

SEND Update with WBC & Health

15th May 2024

Attended by:

From Wokingham Borough Council (WBC)

- Emma Cockerell – Director of Children Services
- Ming Zhang – Assistant Director of Education and SEND
- Jamie Conran - Head of SEND
- Jonathan Wilding - SEND Consultant
- Elaine Munro – Principal Education Psychologist
- Hayley Rees – Strategic Commissioner, Children Services

From Health

- Miranda Walcott – Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB)
- Vivienne Okoh - Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB)

From SEND Voices Wokingham (SVW)

- Terri Walsh – Chaired the meeting
- Sarah Clarke – note taking

24 other participants

Welcome and introductions.

Emma Cockerell was welcomed, as the new permanent Director of Children's Services, who has been in post 6 weeks.

The slides are available here: [Zoom Update with WBC & Health 15/5/24](#)

Updated from Jamie Conran, Head of SEND WBC

EHCP data shared, now over 2,000 EHC Plans maintained by Wokingham Borough Council.

Improvements in EHCP process timeliness. In the spring term (2024), average 80% completed in the 20-week timescale, an increase from 55% for the same time period 2023

Where an EHC needs assessment was carried out, 87% progressed to an agreement to issue an EHC Plan (spring term 2024).

SEND Team structure was shared- further updated structure will be shared in the summer term.

SEND Customer Relations Manager, April 2024, proactive in highlighting areas of concern, and is supporting issues to be resolved quickly (early resolution) where possible and in agreement with families

Developing a SEND portal, so families can track and understand where they are in the EHCP process. Will also include some support features.

Listened to the email box feedback from families and are going to reduce the number of generic email boxes – there will be a general SEND inbox, an EHC Needs Assessment inbox, and an Annual Review inbox. The ‘School Age’, PFA, EOTAS inboxes will be closed with an auto reply for 3 months.

Listening to families feedback re communication, developing SEND Communication Standards alongside an escalation process (will sit alongside formal complaints process).

Local Offer – is more than just a website on what is available in Wokingham and have worked hard on improving the content. There is still some work planned in terms of how it looks and feels to ensure it is family friendly and inviting. There has been an increase in hits to the Local Offer and the SEND newsletter, do sign up as has lots of information on things in the area for SEND. There is also a Logo competition for children and young people to enter, to design a logo for the Local Offer (closing date 10 June 2024)

A market stall, in person event related to Preparation for Adulthood (PfA) for those children who are 13 years old upward and would like to know what’s available in Wokingham – 13 June 2024.

More information & booking details here: [WBC PfA Event 13 June](#)

We continue to run SEND drop-in sessions, with the support of SVW, for face-to-face meetings for families.

Webinar 20th June 2024 to explain the phase transfer process and next year we hope to do this as an in-person event with schools and SENDIASS.

More information & booking details here: [WBC Phase Transfer 20th June](#)

Ordinarily Available Provision – SEND support, to ensure a quality offer based on quality first teaching and to meet the needs of SEND early and improve inclusion in mainstream schools. This is in development in partnership with SVW and school SENCOs. Will be running another event for Ordinarily Available Provision.

Update from Ming Zhang, Assistant Director of Education and SEND

Talked about how SEN Achievement, Attainment and Progress 8 data in Wokingham, is better than the national average.

Developing Local provision and ensuring local provision is sufficient. Addington expansion was completed. Oak Tree has opened and filled with 27 places with Wokingham children and 22 places for Sept 2024.

Last year the Government announced 2 new special schools for Wokingham, however, the DfE are in control of the building of the schools and WBC are unable to build directly, sadly this is likely to create delays in the opening of these schools but the team are working hard to ensure it is open as soon as possible and are looking at what provisions can be put in place if they don't open on time.

Updated from Jonathan Wilding, SEND Consultant WBC

The current SEND strategy was coming to an end and required updating. The revised strategy will cover the next 5 years.

1. Inclusion, access and early intervention
2. Sufficiency of services and support
3. Joint commission
4. Effective transitions
5. Communication and coproduction

There will be a consultation for 6 weeks from the 27th May, please do review the consultation and feedback your thoughts, the strategy will then be reviewed with the feedback and go through the WBC governance process.

SEND Voices Wokingham will make sure that the consultation is shared with families via email/social media as soon as available.

Update Ming Zhang & Elaine Munro – Wraparound Childcare Programme

Based on the feedback from the last Zoom feedback meeting.

Childcare for primary age children, from 8am to 6pm, Monday to Friday, to support families to be able to work if they wish too.

There has been some government capital funding to support the programme which will last until 2026. Some of the funding can be used to help providers to test the market on expanding services and does require to be a fully self-sustainable system after 2026. The expectation is that all families will pay the same amount regardless of their SEND needs.

By 14th June 2024, WBC need to submit a report to the DfE on what provision is available and where the gaps are.

Next steps – via SVW there will be a request for information on the wraparound care is locally and how families find the services.

Updated from Health – Miranda Walcott, Designated Clinical Officer (DCO) for the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West (BOB) Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Parent Carer Health Engagement event for those families with SEND children and young people, to understand what services are available to support.

6th June 2024 at Lagoona Park, 2 sessions 10-12 and 12-2.30

Four focused areas:

- Neurodiversity
- Early Help
- Therapies – physiotherapy, speech and language and occupational therapy
- Preparation for Adulthood

Along with other market stalls with services that can be accessed without a referral/diagnosis.

More information & booking details here: [Parent Carer Health Engagement 6th June](#)

Update Short Breaks – Hayley Rees, Childrens Commissioning WBC

Reviewing the current provision, the gaps, and needs of the area.

Understanding the views of families and children, young people and have Short Breaks steering group with SVW, providers and WBC.

Key themes: positive experience with SB coordinators, CAN Network information, how to find information on LO.

Access to the services: waiting times, distance, time to spend with other members of the family/partner, services being able to cope with CYP

Future service development – short breaks need to be longer than 3 hours, difficult to find services to spend the budget on suitable services.

Once the data analysis, June/July 2024, families will have an opportunity to feedback into the work, to support the design of the services moving forward.

Questions raised both verbally and in the Zoom chat by those who attended the meeting.

Key Issues raised by parent carers during the evening:

- **More focus needed on mental health in schools**
- **Lack of Educational Psychology service**
- **Need for early intervention/needs led intervention by schools**
- **Annual Review process**
- **SEND Team vacancies**
- **Transport – the importance of getting it right**
- **Short Breaks – how can parents get involved and feedback**
- **ADHD assessments for children not in school**

Q&As

Q. Wokingham SEND pupil outcomes, are they based on academic progress but not on mental health, and if attainment was not such a push, would mental health of our children and young people be better?

A. Emotional Wellbeing data is collated differently, but markers like attendance and part time timetables are used as indicators. WBC will take away to review and think on how best to look at children and young people's wellbeing as is an important criterion to be considered.

Q. Social, Emotional sections of EHCP, need more focus Mental Health and trauma, understanding in plans? Families are having to explain diagnosis' to case workers. More notice needs to be taken to children and young people's mental health.

A. We are moving toward early interventions to offer the right support. It is hoped that this will improve the mental health of children and young people and enable them to access educational successfully by receiving the right support at the right time.

Q. Why did Wokingham refuse to provide a response on Safety Valve from IPSEA?

A. It was a national request for information, and WBC followed the advice from the DfE, not to publish more detail than was already in the public domain in regard to their legal contract with the DfE. In terms of transparency information is shared with the Children Services Oversight & Scrutiny Committee, where there are papers, minutes and a recording of the meeting are available to watch and are fully accessible to the public. The public are also able to raise questions at the meeting on any area of Children Services.

Q. Is there an update on the increase the number of Educational Psychologists (EP) needed, I know that there is a national shortage, but is Wokingham able to do anything?

A. There is a national shortage, the low numbers being trained is causing a huge issue, and there just isn't enough to go around nationally. There is a strong commitment from corporate to support staffing stability with EP's with a retention and recruitment strategy.

Q. Our son hasn't seen an EP (Elaine actually) since he was 9 and is now 13. It would be so useful to be able to see one again, but it seems impossible at the moment.

Please do get in touch, and we will see if there is anything else SEND Voices can do to support. We do all also feed into national work around supporting the increase in EP numbers, so ministers do hear what an issue it is for our families.

The knowledge and support you provided Elaine was priceless.

Some schools within the academies, have an EP that they can access to support the school (all the schools in the MAT) but this is different to the reports that feed into EHCP and Annual Reviews

Q. Schools can often insist on a diagnosis rather than being needs led. Early prevention would have resolved things early and avoided crisis.

A. WBC agree, please do review the SEND Strategy, and feed into the work.

Q. In our experience schools resist SEN support until there is a diagnosis. This is against SEN guidance that it is needs based not diagnosis based. this is of a particular concern, when there are months or years waiting lists for NHS and CAMHS assessment and treatments. Will the SEND team 'educate' school leadership about this?

A. The aim of the development of our 'ordinarily available provision' is to ensure that every school (in partnership with other local services) plays their part in meeting needs early and that we have clear and consistent expectations as to what this looks like in each school. We recognise (and crucially schools also recognise) that this is not as consistent as it should be and improving this is a key priority over the next year.

Q. Schools are resisting the provision mapped out in the EHCP?

A. There is now stronger partnership working with the schools and work on ordinarily available provision to improve the consistency of support across all schools in

Wokingham. We also now have an area SENCo, Helen, to support and challenge where needed.

Q. When we talk about SENCo, do they have to have specific qualifications?

A. There is a standard qualification, which has to be completed within a certain time scale, whilst in post. We have recruited an area SENCo, Helen, and is working with all SENDCo's to share best practice and support upskilling across the area.

For more information on SENDCo training -

https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/mandatory-qualification-for-sencos?utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=govuk-notifications-topic&utm_source=28165ff7-41d9-4370-aacf-e1aed1c492f5&utm_content=daily

Q. When will the information on the new resource units be available

A. This is still being worked out, in the process of working through and will update when we can. Hopefully, intimately.

Request for Transport services to be at the next zoom session.

Additional Online Chat Q&As

Q. What percentage of applications are you agreeing to assess and how has this changed between 2023 and 2024?

A. Approx. 70-80% EHC assessment requests agreed- stable from 2023.

Q. How are you ensuring that EHC plan applications are being assessed thoroughly and fairly? What percentage of applications are not agreed due to lack of sufficient evidence from OH/SALT? Thanks.

A. We have enhanced our SEND decision making panels, and decisions are based on the evidence available at the time, and utilising the experience of health (CYPIT, therapies also provide input), EP, SENCO, Early Years, Commissioning and SEND colleagues. On occasion if new evidence comes to light, we reconsider our position accordingly.

Q. There is a focus on needs assessments and following statutory timeframes but what about timelines for Annual Reviews and ensuring statutory processes are followed?

A. Agreed- we are still refining how we present our data as there are multiple phases in annual review process- we should be able to present this a lot clearer next session.

Q. Can you explain why there are so many vacancies (SEND Team) ? Are there retention issues?

How can SEND Team Officers cope with only them, and 3 vacancies. I notice they are interim, what happens when they leave?

A. A number of our SEND Team Officers were interim, which can be unstable as they can be recruited and then leave at really short notice, which has happened to us a few times this year. We are committed to a highly skilled, local (ideally) SEND workforce to build upon the experienced permanent staffing we have in place currently. There will be more to come in this space over the next few months as we share our development plans for our SEND workforce.

We have a permanent SEND Team Manager, Sam, who started in January. Christina works alongside Emma (who started today) and are really experienced Assistant Team Managers- unfortunately we haven't been able to recruit the two suitably experienced Assistant Team Manager on a permanent basis- it's such an important role, we want to get it right!

Q. With regard to retention, would it be possible for when a member of the SEN team leaves, they notify the parents / carers that is the case

A. We know this is an issue, particularly where we have had staff turnover for the same cohort of children and are exploring a way where we can send an email to the entire cohort of families to notify of a change of Officer. Moving forward we are hoping our staffing situation settles as we recruit and train our permanent workforce. We will also share more on our local offer website so families can keep up to date of developments.

Schools

Q. There is research the school environment can actually cause PTSD in autistic children. Many children can mask autism, and then get misdiagnosed and really struggle when they reach Secondary School age. In our experience this can get labelled as a bad behaviour, when it is in fact a trauma response. How to get schools to understand the child, rather than focus on 'behaviours'?

Unfortunately, SEN children are a 'cost' to an Academy school, and they have every motive to push them out

My son's school has no staff with and formal dyslexia training and no staff in his year group (and possibly the school) with formal training in ASD or ADHD. Staff training is a real issue (across the board, not just for sencos).

How many local Schools have a mental Health Lead - government guidance?

Our school PSA also team have little to no mental health training.

Transport

Q. Do WBC provide travel buddies for children with EHCP's who are not ready to walk to secondary school by themselves?

A. We are developing this area <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/children-families-and-young-people/send-local-offer/help-learning/send-travel-assistance-school-and-college-0/independent-travel-training>

We will take this back to our travel assistance team and can provide a more detailed update following this.

Q. Is there anyone in the meeting tonight from the transport team please?

A. We will ask someone from Transport to join the next session in the Autumn Term

Unfortunately, not this evening, but they will be in attendance at our (WBC) Preparation for Adulthood Event I referred to earlier on (13th June). We can also take questions here and follow up / come back with a response if helpful.

That would be great, the importance of transport cannot be underestimated as this has a big impact on how children with additional needs start their day.

Q. Is Travel Training available already, this is needed for September. Will this be ready by then?

A. Yes Travel Training already available (see link above)

Post-16 Provision

Q. Apart from colleges, what other educational provision is there available for post-16 or post-19? There seems to be a gap in provision here as well.

We have completed a 'gap' analysis and consulted with young people to understand more about their aspirations and what they want to do / achieve in post-16 education- more to come in this space, but we do have apprenticeships, supported internships etc.

I'm sure you've seen this, but for more information on Supported Internships - see this link: <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/children-families-and-young-people/send-local-offer/preparing-adulthood/help-finding-work-training-and-volunteering/explore-your-options-16#:~:text=on%20GOV.UK.-,Supported%20internships,you%20need%20for%20the%20workplace>

Wrap Around Care for SEND Children

Q. When will this wrap around care be available to purchase?

A. Before and after school care is currently available delivered by schools and private providers the family information service will be able to tell you what is available local to your child's school. Currently not all of the providers meet the criteria of Wraparound Care i.e. 8.00-6.00. The LA does not provide the wraparound care the funding allocated this year is to support current providers or support new providers into the "market" to meet the demand for all families of primary aged children who want it. Providers will be able to request funding to expand or develop their provision from June.

Q So the provision would be the existing provider who told me that my son could not attend without me funding a supervisor for him?

Short Breaks

Q. We have short breaks for two children, and this is the first I've heard of this. It would be useful to contact all families in receipt of short breaks surely?

Q. How do you get a complete view from all children and young children around short breaks? We've not heard anything about this.

Q. How long is the wait list for short breaks? We have been waiting 3 months so far.

Q. We had a considerable amount of funds in our short breaks account, but it was all taken back as we could not find a PA/activities that were accessible, meant out child missed out.

A. We have utilised and analysed data from surveys completed by SEND Voices regarding short breaks covering 2019 - 2023. We would welcome further views, experiences and feedback from Parents and Families to further inform the project.

We have been working with Providers and SEND Voices to look at how we can engage with Families to better understand gaps in provision, what is working well/not working well, to get an understanding of what is needed and barriers to this. SEND Voices have kindly been able to provide a wealth of information from 4 annual surveys, we have been out to speak to a number of children - but are aware that we won't catch everyone. We

would be delighted if you were able to take some time and email your views/feedback and experiences.

For those who would like to email you views, experiences and feedback on Short Breaks the email address is: childrenscommissioningteam@wokingham.gov.uk. Please feel free to share this email address within your networks.

Q. According to Ofsted/Wokingham The Compass Team is supported by a Clinical Psychologist. Who is the Clinical Psychologist as we need to resolve a professional conduct issue with them about a member of the Compass Team that they supervise. We have been refused contact, despite being told that this Clinical Psychologist clinically supervises this person. We were advised by our SENDIASS advocate to get Legal Advice about this issue, but we are trying to resolve this first.

A. This issue to be picked up by Emma Cockerell

Q. I've had no official response to my complaint of 25/3/24.

A. SEND Voices Wokingham will forward details of SEND Customer Relations Manager to follow-up.

Q. Can I ask if I can get in touch with Miranda regarding my daughter's SALT support that has suddenly stopped when her need is still there.

A. please can you share your details with Terri and Sarah, and I will be in contact with you.

Q. Why do WBC name schools on EHCP's that say they can only meet need with increased funding, but WBC name them without increased funding. This means children end up having named schools on their EHCP that can't meet need as they don't have the budget to do so. The LA then say that the school are legally obliged to provide the provision (without the correct budget). The LA are legally obliged to ensure the provision is met, not the school.

A. Parent to contact Jamie Conran to follow-up.

Q. How do ADHD assessments work for children when they are not in school - we have been told that the team don't have enough evidence as there is no school to fill out forms so being left in limbo as the assessment team don't know what to do as there is no school to discuss the child with?

A. I am very sorry to hear that. Did you self-refer into the service? Parents and Carers are able to self-refer even if you child is not in school. Are you receiving support from other services who are able to discuss this with the ADHD pathway team?

Thank you to everyone for attending.