

PARENT CONSULTATIVE GROUP

MINUTES OF MEETING
held on
23rd March 10.00am - 12.00pm
Booker Park Community Special School

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting and introduced the new admin support for the group, Emma Hall.

Introductions from people present who were:

Penni Thorne , Chair FACT Bucks
Gail Walshe, Parent Representative, Buckingham
Lucy Falconer, Parent Participation Worker
Marie Ostercamp, Parent Representative AFASIC
Jenny Pearce, Principle Educational Psychologist
Peter Whitaker, Educational Psychologist
Marlyene Isaiah, Parent Representative, High Wycombe
Sue Butt, Children & Young People's Commissioner (Pooled Budgets Manager)
Glynis Haines, Clinical Group Co-ordinator
Kathy Darvill, C&YP Commissioning & Business
Emma Hall, Parent Participation Team Administrator
Zana Bayley, Parent Participation Worker
Julie Hutchison, Parent Partnership Administrator
Sarah Shaw, South Bucks Downs Syndrome Group
Helen Davies, Parent Representative, Buckingham
Jo Keattch, C&YP Safeguarding Team Manager
Georgina Fielden, Parent Representative, Beaconsfield
Janet Burgess, SEN Consultant
Mark Smith, SEN Manager
Leigh Smith, Parent Representative, Carers Bucks
Ruth McGoldrick, Parent Representative, Aylesbury
Sally Mansi, Young Carers Bucks
Ruth Goodman, Parent Representative, Chiltern Gate School
Penny Chadwick, Parent Partnership Manager

Apologies were received from:

Kathy Forbes, Service Manager Children & Families
Sue Imbriano, Director of Children's Services
Marion Clayton, Cabinet Member for Achievement & Learning
Kathy Forbes

There were no matters arising from the last minutes.

The Chair advised everyone of the change of name of the group. It was decided to change the name to FACT Bucks, which stands for Families and Carers Together in Bucks.

Discussion Point 1: Can the SEN department advise on what training SEN officers receive in order for them to evaluate and assess children appropriately for provision of home-school transport and passenger assistants, and clarifying why schools and parents are not involved in this assessment

Mark Smith responded to the question in discussion point 1 by stating that when they carry out statutory assessments and identify a child has transportation needs they provide Amey with part two of the statement which will state this. They have improved the writing of part two to be longer and much more in-depth than previously. Amey then carry out a risk assessment by sending an officer to liaise with the parents at home to discuss arrangements. They may also go to schools and seek clarification and advice concerning transportation issues. The risk assessment is largely based on physical access and obvious handling concerns. They take into account each young person's individual needs, and any issues around travelling, i.e. travel sickness etc., are provided to Amey to help them decide the best transport provision.

Ruth Goodman asked Mark Smith if the risk assessment process is new since Amey took over the contract, and whether it happens also when children change schools, to which Mark Smith replied it was a new scheme introduced with Amey, and it isn't always necessary to re-assess when a child changes schools, however if it is asked for, or if a child's needs have changed they can do another risk assessment. This can be requested by a school, parents or the SEN department.

Glynis Haines asked with regard to deaf children who use British Sign Language, whose responsibility is it to provide a BSL escort, to which Mark confirmed, it was Amey's responsibility. Georgina Fielden asked if that was also true for children with complex health needs who need trained assistants, and again Mark confirmed that it was Amey's responsibility to arrange.

Helen Davies commented on the heartache many parents face over whether transport is agreed or not, especially with regard to the nearest school. If transport is not given for a school further away, do parents have to go to tribunal to get it? Mark replied that they can go to a transport appeal, which is the main route if an agreement cannot be reached. There they look at the costs and appeal criteria.

Sue Butts then requested if she could give an update on Speech and Language Therapy as she needed to leave the meeting early.

Sue Butts: Speech and Language Therapy Services Update

Sue Butts told the meeting that the consultation around the new model is currently live on the Bucks County Council website. All parents/carers whose children are in receipt of therapy at mainstream schools received a letter about this. The letters unfortunately only went out last week, so the deadline has been

extended to allow more people to respond, and apologised for the lateness of the letters. Once the information has been received it will be considered by the joint project board which consists of commissioners from both the NHS Buckinghamshire (formerly PCT) and Bucks County Council (BCC). They will then move forward in the retendering process of the therapy service which will take around 6 months, meaning the contract should be awarded around the autumn term. The model will not mean an instant change and a transition plan will be necessary to ensure a smooth transfer.

Sarah Shaw commented that the consultation document was very hard to comment on as there were no bullet points or sections to refer to, just long streams of text. Parents are used to separate numbered paragraphs etc i.e. statements, but with this document it is very hard to make comments on particular pieces. Also, the letter arriving late gives parents the impression they are not important or wanting to be heard. She also informed the group that there were two letters, one from Jenny Pearce and one which is showing on the website and queried this.

Jenny Pearce responded by saying one letter was for parents of children with statements, the other letter which was sent out later was more for those interested in the therapy services.

Sarah Shaw then asked about the pyramid structure as detailed in the consultation document and queried how parents will know where their child will fit in. Statements can say if a child is to receive a therapy service, so isn't sure why the new provider would need to measure this.

Jenny Pearce replied by saying that she was aware the statements outlines what a child needs, but feels the preventative part is missing i.e. what should be happening before a child gets statemented, and services are needed by children without statements too.

Ruth Goodman asked a question concerning who received the letter as she didn't get one. Jenny Pearce confirmed that the letter has only gone to parents of pupils with statements of SEN who attend mainstream schools, as at the moment SALT provision within special schools and ARP's is outside the tendering process targeting. Some parents of children who have a recent statement may not have received a letter as the lists used were accurate up to January 10 and not beyond.

Sue Butt: Joint Commissioning of Occupational Therapy Services Update:-

Sue Butt advised that the joint commissioning of children's occupational therapy (OT) had been split into 2 phases. The first phase is focusing on reducing the current risks associated with the existing service around the long waiting list. The current service needs to be operating at a safe and effective level before the joint commissioning process can proceed. This will form phase 2. Sue Butt is aware there are a number of issues which need practically addressing as a matter of urgency, and realises there are concerns because the service isn't operating as effectively as it could be.

Discussion Point 2: *Parents often comment on how effective, useful and vital the Parent Partnership service is, however the need in Bucks is clearly not being met on current levels of funding. The attached documents illustrate current government support for national services in the terms of the Lamb implementation plan. What plans does the local authority have to support the development of such a vital service?*

The Chair explained to the group that Sue Imbriano was not present to answer discussion point 2, and unfortunately no written response had been received. A letter had been received from Connie Sharp from Carers Bucks concerning the under-resourcing of Parent Partnership (PP).

Jenny Pearce said she would like to comment on this. Her thinking on this is that the Lamb Inquiry gives us a very good platform to look again at PP service and the level of delivery that is needed and expected, and there will be a review of the service in the next year, alongside the DCFS recommendations from the Lamb Inquiry document. We need to be clear about what this group would like to happen as well. Jenny finished by saying she could not say what Sue would say but that she feels this is where we are going.

Gail Walshe added that if we are at the point where we can shape what the service might look like, it is important for parents to be involved at the start of that, to avoid any issues arising. Gail then asked if we can have confirmation from those involved in that service review that we have parents involved in that review.

Jenny Pearce agreed that parents views are needed to help and that they will be involved in the review. .

Discussion Point 3: *Parents feel there is currently a gap in support for families in the social care system; can there be an ombudsman, similar to the Parent Partnership system to offer than much needed support?*

Jo Keattch queried the use of “ombudsman” in discussion point 3, but realised that what was implied was an organisation to support parents in Social Services. Gail Walshe clarified by saying that all support is currently in the third sector, with nothing in the council to guide families through a complex experience. Penny Chadwick agreed by commenting that parents have told the PP service that navigating the Social Care system is as difficult as SEN system and they would like a similar service to help.

Jo Keattch explained the service by stating that there is eligibility criteria for the Children with Disabilities (CWD) teams. If you do not fall within the eligibility criteria, you still have a right to an assessment; however at the end of the assessment the result might not be what families want. If you do not meet the criteria you can go through to a Common Assessment Framework (CAF). This scheme is working well for families who are not meeting CWD eligibility. They support by putting in different services to help families. Jo Keattch also clarified that you can be re-referred to Social Care panel if circumstances change, and cases can be taken back to Social Services. Jo Keattch finished by stating that to

have someone independent is quite a difficult task which would need to go back to Sue Imbriano.

Lucy Falconer commented that one problem is that the CAF system isn't known by parents at all, apart from the limited work done by the Parent Participation Team. Jo Keattch responded by suggesting she contact Julie Montague who could come and do a presentation.

Gail Walshe felt that there is still a need though for support; Contact a Family has done this work supporting parents voluntarily to deal with an emotional, complex experience. Gail asked if there some mileage to have a smaller discussion on this with parents to set something up through parents, with some funding or guidance from a local authority person. Jo Keattch replied that she would be willing to think about that, and that we need representatives from other social services involved.

Zana Bayley stated that some parents do not even know how to get a social worker, and the Parent Participation team do not reach everyone so not everyone will know about CAF through them; it needs to be promoted more widely. Jo Keattch responded by saying not all parents want a social worker.

Ruth McGoldrick queried how parents request a CAF and who do they sent it to. Jo Keattch replied that all CAFs should go to Julie Montague

Ruth then commented that another parent had requested a CAF, which took ages and she didn't feel the attitude by staff was very professional. Jo Keattch reminded the group that parents need to be proactive; to ring and ask people to get back in touch sooner. The CAF panel meets fortnightly, so it shouldn't take that long.

It was felt appropriate due to the subject of the conversation to bring in Discussion Point 7: *Parents welcome the new CAF scheme, but do not feel enough parents know about its existence. Could the SEN team send details out to parents of children currently on school action and school action plus?*

Mark Smith commented by saying that he didn't feel this is an SEN matter because CAFs are not exclusively for SEN children. He realised there may be an overlap, but it isn't appropriate to everyone on school action or school action plus.

Helen Davies felt this response was disappointing as at least then you are targeting some of them, and some people who do not have the knowledge about the CAF system.

Mark reiterated that he did not feel this was his expertise and Julie Montague would be in a better position to answer this point.

Jo Keattch commented that the whole scheme is still in its very early days and everyone needs to feel their way a little.

Peter Whitaker agreed with Mark Smith's point of view by saying that he realised the difficulty comes from the enquiry of parents who have unmet needs, and in that respect it is appropriate to think about CAF. For example if the housing

situation was inadequate for a family, the CAF could allow remote services in the CC to be brought in, however the SEN team do not have access to housing. Where the concern relates mainly or exclusively to SEN, whilst it isn't straightforward there are other processes which can help such as PP. That is a counter-argument for sending all SEN families a CAF form. We do not want the system swamped with CAF forms when not necessarily needed. Peter Whitaker informed the group that some schools have completed CAFS for therapy services but this is not relevant or appropriate.

Janet Burgess commented that School Action and School Action Plus are in school to support underachievement, and those children are tracked for progress, so are being supported for that. Only when there are additional concerns would a CAF be a consideration. Janet felt concerned that if it went to all children on School Action or School Action Plus for many children it wouldn't be appropriate, and could be damaging for all parents to receive it.

Georgina Fielden responded by saying that sometimes she had been asked to go through a health visitor to do the form, so they could show their support and sign it. Health visitors are also able to offer other support which could be enough for the family and a CAF then isn't needed.

Discussion Point 4: Can there be some clarification as to the current Young Carers scheme, as there is confusion about who qualifies for which service. Different users in different parts of the country are being offered different support, the assessment and re-assessment procedure is not clear to parents, and there seems to be no provision at all to support siblings of disabled children who are under 7 years of age.

Sally Mansi addressed the meeting concerning discussion point 4. Sally stated that Young Carers start working with children from 6yrs of age, which was from a decision made that children are then able to join in activities as they are more confident due to having been at school for a year. The assessment procedure starts with referrals from professionals. A worker goes out and meets the family to look at the caring responsibility a child has, which includes parents as well as siblings, and could be physical disability, mental health, drug addiction etc. Assessments all come to a panel of all workers across the county. They decide what level of service the child gets, which could be coming to regular clubs, days out activities, 1-1 support to support self esteem and confidence, or support for a particular crisis in the family. The decision is then sent to the family. Young Carers are concerned about re-assessment. Parents have asked for re-assessment and we are aware we do need to backtrack. We do try to keep informed about children's lives through the clubs, but we have 500 young carers registered so it is difficult. There are also specific needs of the young carers which we get to know, so we have started running specific groups i.e. parents with mental health etc so to inform them and help them understand and manage.

Sally Mansi realised that in High Wycombe there is a siblings group, but not in Aylesbury. This is because Young Carers identify the needs in the county and slot the groups into that local need. If there are issues, Sally Mansi requests that parents get in touch with Young Carers so they can address those points. For example we need to think more about how we can support children changing schools and transition into adulthood.

Lucy Falconer asked for some clarification on the Buckingham Group (called YC2). Sally Mansi stated that Young Carers are meeting with YC2, and are looking at how to link in closely with them as they do not do all things Young Carers do, but they do offer more. Young Carers not want them to feel isolated, but suggesting they come to Aylesbury isn't popular due to the distance.

Leigh Smith commented that there are many parents with different levels of need, particularly at difficult times, but those times come and go. Leigh felt that Young Carers need to see the different levels in the process, so that when those difficult times occur families know what levels of support there is. Sally Mansi replied by saying that she thinks Young Carers needs to send an update out to parents which opens up the two way process, as she would really like it to be a responsive service.

Gail Walshe asked is there any intention to change what is running in Aylesbury, as parents are concerned that is less going on there than other areas? Sally Mansi replied by informing the meeting that there is a support group in Aylesbury to support Young Carers with parents of mental health issues, and these smaller groups will change depending on need.

Discussion Point 8: In light of the recent changes re: local ombudsman, how will therapy services fulfil the legal requirements of therapy provision detailed on statements of special educational need which are currently not being met?

Mark Smith commented that one of the aims of the commissioning process is quite clearly to be able to commission a future service for OT and SaLT that is sustainable and deliverable to our needs. The issue has arisen about capacity – not funding – to provide enough therapy to meet the needs as detailed on statements. So we are hopeful that once this has been completed we can meet those needs and not be in the situation again where we can't provide what is requested on statements.

Jenny Pearce said that we are aware that the Occupational Therapy (OT) service is not delivering what is required at this time i.e. statements. This is a top priority to get sorted out, as we need to get the service fit for purpose, as well as going forward with long term commissioning to get a more preventative service.

Marylene Isaiah queried that some people have OT on statements but not received in over a year. If it isn't a funding problem, why cant families go privately? Mark Smith replied that there is not enough capacity in private provision, but that they do use private OT. Jenny Pearce responded by stating the service has gone to private OT, as well as out of county, and to Community Health Bucks. They are not sure what else to do, as they are always looking for more providers. Other big issue is that there are lots more hours on statements.

Helen Davies remarked that she realised that the services are trying to provide, but was also concerned as it may be the different types of OT specified which could be more difficult to source. Helen queried who was responsible for communicating to parents? Mark Smith replied that Jackie Finch does a good job of getting as much info out as possible on this and offering advice to parents.

Helen Davies asked that if parents have comments on this, they can contact the SEN department? Jenny Pearce confirmed they should contact Jackie Finch.

Georgina Fielden told the meeting that the lack of provision for Occupational Therapy and Speech and Language Therapy had been a common talking point in her local Parent's forum in Beaconsfield. Two parents have been receiving SaLT for the last 8 months, but as their therapists have gone on maternity leave, they have been told they are being re-assessed and going back on a waiting list. Georgina Fielden felt this was unacceptable as the children are now going into school with no SaLT to support their learning. Jenny Pearce responded by saying we are fighting on two fronts. All of these short term issues need to be addressed as timescale is crucial for children, and waiting a year is unacceptable. We need to make sure we get the right provider in Buckinghamshire to provide that service.

Glynis Haines informed the group that within SaLT, 3 fairly substantial changes are happening. In Community Health Bucks there is a reconfiguration of all children's services including OT, school nurses etc to develop integrated services within 3 geographical groups comprising of possibly 8 local teams. There will also be a change to the management structure. In due course services will need to develop preventative ways of working and intervention. On the 1st April under the Government's Transforming Community Services initiative, Community Health Buckinghamshire and Bucks Hospital Trust will be merging, and will have a new name yet to be determined, meaning SaLT provision will become a part of the hospital trust. Also there is the tender of SaLT services which may be won by the Trust, but also might be a different organisation. With regard to tendering, Glynis advised the group that the SaLT service hadn't received any of the letters sent to parents, so could not comment about them. In terms of the tendering situation, when staffs are being TUPEd to a different organisation, the receiving organisation needs to know who they are, salary details etc. These details have been sent, but as some staff have now left on maternity leave it means replacements cannot be recruited because their names were not given previously. This is causing staffing issues as mentioned previously. Glynis also stated that they are trying to sustain services, and also trying to evaluate current service delivery.

Gail Walshe asked that as providers will have a legal requirement to provide the service, why can't it be provided now? Jenny Pearce replied by saying that one problem we have had with Community Health Bucks is that although the therapists have tried to recruit, they have not been allowed to due to the changes. There isn't a shortage of therapists, but there is an issue with private providers. They are small outfits, so we are encouraging them to recruit more staff. It has to be the provider that recruits, because even though we have the money, we cannot recruit more staff due to these changes.

Gail Walshe then asked who can we talk to, to influence and help this situation as it is a crucial gap in children's development.

Glynis Haines responded by saying that the problems with service delivery can be attributed to the tendering situation. If the providers bidding for the contract want to use our staff they need to know who those staff are in advance in order to construct their bids. That information has been sent therefore cannot change those staff details.

Jenny Pearce added that we need to have this discussion with Sue Butt. Peter Whitaker commented that the problem is that there are many rules about staff changing from county council to PCT or another provider. Glynis Haines assured the group by saying that we realise we need more staff, particularly in early years to help prevent children needing statements in the future. This will take time, but we do need to address what happens to children in the system now.

Discussion point 6: *Parents are aware of the Anti-Bullying Project Team, but how can they activate it if their child's school denies there is a bullying issue?*

The chair reminded the group that the answer to discussion point 6 was given as a written response.

Sarah Shaw responded by saying she knows there are things happening in schools, but when a school is refusing to act on it, the normal home-school contact process isn't appropriate. What do parents do then?

Lucy Falconer asked if there was a way to find out if the school has an anti-bullying contact. Janet Burgess replied by stating that the School Improvement Service are not necessarily there to support parents, but schools primarily, similarly with SEN. So the answer is always to find out from the school.

Ruth McGoldrick commented that if schools are the ones who contact the team, then generally the schools with the bullying problem are not necessarily the ones who are going to contact the team. Janet Burgess answered that they do track schools and their involvement with the team, and do question schools if they say, e.g. "we have no pupils with SEN" as the data may prove otherwise, similarly for schools that say "we have no bullying" or "we have no incidents of racism", and they do try and get to schools who are not engaging.

Mark Smith said that in the Lamb enquiry there are two recommendations: 9- anti bullying alliance and 10 National Strategy to deal with bullying, so there is a focus element on bullying.

Peter Whitaker informed the group that he felt from a casework point of view if there is a specific case to contact the Education Welfare team or Educational Psychology if it concerns an SEN child. Bullying is not their primary purpose but they do come across it in their work.

Questions on written reports.

The group were then invited to ask questions about the written reports submitted before the meeting.

Penni Thorne asked if it could be clarified by what 103a and 103b are in relation to the SEN report. Mark Smith replied by saying they are the two national targets for completing a statement within 26 weeks, one is including exceptions and one is excluding exceptions.

Penny Chadwick told the group that she, Lucy Falconer and Gail Walshe attended a Participation Conference in London which was very inspirational. There were

some good models of parent forums and participation with several presentations. Swindon had a good model, but their main thrust was on the phrase “are we there yet” so lots of work still to be done. The culture change is an evolutionary process which will take time. Penny felt that the meeting today was an example of a productive and effective collaboration. Ed Balls spoke at the conference and is keen that this Parent Participation carries on after March 2011. Contact-a-Family are committed to a pilot to support parent forums to communicate between each other along the model of the parent partnership network. Penny wanted to share the best quote from day “do not go where the path may lead, but go instead where there is no path and leave a trail.”

Jenny Pearce commented that the new referral system was working well and they had received 10 direct referrals which resulted in new cases.

Gail Walshe commented that it was good to see children had been involved in recruitment, and asked will there be scope for parents to be involved in recruitment as well?

Jenny Pearce told the meeting that she line manages the parent support team, and believes all of the interviews for that team had a parent representative. This is something they would consider for the EPS. Jenny felt there doesn't seem to be such a robust structure for including parents as part of Bucks CC processes.

Gail Walshe responded by saying there is a structure but it isn't as well developed in Bucks as it could be.

The next meeting date was confirmed as Thursday 24th June and the chair closed the meeting at 12:05pm