



NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2022

COMMENTS FROM THE CHAIR

As we approach the end of the half term, here is an update on the work of the Forum since June. If you want to know more, do join us for our Annual Meeting on 1st November at Missenden Abbey starting at 10am. We will present our official report and financial statement for the year ending March 2022 along side our review of our objectives for the year and outlining those for the current year as set by the Trustees. We will also be joined by Simon James, Director of Education at Buckinghamshire Council who will brief us on key priorities including SEND and answer questions. For details see <http://www.factbucks.org.uk/>

Our priority remains ensuring that a parent rep is in every meeting to which we are invited. This ensures that the needs and concerns of parents and their young people are always being heard and that we can work to improve the offer being made in ways that meet those concerns. The Inspection Report noted below emphasised that FACT had been accurately reflecting the concerns expressed by parents directly to OFSTED and as a result our influence at a strategic level was clear and effective. We have much still to do to capitalise on this in relation to the operational aspects of services and there is a very large gap between the aspirations of the SEND reforms and the lived reality of individuals.

WHAT FACT REPS HAVE BEEN DOING

In the last 6 weeks that has meant attending 60 meetings across the range of SEND issues including:-

- Reality of Ordinarily Available Provision
- Decline in the timeliness of Ed Psych reports
- Challenges of emerging regional structures in health that are delaying increased resources for ASC/ADHD assessments
- Potential transfer of Transport assessments from Education to Transport
- Ineffective user engagement of the service provider for community equipment (ie wheelchairs, nappies etc)
- Wider respite opportunities for young adults in adult social care
- Consideration of changes to the Specialist Teaching Service
- Appointment of service leads in Integrated SEND service and staffing concerns generally
- Drafting a revised SEND chapter for the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment
- Extending the programme for holiday support for families in receipt of free school meals (HAF) to include provision for SEND CYP generally
- Making the coproduction charter a real agent for change
- Advocating for a focus on quality of existing plans especially those which were the product of the unsatisfactory conversion from statements process
- Challenging the lack of urgency in the delivery of improvements in Preparation for Adulthood
- Continued conversations aimed at ensuring the relevance of the Local Offer



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INSPECTION

The Inspection report was published at the end of April [SEND inspection letter from Ofsted](#) and with it the requirement of the local area to produce a Written Statement of Action in 3 key areas – Therapies; Neurological Assessments; and Community Paediatrics.

We have been involved in the oversight group as well as the stakeholder discussion groups working to keep the focus on both addressing the considerable waiting times but also in ensuring a provision which can meet need earlier and more effectively in a joined up, coproduced manner. No one should underestimate the task which this represents. The Statement will not bring real change if it is focused solely on a short-term resource input to clear a backlog – the reality is that in all of these areas the scale of the task and the current issues on recruitment mean that even this is at best a medium term task. We need a completely different area wide understanding of assessment and support – that is earlier and more holistic – and we have been tireless in making the case for it.

The Written Statement has now been approved by the Department for Education and has been published <https://familyinfo.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/send/get-involved/send-improvement/> Its implementation is the responsibility of the Children's Improvement Board chaired by an external appointee of the DfE. FACT has been asked to attend every meeting at which the Statement is discussed and to provide a rolling programme of feedback from parents on the impact of the actions being taken.

SEND IMPROVEMENT

We are mid point through the life of the current SEND Strategy and a review of the priorities has been completed to see if the focus of the groups working to deliver change are still the most appropriate. As a result from September the focus of the groups will now be on

- Annual Reviews;
- Measuring Outcomes;
- Early Identification & Intervention;
- Vulnerable Groups;
- and Preparing for Adulthood.

Other areas of work will now be established Business as Usual tasks like

- Statutory Operations;
- Quality of Plans;
- Sufficiency of School Place;
- and Autism

– all directly accountable to the Integrated SEND Board.

FACT will co-chair all of these. The voice of families into the strategic conversations is now written into the structure.

RECOMMISSIONING OF CAMHS & THERAPIES

The process for the review and recommissioning of these key services has begun and we are working hard to ensure that both contracts deliver better services through adequate resources and structures that listen to and act on the concerns of parents and SEND CYP.



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Consultations will be coming shortly on the strategies for these services and we will let you know how you can engage with them. We will also seek face to face and virtual engagement meetings as part of these discussions.

PARENT DIALOGUE GROUPS

As noted above, these groups relating to the key service support areas of CAMHS; Therapies; Short Breaks; Transport and Neurological Pathway are now written into service contracts and dates for their first meetings are agreed.

These PDGs will meet via MS Team as follows:-

THERAPIES Tuesday 22nd November 10.30am to 12noon

NEURODEVELOPMENT (ASC/ADHD) Thursday 3rd November 10.30am to 12noon

CAMHS (except ASC/ADHD) Friday 18th November 10.30am to 12noon

We have written to those who have to date joined them. The service providers and the related commissioning staff are committed to them. In addition, these Parent Dialogue Groups have been given a specific role within the Written Statement of Action as providers of both current landscape mapping and ongoing impact assessments. In addition, they will be the specific source of parental input into the development of plans in the key areas of Therapies and Neurodevelopment Pathway. If you want to know more please email chair@factbucks.org.uk.

PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD

This was not an area identified as requiring a Written Statement of Action by OFSTED/CQC. However, it is recognised that this was the result of the outline plans established in the preceding 12 months arising from our continuous (and often repetitive) demands for the Council and Health agencies to take this very important agenda seriously and not simply see it as an education issue.

Sadly, because the focus of attention has been on the Written Statement, PfA has not received the breadth of support that is required if progress is to be made in key areas like housing; employment; and community engagement. So we are back in mantra repetition mode and will continue to do this at the highest level until there is real buy in and change, making it clear that when the Inspectors return (probably in 2025) they will be looking for real impact.

AUTISM STRATEGY

This is another area where progress over the last 6 months has again slowed but predominantly because of a genuine desire to collect input from as many age groups as possible. Parents have been very responsive, along with adults, but it is clear that there remains too little input from young people and this is now being actively addressed. There will be a consultation stage and as soon as we are aware we will make it known.



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SUFFICIENCY OF SCHOOL PLACE

The strategy that was coproduced and approved in 2021 is not being implemented. There has been an extension in the offer of Additionally Resourced Provisions including the opening of the new facility at Kingsbrook School in Aylesbury, as well as increased places at several existing special schools. We are also helping in the preparation of a bid for funds to build a new Special School focussed on those CYP whose principle presenting needs are Social, Emotional and Mental Health.

These are important improvements in provision but we know that there remains a lack of places and a lack of types of provision, currently only available out of county, that must be addressed.

TRANSPORT

The annual school transport consultation is live again and will run to 4 December at <https://www.buckinghamshire.gov.uk/school-transport-consultation>

As well as the draft Home to School Transport Policy and the draft Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2023-24, there is an additional element to the consultation (i.e. proposed changes to school bus ticket charging ([Spare Seats Scheme](#))). Within these the only notable change for SEND parents is a proposed 3% rise in the charges.

There will be an opportunity for parents to make their views known on the policy and its workings directly to those running the service and the lead Council member on 16th November. [SEND transport consultation event](#) .

TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

Last year we worked with SENDIAS to deliver several webinars. We are preparing another selection to help parents for the Spring Term 2023 as follows:-

- Parents/carers new to SEND - 10am - 11.30am Friday 27 January 2023
- Emotionally based school avoidance - 10am - 11.30am Friday 10 February 2023
- Mental capacity - 10am - 11.30am Friday 24 February 2023
- Preparing for adulthood - 10am - 11.30am Friday 10 March 2023

A Parent focussed session on the de-escalation strategy used in schools – Step On – is being organised focussing on parents whose children attend schools which have been trained in this programme. We are offering this because it is being used and we felt parents should know more about it. Details will follow.

We are also talking with the SEND team about returning to face to face meetings with the Area Teams which again will start in the late Spring term, alongside our annual FACT information and resource event.