

**Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee**  
Meeting to be held on Monday, 9 September 2024

Electoral Division affected:  
All Divisions

**Corporate Priorities:**  
Supporting economic growth;  
Caring for the vulnerable

**SEND Update Report – Communication Improvements**

Contact for further information:

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**Brief Summary**

This report explains the progress made in improving communications for families in the SEND process.

**Recommendation**

The Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee is asked to:

- i. Reflect on the information provided; and
- ii. Consider ways to further support work in this area.

**Detail**

One of the priorities of the SEND Improvement Plan is to improve communication and transparency with parents and carers.

The numbers of new assessments for EHCPs have doubled in the last two years and we have only recently started to recruit staff to support this increase in workload which has led to a break down in communication with parents and carers. Due to the lack of educational psychologists nationally, it is very difficult to recruit EPs. EPs are required for all new assessments and many annual reviews where a change of placement is required. Therefore, all local authorities are struggling to meet their statutory deadlines due to this problem.

The difficulty in meeting our statutory deadlines has resulted in a record number of complaints. Between July 2023 and July 2024, 1182 complaints have been made to the service. It has also meant it has been difficult for parents/carers and schools to have their queries answered in a timely manner.



Actions taken so far :

### **SEND Helpline**

The SEND helpline was launched in September 2024. It is staffed by current caseworkers so that they have the knowledge to be able to resolve some of the issues on the call. Unfortunately, the helpline has become overwhelmed by calls. Therefore, we have conducted an analysis from the digital team of how to further triage calls, signpost families to appropriate support and try to keep the line free for genuine queries we can provide solutions for. Staffing the helpline and providing better training for our staff to manage difficult conversations has been put in place and we hope to see improvements by the end of September. Under the new system parents/carers will be able to book a slot with their appropriate case manager/case worker for a call back which should work more effectively in getting cases resolved.

### **SEND Recruitment**

Since January 2024 we have recruited additional staff to the SEND team. This has included six tribunal officers and SEND case work staff. This means they can focus on providing appropriate support for the families through this process and also focus on providing mediation solutions before cases go to court where possible. By increasing the numbers within the team, we hope to provide better oversight and supervision of staff and the ability to have time to review EHCP cases in a timelier manner and have the time to speak to families and schools to resolve issues quickly. We are also working on quality and practice with our team to ensure that families are receiving accurate, professional advice from helpful staff.

### **SEND Complaints**

We have recruited two members of staff specifically to focus on complaints. This has ensured more consistency and professionalism with our approach to complaints but also trying to ensure we answer complaints in a timely way. Where there are delays this is usually due to the need for case managers to be involved in the detail of the complaint which given the capacity issues as explained above can be difficult. Please see below where you can see the impact that these staff have had on reducing the numbers of complaints and completing them more quickly. We have put in another business case for another two officers to complete this work and we hope this means we can move to having no overdue complaints by the end of the year.

## **July 2024**

147 items correspondence items in total. Of these:

62 are overdue;

77 are ongoing;

8 are in the final stages and awaiting approval;



## No. of correspondence Completed / Ongoing

<b>Week</b>	<b>Completed</b>	<b>Ongoing</b>	<b>Total</b>
01/01/2024 - 07/01/2024	3	0	3
08/01/2024 - 14/01/2024	13	0	13
15/01/2024 - 21/01/2024	15	1	16
22/01/2024 - 28/01/2024	15	3	18
29/01/2024 - 04/02/2024	17	1	18
05/02/2024 - 11/02/2024	16	4	20
12/02/2024 - 18/02/2024	10	0	10
19/02/2024 - 25/02/2024	26	0	26
26/02/2024 - 03/03/2024	24	1	25
04/03/2024 - 10/03/2024	18	2	20
11/03/2024 - 17/03/2024	20	1	21
18/03/2024 - 24/03/2024	22	2	24
25/03/2024 - 31/03/2024	15	1	16
01/04/2024 - 07/04/2024	13	1	14
08/04/2024 - 14/04/2024	12	1	13
15/04/2024 - 21/04/2024	28	0	28
22/04/2024 - 28/04/2024	20	4	24
29/04/2024 - 05/05/2024	37	5	42
06/05/2024 - 12/05/2024	13	1	14



13/05/2024 - 19/05/2024	25	0	25
20/05/2024 - 26/05/2024	22	4	26
27/05/2024 - 02/06/2024	14	1	15
03/06/2024 - 09/06/2024	29	4	33
10/06/2024 - 16/06/2024	21	7	28
17/06/2024 - 23/06/2024	10	13	23
24/06/2024 - 30/06/2024	4	20	24
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>462</b>	<b>109</b>	<b>571</b>

### **SEND Partnership Communications Priority Group**

The Working Together Strategy has been finalised and added to the Local Offer webpage to demonstrate to parents how co-production works and which partners are involved in supporting parents. Articles have been published in the SEND Newsletter and information regularly shared via the local offer Facebook page. 24 SEND Engagement Events and 6 virtual working together events have been held with partners to gather feedback that will shape future services. Lancashire Parent Carer Forum has been supported by Contact and the SEND Partnership to increase participation and membership, which has grown to over 250. An Engagement and Participation Protocol has been agreed. Children and young people have voiced that SEND Partnership Board meetings are to include face to face opportunities to share information in an easy-to-understand format, with plenty of time to digest which has been taken on board and implemented. The Local Offer development group have reviewed how useful the information is for parent carers, children, young people and practitioners.

### **Consultations**

N/A

### **Implications:**

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

### **Legal**

Our SEND duties are outlined in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice 2015. These are absolute duties we must deliver. Most of the complaints are due to non-compliance with these duties, so there is a legal risk



through the Ombudsman and through Judicial Review if we do not continue to improve our processes.

## **Financial**

As these are absolute duties, sufficient funding must be available to discharge these duties. Complaints to the Ombudsman and through Judicial Review carry a financial risk to the Council.

## **Risk management**

The SEND risks are detailed in our risk registers.

## **Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 List of Background Papers**

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
None		

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

