



2 DEC 2019

## PROGRAMME UPDATE

### SECTION 1

#### Welcome from Helen Ellis, Assistant Director for Education, SEND and Family Solutions

I have spent the last few weeks working with the partnership to better understand the current SEND system. I was delighted to meet with parents and carers, schools, health colleagues and local authority staff and it is abundantly clear that we need to go back to basics to design together, a system that is fit for purpose.



**Helen Ellis**, Interim Assistant Director with lead responsibilities for Education, SEND and Family Solutions

Two weeks ago I attended Working Together for Change's steering group to personally introduce myself and provide assurances that we will be working hard to develop services that support the greatest aspirations for our children and young people.

Parents and carers gave a very frank and detailed account of their experiences of the current arrangements and I would like to thank you for your openness and honesty. We discussed issues around transport, difficulties around finding out information and advice at the beginning and during a parent and child's SEND journey as well as inconsistencies within our services.

I appreciate that our processes are cumbersome and confusing and it is my aim, moving forward, to ensure that that access to support services is appropriate, clear and transparent and that families are given access to key workers that can sit with them to help them navigate through the system, feeling more connected and involved.

Parents also commented on the lack of clarity on the role of the Family Centres, and that there was a belief that families have to be in crisis to access Early Help and Family Centres. I have to say that this is not the case. There are many universal, peer to peer and parent groups that run from the centres. Staff are always developing and exploring ways that they can support and signpost families and so to this end we will be launching a campaign in the New Year to promote the Family Centre's offer across the whole of Dudley.

Parents and carers also talked about the inconsistencies with regards to mainstream and special school provision as well as ensuring that wider inclusion should form the bedrock of everything we do. This will in turn ensure that everyone from the cleaner, teacher, governor, local authority, health and wider partners fully understand disability. This has to be our goal – but we know that this will take time.

I recently attended the School's Forum's and parents and carers concerns are mirrored within schools. We recently consulted with schools about proposed changes to Dudley's local funding formula for mainstream schools in respect of a transfer of funds to the High Needs Block, however given that the majority of schools were against these proposals we have decided not to pursue this route at the current time.

Clearly there is a huge amount of work to do. Our Improvement Programme is in its infancy and we are currently finalising the governance structure and work programme. However, throughout this process I am committed to ensuring that we will be open and honest and keep you regularly informed of our progress.

Finally congratulations goes to Working Together for Change's Care and Share Platform, and in particular Anthony Cokeley, who last week won the prestigious Dudley Forging a Future Award for digital innovation. The Care and Share platform allows parents and carers to share information about their children and young people with professionals as well as having the ability in a secure environment to ask questions with the wider network about SEND. For more information please go to <https://careandshare.uk/> - A very well done to all involved.

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