision that will be made for their child with less delay and without needing to chase us for updates.

3. Communication and Information

You have raised with us that communication between education, health and other professionals does not always seem to work well in the eyes of families, and also that approximately half of parent carers have reported some difficulty finding out information about services.

What have we done so far?

- As previously mentioned, we have moved our EHC Needs Assessment process to an online portal-based system. Professionals can log in and see which requests are due, lessening confusion and the need for chasing up of multiple pieces of information.
- We have increased staffing to our SEND Family Services team, to reduce individual caseloads and enable officers to communicate with all parties more promptly.
- We have increased staffing to the Local Offer helpline – a family facing phonenumber – to ensure that calls are answered and/or redirected more quickly.
- We have launched the Inclusion Support Line for practitioners, to enable them to get a quicker answer for general queries and leave other avenues free for more specific or detailed enquiries.
- We have relaunched the Source website with a new “I have additional needs” section for children and young people in Suffolk.
- Following feedback from families that our current Local Offer website was hard to navigate, we have also taken the decision to move it to a different platform. This project is currently underway and will launch in late November 2023.

How well have we done it?

- The EHC Needs Assessment portal is improving the timeliness of our initial statutory process and is enabling families to have access and track where the process is at.
- Additional coordinators and assistant coordinators have been recruited and are varying points of being trained. We also have 18 temporary officers that are supporting in the continued growth that Suffolk see's (On average this is at 10% per year).
- Our Local Offer helpline takes around 1200 calls each month, answering calls on average in around 90 seconds, responding to basic queries and/or scheduling callbacks in Family Services Officers' calendars within 3 working days.
- The Inclusion Support line deals with more detailed questions from professionals, often with signposting and follow up work needed, and has taken just over 580 calls and / or webchats since its launch. This has freed up resource elsewhere and increased the quality and consistency of our advice.
- The source website has been a great success with young people, with feedback direct from our Young Person's Website on how great it is to access.

What will we do next?

- The new portal for Annual Reviews will be opened up more fully to schools and for Annual Reviews from March 2024. This will enable schools to see all children and young people that are on their school role with an EHCP, who is their allocated family services worker and provide improved communication.
- The new Local Offer website will launch by end 2023. There are lots of meetings to take place during Autumn 2023, to which SPCF are part of ensuring content is improved and addressing any areas that we might need to continue to work on.
- In September 2023 we will be changing our telephone arrangements, to enable families to speak to their local Family Services team more quickly. Rather than the current central response line we will publish three phone numbers – one for each area team. These will be manned within the area teams and should help more queries to be answered straightaway. Our Customer First team will continue to provide an overflow facility for busier times.

What difference will this make to families?

- Communication between families, different groups of professionals and the Local Authority will be improved by the greater use of the portal. Families will be able to directly message their named officer through the system.
- The new Local Offer website will provide superior user navigation and a much more targeted search function, enabling families to find general information about services more easily.

We know that we still have much to do, and we are mindful that the impact of these changes and improvements are not yet always being felt by families. We hope that this response shows that we are taking families' feedback seriously, and that we remain committed to change and improvement throughout the whole of the Suffolk SEND Partnership System.

We remain grateful to you and your team for all your continued hard work and commitment to working with us.

With very best regards,

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