

Update for families with Wokingham Borough Council (WBC) and Health (ICB and BHFT)

2nd June 2026, 6.30 – 8.00pm @ The Holt School

Attendees:

Prue Bray, WBC Executive Member for Children's Services

Jamie Conran, WBC Acting Service Director SEND & Inclusion

Emma Cockerell, WBC Executive Director of Children's Services

Lajla Johansson, Head of All Age Learning Disability, All Age Neuro-Divergence & SEND 0-25
Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Hayley Rees, WBC Service Director, Strategy, Transformation and Commissioning Children's
Services

Ming Zhang, WBC Service Director of Education and SEND

Sam Philo, WBC Acting Head of SEND

Karen Cridland, Director Children, Family and All Age Services Berkshire Healthcare
Foundation Trust (BHFT)

Miranda Walcott, Designated Clinical Officer for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
(0-25) Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (ICB)

Sarah, Terri, Hannah - SEND Voices Wokingham (SVW)

Apologies: None

Attended by 26 parent carers + 1 young person

Welcome, housekeeping and introductions from SVW

Q&As - Colours indicate which organisation the response was from

Wokingham Borough Council

Health

SEND Voices Wokingham

Jamie Conran – Presentation ASEND Inspection Outcomes & actions to date and SEND Reform Plans

Jamie presented the results of the Area SEND Inspection that was completed in January 2026 and spoke about activities to date and the Priority Action Plan which is being developed.

Jamie then shared information on the development of Wokingham's SEND Reform Plans.

[See slides for additional information](#)

Question & Answer Session:

These have been grouped into themes that were raised during the session

Q – It is great to hear the plans for the future, but what is going to be done to help the children who are currently being failed?

Various examples given:

- Children out of school with no education
- Waits in excess of 2 years for CAMHS
- No support for school-based trauma
- No outreach/specialist support whilst waiting for tribunal
- What are schools doing to help & support these children?

A – We are focusing on SEND Reform Plans to ensure children and families experience more timely and coordinated support, including workforce development and the introduction of Multi-Disciplinary Teams (MDTs) and the Experts at Hand. One of the main priorities is training for staff to better understand children's needs. The Government see this as a 10-year transformation plan. There will also be more outreach support (exploring this from our special schools) to support mainstream schools.

However, we know we need to do more right now and will continue to work hard to deliver the improvements we had already planned prior to SEND Reform being announced. Whilst Ofsted recognised that we had made progress and had a range of areas of good practice and strength, we are also delivering to address our current challenges, for example opening a range of new unit/resource provisions in September 2026.

A – At the end of March in Wokingham the average wait time for a first appointment with CAMHS was 5.7 weeks. However, our waiting times for neurodiversity assessments (autism and ADHD) is 2 years or more.

We recognise that waiting for an autism or ADHD assessment can be difficult for children, young people and their families, especially when day-to-day challenges are already having an impact at home, in school or in the community. It is therefore important to emphasise that support should begin immediately and not wait for or rely on a diagnosis. Across Berkshire, there is a wide range of support available based on a child or young person's needs, whether or not they have had an assessment. Berkshire Healthcare signposts families at the point of referral to a wide range of local and online resources, offers parent/carer support through SHaRON, and provides advice if needs increase or circumstances change while a child is waiting.

Much of the same support available after diagnosis is also available before assessment or even without referral for assessment, including practical advice, online guidance, workshops, peer support, and strategies to help with areas such as emotional regulation, sleep, behaviour, sensory needs and attention difficulties. More information is available on our website: [**ADHD and autism | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**](#)

Families should also be reassured that schools and educational settings are expected to put support plans in place before referral, based on the needs they are seeing, rather than waiting for assessment or diagnosis. This means children and young people should not be joining a waiting list without support already being considered and put in place to help with identified needs

During the meeting many families also highlighted the impact of school placements on their children, using the term trauma to describe this.

We recognise that negative experiences of education can have a significant and lasting impact on children, young people and their families, and that these experiences can remain with them long after they have left the school environment. Experiences such as bullying, exclusion, repeated misunderstanding, unmet needs, or overwhelming school environments can affect wellbeing, confidence, and a young person's sense of safety.

It is important that these experiences are recognised and validated and that any support offered to a young person should be both trauma- and autism-informed, acknowledging the individual's experiences and considering the wider factors that may have contributed to their distress. Research also emphasises the importance of restoring a sense of safety, making appropriate environmental adjustments, and involving the young person in decisions about their support. Our Mental Health Support Teams provide advice and consultation to schools to help them to provide appropriate support to individual young people as well as providing training and helping develop a whole school approach that facilitates positive emotional wellbeing and mental health for all children attending the school.

In addition, CAMHS provides assessment and treatment for mental health difficulties. Where the impact of school experiences has led to difficulties that meet the criteria for a mental health condition, such as an anxiety disorder, depression, or Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), mental health intervention through CAMHS may be appropriate and should be offered. In these circumstances, treatment would focus on the mental health difficulties arising from or associated with those experiences and would often involve an evidence-based intervention being offered, such as Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy.

However, not all distress arising from difficult school experiences is best understood as a mental health disorder. Some responses can be conceptualised as understandable reactions to very challenging and adverse circumstances, rather than evidence of a mental health condition. This does not lessen the impact of those experiences or the need for

support but does not necessarily mean that a CAMHS intervention is the best fit for the young person's need.

Other agencies, e.g. counselling services and SAFE!, can help children, young people and families make sense of their experiences where they feel this would be beneficial. It is also important to recognise that not everyone needs to revisit or process difficult experiences in therapy. For some children and young people, distress reduces naturally over time when they feel safe, understood, and supported.

We have introduced community navigator posts into CAMHS CPE (common point of entry). These roles now support families to access appropriate support from partner agencies including:

Tellmi - Digital mental health support

ARC Wokingham Youth Counselling

Support for young people affected by crime | SAFE!

Q – This is the same promised we heard after the last inspection but nothing changes, what is going to be different this time?

A fundamental systematic change is needed - a total overhaul as the current set up does not work.

A – Ofsted did recognise there had been improvements, including stable leadership and a permanent SEND workforce which was beginning to make a difference. We are on a journey and will continue to work hard to address the areas raised this evening. The SEND Reform Plan and delivery of this is aimed at delivering a significant shift in how we work as a partnership to support children, young people and families.

Q – How are you going to improve silo working and services not communicating or listening to one another? No engagement with families, SEND team communication raised as an ongoing issue.

A – We recognise the importance of timely communication with families, and this is a continued priority for the SEND Team. EHCPs grew by 350 in 2025, which presents a challenge keeping up with the increased demand, however we are looking at SEND / Annual review portals to help the team with some of the more manual tasks, so they can focus more on communications and meeting attendance.

We are using the opportunity presented by SEND Reform to drive our partnership working, and as leaders are committed to coordinating our work to support a more seamless experience of accessing support.

Q – Parental Mental Health, what can be done to support families.

A show of hands indicated the mental health of many of the families attending had been negatively affected

Miranda and Karen have agreed to work with parents to identify how we can, where possible to support parental mental health when their child/young person is having support from CAMHS. This will however need a system response to support families in crisis

Berkshire Healthcare provide services to support adults with their mental health

- Talking Therapies. Here's how to access the service: **Refer yourself to Talking Therapies | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**
- The Wellness Hub where they can get a referral which will support them to access the whole range of 3rd sector organisations. Here's how to access the service: **Berkshire Wellness Hub | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**
- Let's Connect will help people to build a social network that supports them to manage the challenges experiences: Here's how to access the service: **Let's Connect Wellbeing Network | Berkshire Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust**
- There is also access to social prescribers within primary care. (Primary care is mainly GPs but includes dentistry, pharmacy, practice nurses, opticians).

SEND Voices Wokingham are currently working with **Wokingham Recovery College** (mental health support for adults) to set-up a session for SEND families. They will also be attending our Local Offer Live day in October when you can talk to them directly about the services they provide for parent carers in the Borough.

Q - What is the escalation process for complaints, some highlighted they had been blocked from making a complaint

A – **WBC Complaints Process:** <https://www.wokingham.gov.uk/children-families-and-young-people/send-local-offer/updates-news-and-information/complain-about-send-issue>

Children, young people and families have the right to make a complaint and should not be blocked from doing so. Any specific examples of this please share with Terri / Sarah (SEND Voices Wokingham; email info@sendvoiceswokingham.org.uk) and we can look into this with consent.

A – You can make a complaint to Berkshire Healthcare by contacting - **Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS):**

Address: Building 1 Room 1.1.11 Prospect Park Hospital, Honey End Lane, Tilehurst, Reading, RG30 4EJ

E-mail: pals@berkshire.nhs.uk

Tel: 0118 904 3467 – PALS are open 9.30am - 4.30pm Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays).

Or by contact the Complaints Office:

Tel: 0118 904 3420

Email: complaints@berkshire.nhs.uk

The complaints office is open 9.30am - 4.30pm Monday to Friday (excluding Bank Holidays).

You can also contact Julian Emms, Chief Executive via the complaints office email.

We have listened to your feedback about health services and will take that back to our teams.

At the end of the session, some of you spoke with Miranda Walcott (Designated Clinical Officer for SEND – ICB). If anyone would like to follow up directly with Miranda, please contact: bobicb.dco@nhs.net

Q – Have you got the money to support your SEND Reform Plans?

The LA are too often wasting money on things that are not needed or don't work rather than spending it in the places its needed and parents/carers know will benefit children in the borough.

A – Funding is currently based on 2017/18 figures. We are asking for a commitment that the money for the SEND Reform Plans is going to keep flowing. Wokingham is the lowest funder LA in the country.

Q - What is being done about lack of school planning?

A – As of last summer (2025) there is now a school placed planning process in place. Accuracy of this is very good (place allocation now within 2% accuracy).

We are opening a new primary school where there is a lack of places, but other primaries now seeing the decline in birth rate.

Secondary mainstream places still under pressure for the next couple of years.

SEND Sufficiency planning is ongoing with more places opening in mainstream schools, including secondary: **Options to create more SEND school places**

We will share more information about school place planning via SVW

Q – What are you going to do to re-build the trust with families? It got better for a bit but now it is worse than ever.

A - We know that the SEND Inspection outcome has impacted trust with families, but we are committed to rebuilding this and will work with SEND Voices and use other opportunities to continue to meet with and listen to children, young people and families to check how we are doing, and drive service improvement.

A – We have listened to your feedback about health services and will take that back to our teams.

At the end of the session, some of you spoke with Miranda Wilcott (Designated Clinical Officer for SEND – ICB) and Karen Cridland (Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust) about specific health concerns. If anyone would like to follow up directly with Miranda or Karen, please contact: bobicb.dco@nhs.net

Q – Who regulates you (the panel members from WBC & Health)? Who is ultimately responsible?

A – Emma Cockerell is ultimately responsible as the Executive Director of Children's Services.

A – Karen Cridland is Director of Children's Services within Berkshire Healthcare who provide children's health services and the CEO of Berkshire Healthcare is Julian Emms

Ofsted and the Department for Education (DfE) regulate the LA and CQC/NHS England regulate Health

Q – Many questions raised about the SEND Panel process:

- Why is it a no to assess when my child is obviously struggling?
- Why do panel not listen to the evidence?
- Why is panel not transparent?
- Why don't you listen to recommendations from CAMHS and other professionals?
- *'this is one of the only services you come to and ask for help and get refused every time'*

A – The SEND Reforms will mean that children get support earlier without the need for and EHC Needs Assessment.

Further information relating to our SEND Panel is detailed here [EHCP decision making panels](#). We are currently working on how we share information regarding SEND Panel, and decisions overall including data. We will share this with SEND Voices to cascade more widely.

Q – 229K was spent in 23/24 on tribunals, cost of mediation is on top of this as well. How much does each tribunal/mediation case cost rather than providing support or and EHCP for a child? The tribunal system is a failure - at every point.

A – Costs of each tribunal are individual, but we are working on providing data regarding this as most of our tribunals we resolve prior to a hearing with a Judge.

Q – Will you start listening to parents and the children, they know what they can and can't do? – they are the experts

A – With the Experts at Hands model we have already highlighted that the parents and children are actually the experts.

WBC employ 4 young experts (18-15 years with lived experience) who are advising on current practice as well SEND Reform Plans and also working with larger groups of young people. This is an area we would like to do more.

Note from SVW – we are disappointed that we have been feeding back many of these themes for years through our Termly Feedback from Families and our Annual SEND Survey. We would like a commitment from the Area SEND Partnership that our feedback is listened too and taken seriously as well (as it represents more families than were not able to attend this evening). We would like to see this running through the SEND Reform plans and PAP with an additional commitment to the “we did” feedback. Agreed.

Q – Staffing levels, caseloads too high for the SEND team

A – As above we grew by 350 EHC plans in 2025, which places additional pressure on the SEND Team with communication, statutory timescales and attendance at meetings. We are recruiting additional support to help with our annual reviews and are exploring SEND / annual review portals to help the Team with more manual areas of work, which will assist in freeing up some capacity.

Q – Concerns raised over school staffing levels, particularly TA's and SENCOS. What is being done to support schools. How are you going to make sure all schools are doing what they should be for SEND children.

There is a range of support already available for schools, including a SENCO Induction Programme, outreach services, multi-agency inclusion clinic and EP support. Our SEND Reform Plan is aimed at increasing this support, including exploring the role of special schools in this. We are also creating a partnership quality assurance framework which will focus on the delivery of support for children and young people (how do we know).

Q – Where are the 'Expert at hands' coming from when there is already a shortage of EP's OT's etc - how are these people going to be in roles when there is not enough of them for the need. And how are school staff being trained to support children better in schools?

This is a national challenge, but we have a plan for workforce development and 'growing our own', alongside looking at our existing capacity to ensure we can start Experts at Hand from September 2026.

Q – Would you give yourselves the same rating as the Inspectors?

A – Yes—certainly 12-18 months ago. The inspection highlighted some early signs of improvement, but we know we are not where we need to be yet. We were already aware of issues with data, wheelchair provision, and how settings deliver the support set out in EHCPs.

We accept the findings in full.