

An Update from Clare (Chair) and Sam (Vice Chair) on the SEND Improvement Board



We wanted to share a bit more about one of the behind-the-scenes pieces of work we do as part of our role at DPCV. Claire and Sam, our Chair and Vice-Chair, attend the SEND Improvement Board, which brings together health, education and social care leaders following the Ofsted Improvement Notice. This update is not formal minutes, but their reflections and notes from a recent meeting, shared to offer some transparency and insight into this work.

Main Topics Discussed

This meeting oversees the work of health, social care and education providers in response to the Ofsted Improvement Notice, which was issued over 18 months ago. Both Claire and Sam attend these meetings on behalf of the forum.

Each meeting takes around three hours to prepare for (we are neurodiverse), and the meeting itself lasts approximately three hours. We volunteer our time to do this.

Over time, we have increasingly found it harder to attend. Some of this is due to our family circumstances. Like many amazing SEND families, we ebb and flow – we have ups and downs, and supporting our family’s needs takes a great deal of energy, in ways that are not always understood.

Another reason these meetings are hard is that we are living through and experiencing many of the issues and challenges that the partnership is set up to address. Being in meetings that discuss issues which have a significant impact on parent carers and their children – because this is our world too – is not easy.

Our role is to challenge and provide feedback from parents, based on what we hear through our events, surveys and direct correspondence from our members.

The meeting reviews actions from the SEND Improvement Plan. This particular meeting focused on:

- Communication and engagement
- Sharing performance data, to better understand it and use it to evaluate and drive change
- Updates from each partner

The data discussed covers many aspects of services, including Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) processes, CAMHS waiting times, neurodiversity (ND) assessment waiting times, and more.

Partner updates included discussion about a self-assessment activity that the partnership needs to complete. This overlaps with the Ofsted Improvement Plan, but our understanding is that every local authority in England is currently completing a similar exercise.

Our understanding is that redacted minutes from these meetings are made available on the Local Offer pages.

Historically, as a charity, we have chosen not to communicate publicly about this meeting. We believe it is the responsibility of service providers to do so and, to be honest, communicating this accurately takes a significant amount of time – all on a voluntary basis.

However, we are sometimes criticised on social media for being “in the pocket of the local authority” by parents who are as overwhelmed and exhausted as we are. Because of this, we are beginning to shift our approach, and this update is our attempt to do that.

We are trying to tread a careful line that allows us to be authentic while continuing to support the partnership. Maintaining working relationships with the partnership is important – it is the only way to be in the room and challenge at that level. We still worry about the difference we are able to make.

Key Outcomes

1) Communication and Engagement

This part of the meeting explored why communication across the partnership is not improving, particularly in relation to sharing updates and highlighting where improvements are being made.

We continue to raise concerns about poor communication experiences, based on what parents tell us through surveys, events and direct contact. We have been clear that the level and quality of communication with parent carers and children is not where it should be.

Again, it is not our role to communicate on behalf of the partnership. However, ongoing delays, mixed messages, occasionally disrespectful tone, and missed opportunities to build trust and genuine relationships mean that we feel DPCV needs to rethink its current communication strategy. We have been disappointed by communications from the partnership, and we have made this very clear.

Engagement

Earlier this year, we held workshops to develop a set of shared values that everyone in the partnership should experience – service providers and parent carers alike. These values have now been written up into an Engagement Charter.

The intention is that this charter becomes a shared set of expectations that the partnership can be “held up to”. The next steps are around how these are shared across schools, health professionals, social care and, of course, with parent carers.

To be honest, this work does feel tokenistic given the current state of services and lived experiences. However, the charter provides a way of evidencing where communication and engagement are working well, and where they are not. We will be sharing the charter and sitting in meetings where these principles can be monitored through quality assurance processes.

2) CAMHS and ND Waiting Times, “Support While Waiting”, and Wheelchair Delays

Data was shared showing the extent of the delays, which are long. A new business plan for the ND pathway is currently in development.

Because these services are delivered by different health providers – and in areas such as High Peak by services from Tameside and Glossop – waiting times vary depending on where you live and which service you are referred to.

Outside of this meeting, we have been meeting with service commissioners for mental health and SEND, alongside Derby Parent Carer Voice, to raise concerns about assessment waits, lack of support for families, and inconsistent neurodiversity-affirming practice reported by parent carers.

At a commissioning level, the overall mental health service model is called THRIVE. This spans schools, GPs, voluntary sector providers (such as Compass), and CAMHS, including the “support while waiting” service. It also includes the services delivered through the Neuro Hubs.

To evidence our members’ experiences, we ran a survey earlier this year. We use this within meetings to challenge the partnership, highlighting that the service is not meeting need and that it is difficult for families to understand where to turn for help, particularly during a crisis. We are supporting commissioners to improve how access routes and communications for parent carers are described.

3) Data

To improve services, there needs to be a clear understanding of current performance. It has taken a long time for the partnership to begin sharing a performance “dashboard”.

We have asked for this to be publicly shared on the Local Offer pages, as is the case in other local authorities.

We spend time analysing the data that is shared with us at meetings (although we do not see the full dataset), so that we can best represent our members. We cannot cover all of this here, but we used the data to challenge the partnership on how it is being interpreted and used to drive improvement.

4) Updates

We updated the partnership on:

- Recent workshops delivered with Educational Psychologists, DIASS and the ND Hubs
- Current surveys, including our ongoing EBSA survey
- Events we host for professionals, including a recent evening session with the Head of SEND at Derbyshire County Council

We also shared that we want to change how we communicate with DPCV members about this work, but that we have been holding back while waiting for the partnership to improve its own communication in this area.

We know this work can feel slow, and sometimes far removed from families’ day-to-day realities. We also know that being in these spaces does not automatically lead to change. What it does allow us to do is to bring parent carer voices, evidence and lived experience

directly into the room, to challenge where things are not working, and to keep asking difficult questions. We will continue to do this alongside listening to, and learning from, our members, and we will keep thinking carefully about how we share this work in a way that is honest, proportionate and centred on families.

With best wishes,

Claire and Sam

Chair and Vice Chair
Derbyshire Parent Carer Voice