

CASE STUDY: SEND SERVICE 'FRONT DOOR'

WHAT ARE WE MAKING BETTER?

A range of concerns were raised by stakeholders including emails not being responded to; telephone calls not being answered; calls not being returned; and making multiple calls with no resolution. A high turnover of staff in the Statutory SEND Team meant that parents did not always know who to contact. SEN Officers reported that they were struggling to respond to contact as a result of their high case load and high volume of queries coming into the service.

The council recognised that change was needed to improve parent and stakeholders ability to contact the service and receive timely responses. The structure includes a new Delivery Team. Their remit is to improve customer experience and provide an efficient service. The SEND Service now operates a "front door" made up of a central telephone line and email inbox to act as a main point of contact for stakeholders. Queries range from process questions, updates on Statutory Assessments, SENRAP outcomes and transport queries. The majority of queries come from parents/ carers and school staff and are passed to individual officers by the Delivery Team. Calls need to be responded to within 72 hours or three working days and are logged, monitored and evaluated to ensure compliance.

WHAT ARE WE DOING?

We met with SSFV and implemented a number of changes. Direct dial extensions were checked to ensure they are going to the correct and active numbers of EHCP Coordinators. Emails are now logged, monitored and evaluated and officers are required to confirm when they have replied to a query. The Delivery Team chase outstanding responses to ensure a response within 72 hours, and are specific about the type of contact expected to parents. The service contact details have been advertised through the SEND News Splash repeatedly, the SEND Service pages on the Local Offer website were reviewed to make the contact details more prominent and accessible, and partners were asked to share the contact details.

A number of routes of escalation were also implemented. If parents have consistent issues getting responses to queries, or wait longer than 5 working days for a response, then they can email the central inbox and mark it for the attention of the Delivery and Systems Team Leader who will ensure that the query is resolved. If contact is made with other partners in error, parents/ carers will be asked to contact one the front door. If a parent reports difficulties receiving contact from the SEND Service to partners, they will email the inbox so we can be resolved the query directly.

Recent concerns raised have been able to be investigated. The findings have found a range of situations. One parent said they waited a week for a call back; the return call was made to his wife within 72. He told us he wanted more information, but hadn't made contact to request this. In another case, an officer had been emailing the parent every week. The parent had been having trouble with her emails but had been expecting a phone call rather than an email. Another parent raised concerns she hadn't had contact for weeks, but when asked for more detail, reported was referring to calls back from January and February. Finally, one parent said their calls were ringing out, but upon investigation, they were calling the service outside the hours of operation. Patterns of individual Officers performance are now logged and can be addressed through performance management improving accountability.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT?

Fortnightly meetings with SSFV so we can work closely to address concerns, work proactively and obtain ongoing feedback to inform change. The performance of the team will continue to be monitored to avoid and slippage in standards, and the concerns raised by parents/ carers will be addressed on an individual basis. Thematic analysis will be used to inform development so that common concerns can be avoided.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

Reporting will show calls and emails are returned within 72 hours, which will give accurate data on the performance of the service, the volume and type of queries received and where gaps exist in the information published. This will lead to a development in the Local Offer website content as seen through a reduction in some types of queries and increase in visits and length of stay on the Local Offer website. Confidence will be high in SEND Service communication as measured through a reduction in complaints in this area and an increase in positive feedback through surveys and as reported by stakeholders.

