

**SPCV Meeting.**

10th October 2022.

Nick Page, Tim Browne, Iona Payne, Delyth Berni- Smith.

Questions:

1. What does the Integrated Care Board and Partnership mean for Solihull, how will it make things different? Does it mean that health and social care will work together now?

Nick Page sits on the ICB- £4 Billion budget. Now feels that local government and communities have a voice in health. Nick also Chairs the Solihull Place Board with a £3million budget that we will be able to put in to support groups and improve things in the community. Also sits on a board called Solihull Together which brings different systems together including police, health, 3rd sector. Really pushing for new health provision, we need better primary and acute care. Waiting lists for people in Solihull are too long. The Minor Injuries Unit and Urgent Treatment Centre have been recommended to come back and this is likely to happen.

ICB Boards are public meetings, Nick Page will advocate for lived experiences to be raised and brought to the board.

1. In 2021 Solihull had the second highest rate of SENDIST tribunals amongst all Metropolitan Borough Councils, please can you explain why this is, is this figure reducing and what are you doing to learn from tribunal rulings to reduce further unnecessary tribunals?

Nationally numbers of tribunals have increased across the country and numbers of EHCP’s in Solihull have gone up 16% in last year.

There is a shortage both nationally and locally of specialist provision.

As a percentage of tribunals against our numbers of EHCP’s it is low.

New regs- green paper, will hopefully improve inclusion in mainstream schools so this should help.

1. What about when Educational Psychologist’s don’t see child? There are very few occasions when Educational Psychology do not see a child in person.
2. Do you consider what other professionals think re placement?

Yes, will look at a rounded picture and take into account all views and make an informed judgment.

There will be different views and we do accept that.

1. What about refusal to assess tribunals- these pretty much always agree with the parent. When tribunals are a year away it’s a long time for children and families to wait- its not good for children and its emotionally draining for the whole family. Sometimes we do get it wrong, we do have to look at whether a school can meet need within their delegated funding. So, we do gather evidence including Assess Plan Do Review. There needs to be sufficient evidence to agree an EHCP.
2. Educational Psychologists’s don’t always send reports to parents saying that they need to get them from the EHCP service

Tim will raise this with Educational Psychology. Also looking at bringing in a parent portal so parents can see what reports have come in and where they are in the process.

1. With a parental request who is hearing the parents’ views?

Nick Page confirmed that he is hearing from parents that there is a problem with engagement, and that the Local Authority are not engaging and participating with families properly.

1. Schools often don’t ask for children’s views, are Senco’s trained to ask? And further to this what about governors- last SEND governor training only 6 governors attended and with the move to academies you as a LA don’t have power to make schools do things. Nick Page confirmed this is a concern and that the mechanisms aren’t in place to direct schools. Governors sometimes don’t know their legal duties. Teachers are working flat out especially post covid with children having lost so much education and development. In the conversations regarding the proposals in the Green Paper, we are saying to the DfE that we have concerns. SPCV have a huge voice and advocate for many families, we can work with SPCV and families to create an inclusion Kitemark for schools- ensuring it is not a tick box, with an SLT having responsibility for it.

Social Care- IP

Increase in agency staff was to support social workers so their load is reduced. We are investing more in our social workers. We are improving training and support, improving quality of supervision, ensuring they have the opportunities to talk and give their views. We are reinvesting in our teams, trying to ensure caseloads are manageable and they have support, including mental health support.

The quality and amount of time a social worker spends with a family is not dictated, social work practice is to get to know the family and gather the information properly and spending quality time. We are looking at how we work with families and children, we need to ensure that we spend quality time engaging with families. We would like families to share what they would like to see.

1. Please can you explain what you are doing to improve the services of the Children with Disabilities team in social care. Currently parents find this team incredibly hard to access and find getting any assessments and help very difficult.

Iona Payne will look at the team and review the assessments and the timeliness.

1. Are all social care teams now working together properly? For instance, if a family is flagged through MASH, but there is deemed to be no safeguarding issues, would the social worker or family support worker refer to the children’s disability team?

Referrals should be passed to the CDT within 48 hours.

1. Why don’t Solihull have an early help offer and what are you doing about it?

Social care working to develop a level 2 and level 3 early help offer.

1. Direct payments- are paid better than in Birmingham however its really difficult to access direct payments- often told to go back to the local offer, but also not paid at a level that PA’s are asking for as an hourly rate and also there is a huge lack of PA’s and the appropriateness of the PA’s- training, skills and lack of male PA’s.

Iona Payne can look at what rate we pay, she does have a background in working with PA’s and knows finding PA’s is a real challenge.

1. What progress is being made on updating annual reviews- are there still many in the backlog that haven’t been updated for years and for annual reviews that are taking place this year are they being updated properly?

There is still a backlog, we have struggled to recruit and when we do recruit someone from the permanent team leaves so the staff are put there. We are struggling with capacity.

Educational Psychology service is at half capacity- we do keep trying to recruit.

There have been some difficulties with some schools sending paperwork in on time, also difficulties with capacity within the team to write up the reviews.

1. Feels like there is a deliberate push to tribunal to delay spending and not overturning before mediation or concede before tribunal.

If there are concerns about particular cases, please do bring them to Tim. We do not make decisions based on funding they are based on the individual child.

Nick Page has said they accept that this is parent’s perception so they are making sure there are parent reps on panel to ensure the process is transparent.

1. What progress is being made with EHCP’s- quality, timeliness?

In August 100% were issued in 20 weeks, 2 years ago this was 12%. Quality assurance process introduced, and dip sample is taken each month to quality assure before plans are issued. 62% were good or outstanding and required no amends and this is improving.

There is an issue because of lack of EP’s, are pushing to ensure that reports and guidance given by EP’s etc. is specified.

1. What is being done to address the lack of special school places in Solihull?

Over last five years we have increased school places by 20%, The Heights is being built giving 116 places. Are submitting a bid for a further Free School in Solihull, to provide more specialist provision. We have opened Refresh and are creating more ARC’s. We are also looking at early intervention for primary school children at risk of exclusion as there is a gap there.

Mental health issues are particularly prevalent, and we need to improve provision for children with difficulties to put in more support earlier. We do have a gap in early help and social care are working to develop an early help offer.

1. 3rd sector picking up a lot of families but are on their knees and are inundated with families. Lots of 1:1 and 2:1 support. Do the council know how hard the 3rd sector are working?

Nick Page- As a sector your shoulders are being buckled by the weight of things and the cost-of-living crisis is certainly making it worse. With the funding cuts that we have we must make sure that we maintain and grow the voluntary sector. I do meet with voluntary sector representatives and with health to ensure we are all working together, also working with Solihull Together. We can’t have the 3rd sector living hand to mouth on bids, so we need to have a strategic discussion about how we are going to make this better. 3rd sector will have an intrinsic part of the family hubs.

1. Independence skills isn’t now in an EHCP, what are you doing to ensure that this and post 16 is put in.

We work closely with adult social care to ensure that there is adult transition works.

Independence and preparation for adult should run throughout all the EHCP provisions and all of the sections.

Other points:

Family hubs- £2million capital money being given to us by the government to open them, but it will cost £800k per year to run them and this money isn’t being given by government.

Social workers as agency can get almost double the salary that staff social workers do- There is a national shortage of 8000 social workers. There is also a national shortage of EP’s and many other professions which is compounding problems with recruitment.

Solihull currently spend £111 million on adult social care- income £40m from government- rest is coming from NHS.

£43 million spend on children’s services, income £22 million from government. By law the Local Authority have to balance the budget, cannot run in deficit like the NHS does.

The SEND system in this country is broken and is not funded appropriately and this is what the green paper reforms are all about.