

## Notes of Meeting with Chris Spencer - 12/2/19

### Present:

Tania Charlton - PCA  
Emma Passmore - PCA  
Duncan Siret - PCA  
Lucy Fullard - PCA  
Jennifer Cartwright-Taylor - PCA  
Malissa Alway - PCA  
David Newton - PCA  
Amanda Henderson - GCC  
Chris Spencer - GCC  
Christine and Steve Turley - PCA

PSA - There is confusion over the DCYPS service offer and many parents are telling us they do not know about services that are commissioned. Further not all parents want Social Care services.

AH - More services are being developed all the time. Perhaps there needs to be a bigger effort to ensure that services are more joined up. The best place to find what services are available to parents is through the Family Information Service.

PCA - The Local Offer is not fit for purpose, many of the links on the website are broken and information in the offer is not accurate or up to date.

**Action** - AH to ensure providers are contacted and asked to update their information and ensure it is accurate - this has not been done for over three years.

PCA - Parents are asking for someone in Children's Services to help guide parents through the local offer.

AH - This is the responsibility of the FIS, the staff have been trained and have the skills to advise parents.

**Action** - AH to circulate contact details for the FIS to PCA

PCA - Parents are finding it hard to get past first telephone enquiry. They report that they need a more sympathetic hearing and support. When asking for support they are faced with questions about DLA and how it is being used, this is not helpful.

AH - Parents looking for support should go through the 'Early Help' pathway, the Early Help front door is operated by the FIS who run early help enquiries. Staff in the team have recently received training and parents should be receiving a more positive approach from now on, questions are much more needs based and focus on strengths in the family. Although questions about finance and DLA will still have to be asked, the focus is now different.

CS - (Following comments from AH) It is not appropriate for parents to ask for support through the 'help desk' (MASH), which is geared up to deal with high levels of need and safeguarding concerns. Requests for support should go through Early Help (FIS).

PCA - Parents are finding that the Local Authority routinely break the law with the EHCP process and much money and time is wasted explaining to staff that this is the case, and then threatening to go to tribunal before concerns are addressed.

CS - It is important we get this right first time, and although the system is not perfect and time and money is being wasted, by far the biggest slice of the special needs budget, which is heavily overspent, is spend on educational provision.

CS - SEN is overspent, this is not GCC's fault - the fault lies with national government who are not providing enough resource to meet need.

PCA - There are concerns that disabled children are being turned away from schools.

CS - High needs and SEN schools is divisive. Schools are reluctant to shift from DSG to high needs. A few schools have made decisions to reduce the provision for children with SENs, but the vast majority of schools take their responsibilities very seriously and do more that they need to to support SEN students. Schools who are not doing enough are being challenged once CS become aware there is an issue.

PCA - Off rolling of SEN children is twice the national average, this amounts to a moral and ethical crisis.

CS - Debate has started with secondary school heads. CS can direct schools to take children with EHCP to take them. But can't influence attitude of the head teachers.

PCA - The group met with Stewart King recently and the meeting was very positive. SK listened to the ideas put forward by parents, all agreed that better communication with parents is what is needed.

PCA - Parent feel that the EHCP process would be improved if EHCP caseworkers routinely attended annual reviews and challenged schools where specified needs are not being met. Money should be withheld from schools who are not working to EHCPs.

CS - There are not enough staff to cover all EHCP annual reviews and the recovery of money would be very expensive to achieve.

AH - The local authority have commissioned SENDIAS to support parents in the EHCP process.

PCA - SENDIAS do not challenge schools when they are not meeting specified need on behalf of children with complex needs.

CS - How can we help CPA support parents? - attend reviews to support parents, continue lobbying and become school governors to be in a position to challenge schools.

PCA - Why are there no direct payments awarded in respect of EHCP led services?

AH - SENDIAS are setting up a new trial of direct payments and are looking for volunteers to work with them to get this established.

**Action** - AH to ask SENDIAS to invite the PCA to be part of volunteer group to trial direct payments in EHCP for complex needs.

CS - There is a new framework for inspection that will be much more SEN child focused - it starts in Sept, and so will impact on the next school year.

PCA - Parents, or parent support should be allowed to attend SEN panels to ensure that parents views are fully represented in order to aid decision making.

**Action** - AH to raise with Charlotte the head of the SEN service.

CS - Meetings with the PCA is very important and he would like to see it developed, perhaps a different structure would be helpful, an executive group meeting every two months (with Chris, Amanda and Charlotte from GCC) with this wider group meeting perhaps twice yearly might be a better model.

**Action** - PCA to discuss and put a proposal together for CS to consider.

AH - 'Active Impact' commissioned for parent/carer forum

PCA - EHCP forms are very difficult to use, they are not user friendly.

AH - EHCP tools are undergoing development and refinement at this time.

**Action:** PCA to work on a new template of EHCP review document and share the new paperwork to Charlotte.

**Action:** SEN Service to test new format of EHCPs with a couple of parents from PCA.

PCA - Wants to run training courses on how to speak to parents of children with additional needs.

CS - This would be very helpful, PCA could support social work academy and Master Class programme. Limited expenses could be paid to participants.

**Action** - PCA to approach to CS with a proposal to put on training.

PCA - Parents are asking for support with direct payments.

AH - Pendrals have been commissioned to give parents employer support. 10 hours support in the first year, 5 hours in subsequent years are available. Information about direct payments can be found on a new Glos Assistance website. All information is in one place. <https://www.glosassistants.org.uk/>

**Action:** AH to look at running a direct payments workshop.

CS - On the subject of FII, these procedures rely on medical diagnosis of children, social workers have little choice but to react when concerns are raised. There is no 'strategy' to protect services by using FII allegations.

PCA - Report is about how FII allegations are handled and the impact this has on parents.

**Action** - PCA to send CS report once it has been completed.

Duncan Siret

27/2/19