

Kingston Parent Consortium 27 March 2020, notes of online meeting / conference call

This is the second online meeting / conference call with an agenda focused on updating parents and carers on COVID 19 related developments and receiving their feedback.

Attendees

Parents / carers:

Agnieszka Czerwinska
Bev Pass
Kacper Rucinski
Owen Hart
Louise Kearney
Alicja Rucinska
Niamh McMahon

Staff:

Alison Danks (Associate Director for Health Services)
Ashley Whittaker (Programme Director)
Charis Penfold (Director of Education Services)
Geraldine Burgess (Short Breaks Operations Manager)
Ian Dodds (Director of Children's Services)
Jess Thom (Director of Commissioning and Partnerships)
Karen Lowry (AfCinfo/SEND Local Offer Website Manager)

Apologies:

Alison Stewart (Designated Clinical Officer, redeployed as part of incident response, temporarily being replaced as DCO by Enno Kuettner, email: Enno.Kuettner@swlondon.nhs.uk)
Nigel Evason (Lead Children's Commissioner, Clinical Commissioning Group, email: Nigel.Evason@swlondon.nhs.uk)

Ashley highlighted the proposed agenda and checked that no parents / carers wanted to add anything

1. Ian Dodds summarised **AfC's situation and the approach to supporting children and young people with SEND and their families**. 80% of AfC staff are currently working. Nearly all at home. Some services closed if classed as "non essential". All SEN services open including short breaks. Very challenging time for parents and carers with children at home. AfC is being as flexible and as reasonable as possible and is committed to delivering as much as it can in the current difficult circumstances.
2. Owen Hart shared complementary feedback on his SEN caseworker, and asked Charis to pass that on to him. He also described how over recent days his experience of the offer from schools for children with EHCPs has been that it has decreased from full time to two or three days, and how in fact parents and carers are now "lucky to have anything". He suggested that the DfE have now removed Local Authorities' obligation to deliver on the content of EHCPs. He also shared views on the lack of short breaks provision and asked that past decisions to reduce the service be reversed. It was agreed that Charis would address Mr Hart's comments on schools when we reach that item on the agenda, and that as the comments on short breaks referred to "business as usual" circumstances and this meeting / call was about support through the current exceptional events, they should be discussed at another time. (Ashley has since arranged a separate telephone call with Mr Hart to discuss this).
3. Alison and Geraldine updated on **short breaks**. Aim is to offer as much as possible within risk assessed situations. Aim is to communicate with all families. Cannot run groups as usual and so needs to be more home and community support. Restrictions on movements and activities mean few things can be done in the community. Aiming for 1:1 or 2:1 for those where safe from family and staffing perspective. Ongoing piece of

work over the weeks. Aim is to increase the staff pool. For families expecting groups in Easter holidays they should have been contacted and aim is to offer something in the home. Some families have declined and some workers are turning down this work. Trying to match people. Workers may be travelling on buses etc. Asking that workers can wash hands in people's homes, will bring their own towel. Aim is for a 3 hour session including walk "around the block". Also looking at who is in school. *Question: Parents asked how they could be assessed for short breaks if not already accessing. Answer: call SPA which is the normal route to access an assessment for eligibility.*

4. Jess updated on **direct payments**. Guidance is due out hopefully this afternoon. There have been lots of queries about using direct payments for alternative support. Payments continue as is. Guidance covers flexibility compared to business as usual. Contact your social worker if you have questions.
5. Charis updated on **EHCP process**. Still waiting guidance from DfE on this. SEN team all working remotely and the EHCP process continues. Educational Psychologist input needs to be worked through / clarified as they often now unable to do part of their assessments. Also challenges from therapists being redeployed to other duties. Continuing with the process as best we can. Lack of required staff will inevitably impact timelines and the system would benefit from government guidance on what should be considered reasonable and what is not. Caseworkers should be responding to families as normal. *Question: re 15 days to respond to amended EHCP. Can this be extended? Answer: yes it's been extended to 30 days and if 30 days is still not workable then parents and carers should contact their SEN caseworker if they need longer. Question: re year 6 children going into year 7. What is happening to this given that some will not want to go to their allocated school? Will there be mediation and compromise given that not all evidence eg EP and SaLT will be available. Answer: Absolutely acknowledge this issue and also for nursery to primary. Need to deal with on case by case basis. Some independent schools have closed early. Will need to be flexible. Question: Is EHCP provision likely to be affected? Answer: focus on delivering as much as we can with the resources we have. Already an impact on health and therapies given staff are needed and being redeployed elsewhere. Schools are doing as much as they can but changes in their resources also may impact. CCG have been very clear for all services on what is stopping, partly stopping and continuing. Low and medium level therapy services are due to stop for several months. Question: What about therapy that is needed to prevent imminent hospital admission? Answer: We're having to minimise face to face contact but if children need that support we are doing our best to deliver that. In schools as much as possible being done on the phone. Physios will try to deliver if required. Question: Are therapists being redeployed from children services to other areas / adults? Answer: from Moor Lane currently no but it may happen in the future. Some are working from home / remotely. There is a limit to what they can provide and we aiming to contact family by family and risk assess each situation. Families should be included in this risk assessment.*
6. Karen updated on **Health section on Local Offer** (COVID section <https://kr.afcinfo.org.uk/pages/local-offer/information-and-advice/covid-19-updates-and-resources/health-services>). Lots of information put on there and questions please to Nigel (Nigel.Evason@swlondon.nhs.uk) . Alison Danks (alison.danks@achievingforchildren.org.uk) also available to answer questions on AfC Services.
7. Ashley updated on **Kingston's Community Hub**, essentially a telephone helpline. Aim is to deliver additional support to people needing additional help at this time, e.g. food and medicine deliveries, plus coordinating voluntary sector etc. Ian updated that launch is due on Council's website on Monday (since launched: https://www.kingston.gov.uk/info/200287/health_and_wellbeing/1748/covid-19_coronavirus/2). Importantly, to manage the flow of requests into the Hub, if families have an existing key worker, for example an SEN caseworker or a family support worker, they are asked not to contact the hub but instead route requests / enquiries through that existing person. This will allow additional support to be optimally coordinated. Family support workers are included within the Hub staff to advise on vulnerable services. *Question: lots of families of SEND children asking about accessing services eg food and deliveries as the parents / carers can't necessarily identify themselves as vulnerable. Answer: Yes these families can be added to the original list of vulnerable families.*

8. Charis updated on **schools** and what support is being provided to children at home. Big impact on school staffing this week. Working with SENCOs on expectations and how they are assessing risk and maintaining regular contact with families and young people. Ongoing work on resources for EHCP children who find it harder to access learning. Being done on school by school basis. As school staffing resources reduce they have had to offer places to fewer children. Hard for families and hard for schools. Answers to specific questions submitted:
- AfC has a weekly attendance overview of children coming into schools and SEN is keeping an overview of all children with EHCPs, in residential, day schools, in and out of borough provision. This ensures we know what is being accessed across the whole cohort of children and young people with EHCPs.
 - The number of children with EHCPs attending our schools was higher last Monday, and did decrease following the PM's very clear message that wherever possible we should stay at home. A high number of children who have EHCPs do have parents at home who can care for them and this is felt to be the safest place for them to be.
 - Every school has been coping with a reduced staffing structure, and this does impact on what they can provide. SENCOs had an AfC briefing this week outlining some good practice about the statutory process for EHCPs and the risk assessment principles they need to complete for their children. This includes an expectation that the school will check in with every EHCP child at least weekly. I have seen some good examples of how schools are doing this.
 - Mainstream and Special schools just cannot support every child with an EHCP in school at the moment, so they have been encouraged to risk assess all of their children and those most at risk, with families who are key workers, open to social care, are prioritised. Schools will be constantly reassessing their offer and anticipate this will increase and improve over time.
 - We are building our resources online for SENCOs to use and aim to develop these for children in mainstream using some expertise available from Special schools who are more skilled and used to online learning for children with SEND. Schools have only had one week to upskill, develop resources and think about their provision online for children who have SEN which does need to be different. We acknowledge that trying to give some sort of access to friends and staff via a hangout or video link also needs to be promoted.
 - Therapists are developing some online activities.
 - Developing our local resources and support for SENCOs will continue this week, but many SENCOs are also senior leaders so have a number of roles to support at the moment, and therefore it will take a bit of time for the right and specialist resources to develop. If families need further advice or help, I would advise them to contact their child's class teacher or SENCO in the first instance and to talk through ideas about what might be helpful.
 - Schools leaders have many demands on their time at the moment, and are doing their very best, to sustain contact and input with all families, whilst looking after the welfare of their own staff team.

Question: what can be done to differentiate more with materials being sent out to families? Answer: Will work with lead SEND School Improvement Partner (Sarah) on how resources can be improved, sharing across schools and boroughs.

9. AOB: *Question: what can be done to help children at home reduce isolation through more widespread use of technology to interact with schools and also their peers? Answer: Commitment to include this is the work with schools.*

AOB: Question: Please can we have an update on the disability awareness card? People can still apply for card under current scheme but relaunch on hold. But if you want to apply under current scheme please do so.

Action for all: Please share views on when next online meeting / conference call would be helpful. We could do Friday 3rd April at 12.30 if people would like to.