

24 April 2024, remote via Microsoft Teams.

Cllr Jeremy Webster, Cllr Bob Hughes, SEND Support Advisor, Julie Armstrong (Scrutiny Officer)

11 participants

<p>Cllr Webster: Can you tell us what your situation with your children is and so on and so forth?</p> <p>D: I have two children who are additional needs. I have my 14-year-old is in year 10 and I have an 8-year-old in year three. They're both in mainstream school.</p> <p>A: I have twins who have a PDA diagnosis. Autism with PDA, and one has been diagnosed with ADHD. The other one is undergoing diagnosis shortly.</p> <p>L: Sorry, so I'm just in all the doors I can get my foot in trying to get things a little bit better. We're kind of a bit forgotten down here and so near the east side of Surrey, so again trying to push for some more things in this area.</p> <p>F: I have two daughters, one neurotypical. She's 14, although does suffer from severe anxiety. My 11-year-old daughter is diagnosed with, in old school money Asperger's and combined ADHD. <b>We applied for an EHCP in, I want to say, June or July 2019</b>, an initial refusal to assess, we appealed that. I mean, this is everyone's story, appealed that, and lo and behold, there was an assessment, and that was a <b>prolonged process with Surrey County Council and getting the right EP available, OT available and SALT available</b>. We then, because of the length and we are fortunate that <b>we were able to use our savings to do that, we sourced private assessments and reports for that</b>.</p> <p>We then joined the CAMHS as it was, now Mindworks, list and <b>diagnosis took four years for autism</b>. Then <b>they forgot the ADHD piece so</b> we went back to the back of the list for ADHD. So again we sourced that privately initially, but we've since had the CAMHS diagnosis and the initial application. It <b>took until the 31st of March 2023 to get our final EHCP in place</b>. <b>It was a very long, arduous battle</b> and the <b>school were supportive of us</b>.</p> <p>Surrey were not inclined initially to give any hours. Then they offered 18 hours. Then we got the hours that we required, but <b>it was very, very painful process</b> and it was only by going to tribunal. <b>Getting on the tribunal list that Surrey conceded at the 11th hour, on the night before</b>. And</p>	<p>No to assess overturned</p> <p>Timeliness-assessments</p> <p>Financial impact</p> <p>EHCP error</p> <p>Timeliness, to issue Plan Fight/battle Supportive primary school</p> <p>Last minute agreement before tribunal</p>
---	---

<p>so, you know, cost to us, massive cost to my health, you know, immeasurable cost to the rest of the family's mental health immeasurable and the cost to the taxpayer of Surrey having to prepare for a tribunal. And then not needing it, complete waste of the taxpayers' money.</p>	<p>Emotional/health impact (P/C) Emotional/health impact (CYP) Unnecessary cost to taxpayer</p>
<p>I think I speak for probably all of their parents on this and any other parents that are on groups that I'm part of because like L, I do a lot of advocacy work and I sit on various parent carer support groups and things like that. Communication is key and it is so, so lacking and you know you can have some great caseworkers and they do a fantastic job. Sometimes their hands are tied behind their back so they can't do as much as they would like to, but the lack of communication is extraordinary, frustrating, and it makes the journey so much harder for everyone, not least, you know, just little things like, well, it's not a little thing. It's, you know, you get a caseworker and then they disappear off the face of the planet. No one tells you that they've left. No one tells you who the replacement is. You send emails to their line manager, then you go to the area manager. Then you copy in, you know, whomever is higher up than that, and then you eventually copy Be.Heard and only then does someone respond to you again. That's a waste of our time, but also a waste of Surrey resources when people have to read the same email 20 times for someone to get a response. So communication really is key and I think communication not just to parents, but communication around the EHCP process.</p>	<p>Case officer communication Some great case officers</p> <p>Emotional/health impact (P/C)</p> <p>Unnecessary taxpayer expense</p> <p>Not informed of process</p>
<p>So minutes from Panel decisions are very rarely provided to us. It's just the panel met these secret people over here, not who was on the call, what the decision process was, which any corporate body would have to have in place. It's just Panel says yes or Panel says no, it's binary.</p>	<p>No Panel transparency Provide Panel details</p>
<p>G: I've got a son who's in year six. He got the EHCP from at the end of year three, and as time you didn't have a diagnosis, he has a diagnosis of ASD now, and he's also adopted. Previously looked after, he goes to mainstream school. And he has a place now in a mainstream secondary. But that process was really, really difficult and you know, it was quite short compared with a lot of other people's experiences. But I would say it affected my health at the time and definitely my son's well-being.</p>	<p>Emotional/health impact (P/C) Emotional/health impact (CYP)</p>
<p>H: He's heading for his key stage transfer. So a crucial time for him. The SEND Code of Practice tells you to look out for any indications of SEN at an early age. So way back then,</p>	<p>Emotional/health impact (P/C)</p>

<p>when my daughter was showing those signs, nobody listened. I was sent on a parenting course initially, which made me feel I was doing everything wrong. I focused on what I was doing and not on my child, it made me super anxious about my parenting. I kept requesting support and again your parenting is called into question. So at a crucial stage in your child's development, when probably not a huge amount of support is required in order to get them to where they should be and maybe keep them in mainstream instead of needing specialist in the long-run, we didn't get that help. And I know a lot of families don't get the help; the finger of blame is pointed at them.</p>	<p>Not listened to</p> <p>Unsupported Timeliness – delay in support led to crisis</p> <p>Feel blamed/accused</p>
<p>The EHCP process was immensely difficult; the child was presenting with difficulties more at home; the school didn't see it so therefore they wouldn't support the EHCP application. This is very typical of how girls with autism present. My son on the other hand, because he was kicking off in the classroom, making his needs known and very obvious, he got the support straight away. It would help if all Surrey staff were all trained in the law around special needs and the Education Act, because they don't seem to have this knowledge, the people we're dealing with unfortunately.</p>	<p>Lack of knowledge – teachers (autism)</p> <p>Need training in legal obligations</p>
<p>E: My son is at the beginning of his journey and the mainstream school where he is at the moment have been nothing but supportive. My stepdaughter has been referred to CAMHS for assessment for ADHD and ASD. She is going to be out the other side of education by the time she even gets an assessment. The school recognised that she's got needs but offered no support whatsoever.</p>	<p>Supportive primary</p> <p>Timeliness-assessment</p> <p>Primary school not meeting need</p>
<p>A: My kids are both six and both been diagnosed privately at 3 and 4 because if they had needs I wanted them to be identified early. That hasn't worked out as I hoped, because once they got to school the very first barrier was how little educators want to educate themselves. When SENCos have no knowledge of your SEN, in my case PDA, it makes it very challenging. The biggest issue for me is how marginalised autistic girls in particular are in this entire process, not just with schools but also LA assessors etc. It's a generalisation, there are also boys who are very high-masking and compliant. But my twins, a boy and a girl, both presented in the typical boy/girl way; as soon as my son came into the school they accepted his diagnosis, as soon as my girl came into the school they said this is a misdiagnosis and accused me of FII (fabricated and induced illness) and had me take</p>	<p>Financial impact</p> <p>Lack of knowledge – teachers (PDA)</p> <p>CYP who mask not helped</p> <p>Feel blamed/accused</p>

parental courses and now I still have Social Services investigating me for FII two years on. I have already done the multiple courses that I was asked to do and complied. It is all triggered by the school and the schools is still pushing that I'm fabricating her diagnosis, even though it is a very renowned diagnostician. When I have educators who say, We have 30 years in education and we know autism, they should be ashamed. In the last 30 years, autistic girls have been deeply traumatised and marginalised in schools. What you should say is, I took courses in new research every one of those 30 years. I feel like the LA takes advantage of that situation of schools being uneducated because then in the needs assessment reports for both my children, they reflected only what the school saw, which for my daughter was no difficulties because of masking. So instead of listening to the professionals who have worked with her for years, disregarding the private reports has been a huge challenge.

L: "Male presentation" and "Female presentation", though they are not exclusive, some are referring to them now as "Overt/Outward facing" and "Cover/inward facing".

F Communication. Every point of contact that you make, it is signposted to, Have you read this document? Have you done this course? Do this course, do that course. It is very demoralising and demeaning, you do question your own parenting and sanity. But I have an elder neurotypical daughter so a part of me was saying well it can't be just my parenting because she's okay. I do think the stigma around girls is a definite one. My daughters were both at an independent school and when she had a good teacher that understood her and her needs, everything went well. As soon as she went into a class where the teacher didn't understand and therefore got frustrated by her presentation, she was very quickly labelled as disruptive, badly behaved, a risk to herself and others, quite frightening words to hear. Eventually that placement broke down and in hindsight that was the best thing because she's in a state school that couldn't be more supportive of her. Parent blaming is very common and particularly parents of girls. You find it in the corporate world as well, when my husband speaks in meetings, of course everything he said was true and right, but when I would say the same thing in a meeting, "neurotic Surrey mother, what does she know". That's a very common theme. A lot of the time a mother's instinct is something that is real, but a lot of the time we get labelled as neurotic

Need SEN training for all teachers

CYP who mask not helped

Not listened to/dissmissed  
Not accepting private reports

Feel blamed/accused

(some teachers in) Primary school met need  
Lack of knowledge – teachers

Not listened to/dissmissed (sexism)  
Incendiary language

individuals. A lot of the time you have no choice but to get private assessments but then they get ignored and you get, 'Oh there's another Surrey mother, they're finding someone to say what you want them to say'. The LA says the reason we have such a high number of EPs is because of the type of parents we have in Surrey.

D: Both my boys have EHCPs. The nursery was very good and prepared him for the EHCP. We don't have enough hours so he's struggling; we've tried to increase them and haven't provided enough evidence. My oldest son masks. I put in a parental request last year (year 9) for an EHCP. We got the draft through, the hours were the minimum amount, not enough, didn't match up with part F and basically now I'm being ignored, I think I'm on a list for Surrey of 'Don't reply to this crazy woman'. My last email that I sent was 117 days ago. I copied in the manager 64 days ago and I haven't had a reply I might be persona non grata. The barriers I face are not getting replies to emails even when you escalate them. I have repeatedly requested since the draft that it goes back to Panel and I'm kind of ignored. I think I'm on a list. Both my boys are adopted. My year 10 boy wants to be in school, he enjoys school he just needs it in a slightly different way. He wants to be there and it's just a constant fight all the time.

G: My son's EHCP wasn't updated since the date of issue and we couldn't get it updated within the timescales. What was sent to secondary school wasn't right and the school went back and said we can't meet need. If that had been updated properly, if that was a true reflection of my son, we wouldn't have had that battle. There was that communication that all the transitioning EHCPs were completed by the deadline, but I bet if you undertook a review of the actual quality of those EHCPs, you would find that not many of them met the minimum quality you need. For example I've written to the caseworker and said please update this section so it's appropriate for secondary school, and that made it into the final EHCP. The caseworker hadn't even updated her own name.

F: The exact same thing happened to us. My daughter inherited a new first language.

G: It took me a long time to realise this is a legal document and a legal process. I think if I knew that last year I probably would have treated it quite differently. Even the terminology.

Nursery helpful

Hours considered too few

Case officer communication

Feel blamed/accused

Fight/battle

Timeliness – EHCP review  
Secondary school said could not meet need  
Poor quality EHCP error  
Fight/battle

Poor quality EHCP error

Complicated language not explained

<p>I didn't know what High COIN or SEMH was – we don't know this stuff. My son has ASD but he's a masker and I'm really concerned about the Mindworks new framework because it's when young people display a high level of distress that's when they make the referral on, but children who mask are not going to meet the new threshold.</p> <p>F: Parents are educated by other parents, not by the LA, on SEN code, definitions etc.</p> <p>I: I've done nine tribunals. Not this Ofsted, but the last Ofsted inspection before that years ago, I was in the room and Ofsted said the reoccurring theme was with parents that went via Family Voice. if you want anything done in Surrey, you have to force them. You've got to go to tribunal, you've got to complain, you have to do judicial reviews, go to the LGO. Last year there were over 2,000 appeals and 98% of parents win these appeals, but you're always appealing about or complaining about the same things. I used to work for IBM, so I worked in corporate worldwide business, and every time we had a big project, things went wrong. We did a lessons learned and I'm convinced that Surrey do not, because they will not ever learn any lessons. There's law breaking. Under the Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice, it's very clear what Surrey's obligations are, yet they repeatedly fail to adhere to law. The SENCOs at school don't understand the law. I don't think the teachers really a lot of time, don't understand anything. The head teacher will always presume that they know more about children than you. As a parent, you are subject matter expert on your child. No parent in their right minds is going to go up to a teacher and say I think my child has dyspraxia or autism; nobody wants to be in that situation because it's very draining to be doing these things. If you want to chase anything up with the case officer, they never reply to you. If you flag it up with the quadrant manager, I don't know if you still have quadrant managers, they're rude. I did a subject access request and I actually laughed when I heard the things he was saying about me, he said I was "doing his head in". I thought it was hilarious, but in the days where you can do subject access requests, people shouldn't be writing stuff like that about parents because other people could be offended. More of us are going to tribunals and we win them. 60% or something like that of tribunals are resolved before the date – they think this means Surrey and the parents are working</p>	<p>CYP who mask not helped</p> <p>Complicated language not explained</p> <p>Fight/battle Unsupported</p> <p>Lack of self-reflection</p> <p>Perception of illegality</p> <p>Lack of knowledge – teachers</p> <p>Not listened to/dissmissed</p> <p>Case officer communication</p> <p>Incendiary language</p> <p>Lack of self-reflection</p> <p>Last minute agreement before tribunal</p>
--	--

together to resolve things; no, Surrey have gathered no evidence for the last four of my appeals and 24 hours before, they'll roll over. They've got no case, but they'll take you all the way to tribunal anyway. It's like doing the hurdles; there are 100 parents and you're going to put out 10 hurdles and 10 parents will fall at every hurdle, so you've automatically made a 90% cost saving. It's only people that understand that there's a legal obligation to these children. If you don't understand that there's a law you can't go through the tribunal process. Really, the majority of those other children don't stand a chance. And that is what's wrong with it. I feel that it's a formula that works very well for Surrey and has done for decades. It's like we're going to say no to everybody, and if you want us to meet our legal obligations, you will force us. And that works and that's why they do it. I feel like it's personal. It's not personal because, it's happened to hundreds of thousands of people across Surrey.

For example one of my tribunals, the speech and language therapist wrote a report to say this is exactly what I want in the EHCP and Surrey have said if a professional has written a report we can't amend it. Yet they did, they changed the last sentence. It said his speech therapy had to be delivered by a speech therapist or a speech therapy assistant and Surrey added in 'or an experienced and qualified member of staff', so that could be a catering assistant. I said, Surrey you can't do this, that's your own policy, but they wouldn't take that sentence out.

B Lose the tagline 'No one left behind', it winds me up. There's a lot of PR going on which aggravates me. My daughter's been out of education for five years so she's definitely been left behind and that's going to impact on her future prospects. Communication, that is the big thing. After our needs assessment was agreed Panel met within four months which wasn't too bad but we weren't given the outcome. It wasn't communicated to us, we had to chase it what was happening. It didn't get granted but we had to find out 5 months later which meant we lost that appeal time where we could have gone to tribunal.

Clr Webster: Are you aware of who sits on the Panel?

B No. Behind that I think we had six caseworkers and three just that summer. The average a caseworker was staying

Poor quality EHCP (therapist's report amended)

CME

Life opportunities

Communication  
Not informed of Panel outcome

Out of appeal time

Not informed who does what

Case officer turnover

Emotional/health impact (case officer)

<p>was two weeks, they were joining and then I think realising what they'd got themselves into and then going on sick leave. I'm a therapist, I counselled one of the caseworkers who was highly stressed. I'm not laying blame but I think they're set up to fail us. He was telling me how terrible it was and making all sorts of apologies.</p> <p>I think the children that probably get furthest is the ones with the parents that are educated and speak well. I wrote the application for the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS). Unfortunately the case manager didn't take the costings for that Panel so they needed more information. I'd spent days on it and then his one job was to take the costings. He didn't, despite me supplying them to him from the provision. That was another delay. I can only describe it as emotional torture, that last 10 weeks when we were just almost across the line. The provision had started, other children were attending, my daughter was saying, Am I gonna go, am I not gonna go? That that was probably out of everything, the worst.</p> <p>A: If the children were truly the centre of every decision, we would never need to go to tribunal to get our children accessible education.</p> <p>E: A lot of SEND parents would not see tribunal through as our lives are already extremely stressful.</p> <p>L: Panel is an anonymous group of experts supposedly, not convinced personally.</p> <p>H: Panel could be Mickey Mouse and friends for all we know.</p> <p>A: I think the intent is to filter out parents who can't or don't know how to fight for their kid's needs.</p> <p>H: Agree.</p> <p>A: I know someone who used to sit on panel and she told me they literally throw out all private reports and anything that costs money if they can avoid it. I think the issue is so much trust is broken in getting our kids' educations that they can access, that it scars us all.</p> <p>C: I think the schools just aren't honest enough with parents in the first place. So before we even get to an EHCP, they're</p>	<p>Inequality of access</p> <p>Timeliness-Delay due to LA error</p> <p>Emotional/health impact (both)</p> <p>CME</p> <p>Lack of trust Not child-centric</p> <p>Emotional/health impact (P/C)</p> <p>Not informed who does what Lack of trust Not informed who does what Lack of trust</p> <p>Lack of trust</p> <p>Under-resourced Lack of trust</p> <p>Lack of trust(school)</p> <p>Not informed by school</p> <p>Not listened to/dissmissed Fight/battle</p>
--	---



not telling us properly how our children are doing educationally. Schools are kicking the can down the road constantly. Parents are going to them with issues and they're saying we don't see it, so people are not being referred. It's like trying to get blood out of a stone, so before you've even got out of the starting block, you're not getting the right information about your child. SENCo says schools are being told to refer only the most urgent cases. There are children in our school that should have a EHCP. My daughter is in year six. We were told she wouldn't be a top priority. I happened to know that I could apply myself, so I went ahead and did it, but they would not have volunteered that information. The can is just constantly kicked down the road until it gets to year six. When you know, then all sorts of behavioural issues come through and you know, they then find out they can apply for an EHCP. But our children are going into secondary school and they haven't got an EHCP in place because they're basically being blocked.

J: The first thing would be my lack of knowledge when my child first struggled to attend school. I had no clue what to do or who to turn to and the SENCo at school at that time was no help at all. What I would have loved was someone I could speak to face-to-face, to tell me what my legal rights were, what the obligations of schools were, what the Council's obligations were. it was complete shock to me and I had to find my information from friends who've been through it or from Facebook groups because there was no signpost into any actual support. For example, no one ever told me that after 15 days of not being in school, my child was entitled to some sort of alternative education. I had no clue and she went to a whole term with nothing. When it's all new to you, it's really difficult, and I would have loved to have had someone I could have just called who could have talked me through it. A lot of people said this already, but chasing the caseworker, personally I've been dealing with this. Mainly the email has been coming from me, getting nowhere, chasing, chasing, chasing, having sent a couple of chasing emails, left voicemails and getting ignored. My husband took over because I just couldn't take anymore, the stress was getting to me. He emailed the caseworker at 7 at night and got a response by 9pm. And every time he's emailed him, he's got an immediate response. I've had emails ignored, voicemails

Not informed by school of options

Delay leading to crisis

Not informed of options by school

Want conversation about rights and obligations

Facebook groups  
Not signposted to support  
Not informed by LA of entitlement

Case officer communication

Emotional/health impact (P/C)

Dismissed (sexism)

Ignored. Is that because I'm female, a neurotic mother? I don't know, but it didn't sit well with me, to be honest.

SEND Support Advisor: I just wanted to clarify that the Local Authority doesn't instruct any school ever not to request an EHCNA and every EHCNA that does come into the Local Authority, whether it be from a school or a family, in terms of the first six weeks of the assessment period is dealt with under timescales and in exactly the same way. So there's nothing that has come out from the Local Authority to say schools must not do things.

There is a particular parental guide, and I do apologise if parents on this call have not seen it or have reference. It is on the Local Offer. It's called a guide for parents and carers for children with additional needs and all disabilities, and all the processes are laid out in there. Hopefully, clearly. Of course, Local Authority can always improve their communications, everyone's quite right. The Local Offer itself is being looked at currently to make it much more interactive, people-friendly, less wordy, all sorts of things, but in terms of any directions going to schools from the local authority, there aren't.

L: I've definitely seen it in my experience, that SENCOs from primary school are a bit work shy when it comes to completing the paperwork for EHCPs, especially if the kids are getting towards the end of the final year. So I've had more luck with secondary schools actually completing and doing it. I wouldn't put it past them to come up with any sort of excuse to point the finger.

CLLR WEBSTER: So coming back then to the task, what assistance, so this is on the plus side, I wanna bring out here **what assistance have you encountered in accessing support?**

J: We had an inclusion officer when my daughter was still attending and because we had meetings face-to-face with her at the school, I actually found her very supportive at that time. She made a good suggestion for my daughter to attend a horse therapy thing. It didn't lead to my daughter going back, but that was actually quite useful and I felt like we'd had quite a good relationship, albeit at no point did she point out that once she didn't attend, she was entitled to some sort of different education. I think the key there was face-to-face; because we were speaking to her, we weren't

Inclusion officer face-to-face

Not informed of AP entitlement

Mediation face-to-face

Not informed school hadn't responded

<p>just a number, she could see who we were. She could see what our child was like, and it felt more personal, so I think face-to-face is really important, or at least speaking to people, not just everything done by emails.</p> <p>The other thing I found useful is when our EHCP request was initially declined and we went for mediation, which again it was on a Zoom call, but it was face to face, we got to actually talk to people and explain things and and it was overturned there and then because it turned out the school just hadn't responded, which was why it had been declined. But we weren't advised that at the time, so when we got to mediation because people were actually communicating, it was really useful and decisions were made there and then on the day rather than taking weeks.</p> <p>H: X was extremely helpful in explaining why the school wasn't suitable for my daughter. Without her input and understanding it would have made our lives a bit more difficult. X was named for my daughter in her EHCP, completely unsuitable. For my son's key stage transfer currently X is named which is not suitable. The school have said it's not suitable, so we are hoping for a similar experience with the SENCo there to put forward a good argument.</p> <p>G: The support I valued was the school when we had this bump where the transition didn't happen in a timely way, the head teacher and the SENCo met with me in person and the SENCo really just helped me understand the process and I think there were both really supportive. I think peer support is important, but sometimes it can guide you in the wrong direction. Everyone might say have a look at this school, but this particular school only has four places available. I keep on going back to the fact that EHCP is a legal process and I think the support that people need is actually helping understand that process. I think peer support is beneficial, but the equivalent of your union rep to me would be more beneficial in helping me through that process because it's quite complex.</p> <p>A: To be honest, I've really not found anything within Surrey. Other than people in L-SPA and Be.Heard who are following protocol and do their bits. I found a lot of support, but it's all been either private or through Facebook groups or things like that.</p>	<p>Swift decision at mediation</p> <p>(secondary) SENCo explained why and was understanding</p> <p>Named secondary school said it was not suitable</p> <p>Supportive head and SENCo face-to-face explained process</p> <p>Non-professionals can misinform</p> <p>Need help understanding legal process Peer support</p> <p>LSPA and Be.Heard following protocol Facebook groups</p> <p>Private clinicians' advice on schools</p> <p>LSPA informed on process Virtual School Third sector</p>
---	--

Developmental paediatricians that also work in the NHS, but you get to see them because you've accessed them privately, they actually give great advice as to schools. For example, my children were at an independent preschool and would have probably gone to an independent school, but the developmental paediatrician said that for their needs, it'll be much harder to get them the EHCP that they need being at an independent school.

D: I had good support from L-SPA and also from the Virtual School and National Autistic Society. From L-SPA it was advice given to me when something had happened during the process of the EHCP for my eldest and I was questioning whether or not I should or shouldn't have happened. I was given very good advice that was very informative and very thorough.

E: I cannot fault the SENCo and the family link worker at the school. They have been amazing from start to finish for me. I had no clue about EHCPs or anything like that and they've led me along the way and they've been amazing.

One of the best things that they ever did for me is to refer my son and us as a family to the Freemantles Outreach Service, into your home and in the setting with my son and they have been absolutely fantastic. They provide training to the school as well, which is amazing.

F I can on one hand be very critical of the LA and that's constructive criticism, but there have been pockets that been really good. We had one case worker who has since left, she was amazing as the caseworker, she had SEND kids herself so that definitely helped. She was able to communicate with the schools and she was empathetic and she was also able to work the system internally in finally getting us across the line and she was very practical. Whilst

the system is very broken but there are pockets of individuals who are definitely doing their best. Also, when we finally got the hours in the March EHCP, the OT that Surrey sent was very honest that they couldn't meet needs of the OT requirements and so we were able to get funding from Surrey for a private OT. I'm sure they had to battle hard internally for that, but I appreciated the honesty and the communication that came with that.

C I'm really glad that I've contacted the National Autistic Society and did their Stepping Up for Autism course.

(primary) SENCo and family link worker informed on process

Third sector

Good communication, empathy and knowledge of system from case officer with lived experience

Honesty of OT

Fight/battle

Third sector – quick response, knowledge of system

Fight/battle  
Apology appreciated

Definitely go to **charities that can help** if you're having problems with EHCPs.

**I got a quick response and they've signposted me to what I need to do** because we are nearly at 60 weeks. **They know the system and we don't. The advice she gave me - if we don't hear back, this is who you go to, write to these people for a date for the panel - that's invaluable**, and that was one email today.

B: **It's been a hell of a battle**, but **I have valued an apology from X when you were a duty case officer**. You're the one that actually gave us the result of the Panel that wasn't given to us a couple of years ago. **You got all the information to us that we needed and also an apology. That is gold, when somebody takes that moment to say "That shouldn't have happened"**. **One good caseworker who was the one that always came in after our case officer disappeared somewhere, both times she swept in and got results for us. She was the one who got the EOTAS across the line.**

I: The **charities IPSEA and SOS!SEN. IPSEA have helped me with quite a lot of my tribunals** because I've got dyslexia so I find dealing with that amount of paperwork really difficult.

**Parent support group, there's local support groups on Facebook, and other parents that go to my children's schools**

My boys go to independent school. The staff there don't have the budgetary constraints so **they're more likely to be honest with you and to fight for what your children need**. I understand in mainstream the SENCo can't really do that because there's budgetary constraints. Maybe I'm lucky, they're not all the same.

**Family Voice**. And **some of the staff at Surrey when they explain why something hasn't happened, so say something happens and you don't like it, but if somebody explains to you why it happened, you can understand it better. You don't have to love what somebody saying to you, but if they talk to you and you feel like you've got some kind of rapport then makes it a lot easier.**

Cllr Webster: So I'm gonna pass on to each of you to think about what **one or two things the Council could do differently to make your lives easier and build confidence and trust.**

Replacement case officer made things happen

Third sector  
Help with paperwork

Parent group  
Facebook groups

Lack of trust(school)

Under-resourced

FVS  
LA staff explained why

Ensure named schools can meet need  
Lack of trust(LA)  
Under-resourced  
Communicate  
Know legal responsibilities  
Take time to know children

Train case officers

Asked again for same information

Under-resourced

Under-resourced

<p>H: Not to name schools that can't meet need in the EHCP just to save money. Definitely communication. But also, I'll come back to it again, know their legal responsibilities and understand them. Understand the families they're working with, and take the time to get to know their families. My children are not just their EHCPs.</p> <p>K: If you think about the caseworkers, it's making sure they're all trained to a high standard, that basic competency, because some of the interactions that we've had, they're so often asking for the information they've already got in their possession. They're not consuming it because they don't have time to have a proper look, step back and understand the case.</p> <p>J: That's probably time constraints. I'm sure they've got a huge caseload and that prevents them from actually understanding the case and the family. It comes back to speaking to us, if I could just speak to someone and build a rapport with them, I think it would help massively.</p> <p>G: It is communication. I've never spoken to my caseworker. Through this whole transition review, she's never picked up the phone to me. I've spoken to her line manager, but I've never spoken to her. When things went wrong, if she'd picked up the phone I could humanise her. If I could have spoken to her and had that honest conversation we could have spoken like humans. Because she didn't speak to me, I was heightened; I was probably up here and the actual reason was probably there. They made a mistake and rather than say, oh sorry we've got things a bit wrong here, there was no ownership of that mistake. My son didn't have a school place and all his friends did and they wouldn't pick up the phone to me.</p> <p>The other thing is respect the legal process, particularly with quality of EHCPs, because as school budget's get tighter, they will find reasons to reject saying they can't meet need, so if the plan is not fit for purpose, it's just another reason for schools to turn them away.</p> <p>A: If a parent is taking Surrey to tribunal then they should review immediately and concede where the parent has a strong case not wait until the night before or wait for a judge to order Surrey to give the child what professionals are saying the child needs. I think this would change if we just</p>	<p>Take time to speak with parents</p> <p>Case officer communication</p> <p>Take time to speak with parents Want honesty</p> <p>No ownership of mistake</p> <p>CME</p> <p>Want quality EHCP for school compliance</p> <p>Immediately review strength of tribunal case</p> <p>Last-minute agreement</p> <p>Put child first</p> <p>Want timeliness Want AP where required</p> <p>Respond to emails Under-resourced Want Panel transparency Training for Panel Recognise parents know their children Not listened to/dissmised</p> <p>Timeliness-to issue Plan case officer communication</p>
---	--

<p>put the child at the centre of everything and said, what does the child need instead of just looking at the parent versus Surrey. Stick to the statutory timelines for EHCPs, give alternate provision when you're supposed to, just follow the law.</p> <p>D: Agree with communication – even getting your emails replied to, I understand there's a high caseload. Transparency with the Panel, because you don't seem to hear much. You don't know who's on it; are they trained in SEN needs? Do they understand the additional needs of children? Because they are our kids and we are the experts on our children. I'm not sure if the paperwork I put in is even read sometimes.</p> <p>E Same as everyone else really. My son's EHCP from when it was agreed to actually getting that EHCP was a year. I've never spoken to my caseworker. I've had three points of contact along the way. I was emailing regularly and I did ask for a not just generic response. I don't care how long it is but I just want an honest answer on what the timeframe will be and all I ever received was that generic response, which rubs you up the wrong way.</p> <p>F Transparency, accountability and responsibility. Panel has been repeated over and over again, but it is a black box, a secret coven that no one knows anything about. The reluctance to give any information about what was sent to Panel, what was decided, what discussion was, that's just normal. Putting child front and centre is forgotten so much. We are talking about children under the age of 18 but a lot of the time very young people. They are treated like pieces of paper objects; it's not just their education, their mental health, their life on the line. I can't repeat this often enough but communicate, communicate, communicate; even if it's bad news, just tell me. I can take bad news; constant no news where I have to chase 10 people is a waste of my time – my blood pressure goes up here – and it's a waste of taxpayers' money ultimately.</p> <p>C It's the timeline, nearly 60 weeks since we applied. I don't know if that's longer than average, but it seems like it's quite long. We haven't seen an EP report - how can we make informed decisions about our daughter and her education if we're not given the right information? We might have applied for a different school if it had been within the legal timelines.</p>	<p>Want honesty</p> <p>No personalisation</p> <p>Want transparency No Panel transparency</p> <p>Put child first</p> <p>No personalisation</p> <p>Communicate</p> <p>Emotional/health impact (P/C) Unnecessary taxpayer expense</p> <p>Timeliness, to issue Plan</p> <p>Not able to make informed best choice for child</p> <p>Case officer communication Case officer turnover</p> <p>Want proactive communication</p> <p>Train LA staff (by IPSEA) 'Secret shoppers' to check compliance</p> <p>Reflect on how to avoid common causes of tribunals</p>
---	---

If we have to appeal, I'm guessing that EHCP won't be decided upon until she's in year seven, which is too late to make informed decisions about your child. The timelines have just been awful.

B Communication. If a caseworker is leaving, let us know who the new case officer is rather than just out of office replies. We've been through six and the current one probably isn't there, because our provision aren't able to get hold of them and they're asking me and I don't know, just keep us updated.

I Stop breaking the law. Everyone that works for Surrey should be trained by IPSEA and held to it. Maybe they could have secret shoppers, people emailing or phoning in to check that they are actually adhering to the law, it's 20 weeks to issue an EHCP. Another thing would be to look at tribunals for common themes, and publish one or two targets that they will work on to stop those tribunals happening.

L: A lot of the mums here have said a lot about communication, which I completely and thoroughly agree with, but I think there's an absolute huge lack of competency, so even if that communication was made perfect overnight tomorrow, I just don't think there's the competency there. My case worker is apparently a post-16, but my daughter only just now turned 15. She's not even in Surrey, she's from up North and is on Teams. Are caseworkers literally meant to shuffle paper around and just get things together or are they meant to have expertise? Because I know you're struggling with filling posts and they've got 170 cases each or something ridiculous. Does the system need to go back to square one? Is it salvageable or is it just not working? The processes around the EHCP are individual to each county, and they're built up by them. Is there any way that can be stripped back and made a lot more efficient? They should not be allowed to take parents to tribunal and then give in at the last minute causing massive headaches. Is there no morality around that? The complete lack of provision is the confusing thing because the responsibility is on the local authority to provide education for the children. And making sure it is equal across all of Surrey and all of the quadrants.

Not knowing who does what

Under-resourced

Last minute agreement  
Emotional/health impact  
(P/C)

Lack of provision

Want consistency  
(geographically)





This page is intentionally left blank