

**HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

WEDNESDAY 19 JUNE 2002 at 10.30 AM

PARENT PARTNERSHIP SERVICE

Agenda Item No.

3

Report of the Director of Children, Schools & Families

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1. Purpose of report

This item was requested by Pat Cherry for possible scrutiny by the Committee in the light of the new Special Educational Needs (SEN) Code of Practice 2001; the report describes the current service provision and legislative framework, existing practice and future aims of the Parent Partnership Service.

2. Summary

The Parent Partnership Service offers support, information and training to parents of children with special needs, and plays an important role in preventing and resolving disputes. It does this by:

- contributing to strategic planning and effective service delivery with schools and CSF
- helping officers within the organisation to have a greater awareness of parental perspectives
- increasing the levels of parent participation in local policy development, implementation and review.
- meeting the requirements for both informal and formal arrangements for avoiding or resolving disagreements
- developing skills in mediation and conflict management. This is an especially sensitive area of work within the school context but one that both schools and parents find supportive as directly contributes to improved outcomes for children.

3. Conclusion

In the response to the revised SEN Code of Practice 2001 the Parent Partnership Service has committed itself to:

- Adopting a strategic role in supporting and promoting the views of parents, carers and their children.
- Further contributing to school effectiveness and improvement in the area of special educational needs.

The Parent Partnership Service is responding positively to the new SEN Code of Practice 2001.

1. Background

- 1.1 Parent Partnership Services (PPS) were first proposed in the Code of Practice for the Identification and Assessment of SEN 1994, and became a statutory requirement within the SEN and Disability Act 2001. The Hertfordshire PPS was established in January 1995, appointing a Parent Partnership Co-ordinator. Funding was initially provided through a three year funding programme from the DfEE (as it was then). Hertfordshire was the only LEA to make a permanent appointment; other authorities opting for a secondment or temporary contract. A further three-year funding cycle by the DfEE enabled the service to expand in 1999 to the current staffing level.
- 1.2 The aims of the Parent Partnership Service are to provide impartial, informed information and guidance to parents and carers of children with special educational needs. The service also aims to support the partnership arrangement parents and professionals have. To achieve this the service consists of
- A full time Co-ordinator
 - A full time equivalent central helpline/administrative assistant
 - 3.3 full time equivalent Parent Partnership Supporters on a term time only contract (one member of staff in each Quadrant)
- 1.3 The majority of calls to the five Parent Partnership helplines are from parents and carers of children at school based stages of support. The service also receives calls from schools, CSF colleagues and health professionals. There is a central helpline, which is answered during office hours by a member of staff and provides a year round service. Issues arising from the helplines are regularly discussed with Quadrant staff and Operations teams.
- 1.4 **The number of calls to area Parent Partnership helplines is as follows:**
- | | |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|
| September 1999 to July 2000 | 1249 calls |
| September 2000 to July 2001 | 2647 calls |
| September 2001 to - | 2402 calls <i>to March 2002</i> |

2. Current Practice

- 2.1 The SEN Code of Practice 2001 states that: -

‘The aim of parent partnership services is to ensure parents of children with additional needs have access to information, advice and guidance in relation to the special educational needs of their children so they can make appropriate, informed decisions. The service should provide advice to the parents of all children with SEN not only those with statements. The prime role of parent partnership services is to help parents whose children have been identified as having SEN. However, there will be cases where parents believe that their child has SEN, but the school takes a different view. Parent Partnership services should be flexible in their approach and handle such cases sensitively and sympathetically. They should consider parents’ concerns carefully, try to help and support parents who want information, and not dismiss out of hand any enquiries for assistance or information.’

Para 2.19 SEN Code of Practice 2001

- 2.2 The Code also describes the minimum standards that are required but allows flexibility in how these standards are delivered.

- 2.3 A major initiative within the new Code is the arrangements local authorities are required to make for avoiding and resolving disagreements between parents and schools/local authority. The lines are not prescribed where the role of Parent Partnership Services end and the role of an independent disagreement resolution service begins. This allows sensible flexibility as to the best way to achieve a positive outcome.
- 2.4 Hertfordshire currently has a service level agreement with Mediation Works Ltd, this arrangement responds to the requirement in the Code for a local authority to make arrangements that include the appointment of independent persons. There is a bi-monthly meeting with the Service Manager to discuss the procedures that have been put in place and monitor the demands on the Service. It is too early in that process to draw any firm conclusions about the response and effectiveness of this arrangement.
- 2.5 Hertfordshire has a diverse population of parents and carers ranging from those who are articulate and knowledgeable, to groups of parents and carers who may be described as 'hard to reach'. The Parent Partnership Service strives to meet the needs of 'hard to reach' parents and carers by being based locally, promoting the service widely not only in schools but in libraries, health clinics, Citizen Advice Bureaux and public information points. Parent Partnership supports the parent-professional partnership, and enables professionals to recognise the value of working closely with all parents for the benefit of the child.
- 2.6 Preventative work is a particularly important focus of the work of Parent Partnership. A local service, which is responsive to trends, enables Hertfordshire to fulfil this requirement in the Code. The team has qualitative data on cases where disagreement has occurred, between parents and the local authority. Each member of staff has successfully been involved in enabling all parties to reach an agreement. During 1999 –2000 Hertfordshire managed to resolve 76% of the appeals lodged with the SEN Tribunal without having to go to a formal hearing. This is the best figure within the Eastern region.
- 2.5 Monitoring of the service takes place by satisfaction surveys from parent workshops, written questionnaires and telephone interviews. Past surveys, including those in minority ethnic languages show a high satisfaction rate and have influenced the current structure and activities of the Service. For instance 88% of parents who received Parent Partnership written information found it helpful and enabled them to understand SEN procedures. 70% of parents who contacted the service wanted specialist help over the telephone, 49% sought help in meetings, 57% asked for further explanations with procedures and paperwork, whilst 55% of parents wanted help contributing to assessment procedures. Of those asked (200 parents) 88% felt fully or partly involved with school and local authority procedures. The Parent Partnership Services will continue to contribute to increasing this figure.
- 2.7 A further set of data will be collected during 2002; these findings will influence further planning.
- 2.8 The service's developmental activities for this year are described in the CSF Plan 2002/03 Activity Sheet Reference 4.5.4.

3. Training and Development

- 3.1 Much of the thrust of the work of Parent Partnership is to ensure that parents are able to take an active part in their child's education. This requires enabling parents and carers to feel confident in the relationships they have with CSF and schools. We offer informal information sessions, conferences and county information days. The most recent in March this year was attended by more than 1000 visitors.
- 3.2 There is equally important ongoing work to undertake with schools and CSF staff - raising issues on behalf of service users. The team has provided Inset to a wide range of groups since January 2002:
- University of Hertfordshire – Special Teaching Assistants (STA) Course
 - Education Forums – Governor awareness raising
 - Code of Practice - Co-providing with SEN School Improvement Team (four sessions in each quadrant)
 - Parent, Health and Voluntary Organisation Conference
 - Workshop at Inclusion Conference
 - Disagreement Resolution – Heads and SENCOs
 - Parents and Carers – Statutory Assessment Meetings
- 3.3 The National Parent Partnership Network (NPN) is producing a training pack, which will be free of charge to Local Authorities to use with their own potential Independent Parental Supporters. A recruitment process will begin in during July 2002, with parent information sessions as a starting point.

4. Financial Implications

This report has no financial implications.

The current cost of providing the service at 2002/03 budget prices is £170,000.

Background material referred to by the author while compiling this report

SEN Code of Practice 2001 (DfES)