



Education and Skills Scrutiny Board
24 November 2016

Consultation and Engagement Practices for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Services in Surrey

Purpose of the report: Scrutiny of Services and Budgets

The purpose of this report is to explain the approach taken to consultation and engagement around Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in the light of the SEND Code of Practice 2015, the principles of the SEND 2020 transformation programme and lessons learnt from previous consultations.

Introduction:

- The Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice 2015 have resulted in a significant number of policy, practice and commissioning changes in Surrey. These changes require significant engagement with a wide range of stakeholders, including families of children and young people with SEND needs.
- The SEND Code of Practice 2015 stresses the importance of involving families directly in strategic decision-making about SEND services. It advises that Local Authorities should work in partnership with their local SEND parent carer forum as well as with a wider group of families and service users. Active participation and coproduction with SEND customers is recommended.
- The main vehicle for the improvement of current SEND services in Surrey is the SEND 2020 transformation programme which reports to the Surrey SEND Partnership Board. A commitment to a partnership approach and active engagement or coproduction with stakeholders is written into the principles of the SEND 2020 programme.
- However, this commitment is not consistently embedded into practice. Whilst some SEND consultation work has exemplified these principles, there have also been examples of less effective practice and a degree of customer and partner unhappiness. Key lessons have been learnt from these poorer examples and, where possible, consultations have been revisited and improved, Annex 1.

Consultation and Engagement Practices around SEND and the SEND 2020 Programme

- In order to support best consultation and engagement practices around SEND transformation and the work of the SEND 2020 programme, an initial mapping of key stakeholders has been undertaken and a SEND communications and engagement plan has been agreed.
- In addition, a multi-agency Community of Practice for Engagement and Participation has been established to share best practice and reflect on lessons learned.
- Active participation and coproduction with customers (families, children and young people with SEND) is described in a new SEND Coproduction Policy which was adopted by the SEND Partnership Board in July 2016, Annex 2. In this policy, participation is defined as, 'families working with strategic groups and decision-makers to shape services', and coproduction is defined as, 'working together on the development of decisions that are made in an equal and reciprocal relationship'. A striking example of the successful application of these principles has been in the engagement work around the published SEND Local Offer interactive website, which was relaunched in April 2016 with full participation of several hundred SEND families and young people following their feedback on the initial version launched in September 2015. This engagement was realised via workshops, engagement events and through social media.
- In order to facilitate this level of active participation and coproduction, the SEND 2020 programme has worked closely with representative groups of SEND families and young people as well as with the wider community. In line with the SEND Code of Practice, work has been done with Surrey's SEND parent carer forum Family Voice Surrey to ensure they are a sustainable and representative group. In addition, links are being formed with 'special interest' groups such as the parent bodies of particular settings and with groups representing the 'harder to reach' families, such as the Surrey Minority Ethnic Forum and the Surrey Gypsy Traveller Communities Forum.
- To ensure that SEND young people themselves have a voice, a SEND rights and participation team has been established and furthermore, school and community-based young people's groups are being developed to participate in consultations. The SEND participation team works in partnership with other participation teams in Surrey and has agreements in place with voluntary providers such as Surrey Disability Challengers and Barnardo's who work with SEND young people with more complex needs.
- A suite of policy and practice documents is being developed to support best consultation and engagement practice, including a quality standards monitoring tool. Some of this documentation, including the SEND coproduction policy, has been shared regionally with other Local Authorities in the South East through the Department of Education's South East Regional Round-Up newsletter.
- In the next section of this report, the best examples exemplify the approach described above and show how lessons have been learnt from previous, less effective approaches.

Best Practice Examples in SEND Consultation and Engagement

- The partnership approach to redeveloping the published SEND Local Offer website has already been cited in point 7. A steering group comprising all partners, including parents and young people, ran a number of engagement workshops and group discussions throughout 2015-16 in order to redesign the published SEND Local Offer website. As a result, the site was relaunched in 2016 as an interactive portal with a special area for young people. Analytics data demonstrates an increasing use of the site by customers.
- A second best practice example is the pre-consultation and engagement work carried out on the review of the placement criteria for Surrey's residential provision in its maintained special schools, 2015-16. Three linked stakeholder engagement groups were established for initial discussions about the review before going out to wider consultation. The membership of these groups comprised headteachers of the schools concerned, Family Voice Surrey, a wider group of parents and young people, Surrey County Council representatives and health partners to ensure all views were heard in a fair and transparent way. In addition, meetings and workshops were held in each of the affected schools to provide an opportunity for parents, pupils and staff to ask questions and find out more about what was being proposed. This review is about to go out for formal consultation which will be run along best practice guidelines.

Lessons Learnt from Earlier Consultations

- Initial iterations of two key SEND consultations did not always follow the principles and practice outlined above. As a result, significant concerns were expressed by families about what they perceived as a lack of transparency and lack of genuine engagement and consultation.
- As a result of scrutiny and challenge, and lessons learnt about the importance of a wide-ranging and proactive engagement and consultation approach, these consultations have been revisited and improved. For more detail on the lessons learnt, see annex 1. Recent iterations of both consultations have been cited by parent representatives as examples of good practice, and of learning by listening to the customer voice. They were also cited as good examples in written evidence prepared by Family Voice Surrey ahead of the recent SEND CQC-OFSTED inspection.

Next steps:

The draft Quality Standards monitoring tool, Annex 3, will be taken for sign off by the SEND Partnership Board Autumn 2016, along with a schedule for annual self-evaluation and monitoring reporting to the Partnership Board.

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Annexes:

Annex 1: Lessons Learnt from Consultations A and B, 2015 (early versions of consultations re-run in 2016).

Annex 2: Surrey SEND Coproduction Policy 2016.

Annex 3: Draft Quality Standards for CYP participation monitoring tool 2016.

Background papers:

SEND 2020 Development Plan 2016, *as published at Education & Skills Board*, March 2016.

Minutes of SEND Local Offer Steering Group 2015-16 (full set available on request).

SEND Code of Practice 2015

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/send-code-of-practice-0-to-25>