

Board Reporting Template

This template is designed for officers to report to the board, providing key updates, progress, and recommendations aligned with the board's objectives.

Submission Date: 24/06/2025

Officer Name and Role: Christine McInnes, Director of Education

1. Report Title and Submission Details

- Report Title: Update on parental
- Date of Submission: 23/06/2025
- Officer Name and Role: Christine McInnes, Director of Education
- Reporting Period: 2024-25

2. Purpose and Context

This report provides an update on work being undertaken across the system on engaging with parents and carers and how their input influences service development. Being able to evidence how leaders take account of the views of parents and how this intelligence is used to shape services will be considered during inspection.

The SEND Code of Practice (January 2015) highlights the expectation of co-production with parents/carers both at an individual level in relation to their own child or children, working together as equal partners with professionals to design, plan, deliver and review support and services to achieve shared outcomes. At a more strategic level there is an expectation parents (and their children) are involved in discussions and decisions about local provision. This includes reviewing educational and training provision and social care provision, and in preparing and reviewing the Local Offer.

Whilst the COP is more specific in its definition of co-production and this has informed the Kent Area Co-production Charter, Ofsted take a more flexible approach and will be looking for evidence of influencing practice and outcomes, rather than focusing on true co-production, which is a very resource intensive and lengthy process, so not always appropriate.

The key criteria referenced in the Evaluation schedule of the Area SEND Inspection Guidance and handbook April 2024 related to co-production include:

“ 31. Inspectors will evaluate the impact of the local area partnership’s SEND arrangements on the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND, including the extent to which:

- children, young people and their families participate in decision-making about their individual plans and support...”

“ 32. Inspectors will evaluate how the local area partners work together to plan, evaluate and develop the SEND system, including the extent to which:

- leaders actively engage and work with children, young people and families

- leaders evaluate services and make improvements and
- leaders create an environment in which effective practice and multi-agency working can flourish.”

We are working towards addressing these expectations in the SEND improvement work and further embedding parental engagement and co-construction.

3. Key Updates and Progress

3.1 The Kent Approach

Kent has a multi-faceted approach to parental engagement, collecting feedback and on occasion when it is appropriate co-construction.

Kent Parents and Children Together (KPACT) is the DfE recognized, statutory Parent Carer Forum (PCF) for Kent. Their role is to work with the LA and NHS to gather the voice of families to 'design, develop, review, and improve services and support for children and young people with disabilities 0-25 yrs in SEND.'

The DfE provided consultancy support from the Council for Disabled Children in 2024 to facilitate a greater understanding across all stakeholders about the terminology used in relation to engagement, consultation, and co-production. This informed the development of a draft Kent Co-Production Charter, which is in the final draft prior to expected publication in September 2025.

The relationship between KPACT and Kent (primarily KCC and the ICB representatives) is formalised through a collaboration agreement that was co-constructed with Kent PACT and signed off in October 2023 refreshed through an annually agreed plan.

3.1.1 Examples of How Kent PACT Has Gathered the Voices of Families to Design, Develop, Review, and Improve Services - Kent PACT is committed to ensuring that the voices of parent carers are central to shaping local SEND services. As a small organisation with limited resources, we continue to prioritise meaningful engagement wherever possible. Below are key examples of how we have actively gathered and used family feedback to inform and influence service design and delivery.

3.1.2 Co-Production - Co-production lies at the heart of Kent PACT's approach. We believe services are most effective when designed in partnership with the families who use them. However, meaningful co-

production is time- and resource-intensive. As a small parent carer forum serving the largest county in England, limited staffing and volunteer capacity require us to prioritise carefully.

Despite these constraints, we remain committed to co-production wherever feasible and continue to advocate for sustainable infrastructure and support to scale our efforts effectively.

3.1.3 Focus Groups and Forums - Kent PACT has developed and facilitated themed focus groups and forums to collect direct feedback from families. These sessions, held in partnership with key service providers and SEND stakeholders, are designed to be inclusive, accessible, and grounded in lived experience.

Examples include:

- Education & Inclusion: Topics such as SEN support, transitions, and “myth-busting” for communities of schools, delivered with education partners.
- Health Engagement: Parent carer input into the NHS Balanced System for Speech and Language Therapy (SALT).
- Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG): Sessions delivered with professionals (e.g., IASK, Local Offer), including roadshows and community events.

These events enable families to identify service gaps, propose improvements, and receive direct support navigating the system.

3.1.4 Surveys and Consultations - Kent PACT actively promotes local authority and partner consultations and conducts independent engagement through:

- Targeted polls
- Formal surveys
- Online and in-person feedback sessions through webinars.

Recent and planned survey topics include:

- Biannual SEND survey (July 2025)
- Short breaks provision
- School transport
- Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme
- Transitions between educational stages

3.1.5 Targeted Engagement with Marginalised Groups - Kent PACT

recognises that mainstream engagement often excludes some families. To address this, we have prioritised inclusive outreach by:

- Representing neurodivergent children and young people on the ND Steering Group.
- Engaging parents of children in Alternative Provision
- Supporting neurodivergent-led families with tailored workshops
- Working with families from culturally and ethnically diverse backgrounds

Examples of targeted actions include:

- Working with Family Hubs to share early help and training opportunities.
- Offering a 6-week wellbeing workshop for burned-out parent carers, led by a therapeutic professional.
- Investing in and delivering the Exeter University **Healthy Parent Carer** programme, including a bespoke **SEND Dads course** delivered by trained SEND dads.

3.1.6 Strengthening Communication and Engagement - Since 2023, Kent PACT has significantly enhanced its communication and engagement impact. Improvements include:

- Enhanced staff training
- Investment in a new CRM system
- Expanded media and marketing expertise

These steps have resulted in more professional, accessible communications and a substantial increase in engagement. Between March 25 and June 25 alone, we recorded **81,349 views** - a **68% increase** in social media engagement since 2023.

3.1.7 Conclusion - Despite the challenges of limited capacity, Kent PACT continues to demonstrate the impact of authentic parent carer engagement. By actively listening to and amplifying the voices of families, we contribute to more informed, inclusive, and effective services for children and young people with SEND across Kent.

3.2 KCC

3.2.1 Evaluation Practice - Parents and carers have regular opportunities to submit evaluations (at the completion of the EHCP process and following an Annual Review) and a new Feedback Framework is used to collate

information for consideration in decision-making. An example of how this feedback is used to influence includes through the 'Talk Tuesday' initiative. In 2024, nearly 16,000 calls were made to parents during dedicated engagement hours. This provided a consistent platform for families to be heard and supported. Learning from this initiative has informed quality assurance practices, workforce training, and better complaint resolution, particularly within the post-16 team who now have protected communication time each day.

3.2.2 The Information and Guidance offer including the SEND Enquiries Hub. This Hub handles high volume of phone calls and emails, the SEND Roadshows and the newly launched SENDCast interactions. The whole offer has recorded over 25,000 direct engagements in 2024.

3.2.3 Qualitative feedback specifically about the Hub included highlights its effectiveness. Families described the service as “clear,” “brilliant and very understanding,” and “second to none.” Many parents reported feeling “guided,” “listened to,” and “valued,” with one parent noting, “They helped me understand what to do next and followed up quickly.”

3.2.4 The Enquiries Hub also provides trend data which is shared across the service and inform system improvements. Analysis of the first 5 months of 2025 queries shows recurring themes around:

- How to navigate the EHCP application and review process
- Understanding Autism and ADHD diagnosis pathways
- Clarifying post-16 transitions and support
- Managing timelines, delays, and communication breakdowns

In response, several improvements are being put into place:

- Revised online FAQs and decision-tree visuals for EHCP and diagnosis pathways
- Stronger integration with Family Hubs for earlier navigation and trusted points of contact including SEND staff working from Hubs
- Targeted staff training for Enquiries Officers to ensure more consistent messaging and improved escalation routes
- Targeted training for staff on communication and customer service
- Communication has also been embedded in our revised performance management targets.

- 3.2.5** Case studies and interviews with parents and carers, young people and education colleagues to celebrate success, identify challenges and promote what is happening across Kent in our education sector are now being collected. Building on this, the SEND service is currently organising SEND staff attendance at school coffee mornings across Kent to be part of conversation and be a part of the local community. These changes are being implemented following direct feedback from families.
- 3.2.6** SEND Information, Advice, and Guidance (IAG) Roadshows have significantly increased access to trusted information for families across Kent. Throughout 2024, these place-based events were delivered in partnership with Family Hubs and local services. They reached over 15,484 families, with an additional 9,743 individuals engaging via the newly launched SENDCast (available on Facebook) and online content linked to these sessions. Across these events, more than 600 direct click-throughs and 18,000 video views were recorded, reflecting both reach and sustained engagement with IAG content online.
- 3.2.7** Feedback collected via event evaluations and comments has been overwhelmingly positive. Families consistently described the events as:
- “Very informative.”
 - “I learnt about services I didn’t know existed.”
 - “Now I know where to get the support I need.”
 - “Brilliant range of support for different age groups.”
 - “Really helpful — thank you so much.”
- 3.2.8** The impact extended to professionals too. Family Hub staff reported increased confidence in discussing local SEND services with families, contributing to greater trust in the universal offer. These joint-working relationships were foundational in increasing accessibility of support earlier in a family's journey. The events also generated valuable intelligence on what families need and where service gaps are felt. A trend analysis of IAG interactions found that families most frequently sought support or clarification around:
- Navigating EHCP processes and post-assessment delays
 - Understanding Autism/ADHD diagnosis and support pathways
 - Clarifying post-16 options and transitions
 - Mental health and well-being services for children and young people
 - Access to inclusive recreational activities and social groups.
- 3.2.9** In direct response to this feedback, the following changes are being implemented in 2025:
- A dedicated post-16 event planned for Tunbridge Wells and a cluster-based approach in Sevenoaks working with local schools

- Stronger partnerships with schools and SENCos to improve early information sharing
- Visual and interactive planning tools being added to the Local Offer site, based on family feedback requesting easier navigation and clearer timelines
- Further integration of IAG into Family Hub models to ensure continuity of messages across the system.

3.2.10 KCC benefits from continuous consultation through the involvement of experts by experience.

By embedding expert voices directly into program design, KCC ensures that its services remain responsive and relevant to the complex, real-life challenges faced by families.

Key programs influenced by these experts include:

- Designated Key Worker Program: This initiative assigns experienced individuals to provide tailored support, guiding families through complex needs and individual care plans.
- Neurodevelopmental Assessment Pathway: Designed to streamline assessment procedures for conditions such as autism, ADHD, and other developmental challenges, ensuring timely and accurate support for CYP.
- Children and Young People's Crisis and Complex Care Program: This program supports families managing acute mental health and behavioral needs, offering immediate intervention and ongoing care resources.

3.2.11 Multi-agency quality assurance audits. The QA team undertake regular audits of EHCPs, with findings fed into system development, training and individualized feedback to individual staff. Multi agency audits also take place where the team includes KCC officers, Health representatives and KPACT, again with findings being fed into service development. In July 2024 the Multi agency audit had a particular focus on Section A of the EHCP.

3.2.12 The audit examined 10 EHCPs issued between April and June 2024 and highlighted significant inconsistencies in how the child/young person and parent/carer voice was captured and represented. Only 30% of plans clearly presented views from both children and their families, while in 70% of cases, it was not evident whose voice was being represented or how it was gathered. In over 60% of plans, Section A did not reflect a holistic or individualised view of the child or young person. Instead, views were often drawn from third-party reports, with limited use of direct quotes, adapted formats, or trauma-informed language.

- 3.2.13** This learning directly informed the development of a revised Section A template, which the redesigned template places greater emphasis on:
- Clearly identifying whose views are being shared (child, parent, both)
 - Capturing direct voice using appropriate communication methods
 - Including 'how best to communicate with me' guidance as standard
 - Structuring content around strengths, aspirations, and lived experience.

3.2.14 Parents consistently advocated for clearer, more personal representation of their child, especially in the early sections of EHCPs that set the tone for provision and outcomes. The new Section A reflects this by ensuring that Appendix 1 is actively used, promoted, and supported during the planning process, and by discouraging reliance on second-hand summaries from professionals. This is a strong example of how parental voice, supported by data and collaborative audit, is leading not just to better individual plans, but to systemic service improvement.

- 3.2.15 The work of the Commissioning Service** - Following engagement with parents and carers the Short Breaks Activities Grant Prospectus was designed and published. The objectives of this programme are:
- Provide a break for parents and carers to enable them to continue their caring duties.
 - Provide meaningful activities for children and young people when their carer is on a break.
 - Distribution of available funding based on an agreed set of variables.
 - Commission an equitable offer of short break provision to meet variable levels and types of need.
 - Ensuring a wide range of available short break activities across the county at different times and meet differing needs e.g., school holidays, weekends, after school to meet the needs of both the CYP and parent/carers.
 - Ensure a broad range of activities available for all age ranges.

3.2.16 The assessment of submitted bids were assessed remotely by four members of KPACT, a representative from the Wellbeing for Schools Project, and a commissioner. The representatives from Kent PACT included a parent who has a lived experience of a child with a disability. Whilst it is difficult to compare the current activities with the previous commissioning process due to differences in reporting, there has been a reduction in no-shows of 36% between 2023/24 and 2024/25 demonstrating that the activities are more tailored as a direct result of engagement from the outset.

3.2.17 Together with Parents is a commissioned service developed in 2022. The service supports parents and carers whose child is currently on the waiting list for a Neurodiversity (ND) diagnosis and is also in receipt of Integrated Children's Services. The aim of the service is to support parents and carers to build resilience and self-help strategies to avoid reaching crisis whilst awaiting assessment. The service was developed through co-production with parents and carers. The key feedback was that parents valued a service that understood their needs, anxieties and stresses, that sitting on a waiting list for up to three years can create, for both the child and the wider family. We listened to their feedback and created a service that has a staff team with lived experience and feedback from families throughout the contract has been extremely positive (case studies can be provided).

3.2.18 Since its inception in May 2022 TWP have supported 1,520 families through the service. This includes (but not limited to) 3,978 face-to-face family meetings, 560 peer support groups (average six per week), 455 Cygnet Programmes (average four per week, term time only), reduced the Cygnet waiting list by 265 families in 2023/24 and employs 12 (7.5FTE) staff members with lived experience. The majority of Cygnet and Peer Support sessions are delivered in the evening, from 9pm to 11pm and they are trialing an early morning one during the school holidays from 7am - 9am. Due to their lived experience and the complex lives these families live, these times work better, and attendance is good, especially for those families with adolescents.

3.3 The Integrated Care Board

3.3.1 The ICB's approach is included in two key documents both published in 2024. The Lived Experience Engagement and Employment Framework was jointly produced by KCC, Medway Council and NHS Kent and Medway to support all levels of engagement including co-production which is being implemented locally. This can be viewed here <https://www.kmhealthandcare.uk/get-involved/lived-experience-engagement-and-employment-framework>

3.3.2 In September 2024, Kent and Medway ICB Children's Team published a report on How the voices of children, young people and families are gathered and how they are used to improve their experience and outcomes' and this can be viewed here - <https://democracy.kent.gov.uk/mgConvert2PDF.aspx?ID=127799>

3.3.3 Work has been reported previously, one example of the Social Media Plan for The Balance System is included in appendix 1.

3.4 Joint KCC and Integrated Children's Board

3.4.1 PINS (Promoting Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools) project in Maidstone. This nationally funded (Department for Education (DfE), supported by the Department for Health and Social Care (DHSC) and NHS England (NHSE) pilot project has been rolled out initially in Maidstone and is now being expanded to Thanet. It aims to support a joint KCC and IBC programme to reduce the waiting list for ASD diagnosis, establishing a whole school approach to supporting a wider range of needs by strengthening the universal offer, as well as establishing early identification and intervention for Neurodiverse children in mainstream schools. Collaboration with parents and carers is integral to the programme and this aspect of the work has been supported by KPACT.

3.4.2 One outcome was the development of a comprehensive menu of support for parents in response to their requests and the establishment of parent/carers fora in each participating school to make the partnership sustainable going forward. More information including on the Parent Forums can be seen here [Supporting neurodivergent children in Kent schools - News & Features - Kent County Council](#)

3.4.3 The participating schools' self-evaluation includes data on co-production and parental engagement which includes assessment against the following criteria:

- Ensure we make greater use of parental voice in some of our decision making around our provision
- Continuing our efforts to engage all our parents
- Reflect with our parents and how we are consistent with the information that we share with them
- Create opportunities to more formally gain SEND parent voice when considering policies and practice (parent forums) Which showed improvement.

3.4.4 The Balance System - Recently parents/carers were brought together to co-produce information about the Balanced System. An FAQ document was developed which was aimed at parents/carers already receiving support from speech and language therapy services. However, after discussion with our parent engagement group, it eventually iterated into information that schools would be provided with to put on their websites to

explain the Balanced System to all parents and carers. The group have also supported us around development of social media posts to explain the Balanced System for parents.

3.5 Key Performance Indicators

3.5.1 This reports includes just some of the work that is ongoing with parents and some examples of the impact of the engagement. Despite the significant increase in investment of officer time in engagement, we are not seeing evidence of this translate into more parental confidence in the SEND system. In the interests of streamlining reporting and in view of the challenges of developing an appropriate KPI related to parents, a new simplified score card has been developed for the Board which does not include a parental KPI. The Board will want to consider how to support, challenge and make a judgement about this important area of work.

3.5.2 Risks and Challenges - There is a continued risk of reputational damage and that this will influence the outcome of the next area inspection. Whilst before the local election, given success in making tangible improvements to the SEND system meant there was an easing of reporting requirements, creating greater capacity in the senior leadership team to devote to comms and engagement there are now growing demands for FOIs, media enquiries and reporting which is eroding the time available to devote to positive comms.

Content is being generated, and discussions are underway about changing the methodology for disseminating positive stories to build greater confidence in the system, for example by the Partnership Board (and the post 16 Pathways for All Board) developing a social media presence and being used to disseminate information.

The second key risk is accessing a range of parental views, particularly during inspection. As can be seen from the quotes above there is positive feedback, however it is currently very difficult to give voice to these parents and carers during assessments and the inspection.

3.5.3 Recommendations for Board Action - The Board is asked to note the contents of the report and advise on:

- views related to the current direction of travel with regard to the breadth of engagement, influence and co-production with parents

- how officers can better demonstrate the strategic use of data to evidence the influence of parents and carers of the development of services
- to give a view of how the Board would want to consider this area going forward
- how to better mitigate the risks in this area
- to agree with the development of a Board social media presence and for this to be used to raise the profile of the SEND development work particularly the influence of parents in service improvement.

4. Appendices

Appendix 1 - Social Media Plan for The Balance System



TBS Social Media
Plan July 25 report.pdf