

### **Brighton & Hove City Council - Response to PaCC Position Statement**

Before starting, it is important to acknowledge how challenging and difficult it is for families who have children and young people with SEND and which has been made worse by the pandemic.

We understand how critical the situation has been at times and that a lack of access to short breaks/respite and other support services has had a significant impact upon families.

I was also disappointed to read some of the experiences parents had regarding their interaction with our services.

I want to reassure you that these have been brought to the attention of the new Head of the Specialist Community Disability Service 0-24, who will be sharing these comments with her team and working with them to ensure that the lack of consistency experienced by some parents will be addressed through supervision and future training.

We have carefully read PaCC's position statement and taken on board the feedback from parents (see below). Whilst this document informs our work going forward, we were already aware that the areas of provision and services highlighted in this report required attention; some of which are already included within the SEND strategy under Priority 3 SEND Pathways and Priority 5 Transitions and preparing for the future.

Indeed, we had previously mentioned to PaCC that social care for children and young people with SEND 0-25 would be an area of focus for Autumn 2022.

It is regrettable that we have not been able to move more quickly on the development of these service areas, but the council has had a range of recruitment challenges as a direct result of the pandemic. We recognise that these staffing issues have also had an impact on families.

The significant shortage of care workers required to maintain and support the sector have been unavoidable and are reflected nationally.

However, I am pleased to report that we have now recruited to the Head of Service 0-24 position within the Specialist Community Disability Service (SCDS).

The new Head of Service who has been working with us in an interim capacity since January 2022, has a great deal of experience in running disability services across a range of authorities and brings with her a wealth of experience and many new ideas.

Over the last few months, she has managed to recruit to the social work team vacancies in the SCDS. Although, the recruitment and the retention of staff within our two short breaks homes remains challenging in line with the national picture.

In recognizing the urgency of this work, and to move it on at a pace, I have suggested to PaCC that we have a co-production working group comprised of parents/carers, officers and short breaks care home managers.

The initial purpose of this working group will be to plan the holistic review of services and provision mentioned within the position statement.

The review will then be undertaken by the Head of Service 0-24, and the findings presented to the group and used as a baseline to develop a co-produced action plan that will dovetail with and support the delivery of the SEND Strategy and the Adult Learning Disability Strategy.

As PaCC's position statement has stated, there have been many examples of where officers have worked successfully with PaCC and other partners to develop strategies and services, and more recently putting in place additional educational provision for autistic children and young people.

Therefore, I fully expect this next phase of work to build upon the good relationships we are continuing to build with PaCC and Amaze to respond to the ongoing and changing needs in the SEND community.

I thought it also might be helpful to provide you with an update and the actions we are proposing to take regarding the recommendations put forward by PaCC.

### **PaCC recommendations and BHCC updates**

- 1. Increased investment in children's social care. PaCC note that social care budgets have remained static. This should include a review of the level of unmet need in the city, highlighted in this position statement.**

Currently we do not believe we require additional investment in our social work teams. Caseloads are at a manageable level and are lower than most other local authorities. A market supplement has been applied to match social work salaries to our competitors and we will soon be almost fully staffed.

In terms of our short breaks provision the benchmarking data released by Government, based on 2021/22 budgets, shows that in terms of short breaks and respite provision we benchmark high in comparison to the national position.

Our budgeted spend per head of 0-17 population is £32, this compares to the England average of £23. In purely cash terms this means the council is spending around £450k more in this area than would be the case if we were at the national average. Therefore, at this point in time, it would be difficult to justify an increase in funding in this area.

However, we do believe that we could be more effective in how we use our current resources and thereby provide more support to a wider range of families.

We have already made progress in this area and our short breaks providers, Drove Road and Tudor House, are beginning to welcome more children and young people into the homes.

We are expecting to continue increase the number of short breaks available to families over the coming months until we have fully maximised the potential of both homes. The only barrier to achieving this aim is if the recruitment to these provisions continues to be a challenge. In order to address this issue, we have implemented a rolling advertisement to ensure there is no break in recruitment activity.

We recognise that a review of the eligibility criteria for short breaks provision is urgent and needs addressing quickly. Therefore, as part of the review we will be revising these criteria with stakeholders through the co-production task and finish group. This will also include eligibility for respite and short breaks for those children and young people who have ASC or another neurodivergent diagnosis.

## **2. Apply an Early Intervention family support model in order to invest to save and reduce the need for high-cost packages at a later stage.**

We are hearing the challenges that our families are facing and the positive impact that early intervention would have on the outcomes of children and young people as they transition into adulthood.

We believe that more multi-agency targeted support to parents at critical stages in their child's lives will enable us to understand and respond to the family's needs more effectively.

One of our proposals is to begin working with children at a younger age using our existing resources differently and developing resources where necessary. An example of this might be using Drove Road and Tudor House to provide day activities for younger children who are not yet of an age where we would offer overnight accommodation.

This could provide valuable time to the family during the day which they can use to do things that ordinarily might pose a challenge. The child also gets a short break with their peers doing a fun activity.

Operationally our focus is already trained on how we increase early intervention capacity. We have already appointed 2 full time Social Work Resource Officers (SWROs) to the 14-24 POD.

These posts will be undertaking some of the yearly reviews of young people and will

be undertaking direct work with their young people to really understand their hopes and aspirations for the future.

The expectation being that they use this understanding to plan with the young person and their families what opportunities are available to them to reach their life goals. We would also expect the SWROs to attend EHC plan reviews and any other significant meetings as required to support the young person and their family. We believe this approach will really help to support our young people's transition into adulthood.

Direct payments are an early intervention tool which can be used to meet care needs and support in accessing activities for children and young people. These can also be used to appoint a Personal Assistant (PA) to take your child out for a trip or activity.

We recognise that finding a good PA is an issue and that we need to have a recruitment and retention strategy to increase the number of PAs with the necessary skills to work with children and young people.

We would welcome working with the co-production group on developing this strategy and with other partners such as Possibility People, specifically to think about what opportunities there are to secure a larger skilled workforce, how we can provide training and support to retain their services and is there any further support we can provide to parents/carers in recruiting a PA for their child.

We are intending to further develop the outreach service to become more outcome focused, where direct work with young people could include activities, such as travel training and enhancing their independent skills. This could include taking young people shopping for clothes or for food, cooking, budgeting, attending appointments where possible or even pursuing interests the young person might have.

- 3. Review and co-produce Brighton & Hove's short breaks and respite policy (ref SEND Strategy), including a focus on eligibility criteria, adhering to national legislation, adopting best practice and responding to local need. This must include a review of inclusion of families of neurodivergent CYP without a learning disability.**

We are committed to reviewing and co-producing the short breaks and respite policy through the working group. This will include a focus on eligibility criteria and responding to local need. It will also include looking at how we ensure those children and young people who are neurodivergent and without a learning disability are able to access short breaks and other support.

- 4. Review information regarding access to social care and the role and remit of social care panels.**

Our resource panel already has multi-agency representation that includes representatives from Amaze, Extratime, Barnardo's and others from the voluntary sector, schools, short breaks providers and health.

This is to make the process transparent, but there is also the added benefit that these providers tend to know the children, their families and their needs. We accept that parents might not fully understand the role and the remit of the resource panel, and we would be happy to co-produce, through the working group, easy read accessible information on the purpose of the panel, the decision-making process, what informs that process and what is fed back to parents.

**5. Direct payments: review processes and achieve consistent information for families. e.g. a booklet of comprehensive information for all families.**

We now have a Direct Payments officer who is working closely with Possibility People and parents/ carers. The officer concerned is willing to and has gone out to visit parents in their own homes to explain how to set up and use direct payments.

She has also produced a booklet for parents that will help them to understand what Direct Payments are, how you can apply for them and what you can use them for. This will be available in the coming month and will also be available to other services and educational settings.

**6. Review and improve assessment processes, ensuring they are in line with statutory changes, updates and are clearly communicated to families.**

We are committed to ensuring that young people are having timely transition assessments and recognize this as an area of work that needs to be improved. We realise that the process of transition begins at 14 years of age, and we will be developing a framework to track and ensure that every young person between the ages of 14 and 18 will have a clear transition plan in place with regular reviews.

These plans will be implemented before they are 18 and parents will be included at all stages of the planning for their child.

**7. Review residential short breaks to improve consistency, breadth and amount of provision for eligible children and young people, and identification of gaps in provision for those with high level need who are currently outside eligibility criteria.**

This area of work will be part of the scope for the holistic review of provision and services undertaken by the Head of Service. The findings will be presented to the working group and any resulting actions be included within the co-produce action plan.

**8. Promote and improve access to carer assessments and ensure clear information about the difference between needs and carer assessments.**

We recognise this needs to be embedded in the work that we currently do with families. While carers support needs are considered within the strengthening families assessment and as part of the Care Act assessment, we are keen to ensure this aspect of the assessment process is given greater consideration when offering and planning support for the family.

We would welcome further discussion on this aspect of assessment within the working group.

**9. Review of PA recruitment, in collaboration with relevant organisations such as Possability People, to identify and address factors impacting recruitment such as rates of pay, recruitment processes, training, peer support etc.**

Addressed in response above.

**10. Review transition to adulthood processes for both those eligible for specialist children's disability service and those who are not (including autistic young people), to bring into line with statutory requirements. This will require strong joint working between SCDS and adult social care.**

Within the next two months there will be a multi-disciplinary operating transition forum which will robustly track 14-18 year old's with greater scrutiny to ensure children and parent/carers feel informed, consulted and have been a part of the planning surrounding their child's/young people's future.

SCDS will be working with mainstream social work teams including Adult Social Care to ensure planning in regard to transitioning to adulthood for children who do not have a learning disability are provided the opportunity to be tracked and have transition plans into adult services.

**11. Use appointment to the role of Designated Social Work Officer to ensure strong strategic overview and joint working between health, social care and education.**

This is already in place and is part of the job description for the Head of Service 0-24.

**12. Review suitability and availability of universal short breaks offer for children and young people with SEND, to ensure strong city-wide provision for those not eligible for short breaks.**

This area of work will be part of the scope for the holistic review of provision and services undertaken by the Head of Service. The findings will be presented to the working group and any resulting actions be included within the co-produce action plan.

**13. Update the SEND community around the strategic development of an extended day for children and young people, as agreed by councillors as part of the package of plans for the integrated special school hubs.**

([https://democracy.brighton-](https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/s117888/Special%20Educational%20Needs%20and%20Disability%20SEND%20-%20Reorganisation%20of%20Special%20Schools%20and%20Pupil%20Referr.pdf)

[hove.gov.uk/documents/s117888/Special%20Educational%20Needs%20and%20Disability%20SEND%20-%20Reorganisation%20of%20Special%20Schools%20and%20Pupil%20Referr.pdf](https://democracy.brighton-hove.gov.uk/documents/s117888/Special%20Educational%20Needs%20and%20Disability%20SEND%20-%20Reorganisation%20of%20Special%20Schools%20and%20Pupil%20Referr.pdf))

It has always been the plan and agreed with PaCC that once the Extended Day Co-ordinator left their post that we would work with local parent groups to consider how this allocated funding could be used going forward.

It was the intention that these conversations would be taking place this Autumn. Therefore, it now seems sensible to address the development of the extended day through the working group and include it as part of the action planning process.

**14. Review provision for children in need with SEND who do not currently qualify for support from SCDS and ensure robust joint working between the relevant teams to avoid children and young people falling between gaps between services, and ensuring they get appropriate support from social care.**

Within the next two months there will be a multi-disciplinary operating transition forum which will robustly track 14-18 year old's with greater scrutiny to ensure children and parent/carers feel informed, consulted and have been a part of the planning surrounding their child's/young people's future.

SCDS will be working with mainstream social work teams, including Adult Social Care, to ensure planning in regard to transitioning to adulthood for children who do not have a learning disability are provided the opportunity to be tracked and have transition plans into adult services.

The Head of Service will be working to ensure the transition points are smoother and the plans for young people regarding independence/care arrangements are clearer for children/young people, parent and carers to understand.

**15. Training for all social care staff about SEND to ensure an appropriate response to the challenges faced by families and help avoid erroneous safeguarding concerns raised due to lack of SEND understanding, reducing parent carer blame and improving parent carer support.**

We would welcome the input of the co-production working group to develop the training offer for all social care staff on SEND. This will also need to be done with the Brighton & Hove Inclusion Support Service (BHISS), which already delivers a range of training to schools on SEND and which would be in good position to lead on this aspect of the work.

**16. Staff capacity at BHCC/CCG: PaCC highlights the need for increased investment in staff teams at all levels, to address the significant issues in social care.**

Staff investment and capacity within the Specialist Community Disability Service has been addressed earlier in the document. As you may be aware the wider issue of recruitment and retention in the social care workforce is a national issue and we are working with our colleagues in human resources to develop a strategy that will address the problems we are encountering. We would be happy to share progress on this through the working group.

**17. Communication and information: ensure clear and transparent information for families regarding eligibility, social care processes and clear signposting to other relevant services.**

Co-produced communications and information will be a standing agenda item for the working group to ensure the community is kept informed on any agreed actions.

**18. Build and maintain trust and transparency regarding social care through improved communications:**

The citywide strategies relating to SEND Social Care are referred to in the co-produced SEND Strategy. Much of this work has not progressed because of the pandemic and the related recruitment issues. We are hoping with the establishment of the co-production working group these will be addressed and regular updates will be provided to the community and the SEND Partnership Board through the already established reporting process.

**19. Take immediate action to look strategically at the current acute challenges facing social care provision, including difficulties recruiting staff, to identify ways to mitigate the impact on families.**

This has been covered earlier in the document.

**20. Take forward social care recommendations as outlined in citywide strategies as a priority. The SEND community must be notified of the timeline for this activity.**

The timeline for this activity will be informed by the holistic review of Social Care SEND 0-25 undertaken by the Head of Service 0-24 and agreed by the co-production working group once the actions have been identified and agreed upon. The SEND Community will be informed once this piece of work has been completed.

We look forward to working with PaCC and Adult Social Care to address the challenges and find solutions to improve respite and social care provision for disabled children and young people and their families.



Ends