



NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2020

UPDATE FROM THE CHAIR

Six weeks into lockdown and now seems a good point to provide an update on key SEND issues. For all of us this has and continues to be a time of change; fear; burden and confusion. The weight of responsibility for SEND Children and Young People has fallen even more profoundly on the shoulders of their families than ever before. The response of the Council and the Clinical Commissioning Group has been led by the need of the wider community to isolate families to prevent the spread of this disease and to take pressure from the health service. However, we have been asked to give up many of those lifelines that keep our heads above water like school or college; respite care; and the support of family and friends. Whilst there has been fewer opportunities to do so, FACT Bucks has continued to make our shared experiences known to Council and Health colleagues with the hope that they will always remember the burden they are asking families to take on.

EDUCATION, HEALTH AND CARE PLANS

The Government brought in elements of the Coronavirus Act this week which have specific impact on SEND. This alters the requirement on Local Authorities in terms of securing the provision named in Section F of any Plan. Usually (and it will be again) the Local Authority has a legal duty to make the provision as specified but for the next month (unless extended again) there will only be a requirement for them to use *reasonable endeavours*. **This does not mean they can just do nothing** – they have to seek whatever alternatives they can to deliver the provision and they must consult families while they make those changes. More importantly **they must only be made in each specific case** and for a recordable reason – unavailability of therapist due to frontline commitments for example or online teaching rather than in person teaching.

Many of these adaptations have already been required with the closure of schools and the shielding that many families have adopted to protect their SEND CYP.

At the same time, the deadlines for the process of assessing and preparing a plan can be extended where it can be shown that assessments cannot be completed effectively in the timescale or in sufficient depth due to access issues. Once again, these delays must be consulted upon; specific to the CYP; and recorded. The deadlines for appeals have not been impacted and the Local Authority still has a duty to undertake assessments; deliver Annual reviews; and at every stage listen to the views of parents and carers. Schools still also have the requirement to admit children as set out in the Act. FACT have been involved in the preparation of the detailed guidance for Bucks which is on the Local Offer and we will continue to monitor their implementation to ensure that 'reasonable endeavours' are being made.

ATTENDANCE AT SCHOOL

From the outset, the Government recognised and required Local Authorities to make provision for vulnerable and SEND CYP whose safety and wellbeing are threatened by not being in in School. Despite the inference from some schools and in the media, the aim is not to minimise attendance but to ensure that those individuals receive the support they need, as confirmed today by the Department for Education. There is a risk assessment process outlined on the Local Offer to gauge if provision is appropriate. If you are struggling and need support, please speak with your school and then you can contact your EHC Co-ordinator using the email contacts on the Local Offer. Alternatively, please seek help from SENDIAS sendias@buckinghamshire.gov.uk

HOME TO SCHOOL POST 16 TRANSPORT

The Council is refunding any monies already paid for transport that is no longer being provided. If you paid and have not been contacted then it might be that your contact details are not correct in the Council's database. Please contact Post16SENcharging@buckscc.gov.uk for further information. The policy is to be reviewed again this autumn!

SHORT BREAKS

The closure of the Short Breaks provision was a concern to us from the outset because we know the pressures families have to deal with and that respite is so important. We have now had it confirmed that those CYP who usually receive overnight respite are now being offered a daytime alternate at least. We continue to work with the Commissioners and Provider towards the extension of support to other families.

RETURN TO SCHOOL

As and when Schools reopen the issue of transition back to school will be a key one and we have been assured that FACT will be involved in the planning of this return to ensure specific support is given to SEND CYP. In addition (and more so if schools do not return until the Autumn Term) phase transitions need to be handled with sensitivity to ensure that they are as smooth and encouraging as possible for SEND CYP.

We are working with the iSEND team to ensure schools to make this a key priority and they have committed to deliver all Annual Reviews due this term for children and young people due to change school in September most likely using online resources.

ANNUAL REVIEWS

There has been no change to the requirements for Annual Reviews nor their timings. All settings, schools and colleges are still obliged to conduct them using online meetings etc. However, we have reminded the Council that as Children and Young People are at home, many parents will find engaging with meetings more difficult, especially during the day and you may prefer (if it is not critical due to impending transfer to a new school or college in September) to delay the Annual Review until later in the year. Please remember that everything related to SEND is supposed to be through discussion and consent, so speak out if you need more time.

Remember help is at hand

Buckinghamshire Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support (SEND IAS) Service (formerly Parent Partnership) is available for children and young people up to the age of 25 with special educational needs and/or disabilities and their parents/carers. They are independent from the SEND team and are there to help us through a whole range of issues relating to special educational needs and disabilities. Please call their helpline 01296 383754 or email their mailbox: sendias@buckscc.gov.uk

Also the following link takes you directly to the Covid 19 section on the Local Offer <https://www.bucksfamilyinfo.org/kb5/buckinghamshire/fsd/parent.page?parentchannel=32>. This is the place to find all updated information on matters relating to SEND and Family Support.

And next???

Usually we would set out events for the year but obviously that is not yet in our gift. We held a virtual coffee morning this week and will repeat next month. We are working to arrange Meet the SEND teams virtually as well.