

Kingston Parent Carer Consortium: Tuesday the 14th of March, 2023, 12:00-13:30

Meeting Minutes

Parent Carer Forum / Parent & Carers: Linda Nystrom (LN), Helen (H), Karen Gale (KG), Jo Thomas (JT), Anna Mallia (AM), Asif Mullan (AM), Kelly Harrison (KH),

Staff: Ashley Whittaker, Programme Director, AfC (AW), Councillor Stephanie Archer (SA), Alys Robinson, Inclusion Development Officer, AfC (AR), Megan Francis-Falkner, SEND Policy and Project Officer, AfC (MFF), Andy Nowak, Head of Spring School (AN), Karen Lowry, Manager of the SEND Local Offer, AfC (KL), Catherine Marks, Deputy Head of SEND, AfC (CM), Caroline Roberts, Inclusion Development Officer, AfC (CR)

Apologies: Rob Harris, Parent Carer Engagement Officer, AfC (RH) Shaun West, Designated Social Care Officer for SEND (AfC), Sharon Nelson, Deputy Head of Transformation, ICB (SN)

1. Welcome, introductions and apologies

AW gave introductions and welcomed everyone to the meeting. AW gave a brief overview of the SEND Futures plan, which is a joint project between education, health and social care, and covers all children and young people up to the age of 25 with any kind of SEND, regardless of whether or not they have an Education, Health and Care Plan.

2. Update on the Spring School

AN gave an update on the Spring School:

- Spring School is a new autism-specific school being built by the Department for Education (DfE). The site is next to the Moor Lane Centre in Chessington.
- On Tuesday the 7th, the contractor building that school went into administration, therefore the school is unlikely to open in September 2023 as planned. Until the DfE re-tender the bid for the building, no more work will be done.
- There are 32 families who were supposed to be going to the school in September. There is now a solution: the DfE is currently building a primary school in Norbiton which is nearly finished, however there is no plan to occupy it till September 2026. This brand new school is only 20 minutes away from the Spring School.
- Therefore, a contingency plan has been agreed by Achieving for Children (AfC), Ambitious about Autism and the DfE, for those children assigned to the Spring School to attend the primary school in Norbiton for the first year. After this year, they will then move to the Spring School in Chessington.
- There will be a chance for families to ask questions the week beginning the 27th of March.
- Because the site in Norbiton is available in May, there is a chance to do a lot of transition work with the young people who will be attending, to allow them time to adjust.

JT enquired over the location of the school. AN noted that it was on Coombe road, and depending on traffic was a 15 to 20 minute drive from the permanent Spring School site.

JR noted that SENDIASS were available if families wished for someone impartial to talk to about this.

JR also enquired about transport. AN noted that the transport hadn't yet been commissioned so this shouldn't be an issue.

3. Parent Carer Forum update

KG gave an update on the PCF:

- The PCF were invited to be part of an update on the SEND Futures Plan, which covers Alternative Provision and SEND from Early Years to College. The committee agreed that this would be a key priority for the PCF over the summer term.
- Claudia met with Polares (now running SENDIASS), who have reassured the PCF that the service will still be available whilst the changeover is happening.
- PCF will be a part of a new initiative/project which is focused on developing support for children in Early Years, focusing on speech and language communication needs.
- Kingston PCF attended the national Parent Carer Forum. The Director of SEND Alternative Provision (AP) improvement plan spoke at the event, along with Alison Ismael, whose focus was on wanting to rebuild trust across the systems.
- The PCF had the Care to Share event, and the next one will be on the 12th of April, during the evening.
- A specialist behaviour consultant will be doing three workshops with the PCF in March, April and May, addressing topics such as helping children understand their anxiety, and managing challenging behaviour.

AW and KG discussed the SEND and AP Improvement Plan, and KG noted that it was difficult for parents to digest such a large amount of information, and that there are organisations summarising part of the document, which the PCF were putting on their facebook page.

Action: MF to include a link to the Easy Read version of the improvement plan in minutes.

[This can be found here.](#)

Cllr Archer offered the support of herself, Cllr Ed Davie and other local MPs with certain aspects of the national improvement plan, such as lobbying or letter writing to the Secretary of State.

Action: Members of the PCF to contact Cllr Archer if they have any particular points they want raised.

Action: KG to send over a calendar of the upcoming PCF events that Cllr Archer and Cllr Ed Davie could attend.

4. Schools accessed by Kingston children

Parents and carers have raised questions in the past about how they can identify schools that may be the most appropriate for their child and the challenges they face when trying to find the right place for their child.

Action: MFF/AW to follow up with Rob Harris after the meeting and share the summary page of links to those websites.

AW noted that if parents wanted to read about state schools in another Local Authority, they would need to look on that council's website. AW also noted that there is a requirement for Kingston Local Authority to publish a list of schools within the independent and non maintained sector. These can be found on the [website](#), however this shows places where more than five children attend, to ensure individuals are not identifiable.

CM gave an update on legislation around this issue, noting the following:

- According to legislation, AfC cannot recommend specific places to parents and carers. What the service can do is share what is available in the local area to meet certain needs.
- AfC can also clarify for parents the age ranges schools can take, whether a school is a specialist school or has specialist provisions, or cater for more than one area of need.

- CM clarified that Specialist Resource Provisions (SRPs) would come with a much lower number of class spaces than a regular class. The specialist schools will cater to a higher number of pupils however they do have a maximum capacity.
- CM noted that AfC staff could also signpost parents to advocacy groups such as SENDIASS and RUILS who could provide direct support.
- When it comes to mainstream schools the same principles apply, coordinators in the service can let parents know what is available but they cannot recommend one school over another.

Anna Mallia noted that from experience, unless a school does an in-person assessment of a child, it will be difficult to know if the school can realistically meet that child's needs.

CM noted that what she is discussing relates more to the consultation stage. CM also noted that a specialist school will all perform an observation, however when it comes to mainstream schools there is a much higher volume of pupils being consulted for, and it is not possible for all those children to have visits.

KG also suggested parents reaching out to other parents in similar situations who are looking at schools to offer advice and experience.

JT questioned whether parents could get a list of schools which details how many children attend, what is the main needs it meets and do the children have to be accessing the main curriculum, to save parents time.

CM acknowledged that it would be useful for parents to have a catch all factual summary. CM noted that there was some of this information available on the Local Offer, however there may be a need to rework what is there to make sure it is accessible and useful. CM also noted that there was scope to further develop on the idea of linking parents in with other parents.

JR gave a presentation, which can be [found here](#).

Helen (Q): My child EHCP needs assessment is underway, but this takes time and my child is now already attending school whilst his EHCP is being drafted. My issue is that I need this information to know where he should attend, but I can't get this information before his EHCP has been drafted.

- CM noted that the parent should have a copy of the advice that is gathered, before an EHCP has been issued. However it depends at what stage in the assessment process.
- Asif Mullan noted that as parents their involvement in deciding on a school placement was minimal. AM also noted that their advice reports were only given to them at the same time as the EHCP.
- **Action:** CM noted that she would look into this, and go back to service users on this.

JR continued his presentation.

JR also noted that SENDIASS had their own personal list of schools however they do not tend to publish this, partly because what schools offer changes so frequently, it is almost impossible to keep up with this and such a list would need constant updating.

Action: JR to request a meeting with the PCF along with Rob Harris and Karen Lowry to go over what is practical and what is helpful in terms of improving information sharing on schools available.

Caroline Roberts, the new Inclusion Development Officer at AfC, introduced herself, noting that she used to be a school teacher before beginning this role.

5. SENDIASS update

JR gave an update on SENDIASS:

- JR noted that the contract for running the SENDIASS service has gone to Polaris. They are still working through processes with them as an organisation, however all staff have been offered the opportunity to move over to Polaris.
- There may be some small delays at the end of March as the IT systems change over.
- There are long term arrangements to make changes on service delivery, yet this will happen over a few years. Main change is how they provide their services, this will be delivered mainly via signposting onto other organisations.
- The SENDIASS phone number will stay the same.

AW noted that a parent had a question she wished to ask, and that Sophie Jones, Head of the Disabled Children's Team was planning to attend the meeting to respond to the question, but was unavailable, and will respond separately. **Action:** AW to follow up with Sophie Jones to ensure she responds.

The parent shared some personal experiences and asked questions about the process for raising safeguarding concerns relating to children with disabilities, particularly those less able / unable to advocate for themselves / with communication needs.

- AW thanked the parent for sharing her experience, noting that in terms of safeguarding the needs of children with disabilities, the principles are the same for all children.
- AW highlighted that safeguarding concerns can and should be raised with AfC's single point of access (SPA). If there is immediate danger the police should be called on 999. The SPA contact number is 020 8547 5008, and the website page can be found [here](#). He gave information about the Local Area Designated Officer (LADO) role, which every local authority has. These officers are responsible for coordinating and looking into any safeguarding concerns relating to adults working with children, including volunteers.
- A link to the complaints process for schools can be [found here](#). AW also noted that all organisations involved with supporting children will have a safeguarding policy, any parent who has a concern can escalate this with their designated safeguarding lead. In a school, the process highlights the option to raise an issue with the school's headteacher.

JR also noted that if a concern is raised with SPA that information would be held centrally, and noted he would be happy to talk to the parent about this issue.

Action: Parent to contact JR about a meeting.

6. Actions from previous meetings

AW referred to a previous meeting relating to the time it takes for a tribunal process to go ahead.

AW noted that the increase in numbers of tribunals have meant that they are taking a lot longer to go ahead.

JR noted that if your child is in year 6 or year 7 they tribunals will be scheduled for before September.

Action: AW to include additional information on the tribunal process and timescales in the minutes.

Additional information:

- the timetables are set by SENDIST not the LA. SENDIST is an independent body.

- for matters such as a decline to assess or decline to issue an education health and care plan, the Tribunal prefers paper hearings (when nobody attends) and they list these cases within a window of time, usually a three week

window. The Tribunal then lists the matter for a specific date and notifies the parties. All of this is out of the hands of the local authority.

- the Tribunal has seen a large increase in cases without a corresponding increase in resources, and the number of cases continues to rise. Some appeals (more complicated ones) are apparently now being listed in January 2024 and again, this is driven by SENDIST and not the local authority.

- for phase transfer cases (e.g. moving from primary to secondary school), the Tribunal has learnt from last year and has allocated the summer term to hear these cases so children / young people know where they are going in September. Last year this was not the case and this was problematic and stressful for families.

- even after a hearing has happened, the large number of appeals and decisions / outcomes / orders can take up to 12 weeks.

7. A.O.B

- There is a task and finish group meeting to discuss SEND mainstream funding, AW is having regular meetings with the Kingston PCF to update on this.
- The SEND Futures Plan will be updated soon. The plan is to do work with families during the summer term on this, and there will be more information coming out on this in the coming weeks.
- The self-evaluation framework for the SEND inspection will also be updated at the same time as the SEND Futures Plan.

8. Social Care & Short Breaks update (sent after the meeting)

Shaun West gave a written update on Social Care:

- Social Care is currently in the process of formulating a response to the new SEND inspection framework.
- There is going to be another whole service event for social care that will offer training to all social care staff in respect of SEND.
- Recent audit activity has shown that information from social care for EHCP's is being sent to the SEND team in different forms, and there is ongoing work to try and use one consistent format.
- Shaun West is leaving his post on the 20th March and cover arrangements are currently being formulated.

Alys Robinson gave a written Short Breaks update:

- February half term support went well for Short Breaks, the team are now planning for Easter support.
- We have begun reaching out to new mainstream providers across the boroughs and promoting Additional Support Funding and to offer any advice/ possible training on inclusion and advice service providers on the reasonable adjustments required to increase access by children and young people who have disabilities.
- There is ongoing preparation for the new financial year, including new Activity Fund and Additional Support Funding application forms for 2023/24, which will go live at the end of this month.
- The team have been making visits to our commissioned provisions, including enhanceable, keen2go, and challengers. This was due to issues with waiting lists, meaning visits are being carried out to see if providers are hitting their targets and numbers.
- AR has been presenting at some school coffee mornings about Short Breaks, which has gone down well.
- There has been little uptake of Social Group and Stay and Play sessions, therefore please promote these sessions. Details about these groups can be found below:
 - Social group - a group that supports young people 11-13 to build friendships, develop life skills and access the activities with peers. The group meets out in the community and takes part in a wide

range of activities, which are chosen by the young people via a voting system. Social Club meets one Saturday per month throughout the year. There is a contribution of £15 for each session.

- Stay and Play sessions run every Wednesday from Moor Lane. This is an activity and support group for pre-school children with disabilities and their parents (siblings are also welcome), to enjoy a morning of fun and activities for your child and a chat and coffee for you to meet other families.

End of meeting.