



# SEND BIRMINGHAM

## The Partnership Newsletter



## SEND and Alternative Provision Partnership Newsletter – December 2024

We're committed to providing the best possible services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Birmingham. In this Partnership newsletter we aim to set out the key highlights from the SEND and Alternative Provision Board Meetings.

At our meeting on 3 December, the board was reassured by John Coughlan, SEND Commissioner, that the two major interventions – the corporate Best Value Intervention and the SEND Intervention – are progressing closely together. These interventions are focused on improving the function and stability of Birmingham City Council as a whole and the overall SEND system. They are working closely together to make sure changes happen in sync. There is a great deal of work still to be done to achieve acceptable standards but there is now evidence of progress that must be sustained.

### **Voice of Experience: A Family's Journey Through SEND Services**

In a telling presentation, Natalie Williams, Head of SENAR, shared the story of a young person and their family's journey through the SEND services in Birmingham. The family faced challenges following a serious medical issue, and they were able to access support from a range of professionals, including the Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) process.

Their dad shared both positive and challenging experiences. He praised the continuous support from SEND services but pointed out the difficulties they faced, such as delays in finding suitable housing and feeling that the mainstream school wasn't fully meeting the young person's needs.

It was clear that while we're good at responding when families are in crisis, we also need to improve the support we provide to families who aren't in crisis but still need help. This is an ongoing area of focus for all agencies involved in SEND services.

## How Data Helps Us Improve SEND Services

The Head of Digital, Evidence and Performance presented a performance dashboard showing how well Birmingham's SEND services are performing. The dashboard highlighted key areas like the number of Education, Health, and Care Plans (EHCPs) in place, and how quickly assessments are being completed. One key takeaway was that ADHD data is currently grouped under the broad "Other" category, which doesn't give enough detail. The board has asked for this to be refined so that ADHD can be properly tracked. Additionally, there's a need to track SEN Support Plans alongside EHCPs to give a clearer picture of the services children are receiving without formal plans.

The data will continue to be reviewed regularly, and we're committed to making it more helpful for parents, so that we can make informed decisions about how services are working, and where they need to improve.

## The Graduated Approach: Ensuring Consistent Support for All Children

Heather Wood, Head of SEND Advisory Service provided an update on The Graduated Approach, a model designed to ensure all children with SEND receive the right level of support. This approach works by identifying children's needs early and providing support at three key levels: universal, targeted, and specialist.

A key part of this approach is the Ordinarily Available Guidance (OAG), which helps schools and settings provide appropriate support without waiting for additional resources. This includes practical strategies and resources for teachers to use when a child is struggling to make progress. The aim is to ensure that every child receives the support they need to thrive in their school environment.

This work is ongoing, and the team is making progress in aligning schools and services across the city to work together more effectively.

## Reducing Waiting Times for SEND Assessments

Birmingham Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust shared some positive updates on reducing waiting times for assessments in the Neurodevelopmental pathway. The service is working hard to increase its capacity, aiming to reach 160 assessments per month by April 2025, starting with 123 assessments per month in January. Recruitment efforts are going well, especially for ADHD assessments, with all positions expected to be filled by the end of the financial year.

To support families during this time, an advice line has been set up to provide quick responses to concerns. Additionally, a rapid process review is ensuring that caseloads are managed effectively and safety checks are in place. These steps show a strong commitment to improving the assessment process and providing better support for families.

Pam Armstrong, Chair of the Birmingham Parent/Carer Forum, emphasised the need for clear communication channels, highlighting that many parents prefer speaking to someone in person. This feedback is being taken seriously, and efforts are being made to improve communication and ensure consistent, clear messages for everyone involved. These positive changes aim to reassure families and provide the support they need.

With regard to waiting times, Pam also stated:

*"Whilst I appreciate you raising the assessments to 160 by March 2025, however this is currently what is commissioned but due to a shortage in the work force it hasn't happened for some time and it wouldn't be fair to make it seem like you are picking up extra assessments when they should already be happening?"*

*I would like to know how you are planning to reduce the numbers that go above 160 a month? Changing the criteria to offload children and young people is unacceptable and I will not support that plan.*

*I have offered suggestions around online assessments that happened during covid that worked well, I have asked about dual diagnosis for those children and young people awaiting an ASD and ADHD assessment but have yet to receive a response to my suggestion?*

*Children and young people have the right to have an identity whether it be ASD , ADHD or both, we wouldn't deny someone a diagnosis of Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy or schizophrenia so they need answers and so do their families."*

## **Working Together: Improving Multi-Agency Collaboration**

An update on the multi-agency audit was presented – a process where different agencies work together to review and improve their services. This new approach is helping to ensure that all services involved in supporting children with SEND are working effectively.

The audit is already showing improvements in the quality of services and this collaboration is key to delivering better outcomes for children and families. As the process continues, the partnership will refine how audits are done and ensure that agencies provide clear updates on their progress.

## **Strengthening SENAR: A Focus on Permanent Staff and Improved Communication**

Natalie Williams, Head of SENAR (Special Educational Needs Assessment and Review service) also provided an update on the SENAR Re-design, which aims to improve the way Birmingham's SEND services are structured and delivered. Since the service started its redesign in 2022, significant progress has been made in hiring permanent staff, which has led to better communication with schools and families.

Feedback from schools has been positive, with many noting the improved relationships and more consistent support. This positive feedback illustrates the tangible benefits of the re-design, showing a more stable and effective service for families.

Pam Armstrong was keen to commend the progress and growth within the service, appreciating the efforts of the SENAR leadership team.

## **Looking Ahead**

As we move into 2025, the SEND partnership in Birmingham is focused on making sure services are improving for all families. The partnership remains committed to supporting children and young people with SEND, and will continue to provide updates as progress is made.

Thank you for your continued support, and our very best wishes for the year ahead.

**Dr Sue Harrison – Strategic Director of Children and Families**

**John Coughlan – SEND Commissioner**

***Birmingham Local Offer:*** To find help, advice and information about the services available for your child or young person from birth to 25 years with a special educational need or disability (SEND) visit the Birmingham Local Offer at [www.Local Offer Birmingham](http://www.Local Offer Birmingham)

***Birmingham Parent Carer Forum:*** Visit [www.birminghampcf.org](http://www.birminghampcf.org) or email [info@birminghampcf.org](mailto:info@birminghampcf.org)