

2023

# BETTER TOGETHER REPORT



# Table of Contents

Introduction	_____	<b><u>03</u></b>
Foreword from Oxfordshire County Council	_____	<b><u>04</u></b>
How It Worked	_____	<b><u>05</u></b>
Professionals Guest List	_____	<b><u>06</u></b>
Key Themes	_____	<b><u>08</u></b>
Professional Panel Comments	_____	<b><u>18</u></b>
Next Steps	_____	<b><u>21</u></b>
Event Feedback	_____	<b><u>28</u></b>
Acknowledgements	_____	<b><u>30</u></b>

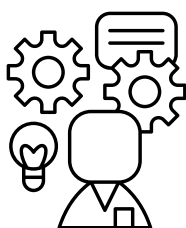
# Introduction

The third Better Together event was held in March 2023, the first since 2019 due to the Covid pandemic. For the first time, it was jointly organised and funded by Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum, Oxfordshire Family Support Network and Carers Oxfordshire.



## **AIM OF THE DAY - *to not just be a talking shop!***

This was an opportunity for parents/carers and professionals to work together to improve services. We believe and always hope that by sitting round a table with others it will lead to productive discussions and actions on what is working and what can work better on a number of key topics important to all of us. We focussed on issues that both families and professionals have highlighted to us as important areas to discuss across education, health and social care services.



## **FACILITATION - *Good facilitation is always key to this event***

Our facilitators did an excellent job of making sure that everyone got the chance to speak and we also had scribes to make notes of all the feedback that is in this report.

We really wanted people to focus on what can be better but we knew people would want to talk about what's not working or is not working for them. The questions were pitched in a way to help keep a positive focus.

# Foreword from Oxfordshire County Council

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*Dear parents, carers, and colleagues,*

*Thank you for coming along to the “Better Together” conference in March 2023 and for contributing to the very successful day that was that was hosted and facilitated by Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum (OxPCF), Carers Oxfordshire and Oxfordshire Family Support Network (OxFSN)*

*We greatly appreciated all the shared comments, observations, and feedback, plus your engagement with each other and partners. It is important that together we make a difference for children and families.*

*Feedback from that day has now been collated and produced into this report. It makes very interesting reading and links closely with many of the Local Area Partnerships aims and ambitions, moving forwards for our children and young people. The pledges included in the report are key to us all engaging better with our children and families, to improve outcomes. Progress with these pledges will be reported on through the Local Area/SEND Priority Action Plan workstreams.*

*Oxfordshire County Council would like to apologise for the delay in completing our part of the report due to staff changes. We would also like to take this opportunity to thank all the volunteers who contributed to the day and to OxPCF, Carers Oxfordshire and OxFSN for hosting and facilitating the event and for ensuring this report is now published.*

*Our thanks to everyone involved with the Better Together work and conference.*

*Best wishes*

*Stephen Chandler and Anne Coyle*

# How it Worked



- We had 9 tables. 3 tables each covering Education, Health and Social care. We looked specifically at communication, access to services and quality of services and support offered.
- Participants had 40 minutes at each table for a maximum of 3 tables, to discuss the question on the table.
- Each table had a facilitator who guided participants through the question/s, facilitated the conversation and a scribe was available to record comments.
- When participants moved to the next table, the facilitator of that table would then feedback what had already been discussed by the last group. This was an opportunity to build on what had already been shared or add things that may have been missed.
- Participants had the chance to visit 3 tables, but there were free tables in the room and a few stands to look at, providing the opportunity to sit and chat with others.
- Goodie bags funded by OxPCF were handed out to both professionals and parent carers at the end of the day filled with some mindfulness activities, pamper products and some sensory toys - these were very well received!
- To conclude the day, we asked key professionals to contribute to a discussion panel to comment on what they had heard and a commitment of what they would do as a result.



# Professionals Invited Guest List:

Health Services	Oxfordshire County Council	Schools/ Alternative Provision	Organisations/Businesses in SEND
<b>Amier Alagab</b> Healthwatch	<b>Victoria Baran</b> Intermin Deputy Director of Children's Services	Chilworth Upper School	SENDIASS
<b>Maria Bourbon</b> Oxfordshire CAMHS	<b>Kate Bradley</b> Head of SEND	River Learning Trust	Yellow Submarine
<b>Mark Chambers</b> Service Manager for Children's Complex Care	<b>Cllr Liz Brighouse</b> Deputy Leader of the Council	Frank Wise	Carers Oxfordshire
<b>Holly Chivers</b> CAMHS	<b>Stephen Chandler</b> Corporate Director	Orchard Therapeutic Farm	OxFSN
<b>Cheryl Crawford</b> Interim Service Manager: Chidren's Complex Care	<b>Andrea Cochrane</b> SEND Comissioning Manager	Oxford Creators	AFSO
<b>Dr Sarah Haden</b> Consultant Paediatrician	<b>Anne Coyle</b> Deputy Director of Children's Social Care	Mental Health Natters	Flexicare
<b>Emma Leaver</b> Service Director (Primary, Community and Dental Services)	<b>Charlotte Davey</b> Head of Service for Disabled Children		Autism Oxford
<b>Rachel Newsham</b> SEMH Practitioner and Youth Group Coordinator	<b>Kathryn Davison</b> Senior Educational Psychologist		Abingdon Carousel Centre
<b>Vicky Norman</b> Head of Service Oxfordshire CAMHS and Eating Disorders	<b>Mel de Cruz</b> Joint Comissioning Manager - Live Well HESC		Oxford Hub
<b>Tamasine Pottle</b> Health Comissioning Manager	<b>Karen Fuller</b> Corporate Director of Adult Social Care		Oxfordshire Mind

# Professionals Invited Guest List:

## Health Services/BOB

## Oxfordshire County Council

## Organisations/Businesses in SEND

### Emma Short

Nurse Consultant: Learning Disabilities

### Martin Goff

Head of Service (Access to Learning)

Oxfordshire Youth

### Helen Ward

Deputy Director of Quality, Oxford Clinical Commissioning Group

### Hayley Good

Deputy Director of Children's Services

One-Eighty

### Eleanor Gordon-Martin

Enterprise Coordinator (OxLEP)

Autism Champions

### Sam Harper

Team Manager, Adult Social Care

Oasis Autism

### Kim James

Head of Service (School Improvement and Learning)

A New Way of Being

### Jean Kelly

Deputy Director of Children's Social Care

### John Pearce

Service Manager, Strategic Commissioning

### Kay Willis

Disability Services Development Manager

# Key Themes from the Discussions

This section includes the **key themes** from each table from the event.

The comments notated from each session can be viewed [here](#)



# EDUCATION - COMMUNICATION

What would improve your experience of communication with Education services?

**Turnover of SEN Officers**

**More resources offered to parents following diagnosis, EHCPs and leaving school including transitioning.**

**Lists and information with details of all schools in the area for consideration including schools with hubs.**

**One page profile for children to share with everyone involved in the child's care**

**Improved communication from SEN officers to parents**

**Clearer help for people with English not as a first language.**

# EDUCATION - ACCESS TO SERVICES

What would improve your experience of access to education for your child/young person?

More SEND training for teaching staff

Better communication across the board for professionals, teaching staff and families

Improve LOCAL Offer to provide clearer information to families

Better resources, information and clearer signposting offered to families, in and out of school

Lack of appropriate school places and recruitment

Inclusive, child centred environment in schools

# EDUCATION - QUALITY

What would help improve the quality of education for your child?

**Compulsory SEND  
Training for all staff**

**Better communication across all  
sectors (Education, Health, Social  
Care and Voluntary)**

**Improved communication across  
schools and within schools (Primary to  
Secondary, year to year, teacher to  
teacher and TAs)**

**More appropriate/specialist options  
- too much focus on getting children  
with SEN to fit into mainstream**

**Involve the young person and  
let their voice be heard**

**Unified vision of SEND in  
Oxfordshire**

# HEALTH - COMMUNICATION

What would improve your experience of communication with Health services?

Better help for CYP while on long waiting lists for CAMHS

EHCP'S emphasis on health with someone familiar with the person representing

IT and Communication systems need to improve and be clearer

Transition from Early Years needs to be easier to share information/communicate between services

More support for parents in MH difficulties is vital

Improved access to medication, GP appointments etc

# HEALTH - ACCESS

What would improve your experience of accessing health services?

Health passports would make everything easier

Shorter waiting lists at GPs

Different services need to communicate together better (between schools, NHS etc)

Local Offer information and signposting needs improving

Easier access to SALT, OTs - there are currently barriers in mainstream and independent schools

SEN Officer training needed to quantify therapies under EHCP

# HEALTH - QUALITY

What would improve the quality of your experience of Health services?

Pharmacy consultation rooms = more privacy/ease of access at hospitals

Reasonable adjustments to be made to waiting areas (pagers, sensory room etc)

Training to improve skills at understanding communication needs (eg masking, non-verbal)

SEN timeslots in GP surgeries

One page profile/health passports roll out

Greater staff understanding and awareness of the needs of SEND and anxiety.

# SOCIAL SERVICES - COMMUNICATION

What would improve your experience of communication with Social Care services?

Better understanding of how to get a referral to Social Services

Stigma and language needs to be looked at

Improved signposting of how to get help

Clearer understanding of help when your young person gets a late diagnosis

How do people know if they need social services?

Online referral is not user friendly

# SOCIAL SERVICES - ACCESS

What would improve your access to Social Care services?

Improved communication across all sectors

Clearer information regarding terminology and language to take the stigma and fear away

Clearer signposts about how to, when to, where to etc

Referral information about Moving into Adulthood team

The whole professional network needs to communicate better

Should be more about "What do you need?"



# SOCIAL SERVICES - QUALITY

What would help to improve the quality of your experience of Social Care services?

Limited spaces for respite available

Consistency and communication across services/sharing of information

Training for all professionals on what is available/signposting

More services available for younger people

Process of direct payments needs to be reviewed

Parent carers voices need to be heard - they know the child best

# Professional Panel Comments

To conclude the day, key professionals to contribute to a discussion panel to comment on what they had heard and a commitment of what they would do as a result. The panel consisted of the following:

**Cllr Liz Brighthouse:** Deputy Leader of the Council

**Kate Bradley:** Head of SEND

**Hayley Good:** Deputy Director of Children's Services

**Karen Fuller:** Interim Corporate Director: Social Care

**Charlotte Davey:** Head of Service: Disabled Children's Service and Pause

**Stephen Chandler:** Corporate Director

**Anne Coyle:** Deputy Director of Children's Social Care

**Emma Leaver:** Service Director, Primary, Community & Dental Services

**Vicky Norman:** Head of Service: Oxfordshire CAMHS & Eating Disorders

# Professional Panel Comments

*See below for the comments from the panel discussion*

**Cllr Liz Brighthouse:** The system is 'broken and dramatically failing our children'. Trying locally to make a difference. 'CYP' are being fitted into education holes. Recognition of all children being different.

**Kate Bradley:** Quick win: To produce a signposting of support document to the family of every EHCP awarded by May half term. Recognition that some CYP find mainstream school too difficult and shaping the offer to educate all. Not enough alternative provisions and how to increase these. Improving communications with schools and with parents and carers to ensure best practice countywide. Relationships being the key to CYP support.

**Hayley Good:** Touched by the stories and 'brave conversations' today. Acknowledged that external and internal education services needed looking at. External links with different school settings is challenging but identified a 'need to work more closely with schools'. To meet the needs of CYP with EHCPs identified areas to look into; 'whole school training', outreach support, a sensory room in every school and a resource base in every locality.

**Karen Fuller:** Heard some 'compelling stories' around communication difficulties and the website being described as a 'maze'. Awareness of the language used, the need for co-production and community connectivity.

**Charlotte Davey:** Key takeaway was having a single point of contact for families accessing social services.

# Professional Panel Comments

**Stephen Chandler:** Parent carers shared with ‘moving sensitivity’ what works well and what does not. The most powerful message he heard was that the council ‘don’t appear to understand or care’. In his new role he looks forward to addressing what is ‘terribly wrong’, including improving access and making information more user friendly by thinking about local terminology used and changing this.

**Anne Coyle:** Summarised the event as ‘A room full of wisdom’. Social Care thinks they are communicating effectively but now recognise the need to write information that is accessible and co-produced to ensure it is understood by those who use services. Partnership with families so that they need to tell their story only once. Focus on family strengths as identified in the Early Help Strategy.

**Emma Leaver:** Recognised the need for health services to be pro-active e.g. a family ‘champion’ in health for CYP with SEN. To ensure health services link with education and social care. To focus on transitions for CYP and ensuring access to health care at these crucial points.

**Vicky Norman:** Key takeaway was to ensure CAMHS communicated the offers for families, e.g. the NDC Pathway pre-assessment and post-assessment offers. To ensure access to knowledge was easy to navigate. To facilitate a joint approach with read only access to other services records.

# Next Steps: Health

The health service have committed to the following next steps:

01

## Commitment

Feedback for the day has been distributed verbally in Senior Childrens leaders meetings in OHFT

02

## Commitment

Ongoing relationship building is happening between health and Occ leaders- there is change in some posts and we are working hard to build strong relationships to support this work- there is good commitment on both sides to do this.

03

## Commitment

Committed to working out a plan of how we could see all of the young people who have been assessed for ADHD but need medication. We are currently out to recruitment for a 6 month doctor and nurse to focus directly on those cases waiting for medication.

# Next Steps: Health

04

## Commitment

Looking into our communication around our pre assessment offer for NDC which isn't being fully utilised and one of the clinical leads has taken this forward to share more widely with GPs, PCF, Schools and Social care to widen the awareness.

05

## Commitment

Recruitment for a Social media and website worker as we want to embrace social media and increase our communication to the families and partners.

06

## Commitment

There is way more work to be done to raise awareness of what's available health service wise for families and we haven't progressed that. Reach out to relevant department about the best way to start that so we add value and don't duplicate.

# Next Steps: Education

Education have committed to the following next steps:

01

## Commitment

Children and young people will be at the heart of our work. We will ensure the voices of pupils and young people are heard, listened to, and acted upon.

02

## Commitment

We will ensure the local offer is reviewed, updated, and published in a timely way, making sure it is clear, informative, and accessible to everyone.

03

## Commitment

We will strategically review school places and the resource base provision to provide appropriate settings for pupils and young people.

# Next Steps: Education continued

04

## Commitment

We will ensure better communications and timeliness of responses and replies.

05

## Commitment

Our practice will be more inclusive for young people, parents, and carers, focusing on their needs, priorities, aspirations, and ambitions.

06

## Commitment

Recruitment and retention of staff, along with staff training, will be a key part of our approach to ensuring quality provision.



# Next Steps: Social Services

Social Services have committed to the following next steps:

01

## Commitment

### **ACTIVE LISTENING**

We commit to listening and learning from parents/carers and children. You are the experts and have the lived experience. We will do this by providing you with opportunities to tell us your experiences to improve services. We commit to listening to parent, carer and children's feedback on the support we offer, we will do this in a number of ways (including telephone call, written feedback and group discussions), we want to make sure the support we offer meets the needs of the people using it.

02

## Commitment

### **COMMUNICATION**

We commit to respectful communication with parents, carers and their children. We will do this by making sure we explain what we mean clearly and do not use acronyms. We will respond when we say we will, and will also provide the name of the person covering if we are on leave (we will use an out of office reply to advise the sender the date of our return and alternative officer to contact).

We will communicate to you in the language you use, providing translation and alternative communication methods when required.

# Next Steps: Social Services

03

## Commitment

### **RESPONSIVE**

We commit to being a service that is transparent and responsive, we will do this by explaining how we make decisions and how you and your children can receive the right support at the right time – including Early Help.

We will do this by holding information sessions locally to explain how we work, and what you can expect from us when we work with your family. We will also clearly explain to you what you can expect from children's services whether this is Early Help or within statutory services.

04

## Commitment

### **NEEDS LED**

We commit to offering a service that is based on the needs of children and young people, ones that provide support and information at the earliest stage of emerging need and affords easy access to Early Help. We are currently developing Family Hubs and an improved Front Door response to parents that provides a practical and responsive support to families.

# Next Steps: Social Services

05

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## Commitment

### **SUPPORT**

We commit to providing children and their families/carers with the support they need to help them thrive. We will do this by clearly publishing our referral process and other procedures in a clear and easy to read format, and providing information to families on the subjects they need.

To make sure this happens we have been working with partners to make sure our local offer is improved and on a website that is easy to understand and accessible. Should things go wrong and you need to complain, we will respond to your concerns constructively and will work with you to find a solution.

06

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## Commitment

### **CHILD and YOUNG PERSON EFFECTIVE TRANSITION**

We commit to informing you and your child if a change of worker occurs and that this is done in a planned way and communicated to you in advance of any changes. We commit to providing you with an easy-to-read transition protocol, which will explain how you and your family can be supported during transition into adulthood.

# Event Feedback

We had some wonderful comments about our event that we'd love to share with you

Sitting round the table with professionals and having time to share with them the reality of day to day life with an SEN child.

It was so well run and inclusive!  
The first time I have ever been listened to and played an active part in a group discussion.

The red and green cards were fantastic. I have always just sat in group discussions thinking of what I wanted to say how I was going to say it, trying to listen to the discussion and work out when is appropriate to step in. Resulting in me never finding that right moment to speak, the conversation moving on and me kicking myself that I didn't say anything. I have never spoken so much in a group discussion and came away buzzing from the experience. Thank you what a great idea

# Event Feedback

We had some wonderful comments about our event that we'd love to share with you

It was a very special event.  
Well done to you all.

Really hoping you are all feeling  
it was a step in the right  
direction and a new beginning.  
You made us think!

Just wanted to say a massive thank  
you. What a brilliant day.

It was planned so well and you  
ensured that noone felt  
uncomfortable and everyone had a  
chance to share and move round  
meeting different people.

I recently attended the Better Together as a  
professional representing Oxfordshire County Council.  
It was a really well run and hugely rewarding event. It  
was incredibly powerful to hear families share their  
experiences with us. There were some stories that  
showed that with the right approach we can all  
support our young people to achieve remarkable  
outcomes. There were also experiences that  
demonstrated areas where things could be improved.  
However, the whole day was organised with the values  
of collaboration and co-production at its heart which  
made it highly beneficial for all that attended.

# Acknowledgements

We want to take this opportunity to thank the following for their support:

- Firstly, the committed and passionate parent carers who came and shared their experiences and added to the rich conversations in the room. You and your child's voice is the voice that counts when it comes to having the important conversations about improvements needed.
- Secondly, we'd like to thank all the professionals who attended the event, who listened respectfully to the parent carer voice and showed their passion and commitment for putting the child at the heart of their decision making in future.
- Our AMAZING facilitators and scribe's who worked so hard to facilitate those important conversations and make sure that ALL voices were heard.
- Ruth Gass for supplying the wonderful goodie bags - such thought and care went into these and it was so appreciated by everyone.
- All the volunteers from Oxfordshire Family Support Network, Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum and Carers Oxfordshire who funded and spent many hours preparing and running the event.

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## Contact

### **Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum**

[www.oxpcf.org.uk](http://www.oxpcf.org.uk)  
[info@oxpcf.org.uk](mailto:info@oxpcf.org.uk)

### **Oxfordshire Family Support Network**

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### **Carers Oxfordshire**

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