



The Partnership Newsletter



SEND Improvement and Alternative Provision Board Update - June 2024

The newly titled SEND Improvement and Alternative Provision Board, now reflects the Board's focus on the wider SEND improvement journey. This month's meeting took place on Tuesday, 3 June and we're delighted to provide key highlights from the meeting.

As many families will be aware, there have recently been a number of political announcements with the general election being confirmed for 4 July, and a little closer to home, Councillor John Cotton Leader of the Council announced a change in Cabinet for the next municipal year. Councillor Karen McCarthy, who has been Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Families since 2022 has moved to the Finance portfolio and has been replaced by Councillor Mick Brown. Children and Families colleagues have been working closely with Councillor Brown to ensure a seamless transition, and [full details of the new Cabinet can be found at this link](#).

Due to the pre-election protocol, council members were not in attendance and John Coughlan, SEND Commissioner, took the opportunity to thank Councillor McCarthy for her contribution to the Board and welcomed Councillor Brown to future meetings.

The Board was pleased to receive a fabulous update from Pam Armstrong, Chair of the Birmingham Parent Carer Forum, on their work with families. It was encouraging to hear how many more families were now joining the Forum, and the full update, which is well worth a read, can be found here: [Birmingham Parent Carer Forum Update](#). Continued funding for the Forum had been successful due to the considerable efforts of the PCF Steering Group, and the Board offered their heartfelt congratulations. Pat Tate, Birmingham's SEND DfE advisor was also keen to point out that the reputation of the Birmingham Parent Carer Forum remained solid.

There had been a number of concerns and questions raised previously from parents and carers, which had subsequently been considered by the Board and the full response can be found at this link: [Parent/Carers Q&A Document](#).

Although grateful for response, Pam Armstrong was keen to state:

“There will be concerns regarding the transport response. I have raised concerns about only being able to apply for a personal budget and then it's appeal. The process seems cruel to get parents to go to appeal again, especially where there is clear evidence of personal circumstances. I know there has been work around medical needs to get a transport. I feel the appeal is still unfair. The 16-18 cohort could be left on their own.”

Sue Harrison, Strategic Director for Children and Families provided an update on the New Balanced Education System which had recently been presented to schools and had received positive feedback. The new system would ensure that every headteacher had an equal voice, through representation at a newly formed Education Board, and the ability to influence strategic decision-makers in key partner agencies such as the Council, Birmingham Children's Trust, NHS, Police and the voluntary sector. The key priority for the Education Board would be on improving outcomes for children through achievement, attendance and inclusion.

An update was provided by Helen Ellis, Director for SEND and Inclusion and Jo Sullivan-Lyons, Interim Head of SENAR, on the Delivering Better Value (DBV) programme. DBV is a programme working to identify and implement local and national opportunities to improve the outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), and place the system on a more sustainable financial footing. Birmingham has been involved in the DBV programme since August 2023.

Over 600 children, young people, parents, carers, schools, settings and practitioners from across the partnership were involved in the programme, contributing to a range of activities to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges facing Birmingham in relation to SEND.

The Board thanked Jo for her contribution and wished her well for the future as she would be leaving the council on 7 June, due to family commitments and other opportunities.

To gain a greater understanding of how the special educational needs and disability system in Birmingham is working, the council is undertaking a self-evaluation across the whole of the Birmingham area. The self-evaluation provides an opportunity to think about what we're doing and is very much about:

- Reflecting on where we are
- Understanding what's making a difference
- Focusing on what more we need to do to improve

Helen Ellis, Director for SEND and Inclusion shared an update on the self-evaluation which was well received by the Board and embedded children's voices and experiences at its heart. It reflected the steady progress that had been made, while recognising that there was still work to be done to ensure the services being delivered remained consistently good. The self-evaluation was approved by the Board and would continue to be updated regularly. For parents and carers wishing to know more about the self-evaluation process, what is being done or how you can participate, please contact TellusaboutSEND@birmingham.gov.uk.

We hope you find this update helpful and look forward to reporting back after the next meeting in July. This will be the 36 month stocktake where progress on the SEND improvement journey will be reviewed.

With very best wishes

Dr Sue Harrison, Strategic Director for Children and Families

John Coughlan, SEND Commissioner