

Update on Kingston Parent & Carer Consortium following meetings on 21 and 23 May 2019

1. Who has registered an interest in joining the Consortium and who came to the meetings?

Since Councillor Diane White, Portfolio Holder for Children's Services including Education, wrote to parents and carers in April, 22 residents have registered an interest in participating in a SEND Parent & Carer Consortium. On 21 (evening) and 23 (morning) May, 15 parents, carers and voluntary group representatives (1) attended meetings at the King Charles Centre in Surbiton to discuss how the Consortium could potentially be formed and operate. Both meetings were chaired by the Interim Director of Children's Services

2. What views did those at the meetings share about what the Consortium should / could do?

- a. Put representing and advocating for all parents, including the most vulnerable, as a core principle. Parents and carers who for whatever reason (inclination, confidence, resources, support infrastructure etc) are not represented in these meetings / on the Consortium must have their voices heard.
- b. Not be a "talking shop" or an opportunity just to "complain". It should be made up of people who "want to make a difference". It should pick a relatively small number of initiatives and deliver them to a high standard and in depth.
- c. Be "open to all", including those with their own additional needs. Not everyone can afford babysitters, and many families are in situations where mainstream babysitting arrangements don't work anyway. So access arrangements need to be carefully planned. Meetings should be held as centrally as possible with a choice of day and evening and with opportunities for parents and carers to join electronically.
- d. Be representative of the underlying cohort of families with children and young people who have SEND. Both meetings were not ethnically representative and attendees were 80% female.
- e. Start future meetings with a discussion about parts of the system that are working well. The high quality of multi-agency support in early years was given as an example of where this is currently the case.
- f. Monitor progress with the improvement areas identified in the Ofsted / CQC inspection and the subsequent Written Statement of Action.

3. What did people raise as issues with SEND provision and services that need addressing?

- a. Professionals from different organisations needing to work in a more integrated way with each other and with parents
- b. Supply of appropriate provision for 16 to 25 years, including vocational pathways
- c. Professionals discussing "who pays for what" behind closed doors and not in front of parents

- d. Professionals making sure that they are honest and realistic about what support is / isn't going to be provided.
- e. The need for investment / improvements to school and wider community infrastructure e.g. adoption of the "Changing Places" (<http://www.changing-places.org/>) approach within education.
- f. Preparation for transitions at all phases (this is a major worry point for parents), including better communications about pathway options (e.g. at post 16 years)
- g. Lack of, and decreasing amounts of, community support activities outside school for children and young people and their families, especially where the level of support required is high
- h. Transparency of which organisation / individual is responsible for what and better signposting would make the system much less confusing for parents and also for the voluntary sector groups who seek to help parents.
- i. Better stability of staff in the SEN Team would allow relationships and communications with parents and carers to improve
- j. Quality of staff is sometimes very high but is too variable e.g. response times sometimes excellent and sometimes slow / no reply received.
- k. Healthcare professionals and social workers sometimes seem unable to respond to parental requests for support including when this is statutory and / or specified in an EHCP. If such support is not available it is currently unclear what should happen next or could be available in these situations and for families it is then very hard to understand where to go next.
- l. Support for families and young people with SEND and without an EHCP needs to be more clearly available, explained and signposted.

4. How did people think greater parent and carer involvement could make a positive difference?

- a. Lobbying Government for extra resources
- b. Decision making on how money is spent to improve value for money
- c. Speaking to school staff to help share knowledge and experience of their unique child with a wider range of teachers and school staff (especially at Secondary).
- d. Treating them as experts in the EHCP process, and be treated as "professionals" in the EHCP process - they have unparalleled insights into their child.

5. What else did people say needs to happen?

- a. There are lots of examples of outstanding staff practice (and support) and of staff making themselves available to meet with and talk and listen to parents and carers. This needs to be universal and to happen even more often.
- b. Social Care and Health (e.g. new Designated Clinical Officer) should be represented at future meetings
- c. A wider range of engagement techniques (e.g. using school networks) must be used to reach out to a wider parent group and supplement the work of the "self selecting" Consortium, including those whose default position is not to engage / raise issues.
- d. Trust must be rebuilt with parent community as in past many put significant time and effort in and felt their voices were not being heard. And people need to be convinced that this time things will be different / better

- e. A way needs to be found whereby parent and family involvement, whether this be via a Consortium or a Parent Carer Forum, does not escalate into an endeavor so large that it becomes unmanageable for the individuals concerned. Many / most would be reluctant to take on roles that could expand into a “full time job”, the specification and purpose of which should arguably be funded by statutory services
- f. The perception that services are deliberately hiding / not advertising services to reduce usage and therefore costs needs to be addressed
- g. Consideration needs to be given to how the voluntary sector are already performing the role that arguable statutory services should be delivering e.g. giving advice to families, signposting, and helping them access things they have a right to

6. So what happens next?

- a. Attendees were generally interested in exploring how the Parent Consortium could also act as the official Parent Carer Forum (PCF), and thereby access the annual grant funding to support their operations. There was also interest, and some support, for understanding more about how alignment with a local voluntary sector group, who could perform some of the necessary administrative functions of a PCF could make roles more manageable for parent / carer volunteers.
- b. Two meetings have therefore been arranged for 10th July (1.30 to 3pm and 7 to 8.30pm, venue to be confirmed). In addition to Council and AfC representatives, Contact (the charity commissioned by the Department for Education to reestablish a PCF in Kingston) will also be in attendance. Those able to attend the SEND Futures Conference on 27 June will have the opportunity to hear first hand from representatives of the Rotherham PCF how parental engagement has worked successfully there.
- c. Parent / carers will be invited to join an electronic portal to allow communication between those registered with the Parent Consortium.
- d. The potential to use meeting rooms in local offices (e.g. Unilever) with high quality video conference facilities should be investigated