

SEND Parents Focus Group 29th November 2017

Meeting Notes

Attended by: Margot Nichols - Chair; (DSPL Manager); Elaine Bridle (DSPL Manager); Leslie Chance (Families in Focus) Jo Maher (Vista); Charmaine Lia (Vista); Helen Allen; Jane Brooke-Hughes; Sue Dixon

Minutes taken by: Janet McPherson (DSPL7)

Welcome and introductions

MN – clarified the position regarding the two DSPL ASD Family Support workers. Their contract was for 2 years ending in (1) March 2018 and (2) July 2018. Debbie Orton then advised that DSPL would no longer be able to support these workers and that their contracts would not be renewed at the end of the 2-year period. **JM** has also attended a County meeting where it was stated strongly that ASD workers were no longer going to be allowed to be funded.

It was felt right that they should be advised as soon as possible of the situation, in order to give as much time as possible for considering their next move and potential new positions. As a result, both ASD workers began job searching and were subsequently offered new positions, which both chose to accept. Both colleagues tendered their resignations to DSPL and worked out their contracted notice period.

Discussion: Parents felt the information was not communicated to them in good time. The interventions given by the ASD workers had been invaluable for children and families and now leaves a gap. Discussion of funding and moving forward considered.

There are wide-ranging needs, not only Autism, (which is well catered for). There is a long waiting list for assessment, can be up to 2 years. SEND parents are often unable to access services if there is no diagnosis.

Schools are under immense pressure. However, access to support in the home is essential and liaising with the school to facilitate & for support in meetings.

Some families have 'given up the battle' trying to get support for their children and have opted to home-school instead. This also has its challenges and is not always the ideal solution.

LC – Some parents have set up self-help groups (e.g. Autism/PDA specific). Five more groups are currently in the process of being arranged. Some parents/carers have been trained to support other parents.

MN – DSPL wishes to spend the money allocated for the FSW in this financial year.

EB – DSPL funding is projected to continue for the next 5 years

Possible Ways Forward:

MN – Possible options suggested at the meeting, for further consideration:

1. SEND specialist home school liaison worker employed by Partnerships. School Liaison worker to facilitate dialog with school/parents
2. Provide training in SEND for existing partnership family support workers.
3. Parent to Parent support - Families in Focus can train parents in the community to provide forums/idea-sharing and help prevent isolation. Enable resilience, mental health support
4. Provide an information 'hub' for parents
5. Provide training for parents to meet identified needs.

Service provision is shrinking. Support for parents and contingency planning needs to be put in place. Parents supporting parents could be the way forward.

The meeting ended at 11.00 am