

West Sussex Special Educational Needs Forum.

Minutes of the meeting held on the 21st February 2007 at Billingshurst Village Hall.

Members Present.

Representatives of Voluntary Organisations.

Michelle Burdis – Sussex ADHD Support Group
Daphne Bush – Sussex ADHD Support Group
Philippa Spicer – Sussex Autistic Society
Mike Branson – SCOPE (Chair)
Sue Aldred – Camelia Botnar Children's Centre

Officers in Attendance.

Jo Tyler – Parent Partnership Officer
Gill Henry – Principal Education Officer

Apologies.

Laura Wallbridge – AFASIC
Caroline Williams – Sussex ADHD Support Group
Hilary Vaughan – Educational Inclusion Manager

1. Minutes of the last meeting.

It was agreed that the minutes of the West Sussex Special Educational Needs Forum held on the 6th December 2006 be approved and signed by the chairman.

2. Matters arising.

2.1 Parent Forum.

Jo informed the group that the first meeting of the parent forum had taken place, sadly only a few new parents had attended the meeting. However, the group has undertaken considerably advertising for the next meeting and are hopeful that more parents will come along. The meeting included some very interesting discussions and was a real opportunity for parents to share their experiences and knowledge with the other parents present.

2.2. Camelia Botnar.

Sue informed the group that they have submitted bids for grants from both West Sussex County Council and the PCT; unfortunately both of these have been turned down. Sue also explained despite the financial difficulties demand for places at the centre has not decreased and the withdrawal of transport has not effected the children currently attending the centre.

3. Team Changes.

Gill Henry explained that the Special Educational Needs Team and Special Needs and Disability Service would shortly be joining together to form the Special Needs and Disability Service. Jon Philpot will be the head of this service; Jon is currently Group Manager for Specialist Services. His new title will be Principal Manager for Special Needs and Disability Service. Gill explained she will be leaving her post as Principal Education Officer on the 31st March 2007. There will also be a new service manager appointed in the SEN Team in the near future.

This change will come into effect in April 2007. Initially the services are likely to run parallel to each other, but considerable work will be undertaken to see how they can work more closely together on the cases they have in common, approximately 400 children are known to both services.

4. Out of County Project.

Gill explained 'out of county' refers to schools that are not maintained by the Local Authority, some of these may be physically located within West Sussex. Gill explained the project has resulted in each out of county school being allocated an Educational Psychologist from the West Sussex team. This EP will be responsible for linking with the schools and monitoring the support available to West Sussex children that attend that school. In the past this type of monitoring has been rather 'ad-hoc' and the plan is to make it more consistent and effective. Each school also has an Assistant Education Officer from the SEN Team allocated to it as well. The EP's have written to all the schools they have been allocated and will be arranging to visit all our youngsters in these out of county schools shortly.

Gill explained a lot of the Local Authority's money is spent in these out of county schools and the plan is to try to build capacity within county to ensure children's needs can be met within local authority provision, thus keeping the money within county. Unfortunately, it is a difficult circle because the more money that is going to out of county provision means there is less money within county to help to improve provision. Gill confirmed there will always be a need for out of county and regional expertise for some low incidence, very complex children but some less specialist needs could be more appropriately met from within county provision. Work to assist this will include improving the capacity of mainstream schools and working with regional partners to 'share' expertise.

Philippa expressed the importance of early intervention for children with SEN and agreed with the aim to build capacity and expertise within county, however she also expressed a worry that out of county placements might be completely removed – Philippa felt improving expertise within West Sussex is good but this shouldn't 'shut doors' to other ways of supporting children at the same time. Philippa also expressed a concern that the struggle that children with SEN and their

parents face in trying to ensure appropriate provision have not changed in the last 10 years – the challenges remain the same.

Mike enquired as to why Philippa thought this was? Philippa thought teachers having too much to do, as well as a lack of understanding of different conditions and a reluctance to listen to and use parent knowledge all contributed to the challenges faced by children with SEN.

Gill explained about a new regional project that is about to launch, this will focus on improving schools awareness of ASD, it will follow a similar pattern to the Dyslexia Friendly Schools Project which has been successfully rolled out across West Sussex.

The discussion moved on to some general concerns about schools accountability especially when children do not have statements and the difficulty experienced by some parents in obtaining information held by schools on their children. It was reiterated that parents are able to obtain all information held by schools on their children and that Parent Partnership can assist them in doing this, however in some cases this has proved extremely difficult and time consuming and parents can struggle to have the impact needed to 'push' the school into releasing the information. **It was agreed Jo would draft a letter to Mark Dunn to be sent by Mike Branson on behalf of the forum raising this issue.**

5. Proposal to combine the Parent Carers Planning Group and the SEN Forum.

Information had been distributed prior to the meeting regarding this proposal. All members at the meeting were supportive of the proposal and thought it was an appropriate way forward especially as we are now all part of a Children and Young People's Service and will soon be a Special Needs and Disability Service.

Jo suggested the first official meeting of this joined up group will be the 18th July 2007 in Pulborough Village Hall at 10.30 am. This date has already been set as a meeting of the Parent Carer Planning Group and will be used as an official launch date of the joined up forum. The group agreed the Parent Carer Planning Group continues to be an appropriate title.

Philippa asked whether young people themselves were represented on this group. Jo confirmed at this stage they were not but perhaps this could be discussed at the first meeting as an action for the future. Jo will feed this back.

6. Any other business.

Mike and the other forum members wished to express their thanks to Gill for her contribution to the forum over the past 2 years.

7. Date and time of next meeting.

It was agreed the next forum meeting arranged for the 4th July 2007 will be cancelled and the group will meet again as part of the new Parent Carers Planning Group on the 18th July 2007 10.30am Pulborough Village Hall. Agenda and maps will be distributed closer to the time.