

Scrutiny Committee - Children & Families – 12 July 2023

Public Question Time

1. Questions submitted by Elvira Elliott – to be read out at meeting by Stephanie Mathivet

(The agenda items the questions relate to are - Children and Families Work Programme, Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing in Somerset)

I am bringing some questions on behalf myself and other members of the group Somerset SEND and EHCP support who have experienced serious delays and lapses in communication from the SEN department causing serious disruption to our lives and our children's education.

The following are just a handful of quotes from other parents dealing with the SEN department showing the typical lapses in communication and removal of parents from the school consultation process which leads to children being out of education for years at a time. I gathered these quotes on May 25th 2023.

“ it was about 20 something emails plus phone calls from us and Senco until we got a response, It took 3 weeks. Caseworker never responded to SenCo. I have have a long list of other failings too.”

“Her stonewalling, missed deadlines and broken promises have caused my son such anxiety as we have only just been able to tell him what school he goes to in sept. EHCP states that a long and robust transition period must be in place for this but their failing didn’t meet this stipulation. Didn’t consult with school before adding it to EHCP. The list goes on and on”

“We received draft plan in October last year and still don’t have a named school or anywhere near a final plan due to being ignored for months at a time”

“..I sent back our first draft with amendments over a month ago and not heard anything...never hear from caseworker at all...”

	<p><i>“been waiting for our finalised plan, been regularly ignored by my caseworker and then have to ring the sen department to get them to book in a call with her, she then rings me and acts confused why she’s been asked to call me. Last I heard she was finalising the last bit and then found out from another parent she left around Easter time. I made a complaint re lack of communication and escalated it to level 2 and was told they’d done nothing wrong”</i></p>
Q1.	Were any EHCPs delivered within the 20 week deadline in 2022/23?
Q2.	How many complaints were upheld against the LA regarding the SEN department in 2022/23 both internally, by the ombudsman or by other professional governing bodies such as the HCPC or CQC?
Q3.	How many SEN children in Somerset will be not attending school in September ‘23 either because no placement has been named in time or because parents have had to appeal an unsuitable named placement.
<p>2. Questions submitted by Hefina Washbourne</p> <p>(The agenda items the questions relate to are - Children and Families Work Programme, Children’s Mental Health and Wellbeing in Somerset and 22/23 Budget outturn position).</p>	
Q1.	<p>There is not enough Social Care Transition to adulthood staff. The waiting list for action is over 11 months. When the non-urgent form process is followed with SEND, families are being told there is only one social care transition to adulthood social worker, and they recently resigned. Our local councillor was told about this and a transition to adulthood social practitioner made contact with our family within 3 days. We are concerned about the lack of social care staff, process, expertise, monitoring and evaluating. There are not enough staff employed to deal with the SEND levels in Somerset.</p> <p>Question: Can the committee explain where in the forward planning budget this area is (as we could not see it anything for disabled or SEND in the budget), specifically why the social care intervention is not happening earlier when the child is 13/14 yrs old (as outlines in your own partnership charter ’21) and what is being done to monitor and evaluate its staffing levels, efficiency, function and output?</p>

<p>Q2.</p>	<p>We are becoming increasingly frustrated about the promises made for the transition from school/college to the workplace for young SEND teenagers and adults. The LA charter of education/training/support to enter the workplace from 16-25 yrs states it is possible to achieve certain qualifications, foundation and experience through 6th form school/college, but this is not what most further education establishments or possible employers are willing to facilitate. These teenagers/young adults have value to add to society and their community. If not supported and nurtured, it will affect their self esteem, mental wellbeing and health.</p> <p>Question: Can the committee explain what monitoring measures are in place to ensure that 6th form schools/colleges are pro-actively extending opportunities for teenagers/young adults between 16-25 yrs, specifically what is the LA doing to ensure they have every possible chance to obtain gainful employment when they are ready?</p>
<p>Q3.</p>	<p>Activities for teenagers/young people with SEND organised by Somerset Council for them in certain areas of Somerset is more than lacking. Chard for example has groups for up to 16 yrs and over 18 yrs but there is nothing for any between 16-18 yrs. Young SEND teens/adults want to be part of society. How is this possible when there are not the opportunities for doing so? As they get older the possibility of meeting their peers and interacting will lessen and if they don't make those relationships when they are young, it will affect their mental health and wellbeing, making them isolated and alone. Many of the activities groups have children and young adults attending whose ability and mental age is way below their actual chronological age, so why do the groups have to have an age range placed on them anyway!</p> <p>Question: What is the LA doing to make sure there are broader areas of opportunity for these children/teenagers/young adults to meet and be integrated into their communities across the whole of Somerset, not just parochial areas of the County?</p>
<p>3. Questions submitted by Vicky Pearson (The agenda items the questions relate to are - Children and Families Work Programme, Children's Mental Health and Wellbeing in Somerset and 22/23 Budget outturn position).</p>	
<p>Q1.</p>	<p>According to the Families Guide: Imagine the Possibilities (South Somerset 14-19 Partnership 2021) they state that:</p>

	<p>"Preparing for adulthood formally begins at Year 9 (age 13/14)..... Starting to plan at Year 9 allows time to research options, plan the appropriate path and put in place any support the young person needs in their final years at school and to make sure their progression in the future is successful.....Identifying young people's needs and aspirations early will help identify any gaps in service provision and shape the future provision of education, health and social care services...."</p> <p>Here in Somerset we know that this is very clearly not happening and therefore is failing our young people with SEN transitioning to Adulthood. Parents like Myself are finding that this process is happening way too late for our young people; all too frequently once the young person has already moved into adult services, by which time it is even harder, if not too late to put in place any support to guarantee suitable future provision.</p> <p>Question: Parents of children with SEN are on their knees from continually battling to get their children's needs met! When it comes to Preparing for our child's adulthood and what we are told should be happening to "shape (their) future provision of education, health and social care services" how will Somerset be held accountable if this does not happen?</p>
<p>Q2.</p>	<p>An EHCP takes a child with SEN up to 25 years of age.</p> <p>Question: Does it not make sense now to review the level of funding/support for Somerset's Community Inclusion and Activity Team and amend the age limit accordingly from birth to 18 years, to that of 25 years, so that a young person can still continue to have invaluable access to their local community and opportunities for social integration?</p>