

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

27th March 2025 7-8.30pm via Zoom

Attendees:

Miranda Walcott, Designated Clinical Officer for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (0-25) Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB)

Vivienne Okoh, Head of Children's Commissioning, Berkshire West Joint Commissioning Team BOB ICB

Lajla Johansson, Lead for All Age Mental Health, LD, Autism and SEND BOB ICB

Helen Alderman, Service Director for Universal and Specialist Children's, Family and Neurodiversity Services, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

Jamie Conran, WBC Head of SEND

Kelli Scott, WBC Head of Service, Children with Disabilities

Carey Tulloch, WBC Senior Specialist Children's Strategy and Commissioning Service

Ming Zhang, WBC Assistant Director Education & SEND

Sarah/Terri, SEND Voices Wokingham

Apologies:

Emma Cockerell, WBC Director of Children's Services

Family Participants: 18

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

Wokingham Borough Council

Health

SEND Voices Wokingham

Welcomes and Introductions

WBC SEND Team Update by Jamie Conran - Head of SEND

Slides – will be shared

An overview was given of the SEND Service structure which includes the SEND team responsible for the statutory EHCP Process. Role information for key personnel and details of what the SEND Team do was shared and is available in the slides.

SEND casework practitioners are now linked directly to a school to build relationships. The SEND Team is nearly all permanent staff (orange boxes on SEND Team slides attached denote interim staff). This will improve the stability to the Team and the service provided. Information is also available on the [WBC Local Offer Website](#).

Q – What happens if a child transfers to another school out of borough, but still lives in Wokingham?

A – you would be allocated to the SEND casework practitioner who is attached to the closest mainstream school to you. Email in if you are unsure who your SEND caseworker practitioner is. Email: sen@wokingham.gov.uk

Q – EOTAS caseworkers?

A – less than 1% of pupils are EOTAS, approximately 25 CYP, therefore there is not a dedicated SEND Casework Practitioner (for all EOTAS children). Please email SEND Team to find out your casework practitioner: sen@wokingham.gov.uk

Q – With the new structure, will the caseworkers have a greater input into panels and understanding the CYP to advocate for the CYP and the correct setting. Will they meet the CYP?

A – SEND Casework Practitioners are encouraged to understand their allocated schools and to visit them, as it helps understanding of what they can offer. They will also listen to the views of parents and the child. This will all be fed into panel to help inform decision making. EPs are also on the panel and can add the personal knowledge where they have met the child (in person).

WBC SEND Sufficiency Update Presentation by Carey Tulloch – Senior Specialist Children's Strategy and Commissioning Service

A **SEND Sufficiency Statement** for provision up to 2030 is currently going through sign off. The statement looks at provision gaps and recommendations on how to address those gaps. Additional funding from national government has been announced today (27/3/25) but as yet it isn't clear what this will mean for Wokingham Schools.

See slides for school provision and alternative provision breakdown.

[Alternative provision in local areas in England: a thematic review - GOV.UK](#)

High needs banding review – We are working with schools and other stakeholders to introduce banding for top-up funding to schools for EHCPs. This will improve transparency and consistency of funding across mainstream and special schools.

Q – What is the difference between a resource base and a SEND unit?

A - Resource Base – approx. 50% of time is spent in the Resource Base and the remaining time the CYP will access mainstream. This however will always be based on the needs of the child and may vary on a day-to-day basis dependent on their need that day.

SEND Unit – approx. 70% of time spent in the SEND unit, with around 30% in mainstream, again dependant on the child's needs.

In both cases this should be based on the needs of the pupil, e.g. they may need more time in the unit/base to start with or at certain times. EP and schools will help support which type of placement is most suitable for an individual. These are new provisions, therefore, not all schools and SENDCo's may not be clear on the differences at the moment.

WBC will develop an information resource which would help explain the differences to support families to understand what's available in Wokingham.

WBC SEND Inclusion Plan by Ming Zhang - Assistant Director Education & SEND

Presentation on the strategic level local area plan for SEND.

WBC Short Breaks update by Kelli Scott - Head of Service, Children with Disabilities

WBC Short Breaks update by Kelli Scott - Head of Service, Children with Disabilities & DSCO

See presentation slides.

Phase 1 – Activity to understand and identify the immediate gaps in provision has been completed. Work has been completed with providers to consider how this need can be addressed. The Phase 1 plan is going for sign off in April, and includes support being offered to mainstream services to make their provisions more accessible for children with disabilities.

Phase 2 – Focuses on the ongoing development of the Short Breaks offer. In April, a survey will be shared to gather parent carer views, along with focus groups being undertaken with families and providers across April/May. This will be followed by the development of a Short Breaks service specification outlining plans for the offer moving forward.

Commissioning Objectives are to:

- promote inclusivity in universal services
- expand availability and uptake
- simplify access
- enhance provider sustainability
- increase availability

PINS – Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools by Miranda Walcott - Designated Clinical Officer for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (0-25) Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board

Wokingham is going to be included in the 2nd Phase of PINS, starting April 2025. This is a National multidisciplinary team pilot for 30 primary schools. PINS looks at supporting primary schools with their understanding of neurodiversity and best practice methods.

Neurodiversity Pathway Changes by Helen Alderman - Service Director for Universal and Specialist Children's, Family and Neurodiversity Services, Berkshire Healthcare Foundation Trust

See presentation slides

Neurodiversity diagnosis appointments - Through additional resource BHFT have expanded staffing and increased the number of appointments available. Online resource has also been expanded and BHFT have introduced the Needs Led model for new diagnosis referrals across the 3 Berkshire West Local Authorities; (Wokingham, Reading and West Berkshire).

There have been changes to the Neurodiversity referral form, see slides for details.

Additional Q&As from Parents

Q – Communication and annual reviews are still poor when do you anticipate this will improve? Six months so far waiting for a draft AR? Would this still show up on your dashboard?

A – We are in the process of creating a dedicated annual review data dashboard, which will help SEND Casework Practitioners to track when annual reviews are due, as well as all of the statutory timescales that follow. We are also launching a specific annual review 'audit tool' so that we can work with families, schools and other practitioners involved with supporting a child, to improve the quality of the annual review paperwork, as well as the timeliness.

Q - There has been temporary staff for the last 2 years and looking at your diagram in your presentation, again the school has been assigned temporary member of staff and again we anticipate we will be left in limbo. Can we discuss our particular case with you, as I fear this will still carry on. The annual EHCP system is still broken. every time the case is looked at things change and we always go backwards and not forward (forwarded to Jamie Conran and picked-up with parent directly)

Q - What will be happening if/when schools do not follow legal process related to annual review procedures and carrying out provision identified and funded via EHCP.

A – Generally, it works well, and the school provides the provision / follows the statutory process. In cases where this doesn't happen, there is the school complaints process, along with talking to the SENCo and Headteacher. Please do notify WBC SEND Casework Practitioners when there are issues. The aim is always to work collaboratively with schools and families.

Q – does the post 16 new hub (40 people) cater for students up to age 25? since our child is EOTAS how can we access (so they are not overlooked) or at least be made aware of what will be available and how to apply?

A – We are currently working with providers to designing the curriculum and will include consideration of the age range for the new post-16 hub within this (EHCPs can go up to age 25). As we approach opening (currently scheduled for September 2026) there will be lots of opportunities to discuss and be made aware of the detail, but also please do speak to your SEND Casework Practitioner and use the Local Offer, to ask a question, if you can't find the information that you need.

We are scoping the curriculum offer with the providers at the moment but as soon as this is available, we will make sure this is on the Local Offer along with the admission criteria/process. We are hoping to have this will be available for the autumn term. There will be a strong focus on supported internships.

Q - does that mean it might not cater up to 25? Our child will be 20 and a half when it opens!!

A – Please see above.

Q – way forward meetings, why have they been cancelled, when the cost of mediation is expensive and the way forward meetings were effective? Along with the lack of information on why there was a refusal to assess. Has there been a cost analysis on stopping the way forward meetings?

A – The Way Forward meetings were paused due to staffing issues. We agree that these meetings are a good mechanism to resolve issues. We hope to soon reinstate these meeting in a similar format and are looking into this currently. The SEND Team would like to gather more feedback from families who have requested that Way Forward meetings are reinstated or have experiences them before.

SEND Voices Wokingham will let families know how they can feedback their experiences of Way Forward Meetings

Q – What happens if schools do not follow lawful process related to provisions identified in EHCPs and have been funded to provide these provisions.

A - Generally, it works well, and the school provides the provision. There is the school complaints process, along with talking to the SENCo and headteacher. Along with raising with WBC SEND Casework Practitioners when there are issues. The aim is always to work collaboratively with schools.

Q Is there was any update on when the secondary provision SEND unit would be open? The date was previously Sept 25 but seems to have moved on. And if it is known when details on location would be published?

A - Due to the capital/building timescales and availability of contractors September 25 is not going to be met, it will be within that academic year 25/26 (may be January but this has not yet been confirmed). I can bring an update next time.

Concerns raised about new neurodiversity referrals.

- The parents know the child best, what about when schools say, 'they are fine in school'!? this is something we have been raising since the changes were announced
- Maybe need for schools training re masking
- A diagnosis is also not just about support in school it can be key in understanding yourself

Q - For the health team why does the dynamic risk register have no clinical members within the team. They make decisions about admission into hospital?

A - The care navigators work closely with clinicians where there is an escalation or de-escalation of need.

Q - I am sorry this did not happen in our case an art therapist is not qualified to make clinical decisions. The key worker a social worker - initiated a wasted section 17 and this has led to my child being batted between pillar and post happy to talk offline (SVW can supply details to Health)

Q - The issue about CIN proceedings (and at other meetings) no longer having an administrator taking minutes has come up again. The procedure is absolutely clear, the chair of the meeting (usually the social worker) should not be taking minutes. How can a parents ensure that mistakes and omissions are corrected as there seems to be an extreme reluctance.

A – The Children’s Services Practice Standards set out practice requirements as they relate the range of activities undertaken by Children’s Social Care; this includes the completion of Child in Need (CIN) meetings. There is no provision outlined in this document that suggests that the chair of the CIN meeting should not take the minutes, although it is accepted that the process of multi-tasking can at times be challenging. Administrative support is not however routinely available for CIN Meetings, as this input is required to respond to other activity across Children’s Services.

Child in Need minutes are not intended to be a verbatim record of the discussion, rather just a summary of the salient points. If, however, there are factual errors contained within the minutes, then I would encourage you to have a discussion with your child’s Social Worker about this, so that amendments can be made. If for any reason you are unable to resolve this directly with them, then I would invite you to contact their line manager for a further discussion.

I just wanted to say that I had need to use the new structure today to contact my school’s allocated case worker and I found it much easier to get hold of the appropriate person. So thank you.

thank you for the really positive update. It's great to see the (SEND Team) structure and improvements coming!