

Solihull SEND Newsletter

October 2022

Welcome back to a new year.

I hope you all managed some rest and recuperation at some point over the unusually dry and warm summer. September is always a time of change with many children or young people starting in new settings and others starting to think about their next steps - but on top of that, this year, we are waiting to hear from government on a number of consultations which closed over the summer so we can think about what that means for us all.

Strategic News

Strategy for Inclusive Education

We are really pleased to report that after many months of working with a range of schools, professionals and parents the strategy was approved over the summer and is now in place. Seven schools are taking part in piloting the training and inclusion audit tool this term and we will use their feedback to inform the wider offer which will be in place in February 2023 when leaders from all schools are coming together to focus on improving education inclusion across the borough. This is a really exciting time for schools and families and it has been great to see the passion and drive of so many key people across the area. Please keep an eye on this newsletter for future updates and if you haven't seen it yet, the strategy is available on the local offer here: <https://www.solihull.gov.uk/children-and-family-support/localoffer/inclusive-education-strategy>

Delivering Better Value

We have begun our conversations with Newton and the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accounting (CIPFA) to prepare for this programme, aimed at helping us to identify ways we can make financially sustainable changes which provide high quality outcomes for children and young people. Our first task is to produce operational and financial baselines and forecasts so we can really understand where pressures are coming from, and how any changes we make in the future are likely to have an impact. In the next newsletter we should be able to tell you what those changes could be.

Additional Needs Strategy

As we head into the last few months of the strategy's first year we are beginning to evaluate what difference this has made. The most important piece of this work has always been to hear of the experiences children and young people, and their families, have in Solihull. We are currently developing an online tool to allow constant feedback and interaction so we can continue to listen and adapt. However, in the meantime we are working with SPCV and a number of other organisations to design a more usual survey to seek views. This will be available shortly so please do keep your eyes out for this, and please join in!

Below are the service updates for this term:

Children's Social Care – Joel Desous

As some of you may already be aware, there are changes afoot from government with the new National Social Care and SEND reforms coming through imminently. In the meantime, I just wanted to update you on the work we are doing to support and improve the social care contribution to the Education and Health Care Plan (EHCP) for many children and families in the borough.

Once a referral is received for an EHCP assessment, a shared multi-agency decision is made at a weekly meeting to determine whether the child will be assessed for a potential EHCP plan.

When there is a decision to assess, the EHCP social care assessors based in the Children with Disability Social Work Team will undertake a social care needs assessment with the family. This assessment is not to be confused with a Child and Family Assessment, which is undertaken by a social worker in line with Section 17 of the Children Act when there is the need to determine potential safeguarding concerns. The Child and Family Assessment is a much more in-depth holistic assessment. The social care needs assessment is set out to determine the needs of the family and whether or not the identified needs can be met without children social care intervention.

For many children, the outcome may be to access the Local Offer for social care activities with SoLO, a provider which is subsidised financially on an annual basis to allow affordability for families. SoLO provide a range of activities and clubs specifically for children and young people with disabilities.

There are also a range of other services families can be signposted to that provide activities for children with disability not able to access mainstream groups. The school of thought is to enable and not disable children further from accessing the specialist services SoLO provide, and to get

them involved with peer social groups outside of the home and school setting without the need for more personal support on a one-to-one basis.

Some children are clearly not able to access some of the specialist activities independently due to their complex needs and there will be some consideration to grant the family with some financial support by way of direct payment (DP) hours. This follows the completion of the social care needs assessment, which will be utilised to set up one-to-one support with a Personal Assistant (PA). This is designed to allow flexibility for what type of activities the child enjoys and can physically, emotionally, or cognitively undertake.

We are aware of some of the concerns parent carers have raised around the lack of resources within the local community as part of the Local Authority graduated response to individual needs. We are working hard with other directorates within the Council to develop an appropriate early help response to your child's needs.

It has been heart-warming to read the positive comments about the impact the support provided to some of you has had on your children.

Some of you have told us that the support provided is **'life changing'** in giving **'me a few hours break from my caring role'** at the same time as allowing their child/ren to have some fun undertaking an activity they would not otherwise get the opportunity to do if the support were not in place.

Parents **of older teenagers who have a PA in place have been very positive about their child being supported** to catch a bus to their favourite shops at the same time as developing their sense of independence, their social skills, learning to read a train or bus timetables, ordering and paying for goods and being part of the wider community.

During August and September 2022 four of our older disabled children have **had their support ceased as they have made so much progress in their life skills** and are now able to, after much work from parents and the PA, **access some social settings alone**. What wonderful news this is in terms of their increasing independence.

Some of the parents and families we work with, have challenged us to improve our service delivery and timely response to concerns. We have heard you and will continue to drive our practice forward to improve service delivery. Not everything is where we want it to be and as you all know, we are on an improvement journey. The social care team is however committed to improving the way we support you and provide you with the service that you and your children require.

SISS – Paula Thompson

There have been only a few changes within teams at the start of the autumn term. Jo Shilton, Team Coordinator for Communication and Learning Difficulties (CLD) left SISS at the end of the summer term and we are currently looking to recruit for January 2023. At the moment any queries for the traded element of the CLD work should go to a school's Named Teacher, or Paula Thompson: pthompson2@solihull.gov.uk

The Sensory and Physical Impairment Team are pleased to welcome Alison Shortt who joined as a full time Qualified Teacher of the Visually Impaired (QTVI) after the retirement of Zoe Foster at the end of the summer term. Currently, we are recruiting to fill one part-time vacancy for a QTVI.

All radio-aid equipment has been returned to students and schools as the new academic year is now underway. Loan agreements have been updated where there is a change of school or equipment. An alternative option to the Solihull insurance can be [found here](#), which may be of interest to you.

For anyone looking for an insight into the Deaf community and what life might be like for those who lose their hearing, have a watch of [John & Joe Bishop: Life After Deaf](#).

Refresh (Nurture intervention provision for primary aged pupils)

At the start of this term our Refresh Team has been out and about supporting pupils as they have begun to settle into their new classes in their home schools. As part of our outreach package we have been supporting school staff and parents with this transition.

Our KS2 group are now back on site with us at Refresh and making great progress, and we have been really excited to open our new KS1 group this term. We have welcomed a new Inclusion Support Practitioner (ISP) to the KS1 team. Both groups are settling in well and we are enjoying having 'family time' throughout the day when both groups come together.

This term we will be working with Solihull Active as they deliver their *Eat Well, Move More* healthy lifestyle programme. The Solihull Music Service will be working with us too and we can't wait to see what new skills the pupils will be learning.

We will be welcoming more pupils to Refresh following the Panel meeting on Monday 3 October. We will begin to transition to more of a cohort model this year and we are keen to work with a wider range of referring schools.

EHCP Service - Amanda Hana

New EHCP request paperwork

The new request paperwork is now live. This has been developed with professionals, SENDIASS and SPCV. This form now collects all of the information which is needed to support the Council in its decision making process so should improve timeliness and accuracy. Therefore, our hope is that this paperwork will make the process more streamlined and easier for all involved and provide more clear guidance - such as a helpful checklist of what needs to be completed before sending. This form is available for anyone to use but all new requests from schools sent to the team must be completed on this paperwork.

If you are a parent and are struggling with the information requested, you do not have to complete this form and can write to the EHCP Service to request an EHCP assessment – however, if your child is known to professionals and/or settings we will need to contact them for the information asked for within the form before making a decision. The new form can be found on the [Local Offer](#). If you need this form in another language please let us know.

Annual review timescales

As we are all aware, the EHCP process has specific legal timescales to ensure the timely and efficient completion of all processes. This requires everyone involved to respond in the timescales set out to ensure we can offer the best service and support for our most vulnerable children and young people. One of our challenges is receiving annual review paperwork in a timely way following the review meeting. We are therefore reminding schools to ensure the review paperwork is completed and sent to the EHCP service in the legal timescale of 10 calendar days from the date of the review meeting. This enables us to process the review in a timely manner and meet further deadlines. If you have any questions about the timescales or processes, please do not hesitate to contact the team to discuss.

Transition planning

The time is upon us again when we are preparing to complete transition reviews. We are required to finalise EHCPs (naming new settings) by 15 February and 31 March for Post 16 learners. This is a statutory deadline and ensures professionals have time to consider and secure appropriate placements and children and young people can have time for a successful transition.

Schools are therefore reminded to ensure transition annual reviews are carried out, completed and sent to the EHCP Service by:

- October half-term: for children currently in Nursery, Year 2 in Infant Schools and Year 6
- December: for young people in Year 11 and Year 13

Please contact the team if you have any questions or require any support.

Community Educational Psychology Service (EPS) - Jane Sowter

It's been a busy summer for the EPS and the start of term already seems a while ago! We have written to all schools with the details of our new traded offer and continue our work for high needs children and families across the borough. At the moment we are managing the EHC workload, despite being short-staffed, due to the hard work of our EP team and the stalwart group of locum EPs who support us.

Thank you to all our schools and families for your collaboration during the assessment process and for helping us produce our psychological advice in a timely manner. Evaluations of the Attachment and Trauma project and the Emotionally Based School Non-attendance Project have both demonstrated rewards (more below) and we also continue to work with the SISS team to support social inclusion and mental health.

The EBSN pathway is now open to new referrals. The first Panel date of the new term was Thursday 29 September and Panel will be every 2-3 weeks during term time. Referrals need to be submitted by Tuesday 5pm of Panel week. For referral criteria, please refer to the Local Offer under 'EBSN'. You will also find our guidance there with advice on early intervention, systemic working with children, young people and their families, and formulating and intervening according to individual case presentation. An abridged version of our guidance has been created by the Anna Freud Centre, along with input from other Educational Psychology Services, which includes a snap shot of risk factors for EBSN, alongside ideas for universal and targeted provision. The resource can be found here: [Addressing emotionally-based school avoidance \(annafreud.org\)](https://www.annafreud.org)

Work on the Graduated Approach continues alongside our partners and we are contributing to other Council priorities wherever we can, including support for refugees, DSL training, school development and critical incident support. The EPs are planning various small pieces of development work and training over the year and we will soon be announcing a new programme to help schools develop the emotional wellbeing and resilience of their pupils – watch this space!

Children and Young People Commissioning - Laura Slegg-Newton

Targeted Short Breaks in Solihull

This month we've got two main pieces of news to tell you about:

New Short Breaks Contract awarded to SoLO

Children, young people and their families will benefit from continued support from [Social Life Opportunities \(SoLO\)](#) after they were awarded a new three-year contract by the Council to provide short breaks for children with disabilities, following a competitive tendering process. The new contract commenced on 1 September 2022 and provides group activities for children and young people who can't access mainstream activities due to the nature of their disabilities and support needs. Activities take place after school, in the evening, on weekends and during the school holidays.

Solihull Council has a statutory duty to provide short breaks for children and young people with disabilities, the main aims are to provide them with an opportunity to spend time away from their parents/carers, relax and have fun with their friends, and develop their independence. It also gives families the chance to have a break from their caring responsibilities, rest and unwind, and spend time with other family members.

SoLO have previously held this contract and are currently reviewing and refreshing the activities on offer in conjunction with children and young people with disabilities and their families. Details of the short breaks activities currently available are on [SoLO's website](#). If you'd like to enquire about Short Breaks opportunities for your child, SoLO can be contacted by phone on 0121 779 3865 or email info@sololifeopportunities.org

Children and young people are eligible to attend short breaks activities and services:

- Up to their 19th birthday (or until the end of Year 13 if they attend a special school)
- If they are resident in the borough or are in care and are the responsibility of Solihull Council, wherever they are placed
- If they have a disability (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) that prevents them from accessing universal services without substantial ongoing additional support.

Solihull Short Breaks Grants Programme

In addition to our short breaks contract with SoLO, Solihull Council is offering grants to organisations providing positive activities for children and young people with disabilities.

Activities may take place after school, evenings, weekends and/or during school holidays. Participation in these activities must enable parents and carers of children and young people with disabilities time away from their caring duties.

It is intended that the Short Breaks Grants Programme will:

- Meet the need for short breaks for an increased number of families
- Widen the choice of providers offering short breaks for children and young people with disabilities in Solihull
- Deliver a wider range of short breaks activities and improve the choice for families in deciding the type of short break activity their child would like to attend

Further details for organisations interested in providing short breaks, including a factsheet and application form, is available on the Council's website [Voluntary and Community Sector \(VCS\) Funding \(solihull.gov.uk\)](#)

Applications for the first round of funding opens from 5 October 2022 and closes on 6 November 2022. Activity delivery will be from January 2023. Grants will be between £5,000 - £25,000 for delivery up to December 2023 in the first instance, with up to £40,000 available for exceptional and/or, larger projects. (Future funding will be available up until August 2025).

Eligibility to attend grants-funded short breaks will be the same as outlined above for SoLO Short Breaks, however it is anticipated that some projects/activities may be targeted at particular groups of children and young people with disabilities. Details of successful grant applicants, and how to sign your child up for these short breaks will be published in December.

Commissioning for Learning – Steve Fenton

SEND Commissioning Manager

We are pleased to announce we have appointed to this newly created post. The successful candidate is Jamie Rynberk who will start with us over the next month or so. His key responsibilities will include evaluating the provisions we have in Solihull against the needs of pupils we need to commission specialist places with; to work on developing out post-16 provision and to strengthen the local authority approach to working better with schools with ARPs.

Special Free School Bid

The DfE have announced a second wave of applications for special free schools. You will recall that Solihull was successful in wave 1 - and The Heights school will open in 2023 and cater for pupils with Autism and associated high level Social Emotional and Mental Health Needs, building up to 116 pupils.

Demand for specialist places continues to grow, and we are facing unprecedented demand in the areas of Multi-Sensory Impairment, Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties, and Severe Learning Difficulties. We will be looking to submit a bid around these needs by the deadline of 21 October 2022.

Engagement – Deborah Carpenter

Members of the additional needs group have started working together to develop an Engagement Planner. This will help our service users know what is happening, when it is happening and how they can get involved. We are working closely with our colleagues across the local authority, to ensure our work is in line with developments in engagement across all services. As part of this work, we will be coming to families and young people to ask what engagement means to them, and to make sure our communication methods are clear and accessible to all.

A Here2Help hub has been created on the Council website to provide people with a central location to access lots of useful information - whether they need help with food, energy, financial advice or wellbeing. Please do take a look at the pages and share with any families who you think would benefit: [Here2Help](#)

Early Years - Lisa Morris

I have had the pleasure of reading through some of the monitoring forms for [Early Years Inclusion Fund](#) this summer. Early Years settings can apply for additional funding from the Council to aid inclusion of children with emerging special needs at either level 1 or level 2 and for specialist equipment.

Early Years Inclusion Fund Panel members also visited three settings to celebrate their practice. We have used feedback from practitioners to adjust the application process through the year to ensure funding supports settings to support children. Some of the feedback is included below...

"We had excellent feedback from parents stating how much their children have achieved within our setting, how happy they have been. Communication using Makaton was a strong point."

"Parents appreciated the specific resources that were purchased at an age-appropriate level to support their child's progress."

"Parents like the fact that we will listen to what they say helps their child and we can provide similar things in setting to support them there too."

The Early Years Team are seeking feedback from settings and families to guide our ongoing work. One year into our reshape as the current team we would really value compliments and suggestions. Some recent feedback for our support work with children is listed below and we also take on-board suggestions that will enhance our support offer.

"S had a very positive impact on the knowledge and skills of J's 1:1 LSA and me – through the modelling, discussions and resources she shared/sent."

"I feel the family as a whole have benefitted from K's support."

"R input strategies that really helped us as practitioners and A, but also helped with the home development and support too."

Work continues to focus on our [Maternity and Early Years Strategy](#) development activities and working together to help our youngest children to have success for today and be prepared for tomorrow. Further, Dingley's Promise Inclusion training has been made available to our Solihull settings. The new modules focus on behaviour and working with parents.

High numbers of Solihull Early Years settings remain graded as good or outstanding in their most recent Ofsted inspection at 97%. This time of year begins our cycle of annual joint-evaluation visits. We look forward to visiting all our targeted settings through the year to celebrate, review and support practice.

Solihull Music – Claire Batty

We are very pleased to be able to offer FREE inclusive music making sessions this term. Alongside making music, and having fun, these sessions help promote personal and social outcomes. Please click on the [link here](#) to sign up to any sessions.

Solihull Parent Carer Voice

Solihull Parent Carer Voice has as always been busy over the last few months. We have taken the opportunity over the summer to build our team and will be adding their biographies to our website soon. We are always looking for more people to join our team so if you are interested please do get in touch.

We have also been doing lots of planning over the summer and will have exciting news to release soon!

Events

We have held a coffee morning for parent carers following the return to school and it was lovely to see so many people attending. We also held a webinar in conjunction with Estates Planning Solutions to give parent carers information about estate planning, deputyships and discretionary trusts. Again, this information will be on our website or please do feel free to contact us if you would like more information about this.

On 10 October we had a meeting for parent carers with Nick Page (Council Chief Executive) Tim Browne (Interim Director of Children's Services) Iona Payne and Delyth Berni-Smith (Assistant Directors for Social Care) and Cllr Michael Gough (Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Children) - this

was an opportunity for parent carers to find out what is being done to improve SEND services in Solihull and what more still needs to be done.

18 October - we have a coffee evening for parent carers.

10 November - SEND Careers Fair, this is for young people aged 14-25 and their parent carers.

All our events are on our Facebook page, [on our website](#) and are emailed out to schools to share so please do keep an eye out.

We try to make our events accessible for as many people as possible, we do have sensory equipment available for both children and young people and for adults if it would help with attending. If there are any barriers for anyone accessing our events, please do let us know and we will try to overcome these.

Resources

We have developed a library of resources that parent carers are able to borrow. We also have a number of iPads available for parent carers to use if they are struggling with access to online meetings/consultations/appointments.

Workstreams

We are involved with many different workstreams across education, health and social care, working to improve services for our children and young people and their families in Solihull. Information about these workstreams can be found in our quarterly newsletter that is on our website, or if you would like more information, please do contact us. Some of these workstreams are: Joint Additional Needs Board, Inclusion Programme Board, Speech Language and Communication Needs, Autism in Schools, Parent Engagement Groups in Schools, Holiday Activities and Food, Children and Youth Offer, Maternity and Early Years, All Age Autism Support Service, Children and Young Peoples Mental Health board, and many more.

Healthy Parent Carer Course

As parent carers ourselves we know the challenges that we can all face and we know the impact it can have on our own emotional wellbeing and mental health. We also recognise that there is often little support available. As such we have trained to deliver a course to parent carers called Healthy Parent Carer Course. This course was written by Exeter University and Parent Carers and specifically focuses on wellbeing for parent carers. The course is run for 2 hours a week for 12 weeks and is online. Parents can self-refer, or we accept referrals from schools and services with parental consent.

Solihull SEND Community Roundtable

The roundtable is bringing together community organisations and support groups that work with or support children and young people with SEND or their families in Solihull, enabling organisations to share knowledge and support each other. Currently the Roundtable has 23 member organisations which is fantastic.

Solihull Parent Carer Voice can be contacted at:

solihullpcv@outlook.com

www.spcv.org.uk

Facebook: Solihull Parent Carer Voice

Twitter: @solihullpcv

Our Voices Heard

Our Voices Heard is the children and young people's forum for Solihull and has recently received funding for a second year. The forum is busy creating a calendar of events for this year and this will be shared shortly.

Our Voices Heard are also looking to work in and with schools this year to enable more children and young people to have their voice heard and to make a difference to services in Solihull.

If you would like to contact Our Voices Heard they can be contacted at

ourvoicesheardsolihull@outlook.com or on their Facebook page; Our Voices Heard.

If you think other people you know would be interested in this newsletter please encourage them to [sign up on the Council website here](#).

If you have any feedback on the newsletter, or suggestions for future items please email and let us know: jand@solihull.gov.uk

Thank you

Charlotte Jones

Head of SEND service 0-25

