

**CABINET MEMBER DECISION – EDUCATION & LEARNING
30 MAY 2023**

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Public Questions

Question (1) – from Anna Sutherland

In Surrey, when families who have children with SEND and EHCPs can't get any meaningful update about their child's case, and they have complained via Be Heard, and have asked for mediation or a mediation certificate but that process isn't being initiated within a reasonable time frame, thereby delaying the family being able to start the year long tribunal process, can you please advise on what else the family can do to get their child or children the education provision which they are entitled to?

Reply:

We recognised that at the heart of our work for families is good communication and we strive to achieve this. There are over 13,000 children and young people in Surrey with statutory Education, Health and Care plans and we are aware that while many of our SEN Case Officers liaise well with parents of children with additional needs and with schools and receive positive feedback from them, for a number of parents and carers this not their experience. We are improving on this by expanding our casework team, and introducing other methods to contact caseworkers, for example through drop-in sessions, trialling digital means of keeping in contact and undertaking a review of our processes.

Case officers are able to give updates on case work, provide signposting to sources of support and guide parents and professionals through the SEN processes. We would encourage any parent who feels they have not been communicated with in an appropriate manner to contact the case officer's line manager. Case officers' line managers' details are contained on the case officer's e-mail signature information that parents will see when e-mailing their case officer, or alternatively parents can contact the L-SPA team via telephone on 0300 200 1015 to ask for a line manager's contact details.

At times, our response to parents may reflect a decision that parents do not agree with and we aim to explain why we have taken that decision. Often a simple 'Way Forward' meeting can resolve disagreements. Where it does not, parents are able to seek mediation and our mediation provider Global Mediation will make arrangements for this to happen in a timely way.

We will continue to keep our dialogue open with parents who chose to appeal a decision through a tribunal (SENDIST). SENDIST anticipates over 15,000 appeals will be received nationally by September 2023. This is causing difficulty in SENDIST with only 12 salaried judges nationally and appeals arriving at a rate of 300 per day. Hence the lengthy time for appeals to be heard, and the importance of parents and the SEN team maintaining good communication during this time.

Clare Curran
Cabinet Member for Education & Learning

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