

## **Kingston Parent Carer Consortium: Wednesday 13th December 12:00-13:30 Meeting Minutes**

**Parent Carer Forum / Parent & Carer representatives:** Asif Mullan (AM), Bev Pass (BP) Chair, Claudia Isaby (CI), Jo Thomas (JT), Kelly Harrison (KH), Linda Nystrom, (LN),

**Staff:** Ashley Whittaker, Programme Director, AfC (AW), Councillor Archer, Portfolio holder for Children's Services including Education, Kingston Council (SA), Caroline Roberts, Inclusion Development Officer, AfC (CR), Diane Sanderson, Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) for SEND, AfC (DS), Helen Barnett, SEND Policy and Project Coordinator, AfC (HB), Jonathan Rourke, SENDIASS (JR), John Wood, Head of SEND Travel Service, AfC (JW), Karen Lowry, AfCinfo and SEND Local Offer Website and Content Manager (KL), Megan Francis-Falkner, SEND Policy and Project Officer, AfC (MF-F), Rob Harris, SEND Parent Carer Engagement Officer, AfC (RH), Tom Mann, Customer Experience Team Manager, Kingston Council (TM).

### **1. Welcome, introductions and apologies**

BP welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were made. BP outlined the purpose of the Consortium as follows: a monthly meeting for local services to understand the parent carer position in order to make improvements for local children and families. The Consortium takes a pragmatic approach to issues alongside an open and honest conversation to help improve the lives of Kingston residents.

### **2. Deep Dive - Blue Badge update**

BP welcomed TM to the meeting and detailed the history of why the process of applying for blue badges has been brought to the attention of the Consortium and PCF: alongside the complexity of the application process, a number of families have reported delays to their applications and in some cases a denial of a blue badge which has resulted in the need to better understand the blue badge process and to have a look at the data on blue badges requested by parents. As a result, TM was providing an update in today's meeting, following on from the presentation on blue badges by Nkem Obianyor in July.

TM gave an overview of the concessionary travel service including the application process, volume of blue badge applications, current challenges and improvements to the service - [the full presentation can be found here](#).

TM noted that the application for a blue badge is complex with many factors to consider, however the team would like to work with local families to see where improvements can be made to make the process as easy as it can be for families. The following questions and additional comments were made throughout the presentation:

Q: BP asked if the desktop assessment of an application is a standard procedure across all local authorities.

A: TM advised that the assessment is based on guidance from the DfT (Department for Transport) and the application form is created by Gov.uk and the format can't be edited or changed. TM advised that complex cases are passed to an Independent Expert Assessor when additional evidence is often requested to support the application.

Q: BP noted that some individuals have lifelong conditions and obtaining up to date documents can be difficult so is there a date limit for evidence. BP also enquired about the training staff receive in assessing applications.

A: TM explained that the DfT guidance states documents produced within 18 months - 2 years are generally acceptable but this is not conclusive. TM's current team are relatively new and have received training from the independent assessors, some of which have a medical background.

Q: BP asked if the independent assessors meet both adults and children when making an assessment to determine the validity of their application.

A: TM replied that adult and child applications are not differentiated and a complex case is managed the same way regardless of the applicant's age. The volume of applications is a concern and TM's team has a role to

ensure those with the highest need are supported correctly. Regarding the type of evidence required, a letter from a GP alone is not sufficient, it needs to be supported by medical reports.

Q: BP questioned why independent assessors with a medical background are consulted when a doctor's note is classed as inadequate evidence.

A: TM advised that the assessors have a combination of medical and non-medical knowledge and a GP letter is valid as part of a bank of evidence for an application (the same applies to a letter from a school) but not as a standalone document.

JW cited experience in a previous local authority where the transport team worked closely with the concessionary travel team to help share knowledge and expedite applications and queried whether it would be helpful to TM's team if he were to share the information on families they currently have on file. TM agreed that this would help to move the process forward as his team feel siloed and somewhat disjointed from other services.

**Action:** JW and TM to meet to discuss ways in which their teams can work together to create a single touch service for families to avoid the repetition of information or their child's story.

LN commented that neurodiversity can be difficult to quantify as is the evidence to support an individual's needs e.g. how could hypermobility be measured. TM noted that families should not be deterred from applying as there is no definitive answer but evidence is usually required in some format to support the application. KL shared a page from the [Richmond council website which details the blue badge eligibility criteria](#). TM agreed that a replication of this page would be helpful for the Kingston council website. BP noted that regular input from the PCF into this area of the process would benefit TM's team and help to improve the situation.

BP queried whether it would be possible to see the number of blue badge applications made for children and young people. TM explained that currently the data system is unable to identify the age of the applicant therefore the exact number of child applications is not known. Kingston has 252 blue badge bays available across the borough and in November just over 5000 badges (around 3% of the borough's population) were in usage in addition to any blue badge holders who visit Kingston.

BP referred to the Consortium meeting in June when the question was raised around a contingency plan for long processing times resulting in a lapsed badge renewal and how families are compensated for this. TM advised that until June of this year, the system was in breach of the 12 week processing time for which he apologised and acknowledged the inconvenience and disruption this caused many local families. This led to a whole service review to help identify current challenges for the team, including resourcing, staff resilience and processing the backlog of delayed applications. TM added that since the summer, the average processing time for an application is 3 weeks, however delays can still occur and one factor is the availability of external assessors to manage more complex cases.

Q: SA asked for monthly figures for badges which have lapsed and there has been a process delay in renewal thus leaving the family without a valid blue badge. SA added that the onus is on the applicant to ensure they renew within a specific timeframe.

A: TM added that the monthly data would need to be collated and explained that if a renewal application is received close to the expiry date there is no facility to extend the badge. TM noted that the number of cases with gaps in issuance is declining but it remains an area of concern.

AW thanked TM for the presentation and the service update. With regards to JW's offer of the transport team working closer with TM's team, this supports comments made by parents and carers that having to repeat information to several council services is frustrating. AW supported the idea of issuing a badge for life for children and young people with permanent health conditions and noted that the DfT guidelines should be challenged when necessary to improve the process of applying for a blue badge and to minimise unnecessary bureaucratic processes.

BP acknowledged the risks surrounding the current processes and reiterated the need for a more collaborative approach between local parents and carers and the concessionary travel team.

**Action:** TW and BP to discuss setting up a co-production working group for concessionary travel in Kingston. This would address the role and cost of the independent assessment team, introducing a parent and child point of view, data analysis of the number of children cases and joint working between JW's and TW's teams.

TM thanked the PCF for the opportunity to present and gave his email address as a point of contact for any further thoughts [tom.mann@sutton.gov.uk](mailto:tom.mann@sutton.gov.uk)

### 3. Parent Carer Forum (PCF) update

BP advised that the PCF are recruiting for an Administrative Support Officer and asked the Consortium to share the advert across their networks - [the job specification can be found here](#). JL and KL confirmed that they will be sharing the job advertisement across their platforms this week.

PCF events for 2024 include the [Happy in School events](#) to help support secondary school students with SEND and a monthly Have Your Say and Play event at the Hawker Centre in Kingston which aims to provide peer support for local parents and carers.

### 4. Participation, Engagement & Co-production update

RH provided the following update:

- A transition event took place at Orchard Hill College.
- Coffee mornings for parents and carers were held at Malden Oaks Tuition Centre, Tiffin Girls School and Coombe Boys School.
- The monthly Let's Nurture group at Old Malden Manor Children's Centre continues to be successful with local families.
- The SEND Parent Champions led a drop-in session at Heatham House as well as attending a SENDIASS online training session delivered by JR. There is also a meeting at Crossroads Care scheduled for January.
- The SEND Short Breaks leaflet is now live and [details can be found here](#).
- RH and DS are meeting to discuss various projects for 2024.
- RH, BP and Rosie Fletcher-Brown met with Kingston Hospital to continue discussions around parent input.
- A meeting took place to discuss the family hub at Old Malden Manor.
- The organising committee of the SEND Futures Conference met to discuss potential keynote speakers based on the theme of inclusion.

### 5. Health, Social Care & Short Breaks update

#### Short Breaks:

CR and Alys Robinson have met with the F.U.E.L (Feed Ur Everyday Lives) team to work on extending the SEND offer across the borough. Currently there are 2 providers in Kingston and 4 in Richmond offering SEND provision as part of the F.U.E.L local offer with a new service from Wandsworth (SEND Unity) joining the project. Additional F.U.E.L budget has been secured to fund trips for local children to attend relaxed theatre performances in Kingston - this falls within the extended eligibility criteria with approximately 20 tickets available. Plans are underway to organise whole family days out.

The participation rate among adolescents aged 14 to 17 in [the Buddy Up Scheme](#) is minimal. BP advised that this could be advertised to parents and carers in the transition focus group on 14th December.

**Action:** MFF and HB to reference the Buddy Up Scheme in focus group on 14th December

## Social Care:

DS advised that, based on the theme of inclusivity and co-production she is looking at potential speakers and workshops for the upcoming SEND Futures Conference in 2024. Work has started to assign SEND Champions across AfC's social care workforce with a package of training being delivered to the new starters. DS is launching a 'lunch and learn' session in the new year to support colleagues with providing quality and timely social care advice for annual reviews and other statutory processes. The current timeliness for advice is at 67%. JR and DS are coproducing a website page for early support using DS's safeguarding knowledge to support the project.

## 6. Actions from previous meetings for further discussion

Due to limited time not all the actions could be addressed:

**Action:** HB to carry over actions to the meeting on 16th January 2024

AW advised that he contacted Sarah Herbert (Lead school improvement adviser SEND, AfC) and the PCF are welcome to attend the following online SENCO network sessions: Monday 19 February 2024 12:15-1:15 pm, Thursday 22 February 2024 3:30 - 4:30pm

**Action:** HB to make a note of this for the January meeting.

## 7. A.O.B

JR advised that recruitment continues for posts within SENDIASS

**Action:** JR to share the job advertisement with KL.

The SENDIASS website is due to be refreshed in the New Year.

BP noted the increase in the number of EHCNAs (Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments) and is interested in the touchpoints and data around this as it provides a good barometer of the needs of the community. JR is currently working with Troy Hobbs (Head of SEND, AfC) on the statistics for the Partnership Board. RH added that he looked at this data 12 months ago and as any professional working with a family can make a referral it would be beneficial to see the data on this.

JW noted that the monthly parent and carer transport sessions have been a success with over 150 parents accessing the online sessions. From January the sessions can be booked online between the hours of 8am and 8pm. JT commented that she has attended these sessions and found them to be both positive and helpful.

**Next meeting: Tuesday 16th January 2024, 12:00-13:30**

## Forward plan of deep dive topics:

**Please note this plan is currently under review**

Meeting date	Deep Dive Topic	Owner
Tuesday 12th September	Transition to secondary school for children with send	Sheldon Snashall, AfC
	CAMHS Tier 2*	Jo Steer
Wednesday 11th October	Swimming facilities in Kingston	Martel Atterbury— Sport & Leisure Development Officer, Kingston Council.
Tuesday 7th November	F.U.E.L (Feed Ur Everyday Lives) project*	Moved to a future meeting

Wednesday 13th December	Blue Badges	Nkem Obianyor – Head of Customer Experience for Kingston and Sutton
<b>2024</b>		
Tuesday 16th January 2024	SEN Transport	John Wood, Head of SEND Travel Service, AfC
TBC	Health Services - current challenges relating to resources / budgets	Alison Danks, AD of Health Services, AfC
TBC	F.U.E.L (Feed Ur Everyday Lives) project	Seema Sehgal, Policy and Projects Officer-FUEL Lead, AfC
TBC	Neurodevelopmental pathways for 0-18 year olds inc post-diagnosis support	Sharron Nelson, ICB Karen Gale, member of PCF
TBC	Speech and Language workshop on eating	Carmel Brady / Fraiza Sword from Your Healthcare
* Items to be carried forward to a future meeting		