



SNAP PARENT CARER FORUM

CENTRAL BEDFORDSHIRE

Autumn 2023 Test the Temperature Survey Report

December 2023

Introduction

SNAP Parent Carer Forum – 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 and Autumn Term 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' (TTT) survey is to monitor how parent carer experience of the Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process has changed from collecting data in our surveys during November 2020, March 2022, June 2023, and December 2023 as well as measure any progress made. We are also tracing satisfaction levels with the Annual Review process of EHCPs between the 3rd April – 29th May in the Spring TTT Survey and again between 1st July and the 16th November 2023 in the Autumn TTT Survey.

This report reflects the voices of 225 parent carers who live within Central Bedfordshire who told us about their experiences of the EHCP process between April – November 2023. Responses to our Autumn 'Test the Temperature' Survey were collected from the 1st July 2023 to the 16th November 2023.

This Autumn 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 although there had been progress made in all six areas of weakness (from the full SEND Inspection in 2019), there had not been sufficient improvement made 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 reviewed the '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 the poor communication levels of the EHC Team. Please note throughout this report the majority of parents will refer to the SEND Team, although this department has been renamed as the EHC Team, which is what we will be stating throughout our report.

Overall satisfaction of the EHCP process and communication with the SEND Team

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 November 2023?

Overall satisfaction rate: 24% November 2023

Overall satisfaction rate: 32% May 2023

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: 26% November 2023

Overall satisfaction rate: 30% May 2023

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

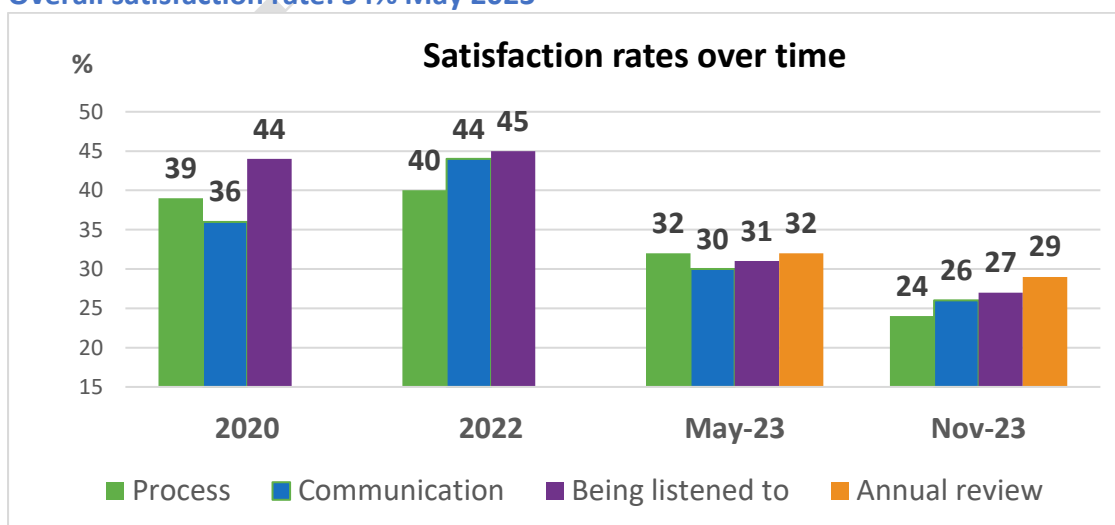
Overall satisfaction rate: 27% November 2023

Overall satisfaction rate: 31% May 2023

Were you satisfied with the Annual Review process during 2023?

Overall satisfaction rate: 29% November 2023

Overall satisfaction rate: 34% May 2023



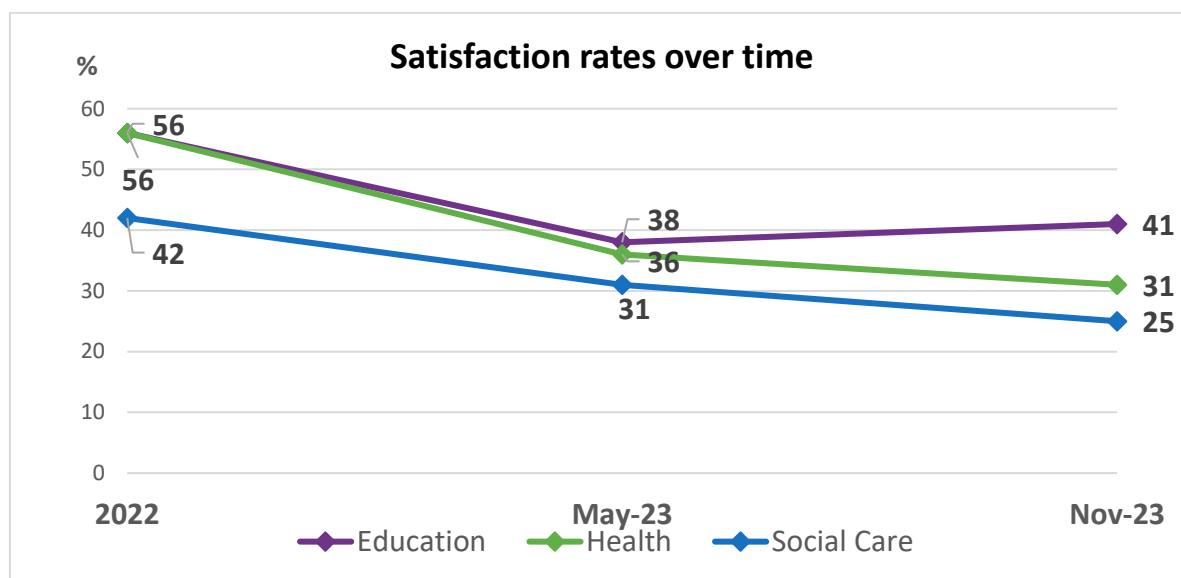
Base: 2020 n=636; 2022 n=498; May 2023 n=537; Nov 2023 n=225

A minority of parents are satisfied with the EHCP process and EHC team communication. November's satisfaction scores are similar to those from May of this year and the indication is that satisfaction is continuing to decrease across all areas.

Satisfaction with Education, Health, and Social Care services

We also tested parent's overall satisfaction with Education, Health, and Social Care services for their child by asking the following question (This question has been included since 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?



Base: 2022 n=xxx; May 2023 n=537; Nov 2023 n=225

Satisfaction with both Health and Social Care is low and looks to be continuing to decrease. Satisfaction with Education is still low but has not decreased since May and is notably higher than that for Social Care and Health.

Test the Temperature, November 2023 – Main Report

This report sets out the experiences of the parent carers who completed our Autumn 'Test the Temperature' survey. In a change to the way we have previously analysed this survey data, we have also 'coded' the open text responses into themes. This has allowed us to quantify the thoughts and feeling expressed by parent carers, creating an even more objective analysis of the issues than in previous years.

As part of our analysis, we have included our Steering Groups reflections and recommendations for Central Bedfordshire Council and our Health services to consider.

Here are a few quotes from parent carers that capture the main findings from the autumn temperature check:

What parents told us

"You get a diagnosis then no support other than here are some websites to look at"

"Communication is very poor and very slow"

"Started brilliantly until the key contact left"

"There is no accountability for decisions taken"

"Really traumatic experience, the more I fought back the more victimized I felt, not child centered at all"

"Parents have to beg, plead, and fight for support. Our children deserve better"

"Cannot get hold of the SEND Team, they do not reply to phone messages or emails, they have no concern for deadlines"

"I felt we were listened to. I feel the problem lies with funding and resources"

"Absolutely demoralizing dealing with the SEND Team. Uncommunicative, unprofessional, & frankly negligent"

Detailed Analysis

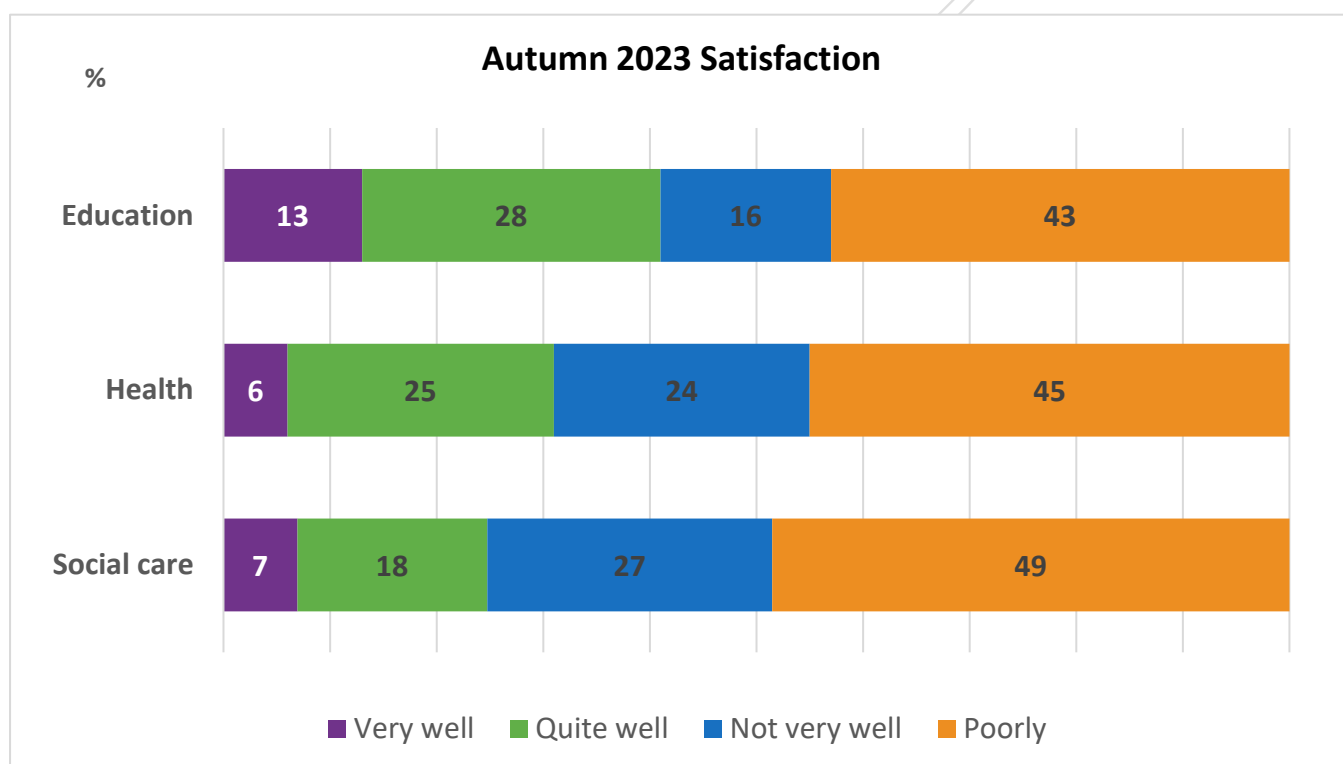
Response Breakdown

Of the 225 parent carers who responded to the survey, 201 shared the age of their child or young person(s): 10 0–4-year-olds; 76 4–10-year-olds; 114 11–17-year-olds and 10 18 -25-year-olds.

Of the 225 responses 137 came via SNAP PCF; 45 from links on social media and 38 from other sources (5 respondents didn't answer this question).

Satisfaction with broader service provision for children & young people with SEND

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?

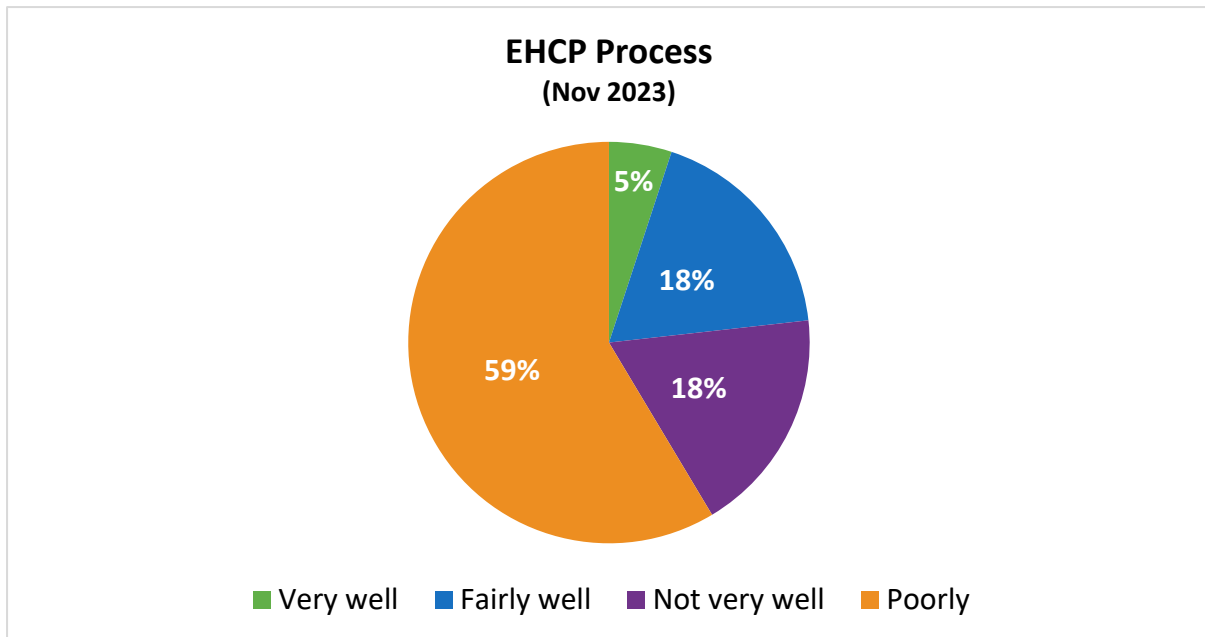


Base: N=106 comments

There are significant proportions of parent carers rating all three services as poor. However, as we mentioned earlier, satisfaction with Education is higher than that for Health and Social Care. While there was no specific question asking why parent carers gave the satisfaction scores they did, it should be noted that there were a handful of positive comments about the role of schools in the Annual Review process and more generally. There were also negative comments about the broader multi agency provision for children and young people with SEND. Examples of these comments can be found in later sections of this report.

EHCP Process

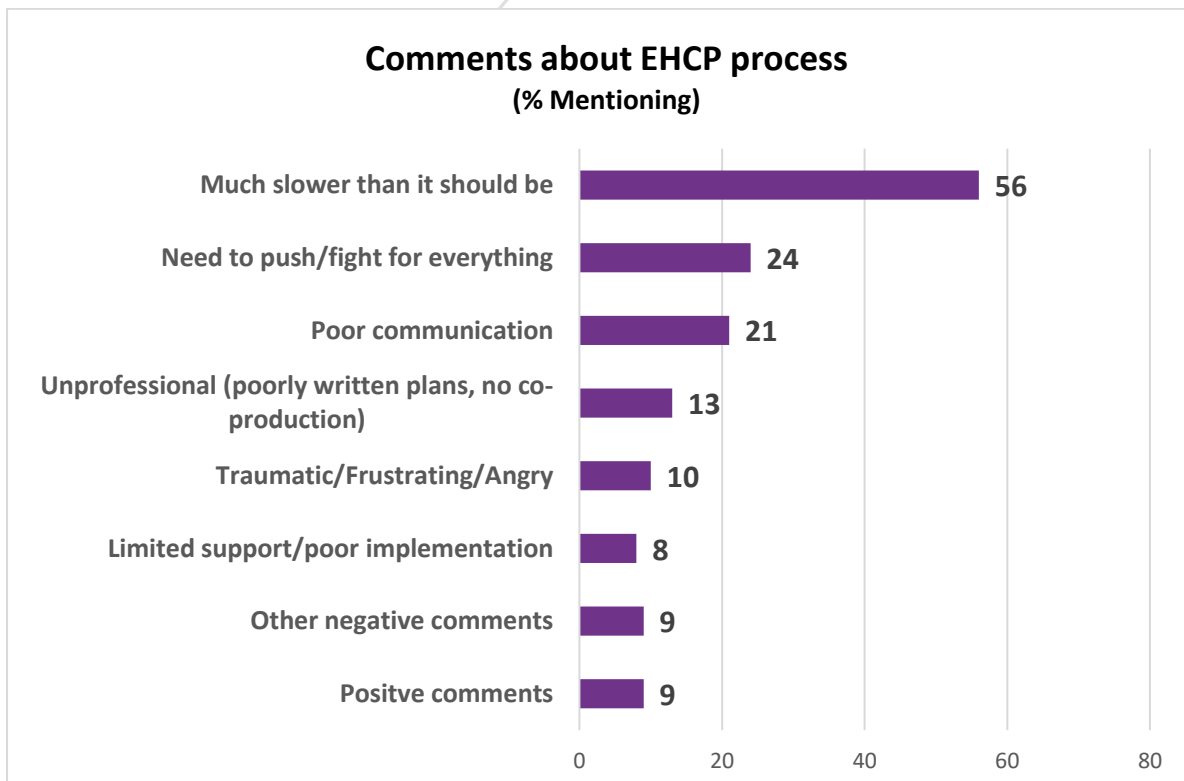
How would you describe your overall experience of the Education, Health & Care Plan Process?



Base: n=201

76% rated their **experience of the EHCP process** as 'not very well' or 'poorly'.

Reasons for poor satisfaction with the **EHCP process** are shown in the chart below.



Base: N=106 comments

The key issue raised is around the speed of the process and this is with respect to the initial assessment, the creation of the plan itself and subsequent reviews. Some parent carers went further and felt that the process is deliberately slow in design, overly complicated and potentially unlawful.

“Annual review amendments took nearly 7 months to come back now we are at review stage again! EHCNA declined despite overwhelming evidence. Just more shoddy delay tactics from the LA!”

“Very late (nearly a year since AR and no final plan).”

“Ridiculous process, difficult, time consuming, you need to be a solicitor to get things into the plan you actually need for your child and then once it comes to review time, they streamline which means crossing out all the important bits.”

“It took 18 months to get in the first place and this year it was reviewed in March but not finalised until November!!”

“Time scales, what's the point of law????”

The second biggest issue is around the feeling that parent carers have to chase and fight for everything. The process appears to be antagonistic and the only way to get a satisfactory outcome is to fight, and in some cases go to the SEND tribunal. There is a sense that those with more time, determination and skills are more likely to get a satisfactory outcome.

“It was an awful battle but got the desired outcome, eventually.”

“Lengthy, constant battling - targets not SMART, had major errors such as in full control of body movements for a child that has seizures and can need a wheelchair.”

“Took over 12 months to get final EHCP from reassessment and then only because I made a formal complaint. Customer services haven't bothered to get back to me either. Again. The complaints system isn't fit for purpose.”

“Complaints process is a joke. Their preference is to let Tribunal or the LGO deal with it rather than have a mature professional dialogue. The team are unwilling to admit they are wrong”

Poor communication around the process is also mentioned by many, a combination of a lack of communication from the EHC team and the EHC team not responding to queries. We will discuss this further in the next section on Communication.

“Communication is very poor and very slow. Questions not being answered directly. Parents being gaslighted.”

“No communication in months and EHCP not finalised after review 10 months ago!”

“Annual review took 4 months. No communication from SEND team.”

“Poor communication, taken longer than 20 weeks”

“Had to keep making formal complaints all of which have been ignored by the complaints process”

Some parent carers also cited a lack of professionalism on the part of the EHC team relating to poorly written plans and not following the process properly. Others highlighted the negative emotional impact of the process, talking about frustration, anger, and trauma.

“School and council are looking at different headings in Section B. Section F not SMART.”

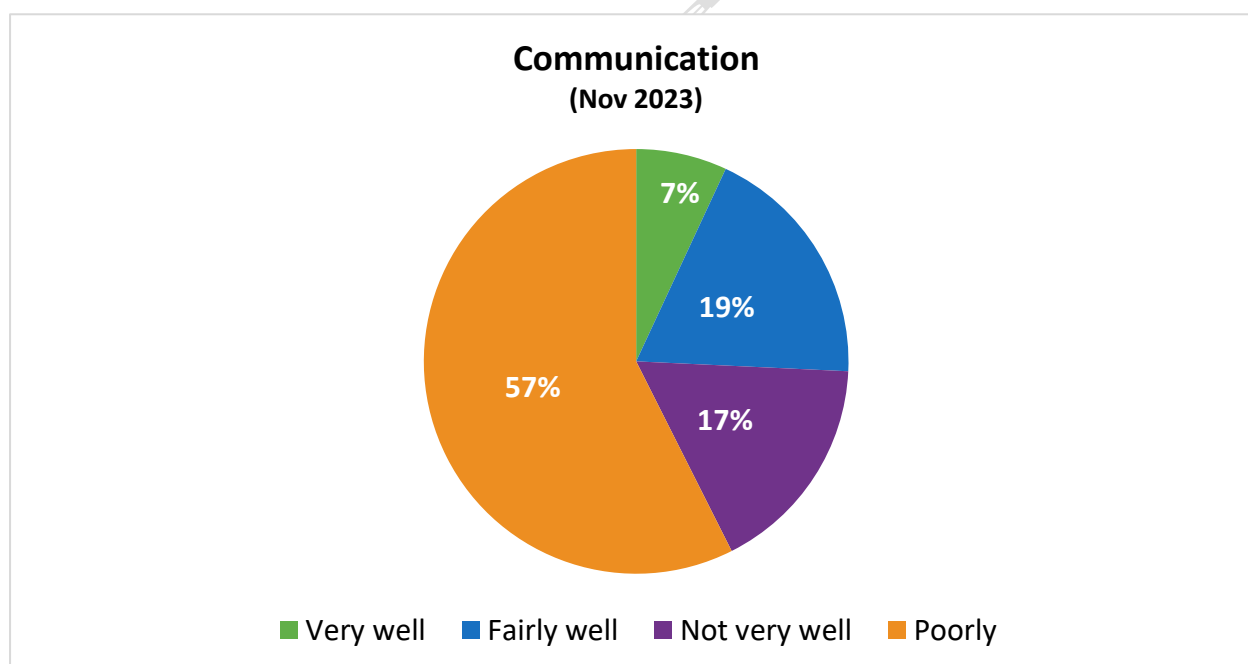
“Out of date information passing blame from person to person.”

“Attended EHCP Masterclass training myself to ensure my child’s EHCP was correctly written! CBC seem only capable of producing cut and paste copies, not making objectives SMART and not documenting what was agreed in Mediation in the plans!”

“Late, poorly written, mistakes.”

Communication

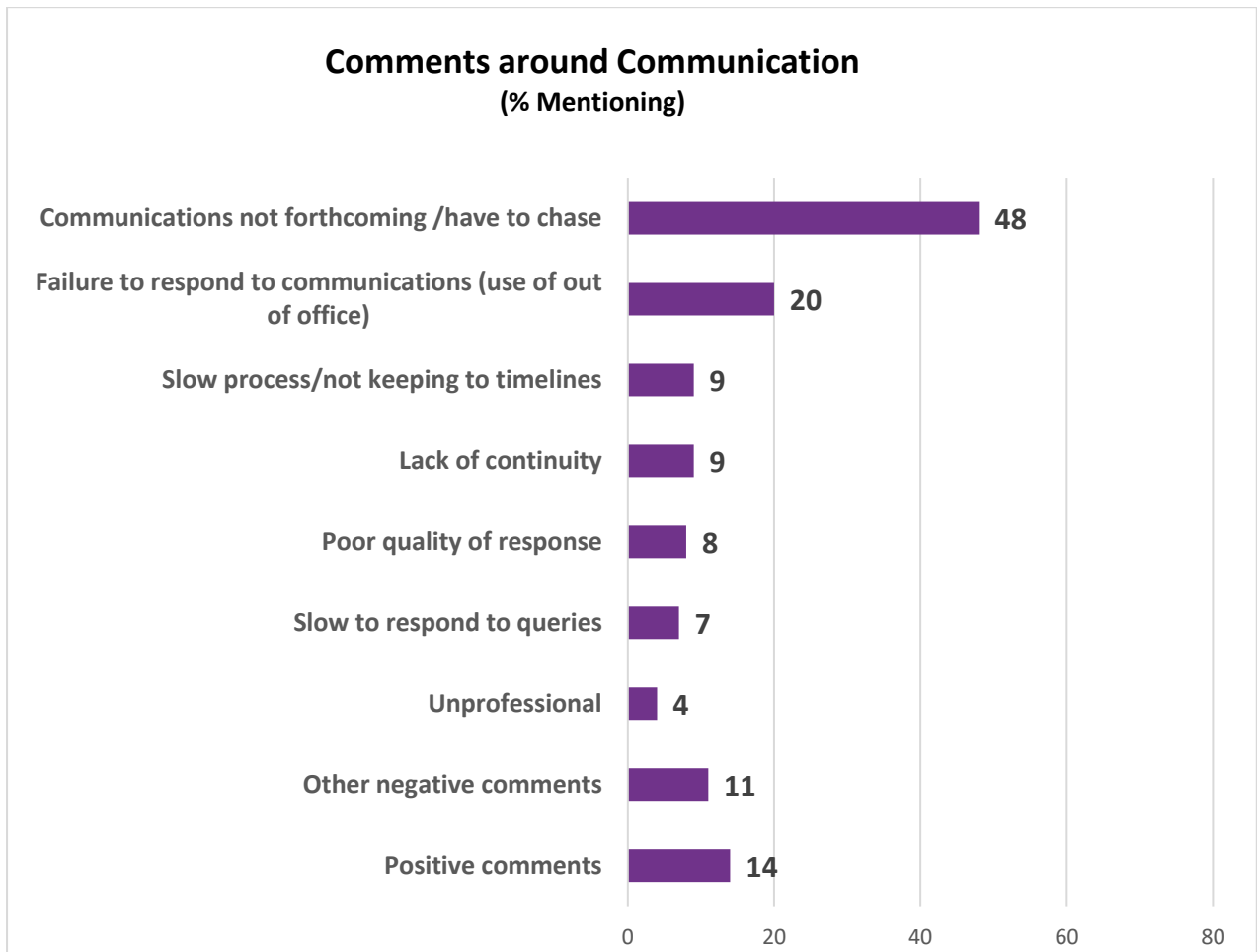
How well have Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team communicated with you and kept you up to date with your child's/young person's Education, Health & Care Plan?



Base: n=200

75% rated **Communication** as 'not very well' or 'poorly'.

The reasons for this poor satisfaction level with **communication** are shown in the chart below.



Base: N=91 comments

There are two main issues that parent carers have with communications. Firstly, regarding the outgoing communication of the EHC Team. Around half of comments related to a lack of communication on the part of the EHC Team. There is clearly an expectation from parent carers that there should be updates on what's happening with their 'case', even if there is nothing substantial happening. The comments suggest that 'the need to chase everything', the 'slow process' and 'not keeping to timeline's is causing frustration which in turn is having a negative impact on their relationship with the EHC Team.

"Communication what's that?"

"No updates at all since it was issued. No idea when it will be reviewed or the process for review."

"Hardly any contact, had to constantly chase."

"My daughter's school deals with it, have heard nothing from CBC."

"There has been zero contact with the EHC team since they attempted to cease my son's Plan without a meeting to discuss, whilst he was still in full time education. There has been zero input, zero support from any department. Quite frankly I don't have the energy right now to write yet another complaint."

“Have to chase every time! The last annual review meeting was December 2022, but EHCP not finalised until May 2023. We did receive a timely email to say the EHCP would be updated in January (which was good), but then heard nothing for months, until I chased.”

The other element of communication that comes through strongly is the failure of the EHC Team to respond to communications in a timely manner. The use of ‘Out of Office’ email messages was mentioned by several parent carers, even though in some cases they believe the team member to be at work. These types of comment demonstrate the scepticism with which the EHC Team is viewed by many parent carers and points towards trust in the service being eroded.

“Never respond unless I have repeatedly chased for an answer, and sometimes not at all.”

“Just dreadful, they don’t bother responding to emails or phone calls!”

“They avoid all emails or calls like it’s their job to avoid communicating.”

“They normally switch their emails to say they are away whenever they are contacted. There’s no accountability for decisions taken.”

“Put not applicable because zero communication can’t be counted as poor. Leaders of the service can’t even be bothered to respond to emails. Not even sure why they are there.”

“They’re never there and out of offices are always on. They never answer in a timely manner, and they act unlawfully a lot.”

A lack of continuity was also raised as an issue. There were concerns regarding poor communication around staff changes, who the main point of contact should be and failure to handover cases properly.

“Very high turnover of team. Not even sure who my contact is now. Very poor communication with myself and each other in my experience.”

“There have been 3 changes of staff in the last year. The SEND team “moved from drop box to Microsoft and lost [our] data”! Had to restart EHC process again from scratch.”

“Apart from being advised last minute when send officers are leaving. Failure of new send officer to make contact until 3 months later.”

“They do what they do and don’t listen to families, refuse OT and SALT assessments. Never speak to the same person twice.”

“Our case got ‘lost’ at the end of August beginning of September 2023 due to change of staffing and no handover - until we pushed and then got a few standard replies until we got passed to someone else.”

Poor quality of response has also been an issue for some parent carers.

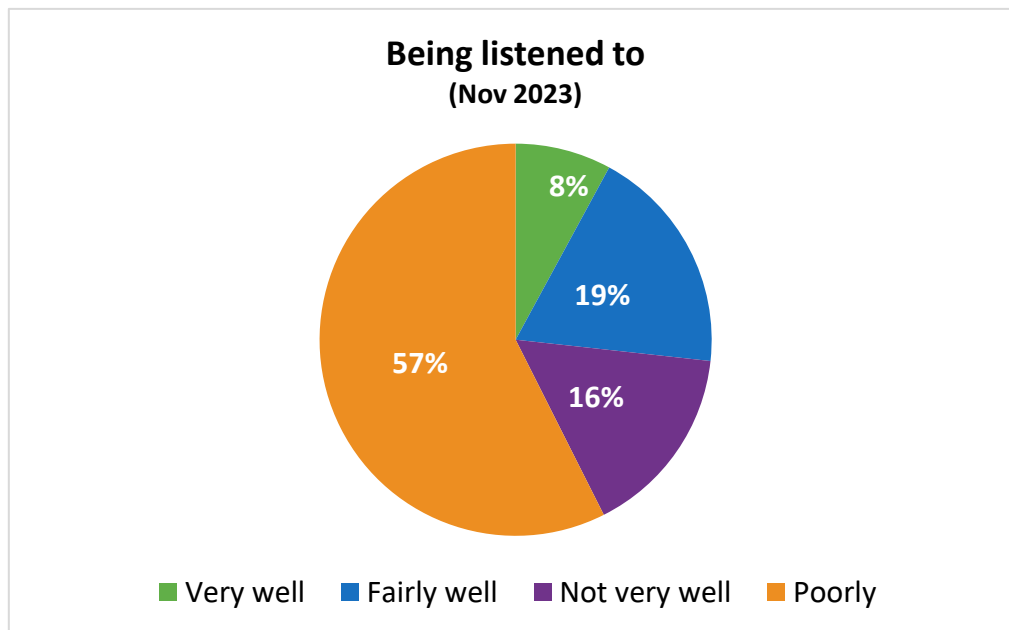
“Information is vague. When you ask more questions half of them get overlooked.”

"I asked for an urgent EHCP review and was told to just speak to the college. My child is close to dropping out."

"Had to chase for an acknowledgement letter and our daughter's name is spelt incorrect on a number of occasions."

Feeling listened to

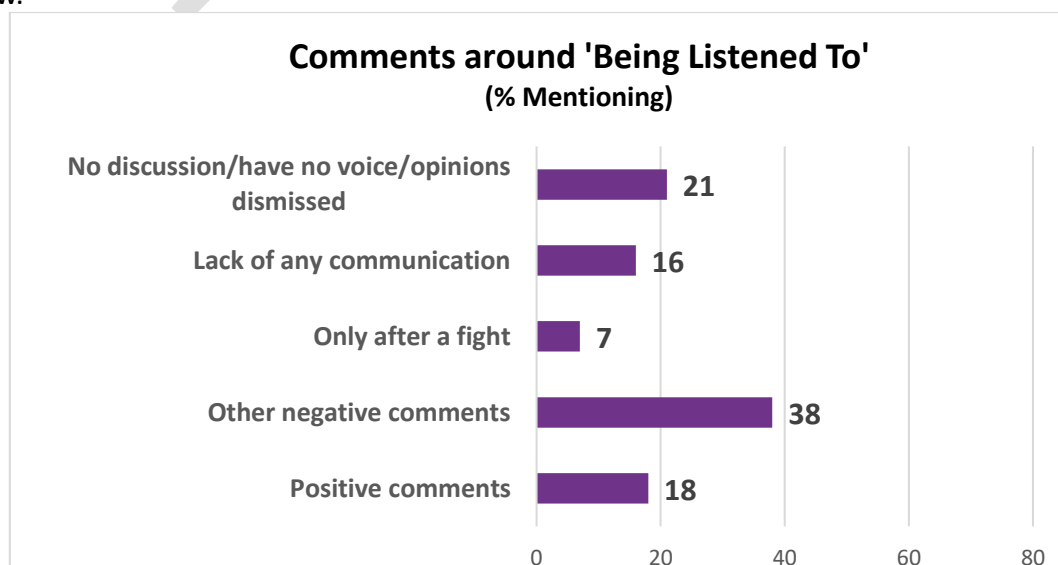
To what extent have you felt listened to by the Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team?



Base: n=200

74% rated **'feeling listened to'** as 'not very well' or 'poorly'.

The reasons for this poor satisfaction around **feeling listened to** are shown in the chart below.



Base: N=68 comments

A broad range of comments were made around satisfaction with feeling listened to. Some parent carers are clearly happy that they are being listened to and made positive comments about their experience.

"I felt we were listened to. I feel the problem lies in funding and resources."

"All staff we have encountered my daughter and I feel listened to and heard our story and our need for support. XXX was excellent as was our Coordinator XX. They took all my concerns on board and worked hard to achieve the best results for my daughter."

"With current Post 16 situation SEND officer has been very supportive."

"I didn't feel heard to begin with but now I feel they listen to me."

The main negative themes are around a complete lack of communication and a complete lack of regard for the views and opinions of parent carers.

"I can't get through to speak to anyone. I think the officer who was dealing with my child's case must have left. Can't even leave a message on the team phone number - tells me to try again in 15 minutes."

"I feel I have been "talked at" rather than being listened to."

"They don't listen just make us fight and say no all the time!"

"They don't listen at all. This is my second time around and they are worse than they were before but still horrendous!"

"Not at all, my son clearly has needs over and above the SEN capabilities of the school. Feel dismissed and the officer was like a politician not answering the questions put to her and then contradicting herself the mediation was abysmal."

Some parent carers talked about only getting listened to once they put up a fight.

"Only listened when it became apparent that I would not go away."

"The only way they talk to me is by making a formal complaint."

"After a number of emails and chases they have started to listen. "

Other comments also paint a more general negative picture of the EHC Team.

"I feel they partially listened because of my professional background. I don't think they would have at all otherwise."

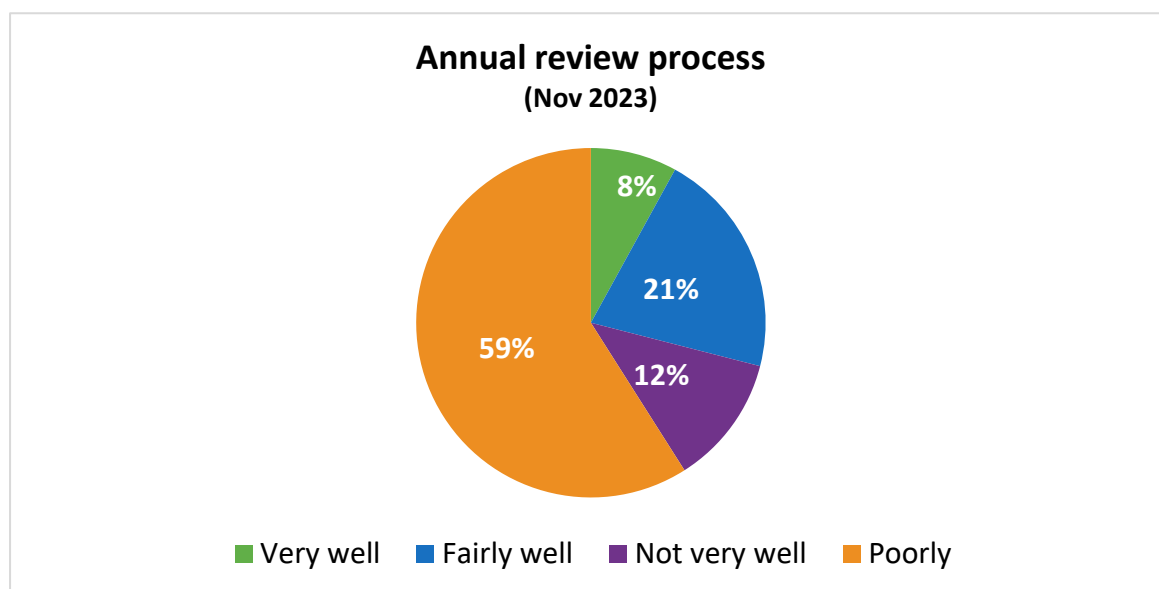
"Arrogant and out of touch."

"Felt they have very, if not no time for you."

"I need a stronger word than poorly. I have never EVER been treated so badly by another human being let alone what they have done to my child. TRAUMATISING and no one has a clue what they are doing. They made the situation worse rather than better, denied any support despite have reports of need."

Annual Review

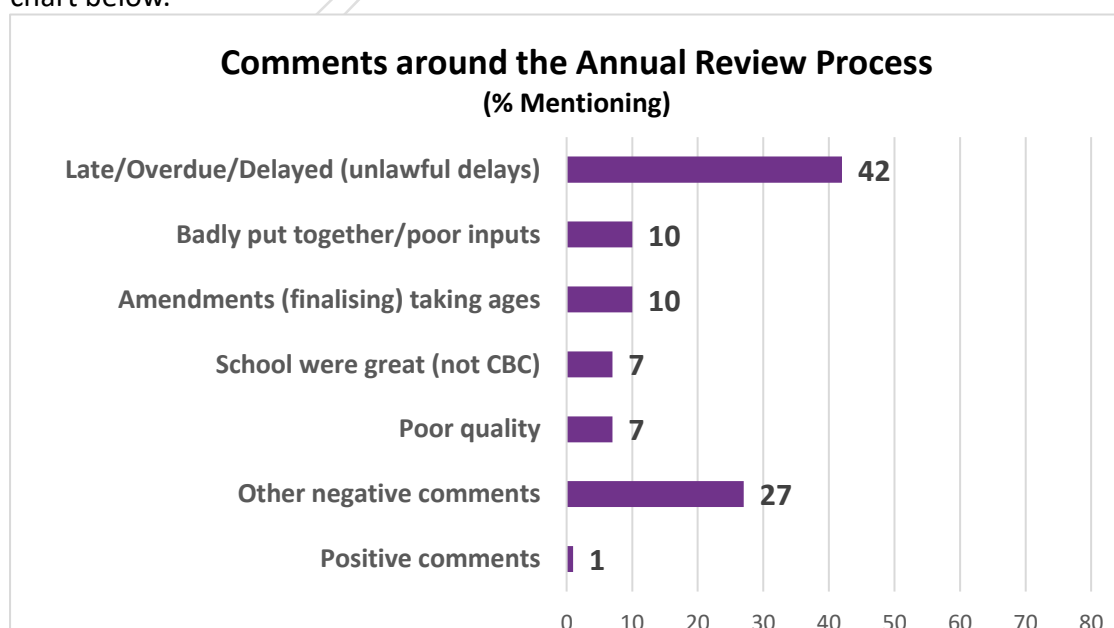
Were you satisfied with the Annual Review process when this was last completed as of November 2023?



Base: n=148

71% rated **the Annual Review process** 'not very well' or 'poorly'. There are no notable differences in experience by age of child or young person.

The reasons for this poor satisfaction with the **Annual Review process** are shown in the chart below.



Base: N=67 comments

The majority of comments relate to issues with the EHC Team not adhering to statutory guidelines and timescales for Annual Reviews. Even when completed some parent carers talk about issues with amendments taking a very long time.

“First annual review was late and resulting paperwork even later. We received a notification of agreement to amend but no draft with it (unlawful, case law on this).”

“Not had one in two years.”

“School submitted their EHCP to CBC in June 2023. EHCP renewal was supposed to be JANUARY 2023. We are aware this is unlawful.”

“It’s been fine, aside from taking months for amended drafts.”

“Late have to chase always.”

“Haven’t had a new plan or had any contact from Sen team or school since he started in Sept 21.”

“This was due 4 months ago and hasn’t been done.”

“The education placement did their best, but we are now 6 months later and 6 months before the next review and it is not finalised.”

There were also a significant number of comments about the contributions to the review being of poor quality and the review itself being poor quality.

“Delays and EHCP remains of poor quality.”

“No, very poor. I’m fed up with telling the SEND how to do their jobs!”

“The school have been great. However, CBC sent me a letter informing me of their intention to ‘amend’ the EHCP. The only thing correct in the standard letter was my name, every other ‘variable’ field was incorrect or contained the details of another child. - a breach of GDPR. I asked for a revised letter, to date this has not been received.”

There were a broad range of more general negative comments around very specific cases.

“In 2022 yes - changes were accepted. This year no. Reviewed by someone who has never met my son, yet they have the power to not make changes to a plan reviewed by people involved in his care.”

“No support given at annual review. CBC have never wanted to meet my child where they are at. Requested dyslexia trained tutor and was told there are none and I could choose between 2 options in person or online (online doesn't work for child's needs) as EHCP did not support child's dyslexia needs.”

“NO. last school refused to meet needs and withdrew support citing staff issues. They would not agree to add reasonable adjustments to the EHCP, and that is why we had to move

school. Desperately need specialist placement, but there is not a local one. LA eventually closed the last EHCP knowing it was incorrect and would not meet need. The promise of a co-production did not happen. New School admits they cannot meet need TWICE, and now want to prosecute us for non-attendance."

Some parent carers did make some positive comments about their school's role in the annual review process.

"School, SENDIASS and I did the review that went well, but 3 months later we are still waiting."

"The supporting SENDCO was very helpful but EHC team input not good, sorry to say and I am nervous to speak out for fear of reprisal when it comes to getting any support for my young person."

"The school dealt with the review and did a brilliant job. CBC did not attend and have not been in contact."

Parent carers feelings about support and/or services for their child

What one or two words would you use, to sum up how you currently feel about support and/or services for your child or young person with Special Educational Needs in Central Bedfordshire?

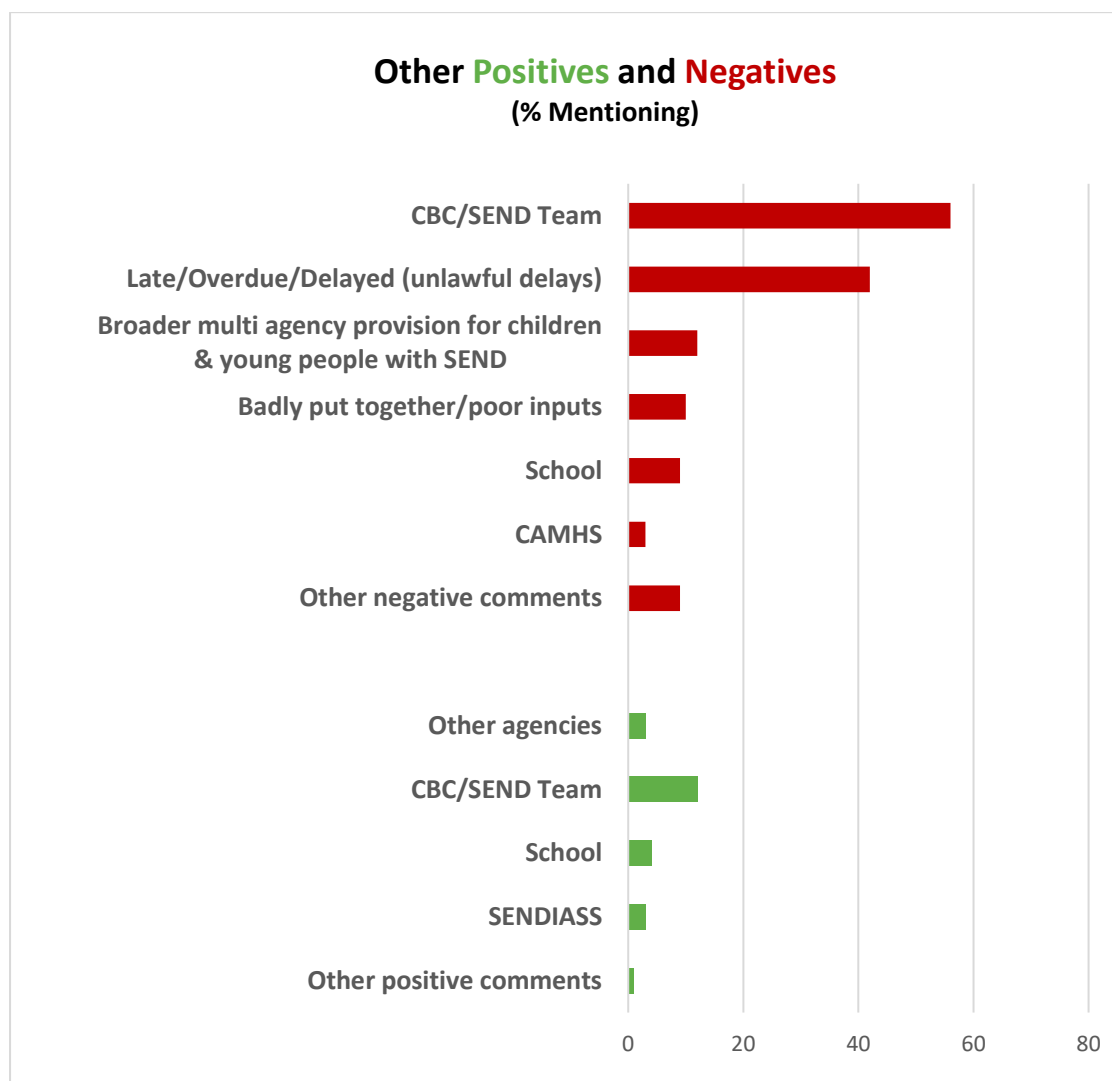
The word cloud below is a visual representation of the word data collected, with the increasing frequency of each word being represented by a larger font.

The language used by parent carers highlights their feelings.



Other positive/negative experiences with local SEND services

Is there anything else, positive, or negative, that you'd like to tell us about? e.g. Your experience of the services and support available to you as a family of a Child/Young person with SEND.



Base: N=137 comments

The additional negative comments from parent carers focus primarily on the EHC team and associated processes and outputs and have already been covered in previous sections of the report.

A significant number of parent carers did take issue with the overall provision for children and young people with SEND in the area with a lack of cohesion between different agencies and departments.

“Pushed from pillar to post with every agency referring to another and doing nothing in the meantime.”

“You get a diagnosis then no support other than here are some websites to look at.”

“My children were discriminated for their disabilities. Child has lost his education from age of 11 due to direct wilful neglect from all professionals involved. children services, local hospital with wrong medical professional and school.”

“Having an undiagnosed neurodivergent child who has demand avoidance/ turning to mental health issues... no services want to support and keep getting pushed from “pillar to post” and they are now just blaming MH issues which this may haven’t been an issue with the correct neurodivergent diagnosis in place!”

“For the duration of waiting for 2 refusals to assess and a tribunal date, mental health declined considerably and self-harming again.”

Other parent carers have had negative experiences from schools, with schools failing to meet their child or young person’s needs and deliver their EHCP plan.

“As a disabled parent, my health conditions have worsened due to the stress and anxiety placed upon us from CBC and school.”

“My son has recently transferred to secondary from his primary school - given his EHCP I would have expected a more thorough Transition process than he received.”

“Nothing on his EHCP plan was met in his last year of education. It was a nightmare start to finish. He began self-harming, and they called his autism a disease! This was from the person in college who was supposed to be helping him.”

“Now that we have a place in an autistic provision things have improved immeasurably. SEND support in Mainstream was useless. I can't understand why mainstream say that they can deliver the EHCP. They were unable to give the support required. There was no communication and much apathy.”

There were a small handful of negative comments about the service provided by CAMHS specifically.

“CAMHS Crisis Team that don’t answer calls or send you to A and E with hours before the CAMHS crisis person is meant to stop covering A and E to be told after hours of waiting sorry they have gone home.”

“Why are assessments not prioritised based on the need and current impact on mental health and on education.”

“Waiting lists are unacceptable. All support is very generic, and it is very difficult to get advice if your child does not fit a typical neurodiverse profile. Exhausted from trying to scrabble through this.”

There were also a small handful of negative comments about the services provided by Bedfordshire Community Health Services.

“Access to the Edwin Lobo Centre for a diagnosis has been very slow. Currently waiting 3 months just for them to accept or reject a referral.”

“My son has been on the waiting list for over a year. I rang during the summer to check where he was on the waiting list. Response was they didn’t know and couldn’t tell me how much longer to see a paediatrician. His anxiety has hit a real high, why can’t they deal with this whilst it is still manageable, things will get so bad they will have to help.”

“Not happy with the post-diagnosis service from Edwin Lobo centre. Workshop didn’t teach me anything new and I am still chasing for the post-diagnosis follow up appointment with the Specialist Nursing Team. Tried to get a health visitor to help but they didn’t know who the team were – never heard of them. Will we ever get seen? What does an appointment even cover?!”

There are some positive comments about the work of the EHC team which underline that they also provide a good service to some parent carers.

“I feel that although the whole process was hard it was made easier by the staff who helped us.”

“I’ve been pleasantly surprised by the process after hearing all the horror stories. The former case worker was so diligent, but things have unfortunately slipped a bit since she left.”

“Everyone I speak to and have spoken to has been knowledgeable and helpful. There just isn’t enough of them to cope with the number of children. But this is a wider problem than here.”

“The new Senior SEND Officer working with us knows their stuff when they do respond.”

“I found our SEND Officer to be very helpful and she really tried to do her best by us”

“it has been an arduous process due to the nature of it, but it has also been very smooth. We were kept well informed throughout the whole process and given realistic expectations. The staff who we encountered as part of the assessment process were excellent. They really listened and summarised my daughters needs well.

Schools and their SENCOs also get praise from a small number of parent carers.

“We are lucky we had very supportive SENDCo at the middle school and the upper school. CBC have no time to attend annual reviews or even amend the EHC plan.”

“All things negative from the process, however the professionals we see via the assessment were great and school have been amazingly supportive.”

“The school have been incredibly supportive and we’re preparing for transition to secondary school in 2024.”

Reflections from SNAP PCF Steering Group

SNAP PCF commissioned a Data Analyst to review the answers to this survey and to group the parent carer responses into themes which we hope has helped to explain the reasons why there continues to be a decline in parent satisfaction levels. We made

recommendations from the Spring 'Test the Temperature Survey' (May 2023), Central Bedfordshire Council created an [action plan](#), which was signed off in October 2023 and uploaded onto the Local Offer website in December 2023. We will continue to work together to complete the actions.

The local area has three areas of weakness that are being monitored by the Department for Education and NHS England as part of their [Accelerated Progress Plan](#). They did not show enough progress in the following three areas after the November 2019 [OFSTED/CQC Area SEND inspection](#).

1. Existing Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHC Plans) are not of sufficient quality to ensure that the needs of children and young people are identified and met.
2. Leaders do not have sufficient oversight of the quality of new EHC Plans.
3. Area leaders in education, health and care do not have a shared understanding of the outcomes they want for children and young people with SEND.

There has been a considerable rise in the number of EHCPs within Central Bedfordshire in recent years. From September 2017 to September 2023, Central Bedfordshire has experienced an almost 94% increase in EHC plans. This compares to 65% nationally. However, it must be noted that between 2014 and 2017, the percentage rate of EHCPs was much lower than our statistical neighbours and the national average.

In addition, the complexity of need in Central Bedfordshire has broadened and there has been a huge house-building programme. Unsurprisingly, those additional houses would bring additional needs within the local area, this is before we have factored in the detrimental impact to some of our children that Covid has caused, early identification of needs and putting early intervention in place is vitally important.

The number of pupils with an EHCP maintained by Central Bedfordshire Council is forecast to increase significantly during the 2020s, from approximately 2100 in Autumn 2021 (Reception to Year 14) to over 3500 by January 2024 and over 4000 by January 2030. This is being driven by a combination of population growth and the rising needs of children and young people with SEND.

Central Bedfordshire Council has committed considerable funding to the EHC Team, which has grown significantly of late. This has been necessary to keep up with the significant increase in demand. From having one head of service, and one manager with approximately nine staff when the area SEND inspection took place in November 2019, this team now consists of one head of service, four managers, and 29 staff. It is evident that the under-resourcing of the EHC Team (SEND Team) has had a detrimental impact on the work of the service over time with high rates of turnover of staff. This has had an impact on the consistency of the service.

However, despite the recent increase in staffing levels, communication continues to remain an issue for parent carers and declines every time we measure this. We need to understand how many staff it would take to see improvements in this team and how they are being measured. Some officers from the EHC Team receive consistently positive feedback from parent carers, and some parents build really positive relationships with their EHC officer. Parent carers talk about how worrying it is when that person leaves the service as they feel

left adrift and have to start again whilst hoping the next member of staff will be supportive, knowledgeable and communicate effectively.

Over a four-year period since the OFSTED/CQC Area SEND Inspection SNAP PCF has been highlighting that communication is a challenge that is adversely affecting parent carers' trust and confidence in the SEND System. Despite the additional financial support that has increased the team staffing levels, the training opportunities provided, and the recommendations made by SNAP PCF something as important as communicating effectively has not happened in enough cases, and parent carers continue to highlight this to SNAP PCF as an ongoing issue.

SNAP PCF asked for a number of changes to be made to the new EHC audit tool; all of our recommendations were accepted, including our insistence that the reports that feed into the plans must be audited along with the EHC plans. The first round of audits consisted of 19 plans being audited, and in the second round of audits, approximately 35 plans have been audited. We will be moderating the second audit at the end of December. We would also like an action plan to be coproduced and worked on together following both audits. The EHCP audits are a tool to improve the quality of EHCPs, this work must be accelerated. The parent representatives for SNAP PCF who were part of the audit team remarked that although it was clear that Central Bedfordshire Council had sent them plans without quality assuring them first, they definitely were not 'cherry-picked' however, the majority of the plans we audited were of poor quality. We would also like to establish what quality assurance process is in place for both the EHCPs and Annual Reviews.

We recognise that lots of work has taken place to work through the issues and try to improve the SEND services. We also acknowledge that Central Bedfordshire Council has made significant progress in recruiting Educational Psychologists which is something to be proud of alongside the development of the SEND Advisory Teachers (SENDATS) and the continued development of the Local Offer website. We are sure that the work on the Graduated Approach, Therapeutic Thinking, and the additional work we have coproduced on Pathological Demand Avoidance will also support positive outcomes moving forward.

Despite these encouraging steps, SNAP PCF Steering Group remains very concerned about some of the feedback that has been received as part of this survey. We would like to remind the professionals reading this report that the parent carers who have taken the time to complete yet another survey have done this in isolation of each other, they are not discussing their concerns on a Facebook page nor in a coffee morning. They have independently taken the time, probably at the end of a busy and stressful day to tell us how things feel for them. We ask if you do nothing else, to go back and read the comments on the word cloud. The words are devastating. The previous word cloud from our [Spring Test the Temperature Survey](#) were just as powerful, and just as devastating.

The over-riding concerns from the SNAP PCF Steering Group are when can we expect to see parent carers reporting consistently and positively to the four main questions:

1. *How would you rate your overall experience of the Education Health Care Plan process?*

2. *How well has 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?*
3. *To what extent have you felt listened to by the Central Bedfordshire Council Education, Health & Care Plan Team?*
4. *Were you satisfied with the Annual Review process?*

Whilst we work through the recommendations made from the May 2020 Action plan, we would like to emphasize the following recommendations, the ones in blue are new to this report.

Recommendations

- 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 EHC Team.
- A review of all waiting times, including any our commissioned local charities and review the support families are receiving whilst they are waiting
- A training package for parents running across the year, like Hertfordshire's model using Families in Focus.
- Ensure better publicity and awareness of service developments and improvements amongst families, coupled with meaningful and timely communication with individual families by all services.
- A review of the current offer of Occupational Therapy (OT) – *The focus is for Sensory OT, which is not commissioned by the BMLK ICB however, there is a need that we reported in our previous survey report.*
- Welcome booklets for Education Health Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA), phased transfer, and Annual Review. *This would also include Early Help, Children with Disabilities Team and SEND Transport.*
- *An action plan coproduced from the previous two EHCP audits.*
- *Create an Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) Policy.*
- *A review of CBC Customer Services (Relations) processes to become more personalised and move away from using a prescribed template. The process to become parent friendly.*
- *Create a problem-solving task and finish group to review, the survey feedback and find solutions such as how to improve the communication of the EHC Team, for example the use of out of office and a set process of when and how to communicate following a panel decision.*
- *Information about the criteria, referral process and waiting times for CAMH and Paediatrician referrals.*

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 to 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

