



# **SNAP PARENT CARER FORUM**

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

## **Spring 2023 Test the Temperature Survey Report**

June 2023

## Introduction

### SNAP PCF – our role

SNAP (Special Needs Action Panel) is a proactive, independent forum of parent carers who all have children and young people with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND).

As members of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), we support the development of parent carer participation, a process in which parents work together with professionals to make improvements to local services.

SNAP Parent Carer Forum (PCF) acts as a conduit for a wide variety of local professionals in their work with children and young people with SEND. Our purpose is to improve the services provided for children and young people who are aged from 0-25 years.

### Test the Temperature - Spring 2023 survey

Whilst our regular annual survey is being updated to bring its contents in line with the current OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Childrens Services and Skills) framework, we wanted to check in with our parent carers to see how things are going for them. The aim of this 'Test the Temperature' survey is to monitor how parent carer experience of the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process has changed since our last survey in November 2021, and to measure any improvements made within Central Bedfordshire's EHCP and Annual Review process. We also checked the overall satisfaction with education, health, and social care.

This report reflects the voices of 532 parent carers who live within Central Bedfordshire who told us about their experiences of the EHCP process during 2023, particularly focusing on satisfaction levels with their child's EHCP Annual Review and their experience of communicating with the SEND Team. Responses to our 'Test the Temperature' survey were collected from 3<sup>rd</sup> April to 29<sup>th</sup> of May 2023.

We felt it was important to measure parental satisfaction rates against [our previous survey in November 2021](#), which itself was then compared to our November 2019 data, in order to track any progress made. This 2023 survey now provides us with three years of data and feedback. This is important because Central Bedfordshire Council (CBC) and the Bedfordshire, Luton, Milton Keynes Integrated Care Board (BLMK - ICB) implemented an Accelerated Progress Plan after the revisit of OFSTED and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in July 2022.

During this revisit, inspectors determined that there had not been sufficient improvement made regarding their Written Statement of Action (WSOA) in the following three areas:

- Ensuring that the needs of children and young people are identified and met in their EHCPs
- Improving the quality of new EHCPs
- Delivering good outcomes for children and young people with SEND

Information about the Written Statement of Action and the Accelerated Progress Plan (APP) has been published on [Central Bedfordshire Council's Local Offer website](#) .

## Executive summary

The SNAP PCF Steering Group has reviewed the survey data collected in November 2019, and November 2021 and compared this with our latest May 2023 'Test the Temperature' data. It is very disappointing and discouraging to see that the data indicates an overall and continuing decline in the satisfaction levels of parent carers with the Education Health Care Plan (EHCP) process and in their communication with the SEND Team, over these three-years.

### To test parent's overall satisfaction of the EHCP process and communication with the SEND Team, we asked the following questions:

*How would you rate your overall experience of the Education Health Care Plan process as of May 2023?*

**Overall satisfaction rate: 32%**

*How well have the Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team communicated with you and kept you up to date with your Child's/Young Person's EHCP during 2023?*

**Overall satisfaction rate: 30%**

*To what extent have you felt listened to by the Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team during 2023?*

**Overall satisfaction rate: 31%**

*Were you satisfied with the Annual Review process when this was last completed as of May 2023?*

**Overall satisfaction rate: 34%**

### We also tested parent's overall satisfaction with Education, Health, and Social Care services for their child by asking the following question (This question was also asked in November 2022):

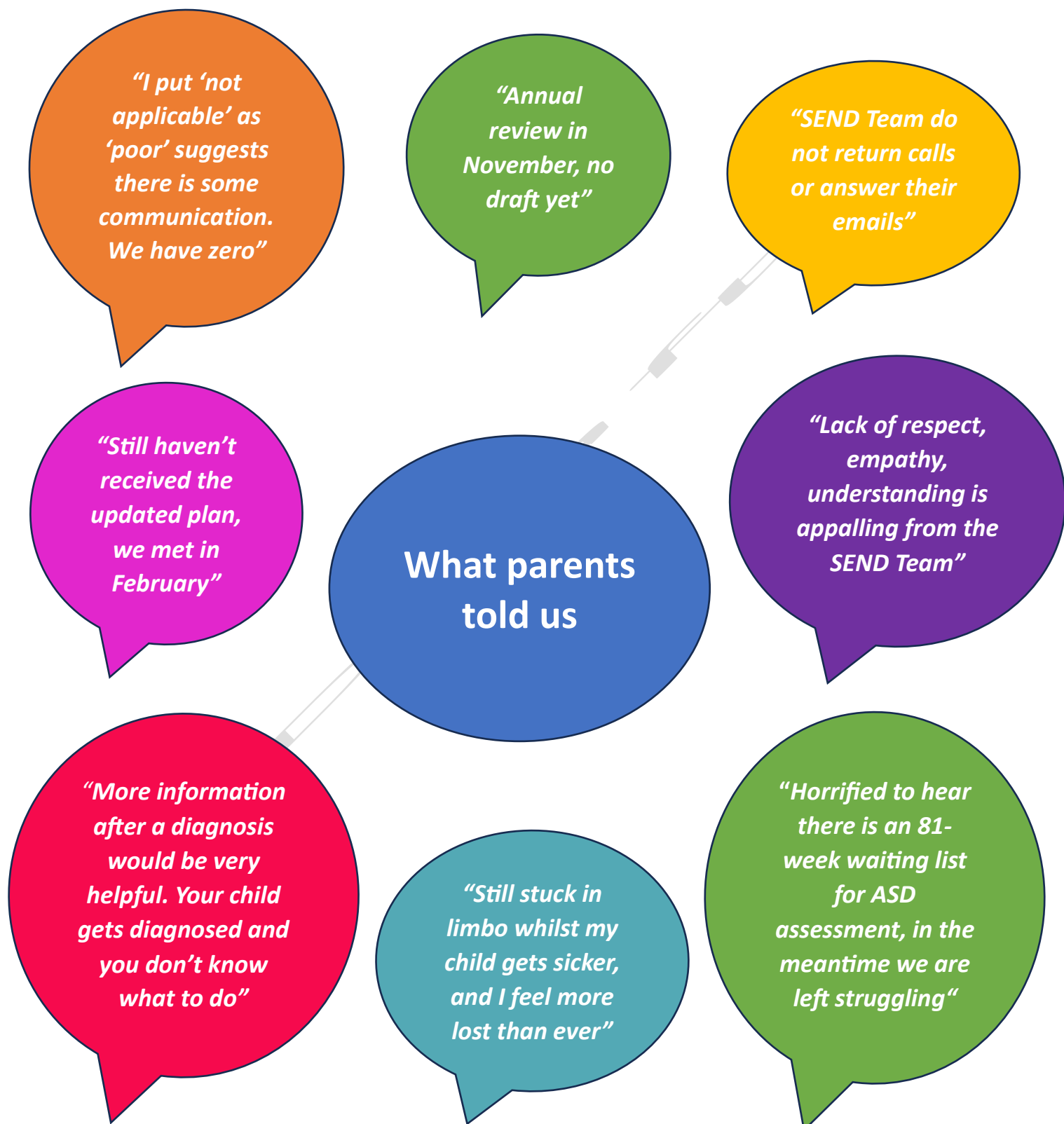
*How do you feel the 3 main areas of Health, Education and Social Care are currently supporting your child/young person with Special Educational Needs in Central Bedfordshire?*

Service	Overall Satisfaction rate		
	2023	2022	Difference
Education	38%	56%	-18%
Health	36%	56%	-20%
Social Care	31%	42%	-11%

This report sets out the experiences of the parents who completed our 'Test the Temperature' survey. We have anonymised the feedback and included much of this feedback within the report to help support the data and to help you understand the reasons for the results.

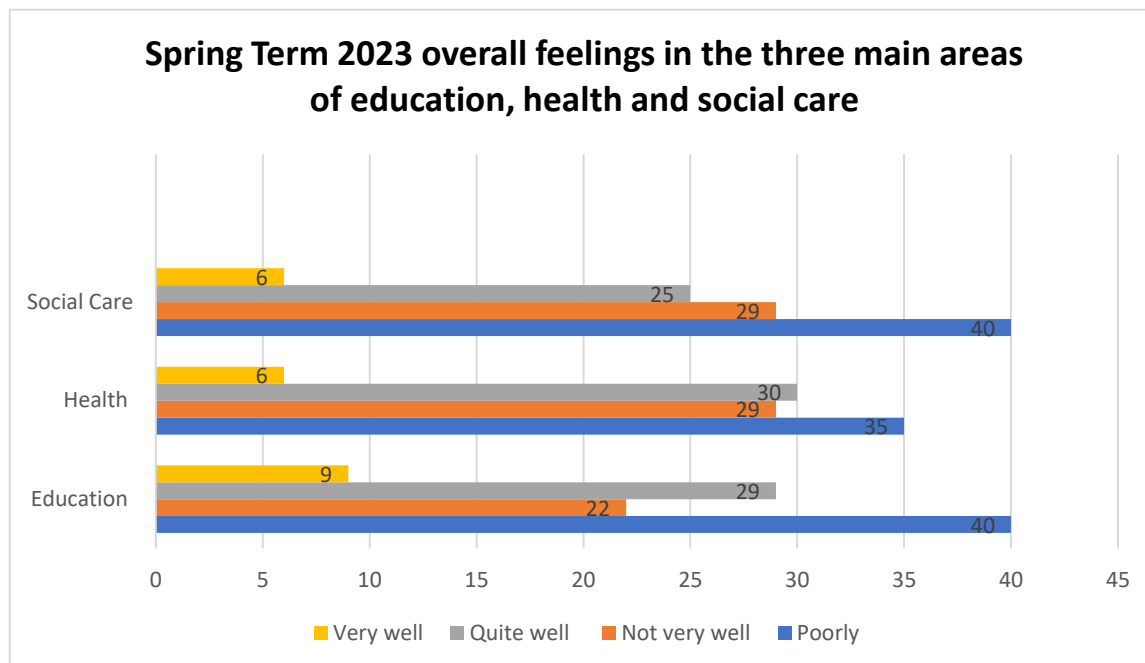
We have also included our Steering Groups reflections and recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council and our health services to consider.

## Test the Temperature, May 2023 - just a few quotes from parent carers:



## Test the Temperature May 2023 - Survey Analysis

How do you feel the 3 main areas of education, health and social care are currently supporting your child/young person with Special Educational Needs in Central Bedfordshire?



532 parent carers answered this question. As this is a new question, we are unable to directly compare it with our November 2021 survey data. After removing the 'not applicable' responses, the levels of satisfaction are broadly consistent across education health, and social care.

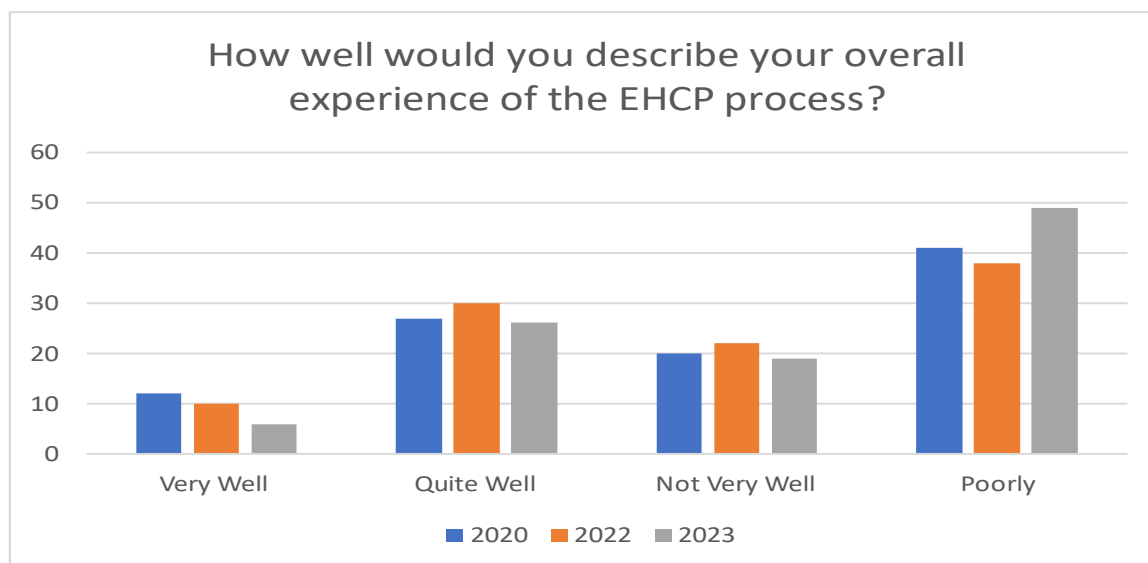
There wasn't a free text box for comments with this question. However below are comments received from parent carers in response to other questions which highlight their concerns:

*"Most individuals we work with seem like good people trying to do the right thing but they're so focussed on working in a framework that's completely broken with woefully inadequate resources and seem so blinded by trying (and failing!) to do things correct legally that they don't have time left to even think about my little boy - and he is the only thing they should be thinking about when I'm talking to them about him and his needs."*

*"There are no services or support from school, CAMHs or CBC. My daughter is forgotten by all but early help- whose remit and ability are restricted. How poorly does a child need to become before anything happens? Services are designed to only support mild cases. Not those that need serious help."*

*"I've got a child who is "masking" at school and is self-harming because of her frustration and understanding. Neither the school, Edwin Lobo, CAMHS or anyone in Central Beds are able to help me. Due to this I feel very isolated and alone, trying my best to deal with a child on a daily basis with issues I'm not sure how to deal with."*

## How would you describe your overall experience of the Education, Health & Care Plan Process?



### Key themes that were evident from the data and comments collected from parent carers:

- The length of time the EHCP process takes. Parent carers are reporting long waiting times with statutory guidelines not being met for assessments, the writing of plans, and the completion of annual reviews.
- Poor Communication by the SEND Team. Emails and telephone calls are not being responded to in a timely manner or not at all in some cases. Parent carers always chasing, not feeling listened to by professionals involved in their child's EHCP assessment and their views are not being heard.
- Poor Quality plans. Copy and paste content, not personalised, spelling/grammar mistakes, outcomes not Specified Measurable Realistic and Time-bound (SMART).
- Difficult and stressful process for many: "horrendous", "confusing", "hard to navigate" and a "minefield". Parent carers talk of the 'struggle', and delays impacting the wellbeing of their young person and their own mental health.
- Too many parent carers must go to tribunal or make formal complaints regarding the EHCNA (Educational Health Care Needs Assessment)/EHP/Annual review process.
- Constant changes in SEND Officers. Lack of continuity for parents – one family had six SEND Officers in two years!

### Some of the 246 written comments received:

**9 Positive**

**235 Negative**

### Feedback from parent carers:

*"Too exhausted to explain"*

*"Legal timeframes ignored, communication non-existent, child not understood"*

*"Nothing happens unless you complain. I'm tired of complaining and it's affecting my mental health."*

*“Lack of transparency in accountability for failure to deliver the plan. The SEND team blame the school, the school blame the SEND team and to be honest I really don't care who's at fault. I need them to deliver for my child.”*

*“Lost my application for a month, claimed didn't have, had had all along, sitting in a colleague's tray! I was able to prove tracking. When finally found, said would fast track. Still had to chase for delays and have now received a draft not personalised enough, more copy and paste!”*

*“Staggering 7 months over proposed deadline to complete. Shocking. Yet we are expected to stay within strict deadlines and be penalised if not.”*

*“Long, drawn out and time consuming for a plan that was of average quality. His reassessment took way over the legal time scales.”*

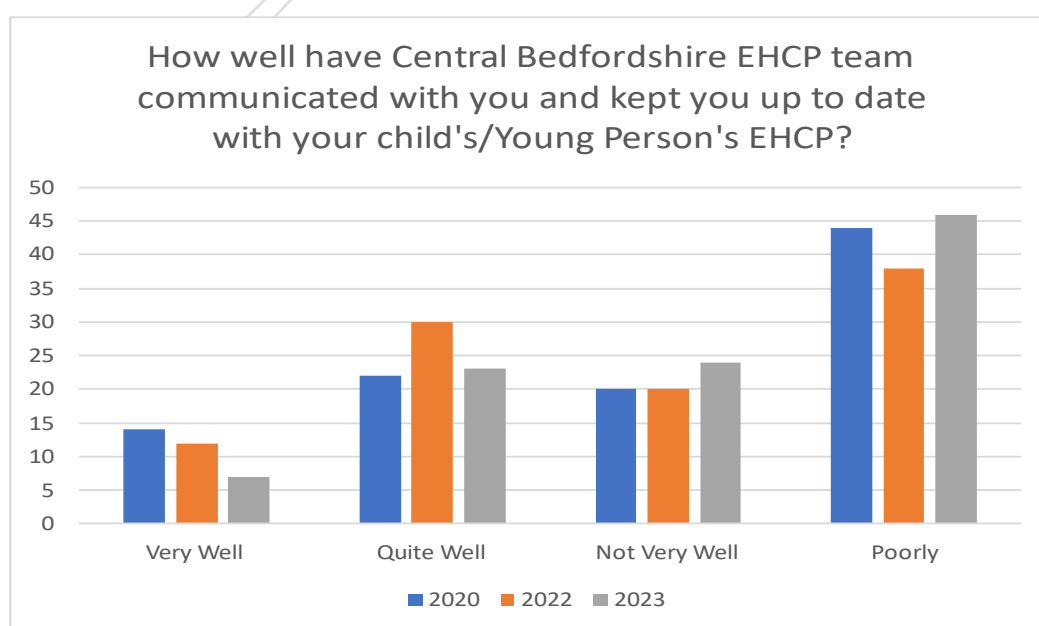
*“Written poorly, rushed, does not take anything into account that other professionals have written and recommended. Completely unreflective of child's need. Very scant, vague and unclear.”*

*“I had no communication from my point of contact until the EHCP draft was overdue and the school could not get hold of her either. Now she has gone back to radio silence and it's hard to know what is going on. The positive note that I can say is that the Educational Psychologist had an appointment quicker than I expected after hearing horror stories, so I suppose we were lucky in that regard.”*

*“Draft EHCP was dreadful - I have had to have it rewritten to make it measurable and quantified. Awaiting co-production meeting”*

*“Only positive due to my SENCO”*

### **How well have Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team communicated with you and kept you up to date with your child's/young person's Education, Health & Care Plan?**



### **Key themes that were evident from the data and comments collected from parent carers:**

- Constantly having to chase to get any kind of response from the SEND Team, varying from days, weeks, and months for some families.
- The SEND Team has been impossible to get hold of by email or phone. Parents are feeling ignored and unheard and left unsure of where in the process they are. This was evident from those awaiting an Education, Health & Care Needs Assessment, Education, Health & Care Plan, or Annual review.
- Poor communication about staff changes within the SEND Team because of sickness or annual leave. Parents feel confused as to who to contact and who knows what. Lack of continuity, things being missed with cases not being managed properly as a result, and a lack of transparency was also mentioned.
- Parent cares must involve management to get responses due to lack of or minimal communication from SEND Officers.

### **Some of the 162 written comments received:**

**8 Positive**

**154 Negative**

#### **Feedback from parent carers:**

*"If they respond at all, which is rare, it is after a significant amount of time and usually with no progress or resolution. Felt ignored and unheard most of the time."*

*"I have chased numerous times and don't hear back for ages. When I do hear back, they promise deadlines then go past those deadlines and again ignore me. Not good enough."*

*"I was continually chasing for responses and ended up chasing other agencies myself to provide the outstanding reports that were needed."*

*"Staff changes have meant cases hasn't been followed up. Staff clearly aren't being managed as they fail to communicate to you unless you email the senior management team. It's shocking"*

*"A few staff have been good; others have been very poor even when more senior team/service members have been involved in our case"*

*"Constant changes in SEND team staff makes it difficult to know who to contact, communication is not forth coming"*

*"I had one email saying that my sons EHCNA was granted and absolutely nothing until after his draft was overdue. Myself, the school and even the lady on the phone I spoke to from the SEND team at the CBC all could not get hold of the person who was supposed to be my point of contact. The lady on the phone even escalated it to the manager and I was promised an email back that day... but the manager never contacted me either and it was again left until everything is overdue and now, I've had no response to my query regarding the draft. I'm not sure how I'm supposed to even send it back when the person seems to be and remain AWOL. It really is bizarre; I've never come across communication which has been this bad before."*

*"No communication! I've had to find out by contacting them, for example, that we have had several changes in SEND officers."*

*"I can't get hold of my Send Officer on the phone, and she doesn't phone me when I email and ask her to. She replies to emails very slowly. And when she drafted the EHCP it was"*

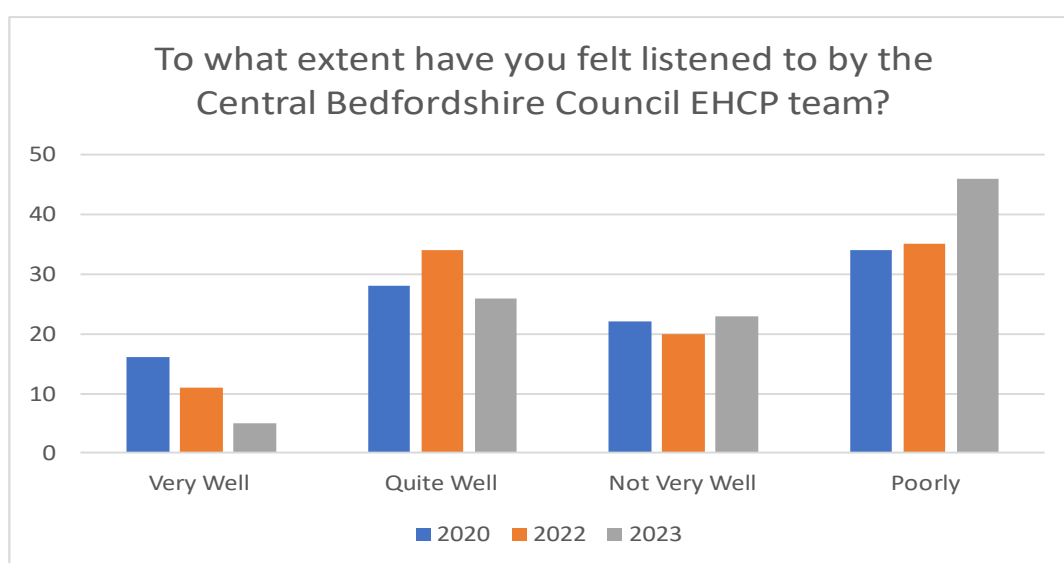


*riddled with errors - both factual and spelling/punctuation/grammar. It was clearly a bad copy & paste job. When I sent back my comments half of them weren't incorporated into the second draft. I also requested an updated social care assessment as it's been six months since the first one and our situation has changed, and despite Children's Services sending it over two weeks before the EHCP was drafted she didn't incorporate any of it and didn't seem aware she even had it."*

*"Constant chasing, no timelines adhered to, but they are now actually contactable, and we do have a named officer"*

*"This has improved, and they are now contactable and respond in a timely fashion, I like knowing who my officer is."*

### **To what extent have you felt listened to by the Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team?**



#### **Key themes that were evident from the data and comments collected from parent carers:**

- Only a minority of parent carers feel listened to, and some say this has taken time to happen.
- A majority are feeling ignored, especially as emails and telephone calls go unanswered. The parent carers voice is often not listened to or recorded. When Officers do listen, they then don't act, such as requests for personal budgets being ignored, or not informing parent carers of the processes or options available to them or their child/young person.
- Parent carers are feeling that Officers 'don't care' about them or their child/young person or feeling 'fobbed off'. Officers are described in parent carer comments as 'dismissive', 'patronising' and 'out of touch'.
- The needs of the child/young person are not understood or ignored. Parent carers mentioned professional reports are in some cases ignored.
- Parent carers are having to complain to get their views heard. One parent carer complaint was dealt with by the manager who the complaint was about.

**Some of the 118 written comments received:**

**8 Positive**

**110 Negative**

**Feedback from parent carers:**

*"Constantly met with patronising sympathies when begging for help. Made to feel like my son is paperwork being pushed around while my whole family has been in crisis/survival mode for years now, with no end on sight."*

*"Hard to be listened to when no one contacts you"*

*"My concerns around my child's EHCP reflecting my child's needs and not what the setting can provide were ignored. No offer of alternative provision when my child was not accessing education - I never even knew what alternative provision was available as this had never been explained to me."*

*"Had a good discussion regarding my comments on the draft EHCP. It was suggested that all of my comments were addressed but the plan remains super vague and actually completely wrong inaccurate as it's written for my daughter being at school and she has not attended since it was finalised."*

*"Detailed reports from professionals have been ignored, disregarded, and our views not clearly recorded."*

*"The SEND worker was literally saying once it's finalised you can appeal, they didn't care I wasn't happy"*

*"I have no idea if they've even heard my pleas for help because I get no response from them"*

*"A complaint is due to be submitted in regard to a lack of communication from the SEND team, lack of co-production with us as parents over our child's school place - thankfully this was rectified but only after submitting appeal documents - a lack of implementation of section F for a prolonged period."*

*"It took a coproduction meeting to get a somewhat decent EHCP and haven't heard from them since, despite complaints about provisions not being met (albeit the complaints have been made by the SENCO rather than me). They didn't get involved at all in the review last year and haven't updated the EHCP"*

*"Emails not replied to. Only replied when complaint logged then back to radio silence."*

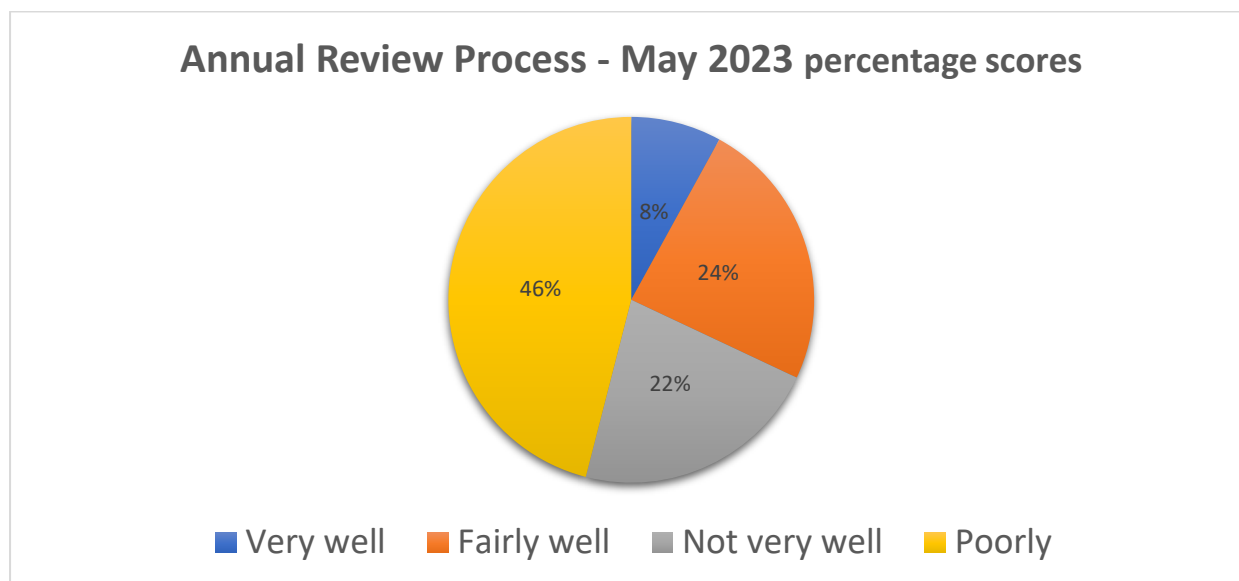
*"They don't listen to you or answer emails"*

*"My officer- has been very supportive, amendments requested to the final plan were agreed and the plan issued with the changes quickly"*

*"I feel heard, but action is limited, I'd have liked more support from them in getting school to implement the EHCP, but no one seems to hold anyone to account"*

*"They can't listen if they don't answer their phone or emails"*

## Were you satisfied with the Annual Review process when this was last completed as of May 2023?



### Key themes that were evident from the data and comments collected from parent carers:

- A lack of input from the SEND Team, and non-attendance of SEND Officers at Annual Review meetings.
- The SEND Team not adhering to statutory guidelines and timescales for Annual Reviews.
- The child, young person and parent voices not being incorporated into the Annual Review process. Parent carers mentioned professional reports were also not being included.
- Annual Review meetings are happening (although not always with a member of the SEND Team present), but plans are not then finalised after the review meeting.
- The lack of information on how the Post 16/Preparing for Adulthood process is different from previous Annual Reviews, including problems with the wrong paperwork being given and parent carers being left confused.

### Some of the 99 written comments received:

**0 Positive**

**99 Negative**

### Feedback from parent carers:

*“Still in the process of reviewing it. The review meeting was on March, and I've heard nothing from the LA.”*

*“Reviewed in October, agree to amend December. Only just received the draft! 7months later!”*

*“Haven't had an annual review since it was issued in 2020”*

*“No child or parent voice incorporated in review process. Process not followed as best practice suggests. EHCP support and interventions offered work of fiction”*

*"After review we received letter that they intend to amend. No proposed amendments sent to us, and we are now 9 weeks since the letter and 85 days since our review meeting."*

*"February 2022 annual review, amended but never finalised so have missed a whole 12 months of proper support (having had assessments delayed on original EHCP)"*

*"We had to abort an Annual Review as it turned out our son's EHCP had never been finalised and we all had the wrong draft to consider. His EHCP is very poor, and the SEND Officer was unable to make effective amendments and then left to go on maternity leave...nothing has happened since."*

*"No. The plan was left on draft format too long and involvement from the council SEND team was extremely limited - mainly via email and even then, very few of them."*

*"Still waiting for a co production meeting for a reassessment I asked for last June. The last annual review was last March, and they removed things without my knowledge then told me this had been agreed at the annual review. It hadn't."*

*"We were not told it was a transition to adulthood review and the draft EHCP looked completely different - despite our child being too young (y8). The review itself was not carried out as such either."*

*"Told that daughter EHCP was not even a post 16 paperwork I had one copy and college had a different copy of the same EHCP never any body from central beds attends these meetings"*

*"I complained to the LA SEND dept, but they felt the issue was with the school. The pathways to adulthood were not completed in the meeting and there wasn't a focus on coproduction. I feel that the LA SEND DEPT could do more to train the SENCOs involved or even attend occasionally, there should definitely be more support for school!"*

*"This literally consisted of me, my son's teacher, and the SENCO. They were great, the LA did not get in touch at all and have not updated his EHCP. It's been 10 months..."*

*"Last annual review was not allowed an opinion in once it reached the LA mine and child views ignored left in the dark mucked about strung along."*

*"Nobody from CBC attended my child's last EHCP meeting and it was a pivotal review as they are leaving college this year and I needed to make plans for what happens when they leave college. The review went well in terms of the college inputting on their progress at college."*

*"Impossible to get the process initiated on time, emergency review requested that took over three months for the first meeting to happen. Abysmal support and progress."*

*"Didn't make the amendments in according to the health care professionals report recommendations. Didn't recommend an appropriate setting as a result we had to go to tribunal which was very stressful."*

*"The college do not seem to know their duties or responsibilities, but it also seems that the LA doesn't inform, hold to account for failure to fulfil EHCP."*

*"It was done late, and the plan was not issued until I made a formal complaint"*

*"As I said, our SENDCo is great but central beds are so slow and it feels like a tick box exercise rather than a personal one"*



**Feedback from parent carers:**

*“The whole thing from getting medical needs tuition, lack of support in school, fighting this archaic system and I am absolutely exhausted, mentally and emotionally.”*

*“Unlawful, I felt pushed into ‘electively’ home educating by educational welfare and early help and by doing so I’ve done them a favour. I’ve stepped away from the system for the sake of my, my child and my family’s mental health”*

*“Disgraceful, I am constantly having to chase for updates getting a diagnosis for my son. This has had a huge impact on his mental health as well as his siblings and the wider family.”*

*“No thoughts to carers mental health”*

**We asked parents to tell us about both their positive and negative experiences of local SEND Services:****Positive themes from the survey responses:****School/SENCO Support**

Some parents have told us about their positive experiences with their child’s school, with amazing support from their SENCO’s.

**Early Years/Childrens Centre Support**

When we tracked individual positive feedback, we found that this mostly come from parents whose child has attended either an Early Years setting or a Childrens Centre. SNAP PCF are continuingly trying to raise the profile of early years and highlight there is a lot of positive working practices taking place that other areas could learn from.

**Other Support**

Our local SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs Independent Advice and Support Services) also received several positive comments from our parents, as did SNAP Parent Carer Forum for our training offer and working to improve the Local Offer website.

Parents also commented favourably on Autism Bedfordshire and Carers in Bedfordshire as well as the hearing-impaired and medical needs service.

**Positive feedback from parent carers:**

*“I think our SEND Officer really tries to support us, but it is evident they are either overworked or under supported”*

*“SENDIASS support has been a god send and I could have never of managed without them. However, they are overstretched which inevitably will impact on timing and amount of support available to individual families.”*

*“Nurse at CDC Centre supporting my ADHD daughter is amazing.”*

*“There is now a SEND playgroup once a week for young children which is nice, nothing for older children.”*

*“The Early Years and community nurses have been so supportive and helpful; I am very grateful for these fabulous people.”*

*“The EHCP department have been amazing however, school are now trying to deviate from the plan which is a battle”*

*“My SENCO has been absolutely incredible”*

*“No threats of fines, section 19 arranged medical needs team are amazing.”*

*“Thanks to the workshops I have attended, funded by SNAP, my recent experience with an EHCP review was so much better, but no thanks to the LA. I was able to create a Person-Centred Plan which went down a storm with the professionals and highlighted just how much support my young person needs.”*

## **Summary of negative feedback from parent carers:**

### **Waiting Times**

The most common issue raised was about waiting times for health services and having to pay for private assessments and diagnosis. There were also comments about the absence of Speech and Language Therapy (SALT) or Occupational Therapy (OT) input despite this important provision being included within the child’s EHCP. Also mentioned were long waiting times for an Educational Psychology assessment or their child not meeting the criteria for this.

We simply cannot overestimate the stress and negative impact that waiting times are having on families. Whilst we have been working with Bedfordshire Community Health Services and Central Bedfordshire Council to look at what support can be put in place for children and families whilst they are waiting for an appointment, the strain that this is often putting on families is intense. Waiting for support creates (and increases) the more complex needs of the child/young person, because of the lack of professional involvement and has a huge impact on the child or young person’s outcomes.

How can professionals talk about ‘the right support at the right time’ for children and young people in Central Bedfordshire when we are so lacking in the timely and effective services that we need? Parent carers also continually raised the lack of accountability across the different services.

### **Social Care**

Parent carers report a lack of support even at times of crisis, instead expecting the child’s special school to support rather than social care. Unlawful barriers with ‘Autism plus’ policies and experiencing barriers to accessing Children with Disabilities Social Care, were also mentioned; as well as being desperate for respite provision but not being entitled to it due to eligibility thresholds. SNAP PCF has asked for a review of the Children with Disability Team in light of the [Cerebra report](#) citing ‘Autism plus’ policies. We have so far been unsuccessful with this request.

### **Lack of leisure opportunities**

As with previous survey reports, parents have raised concerns about the lack of leisure opportunities in the Biggleswade area; a lack of leisure opportunities for children/young people aged from 11 years; as well as activities for Post 18 individuals.

### **Experiences of parents**

Parent carers report being requested to complete inappropriate parent training courses, with parent sessions being needed in the evening or at weekends, rather than just on weekdays.

A lack of support in general for children, young people, and their parents. Mediation services are being requested more and more because Central Bedfordshire Council is finalising EHCPs without the agreement of parents, due to a desire to meet 20-week statutory timescales. Yet the overall experience of mediation is reported as being poor.

### **Education**

Parent carers are having difficulties in getting EOTAS packages (Education Other Than At School) agreed by Central Bedfordshire Council and keeping this for their child once it is in place. There is a lack of understanding about school-based anxiety and how it impacts the child/young person and their family, as well as the need for a school for academically able children with SEND. Parent carers also stressed the difficulties involved with moving from a three tier to two tier education system. Children are also repeatedly being put on, or left on, part-time timetables. A number of parents highlighted the missed diagnosis of, and support for, children and young people with Dyslexia.

### **Schools**

Parent carers report that their child/young person is not being supported by their mainstream school, with a real lack of special school places for those children who need them. Whilst some parents talked very positively about their child or young persons' school and/or the SENCO, which was positive to read, other parents raised concerns about their EHCP not being delivered in the school, the lack of support from their school, and not feeling listened to. The word 'not inclusive' in the word cloud represents parents' dissatisfaction with the support mainstream school is providing. We will be working with Central Bedfordshire Council later this year on ordinarily available provision for schools.

### **School Transport Team**

Parent carers are reporting they are not being paid parental mileage on time (by the Transport team). Others are concerned the Transport team and the SEND Team are not communicating with each other about school transport issues, despite being part of the same local authority.

### **Mental Health provision**

Lack of support for mental health conditions was consistently raised as an issue by parent carers, with not enough awareness and support across the board. Parent carers are being left trying to manage their child's self-harming behaviours and not being provided with any support.

We met with Central Bedfordshire SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service) to discuss the results of our survey, so we could understand what their organisation was experiencing supporting parents. This in turn helps us to triangulate what our parents told us. We would like to thank SENDIASS for providing us with their feedback.

### **Key themes and trends from SENDIASS feedback given in June 2023 include:**

- Commissioned services for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT)/ Occupational Therapy (OT) seem to be almost non-existent at present.
- The SEND team do not seem to know how to refer into Social Care - a multiagency approach is meant to be used at panels, including Social Care but we have a very strong feeling Social Care are not part of the Education Health Care Needs



Assessment (EHCNA) panels. It is unlawful to put "not known to social care" on Education Health Care Plans, yet we are still seeing this.

- Another theme involves a lack of communication/support around Annual Reviews between the SEND team & schools/no co-ordination or checking correct information has been sent before amending etc – there appears to be a reactive approach when parents challenge rather than a pro-active approach.
- Communication in general is a huge concern. Parent carers are not getting responses to emails or calls. Parent carers feel that they are not heard or the issues they are raising are not addressed, even when they do complain.
- Parent carers feel there is a lack of SEND law knowledge in the SEND team, regarding timeframes, lawfully written plans etc. They do not feel they are receiving the correct advice on the change of school placements process. The SEND Team is sending parent carers to SENDIASS to help them choose the best school, which SENDIASS cannot do. SENDIASS are often left to review Education Health Care Plans with parents and then to send amendments to the SEND team to review, rather than being offered a co-production meeting.
- There is a further lack of co-production, with parent carers not being told panel dates, or the outcome of panels. Similarly, they are not being told what schools are being consulted with or the outcomes of consultations. Decisions are being made without parental involvement or the child/young person's voice.
- School consultations are taking over 15 days and are then just on-going. Parents are left waiting with no response, not knowing what the outcomes of consultations are or when/if they will get these.
- There are often huge delays in awaiting in a response from panel. SENDIASS are worried the SEND Team are not getting the consultations back in time for panel and there is a lack of communication around this for parents.
- When it comes to Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) – parent carers are having to source and cost EOTAS packages themselves often without support and prepare this in a timetable/plan for panel.
- SENDIASS continue to report a high number of parent carers going to tribunals. The most common reasons include issues with Section B/F and I of their child/young person's EHCP. Parent carers are coming to them after Central Bedfordshire Council have Refused to Assess (RTA) their child/young person for an EHCP. Two cases have gone all the way to tribunal. However, the judge overturned them both, as each case met the legal test for an Educational Health Care Needs Assessment. The Local Authority are not meeting court ordered, tribunal deadlines. Central Bedfordshire Council are not managing appeals, not meeting response times, and are not engaging with parent carers who are trying to resolve things. Everything feels very last minute for parent carers navigating tribunals, including late notice adjournments by Central Bedfordshire Council, some on the morning of the tribunal – the impact this has on the child/young person and their families is huge. This is a very emotive time for them, could these adjournments not be sought earlier?

- Parent carers are consistently questioning the quality of the Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) they receive. Outcomes are not SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time Bound) in Section E. Section F not specified and quantified. Section F does not include the right provision to meet the child/young persons need included in Section B. Section B also often contains historical information, which has since changed.
- Parent carers are questioning whether the waiting lists for schools are real and how do you get your child/young person onto these waiting lists.
- Where families have English as an Additional Language (EAL) parent carers are saying that the SEND team are not adapting their child/young person's Educational Health Care Plans, Educational Psychology reports and other documents/emails via a translator. SENDIASS are concerned as parents are not fully informed and this is a reasonable adjustment that should be made for them.
- Lastly SENDIASS report there continues to be a big concern from parent carers that their child/young person needs a specialist provision, yet they are having to attend a mainstream school because the places aren't available, with many on reduced timetables, or school refusing.

## Reflections from SNAP PCF Steering Group, how can we improve the situation?

### **EHCP Audit**

Central Bedfordshire Council has implemented an EHCP Audit. SNAP PCF insisted that old EHC plans as well as new plans were audited, this was agreed. We also asked that the professional reports that underpin each EHCP be included within the audit process, as an EHCP will only be as good as the reports included within it; this was also implemented. This was important to us because we were not prepared to undermine [the report](#), we have previously written about the EHCP audits. To date, 18 plans have been audited as a pilot, with SNAP PCF auditing four of these plans. The moderation of the audited EHCPs is due to take place in June 2023.

Going forward, the EHCP audit will then be repeated every quarter, with the number of plans being audited increasing to 50. In this way, the audit process should start to become embedded within the system and should begin to improve both the quality of the plans and the professional reports that inform them. We have consistently challenged Central Bedfordshire Council by highlighting that the audit pilot should have been carried out in the Autumn term of 2022 because of the number of plans that are being produced that are not specified or quantified; resulting in them not being delivered in school and the success of the plan not being properly measured.

### **Quality Assurance process**

SNAP PCF have asked Central Bedfordshire Council to review the parental feedback obtained from the 'Meet the Director' sessions that took place after the OFSTED/CQC inspection at the end of 2020, to measure what improvements parents have seen or any decline in services that they have experienced.

We have also asked Central Bedfordshire Council to share information and themes of complaints made about the SEND service, and to look at several case studies, to see where things have gone wrong, learn from positive cases, and see what could have been done differently. Although this is being touched upon through the Delivering Better Values (DBV) work and the EHCP audit process, we would like a task and finish group created as part of a quality assurance process to further this work. We need to understand the reasons why parents continue to tell us how challenging their experiences are. Without this understanding, we cannot be confident that things will change for the better.

SNAP PCF previously helped to write the [Quality Assurance Framework](#). However, we now understand that Central Bedfordshire Council is planning to update this framework and we would like to understand what quality assurance process is currently being used.

### **The SEND Team**

Our survey questions this time asked for feedback about Central Bedfordshire Council's 'EHCP Team' as previous surveys asking for feedback on the 'SEND Team' resulted in some parents confusing this with either their school's SEND team, or a health service SEND team. As a result, the Central Bedfordshire Council SEND Team were being either criticised or praised for issues and situations that did not relate to them.

For several years SNAP PCF has suggested that the 'SEND Team' be re-named as the 'EHC Team' to make it easier for families to understand what their remit is, and to ensure that any feedback about this team is accurate.

We have also suggested that SNAP PCF re-write all the SEND Team parent communication template letters, guidance, and information, to ensure that it is accurate, sensitive to the needs of children and families, and written in parent-friendly language. We would like these new documents to be branded using the Local Offer (LO) images, to ensure that SEND officers can easily recognise that documents which do not show the LO images are old and out-of-date and should not be used with families.

Linda Orr is now the new Head of Service for the SEND Team. Linda has agreed to our recommendations, and we will be working with her to implement these changes. We believe that rebranding the 'SEND Team' to the 'EHC Team' will help to give a fresh start to this team and help to begin a process of improvement in the experiences of parents and families.

We are also delivering coproduction training to the SEND Team. The Assistant Director of SEND Helen Phelan has also asked SNAP PCF to deliver the feedback from our survey to managers and the SEND Team, which is a welcome and positive change for us as a Parent Carer Forum.

### **Working from home**

Parents are raising many concerns about emails and phone messages not being responded to and being unable to get hold of their SEND officer. Since the pandemic, SEND officers now seem to work mainly from home. We understand that management can see when the laptops of SEND Officers are logged on, but that is as much monitoring as the technology allows. There is currently no infrastructure in place to record telephone calls for training and monitoring purposes.

Whilst there may be some benefits to staff working from home, many organisations have put technological infrastructure in place to enable them to measure the productivity of their staff. We feel that this is something that Central Bedfordshire Council needs to consider.

Working from home also means that officers who may be having challenging conversations with parents are doing so whilst being isolated from the rest of their team. Staff working together within an office environment have natural opportunities to off-load/de-brief with other staff, feel supported by management, and learn from one another as they see and hear others communicate and interact with children and families.

We also noticed from the parent feedback that there appears to be a high amount of sickness and staff turnover within the SEND Team. We would suggest that the human resources department analyse the exit interviews of previous staff over the last 12 months to look for common themes, to try and improve on sickness rates and staff retention.

### **Online system for tracking the EHCP process**

We have asked Central Bedfordshire Council to consider implementing a system for parent carers where they will be able to track their child/young person's EHC Needs Assessment, EHCP or Annual Review through an online portal. Parents will then be able to see what reports have been requested, when they arrive, and when they are actioned. Such a portal could be accessed by parent carers at a time that suits them and could also be used as a way of communicating with their child's SEND Officer. Being able to log-in and see what is happening will give parents more confidence in the process and allow them to know what to expect. Parents could clearly see the reasons for any delays and therefore reduce the need for parents to chase their SEND officer for information. This has previously been trialled with a few schools using a system called Jadu. We would ask Central Bedfordshire Council to consider implementing a system like this for the Education Health Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) and the Annual Review processes.

### **Guidance booklets for parent carers**

Parents tell us that they find it difficult to navigate the system and understand the process when they are applying for an Education, Health & Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), a phased transfer, or an Annual Review.

We would like Central Bedfordshire Council to work with SNAP PCF to produce guidance booklets that clearly set out the process and the legal time frames involved. We would also like to see this being done for school transport, the Early Help Team, and the Children with Disability Team.

## **Summary of Recommendations**

- Re-brand the SEND Team including re-naming to 'EHCP Team' and re-write parent communication documents using the Local Offer images on the paperwork.
- Ask Human Resources to analyze reasons for high staff turnover within the SEND Team.
- SNAP PCF to present the results of this survey to both senior management and the SEND Team.
- Record phone calls made by the SEND Team for quality and training purposes.
- An online tracker for the EHCP process.

- An up-to-date Quality Assurance process in place and monitored using SMART objectives. Include SNAP PCF in reviewing complaints and case studies to triangulate the data.
- Customer service training for the SEND Team.
- SNAP PCF to support coproduction training of the SEND Team.
- Welcome booklets for Education Health Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), phased transfer, and Annual Review.
- Meet parents, build relationships with them, and keep them updated.
- SENDIASS to deliver parent training on the EHCNA and Annual Review process.
- A review of all waiting times, including any our local charities have and the support families are receiving whilst they are waiting.
- A review of the current offer of Occupational Therapy (OT) and Speech and Language Therapy (SALT).
- A review of the 'Children with Disability' criteria.
- Ordinarily available provision for schools and a guide for parents similar to [Bristol LA](#)

### **Thank you**

We would like to thank the parent carers who took the time to complete our survey and thank them for all the support that they give our Parent Carer Forum. We are only as strong as the parents who wrap around us, champion us, and share with us their lived experiences. We will continue to listen to them, raise their concerns about local SEND services, and work with Central Bedfordshire Council, the Integrated Care Board, and our local health providers to find solutions.

### **Contact SNAP Parent Carer Forum**

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**Not for profit Community Interest Company registration no: 10658718**

**Link to our membership form**

**[Parent Carers](#)**

**[Professional/community](#)**