

# Safety Valve Update from Wokingham Borough Council plus Q&A Session, Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November 2023



Below are the questions asked by parent carers following the Safety Valve Update from WBC on Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> November.

## Main Themes:

- Good plans for the future, but what is happening for children now – ACTION NEEDED NOW!
- Poor communication from the SEND Team.
- EOTAS/AP provision stopping because WBC not paying providers.
- Lack of EBSA support. No support available from Foundry.
- Short Breaks

Black text = questions from parents

Blue text = response from WBC

Purple text = response from SEND Voices Wokingham

## Will children have to change schools with Safety Valve?

Do the children already placed in independent schools stay where they are?

Yes, there are no plans to move children unless something such as placement breakdown happened. The annual review process for children/young people attending non-maintained / independent specialist (as well as independent schools) remains unchanged.

## Schools Resources - The plan for Early Intervention is great, but what about the children who need help now?

How do you address when early intervention has been neglected?

How will enhanced specialist outreach offer help children that need extra provision, for example pre or post teach, or 1:1 support to enable them to meet their potential. Schools don't have budget for this provision, and I don't see any plans to address this.

The schools are on their knees they need more staff.

Schools have specific funding available to them to support children with additional needs and/or disabilities. The Council provides additional 'top up' funding for children with more complex needs that may need additional specialist provision. There is also a wide range of 'SEN Support' provision available to schools that do not require an EHC Plan to access. The Council works closely with schools that have said they do not have the required budget to meet need.

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## Area SENDCO

With the appointment of the Area Senco and the additional Senco's, how do you see the area senco managing and supporting schools when the infrastructure isn't in place to put in place the SEND support. This has been apparent for many years and with services already over stretched and funding for schools not covering basic needs in schools how will schools fund better and early SEND support?

The Area SENCO will be a valuable new 'resource' that schools can work with to support their approach to additional needs and disabilities. We know there is some excellent and inclusive practice in Wokingham schools- the Area SENCO will support with cascading this and supporting consistency of practice across all of Wokingham schools. They will also be developing training and resources that will assist schools in supporting children and young people with additional needs/disabilities. Once in post (January 2024), we can arrange an introduction session with families if helpful.

## Communication with SEND Team

All sounds great in theory - we just want basic comms - we currently have no idea who are case worker is? No comms that she left ?? My son out of school since yr 2 he should be yr 7 - he has EOTAS which is difficult to use - too rigid and no one to talk to

So frustrating chasing SEND team / no idea who caseworker is

5 months and no contact, formal complaint, still no response, it just goes on

This appears to be a common theme and we will work to address it asap. The theme about lack of comms is coming through loud and clear and we will address this asap.

We will place an 'org chart' on the Local Offer so families will be aware who their SEND Case Officer is, and the management structure of the Team. Improved communication is a priority area for the Council and we are developing a 'drop in' service as well as Local Offer helpline to support this area (alongside a Communication Strategy).

## Local Provision

You had a great opportunity with the launch of a brand-new ASD school - Oak tree - to improve provision for academically able autistic children but the limited number of places are already filled with children with severe development delay. Where is the provision for academically able children in Wokingham?

Chiltern Way Academy, an Ofsted outstanding specialist setting, mainstream with additional support and the new hubs and provisions will provide this. Clearly, we still have to make provision for those less able. The number of places available in the first instance are limited by the DfE and their process which means schools will open in a phased fashion is not full at opening.

The SEND team hasn't even put Chiltern Way on my son's consultation list (specialist on EHCP). How is the consultation list decided upon? There is tons of provision (though maybe not places...) for non-verbal/pre-verbal children but none for academically able who fall between gaps

I am sorry to hear this, this is not at all what we want. this may be due to the age of the child. There is a provision list available and we consult with schools that are parental preference, as well as those the Council considers may be suitable based on their admissions criteria.

Yet every single one has said no. Hence, I'll be seeing you at tribunal. What a ridiculous system

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I understand the frustration, we can direct some schools but we have to work with those schools and going against their views and expertise makes that difficult.

## EOTAS

Where a child has an EHCP and is unable to access an education in a school, how will the LA provide an EOTAS package if the LA has signed a safety valve agreement to reduce spending on SEND?

I think that's the key - those of us on EOTAS need someone to talk to. Like families with kids in school have a senco, we have NO ONE.

How does WBC justify constant delays over a period of months in providing an EOTAS package for a child with an EHCP?

we can't justify this, some of the packages are very complex and not easy to get in place, but we would not try to justify delays.

I have had to put in a stage 2 complaint now as the LA has still not put provision in place.

Unfortunately, you do make excuses for the and try to justify the delays and state that the lack of provision/providers is why a child is missing out and then parents are ignored - our experience is that the SEND team don't carry out actions, ignore communication and small issues grow and become unmanageable

yes our SALT has stopped

may i ask, is this at a specific school?

No - this is part of EOTAS package, just to clarify = the support has not stopped it's been interrupted due to non-payment

Ok, this was one of the discussions earlier, I know people are addressing individual cases, in some cases we have asked for evidence and quality assurance and until we've had all this information we can't set them up as a provider on the finance system. Thank you for this, I appreciate that's not helpful and We'll look to address it asap

Sorry .. I am confused Colin - our SALT has been paid previously - all comms from our caseworker ceased so all emails I have sent have not been responded to.

We know that our processes for children educated other than at school need to be developed and have a dedicated workstream tasked to this (including parent/carer representation). Individual payment issues have been prioritised and are being addressed. If any remain please contact the SEND Team for action.

## EHCP Process

How do parents get feedback on why parental suggestions made to draft EHCP's are not taken on board?

What standards do you apply to ensure that section F provision is correctly specified and quantified?

The SEND Team are guided by the statutory advice provided by professionals and services. There is a QA process in place to support with specification and quantification of provision. The QA process is being revised and developed further with a view to supporting high quality EHC Plans.

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How long should we expect to wait to get feedback on school consultations following finalisation of an EHCP?

Consultations go to settings at the draft EHCP stage (for newly issued Plans). For existing Plans, the process is slightly different, however most schools have to reply within 15 calendar days. Some schools don't have to follow this timescale which is a challenge (independent).

Do you strive for children to meet their potential? In my experience you seem satisfied with setting a very low bar for outcomes for children.

Future plans look positive. What do we do now whilst we are stuck in gaps in provision? There isn't EBSA support for children who are out of School.

CASE WORKER RETENSION - how can this be improved?

Within the SEND Team there has been some turnover as a number of Officers were interim. This is being looked at to support a permanent workforce that is supported to meet increased demand.

It's a shame it can be owned verbally here but when one puts a formal complaint forward you can't find fault in your work. It throws families to the gutter after hours sweat and tears to get provision in place and then the team not admitting to fault of ignoring communications and not paying bills.

Complaint responses are expected to 'own fault' if something has gone wrong or a service has not been of the standard we expect. We do focus on how we can put things right (or explaining why / how we have reached a decision).

## **Alternative Provision**

Are there enough AP's for children struggling in mainstream now?

Both educational settings and the Council commission alternative provision to support children and young people where it is required. We are working with a range of alternative providers to ensure, if/where there may be gaps, we can ensure children are supported. We are improving our working relations with these providers to ensure that the support they provide is of good quality and represents value for money.

## **Foundry – no access to this provision**

We were told the same thing re Foundry. Unless your child is classified as medically vulnerable there's no point in reaching out to them. This was a few years ago though.

They will not provide any support unless they have CAMHS sign off.

Foundry don't work from family referrals - called them yesterday

They won't talk to families and still demand CAMHS consultant letter to get any help

What's the option if Foundry can't meet the current demands?

EWH offer 8 week interventions, that's a drop in the ocean for our kids

EVERYTHING THAT IS BEEN SAID IS THE SAME FOR US!!

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The Council are working closely with the Foundry (an Ofsted 'Good' provider) regarding their offer and how we can potentially extend it to ensure children and young people are supported closer to their local communities, in between educational placements.

## Parents at breaking point

It has ruined my parenting experience and I honestly cannot see a thing getting better it is impossible

I am also broken from the EHCP process and I believe this is the same for many parents. I have had to do one appeal, fund multiple private reports and now I am facing another appeal due to the lack of specification and quantification of section F. It is like a second job having to deal with the WBC SEND team and I feel like the whole strategy of the SEND team is to delay supporting children, by pushing parents to appeal, and setting the bar very low for their children. It feels like you hope that eventually parents will give up and as you are hearing they do. The children ultimately suffer from lack of support from the SEND team and broken parents.

They have hoped we will give up and they have won to some degree it's cost me thousands and thousands to get to where we are now and it's still not a suitable education and I have had to reduce my working hours by 20 hours a week just to manage the admin

I have been working with WBC with my two children for 20 years I am so sad to see what is happening tonight. SO many angry parents I note Helen Watson stays silent

WBC could save money by not forcing parents to tribunal and therefore avoiding lawyers costs.

Council Officers want to work with families and to support children and young people to achieve their full potential. There is lots to be excited about (new schools, new hubs, greater focus on Preparation for Adulthood, Early Intervention- however we know without improved communications these positive developments risk being lost. We are hopeful that regular sessions like these will help.

## Short Breaks

And how do short breaks fit into this work in supporting families in crisis

I can't face another form to fill in

We have asked the Short Breaks team for an update and will share as soon as it is available.

## General Comments

I think we need these more than once per term. Clearly a lot of massive issues and dissatisfied parents.

We will be meeting with WBC to arrange further update sessions as well as a forum for families to discuss their individual issues. We will let everyone know as soon as dates/times are arranged. This has been agreed and times/dates put in place. Next sessions: Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> February and Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup> May via Zoom 7.00 – 8.30pm

Terri/Sarah, can these comments be made available to those who couldn't attend?

Yes, these Q&A's will be published

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I just wanted to say thank you to all the WBC team - appreciate this is your evening too, and SEND voices for organising.

Its all very well talking about it but parents need action!

[Thanks to everyone for taking time out of their evenings for this call this evening.](#)

Yes thanks, these communications are very important

just answers emails as a starting point!!!

....and stick to the legislation!

Thank you for your time

thank you so much Terri and everyone xx STAY STRONG

Thank you everyone ❤️