

HIGHLIGHT REPORT

From:	Communications Group
Report by:	Caroline McCarron, Assistant Alliance Director (Interim)
Meeting Date:	29th June 2021

1. Summary of progress and actions since last period

The requirement for effective communication was a focus of discussion at the Southend SEND Strategic Board (SSPB) in November 2020, the discussion identified a more structured approach to communications would be beneficial to the partnership.

A theme emerged from discussion relating to the free flow of information and how this was not always the case, leading to partners feeling unsighted on some issues and unsure of where to go or who to ask. Timely and adequate communication was a prominent concern for schools and families, some of whom felt disconnected and disengaged, particularly with reference to the frequent changes in guidance throughout the Covid-19 pandemic

With this in mind the SSPB proposed the formation of a SEND communications task and finish group to review how statutory partners (health, education, social care) were working together, methods of communication (local offer, Southend Learning Network etc.), what is important to partners, parents and children etc. Notwithstanding the examples of effective communications across the partnership, the new group were tasked with understanding what could be done to improve the flow of, and accessibility to, relevant information, supported by the development of a SEND Communications Strategy and potentially a good practice guide.

As a direct result, the SEND Communications task and finish group was quickly established and commenced working towards understanding the scope of what was required and what the group were hoping to achieve. The second lock down in December diverted resources and attention from this group leading to a temporary pause.

The group is now being re-established and has begun taking stock of progress made in other areas of the partnership during the pause period i.e. the establishment of the Voice of the Child and Local Offer groups. These groups whilst working in concert with the Communications group will take forward engagement and co-production, enabling the Communications group to take forward the more 'technical' aspects i.e. focusing on process, accessibility, transparency effective networking and sharing mechanisms rather than content.

Key questions for the communications group to answer will include;

1. What information is the partnership trying to communicate?
2. How has information been shared to date and why/where is it not working?
3. What do parents, carers & families want to see?
4. What do professionals want to see?
5. If communication is poor between partners, what steps need to be taken and how?
6. How will the partnership know it has been successful?
7. is there a need to conduct some research to understand more about the gaps in knowledge, barriers to communication etc.?

The next meeting in July 2021 will see an expanded membership to ensure the group is truly representative of all partners and enable the necessary networking to assist the sharing of information and learning.

2. Risks & Issues

Risk	Impact	Mitigating Actions
Partnership resource & capacity to meaningfully focus on communication approaches & strategy for SEND has not been identified	No improvement in communication, disjointed approach, inconsistent information flow	Partners to commit to supporting effective communication through the identification of a lead in each organisation
Limited co-ordination of information or messages across partners	Partnership working is brought into question. Inconsistent messages leading to uncertainty	Effective networking between leads in each organisation
The procurement of the Local Offer website Platform is one element of a larger procurement.	Dedicated focus on the Local Offer element may be lost resulting in a platform that does not meet the requirements for accessibility and flexibility	The SEND Local Offer & Co Production Officer is a member of the project team, thereby ensuring the requirements for the Local Offer maintain visibility.

3. Recommendations / Discussion / Decisions required from Partnership Board

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - To note the content of the report and support the reinstatement of the Communications Task & Finish Group. - To support the focus on technical aspects of effective communication. - To encourage partners to identify a lead for SEND Communications in each organisation.
