



Communications and engagement strategy – Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

The purpose of this strategy is to improve communications and engagement between the City of York Council, Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group and its stakeholders. We want to ensure that we are sharing the key messages to a wide audience, improve and increase engagement, ensure the opportunities to be involved are clear and share our strategic priorities for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. We will also provide all key partners and stakeholders with regular updates on our improvement journey.

Background and context

The [Children and Families Act \(2014\)](#) places a statutory duty on the NHS and Local Authority partners to provide help and support to children, young people aged 0-25 years, and their families, who have a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). SEND covers physical and mental health conditions and learning disabilities: conditions do not have to be long term or lifelong, although many children and young people with SEND do have such conditions.

Under the Children and Families Act, the NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) works with City of York Council and key partners to ensure:

- Early identification of SEND.
- Ensure effective and good quality support and services are provided for children and young people with SEND.
- Ensure positive life outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
- Communicate with and gather the views of children, young people and their families and other users of SEN services.

- Ensure that the health advice for Education Health and Care Plans is provided on time, and details those health care needs as relate to their special educational needs

The SEND service also works closely with York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, the acute and community services provider and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust, the provider of mental health services and support.

City of York Council uses their SEND Local Offer website to share a range of information about education, health and social care, and activities to support children, young people and their families all in one place. The Local Offer for SEND website provides information on all available SEN resources.

The joint area SEND Ofsted inspection report for York was released in February 2020 and revealed a number of concerns related to communications and engagement. The following outcomes have been determined from reading the report.

1. There is a need to increase understanding of joint partnership (a way of working where children and young people, families and those that provide services work together to make a decision or create a service which works for them all.) and the value of joint commissioning, and embed into the local areas' approach.
2. There is a need to increase overall oversight of health services in the area and monitor services and service activity more routinely.
3. Increase awareness of the local offer for SEND website, as many parents are unaware of the support and resources which exist.
4. There is also a need to improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plans. By involving joint partnership, communication and joint commissioning, the quality of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) will be improved.

The SEND service currently does not meet the standard for sufficient communication and engagement with its stakeholders. By implementing this communications and engagement strategy, stakeholders will be more involved in the SEND improvement journey through updates, feedback and service development.

Targets since the SEND inspection report have been determined, and will help develop the communications and engagement strategy and plan:

- 50% improvement rate of parental confidence and awareness of strategic intent and priorities – evidenced from feedback mechanisms
- 50% increase in engagement across groups with specific health needs
- 75% increase in families surveyed indicated an awareness of how young people, parents and carers can be involved in jointly producing services in York

Our vision

The City of York Council and NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group will provide consistent communication and engagement activities with parents, carers, children, young people and professionals about Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services in York. This communication and engagement will include updates, progress tracking, and joint partnership as part of improving SEND services in York.

Listening to feedback we have created a vision based on what families, children and colleagues have told us is important to them. Our vision is to create an open, honest and well – communicated city. A city where all families of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities will be able to say:

- I am consistently communicated with in a way that is easy to understand
- I know about the changes to SEND services in York
- I know how to be involved in the process of service development and delivery
- My family’s voices are heard

‘There is a necessity for plain speaking’

‘Making it easier to read, will make it easier for everyone.’

‘Make sure that communication materials are done in different ways – no jargon, different format’

‘Take it right back to basic – explain the acronym and jargon’

‘Need more thought around communication and sharing ideas.’

‘Needs to be more open and honest communication’

Achieving the vision

What we do well	What we need to do more of
Communicate with families via the Local Offer for SEND, Social Media, children and young people groups and parent groups	Communicate simply with a wider population of families with children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities
Involve children, young people and parents who are a part of groups in our service development	Embed engagement and communication in all of our work
Listen to families we work with	Actively listen and use feedback from parents, children and young people in our work
	Feedback to all families about our improvement journey
	Offer a wide range of engagement opportunities for all
	Provide information in an easy to understand format which avoids jargon

'I'd suggest timely replies to emails or even replying at all is essential. And when a parent tells you are not listening then reflect and open a dialogue with them to see if you have truly actively listened and understood. Not everyone can communicate as effectively as they would like to. They need to still be listened to.'

'I felt we were involved appropriately and, thanks to an exceptional provision we managed to secure a place in, our son is thriving. We have also been able to communicate with the LA recently about the lack of suitable provision in year 7, and I feel our voice is being heard.'

'Everything seems like too much trouble and getting them to effectively communicate is a battle of its own.'

How we are going to achieve this:

- Social Media connections
- Newsletter
- Face to face, events, conferences, focus groups, parent evenings etc.
- Through SEND services (community groups, youth groups, education providers)
- Printed communications
- Online websites
- Surveys
- Engagement sessions

For more information on how you can be involved in engagement and joint partnership sessions, please go to the Local Offer for SEND: www.yor-ok.org.uk/send-updates.htm

Communication and engagement objectives

Objective	Qualitative measure	Quantitative measure
Increased awareness of strategic planning process and process of gaining involvement in SEND improvement journey	Face to face feedback regarding parental confidence and awareness of processes available Knowledge of stakeholders regarding SEND Improvement journey updates	Website hits Social media stats E-newsletter sign ups

Increased range of communication processes with more accessible online and digital presence	Immediate feedback about communication and engagement process	Number of communication and engagement processes stakeholders can be involved in
Increase stakeholder engagement with service development / SEND channels	Face-to-face conversations with stakeholders	Engagement on social media Attendees to podcasts, webinars, conferences and events
Consistent messaging processing that will celebrate success and improvement	Visiting and speaking to stakeholder community groups	Feedback questionnaires

Key stakeholder groups

Stakeholder map produced separately.

Parents and carers	Schools (primary and secondary) teachers/head teachers/governors	Colleges / sixth form	Young people
Members of the public	Safeguarding teams	Clinical Commissioning Group	City of York Council
Media	SEND improvement board	Tees Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Trust (TEWV)	York Teaching Hospital NHS Foundation Trust (YTHFT)
Politicians	York Inspirational Kids	York And District Dyslexia Association (YADDA)	Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information and Advice Support Service (SENDIASS)
York Tourette's Support Group	York Down Syndrome Forum	Other SEND support/community groups	

Listening to our stakeholders - Engagement and joint partnership

When initially engaging with stakeholders, one thing that continued to arise was an issue with the word 'co-production'. It was not understood, not family friendly and the worry was that it wouldn't be successful in attracting people to get involved, as families would not understand what the offer was. Therefore, a survey was produced to gain feedback around the word co-production. From this survey, the most popular term to describe what we are trying to achieve is 'joint partnership'.

Joint partnership involves people who use services being consulted, included and working together from the start to the end of any project that affects them. People who are involved and treated as equal partners are likely to find that their involvement increases, they are better supported to be in control of their own health and care, and outcomes improve.

Our organisations are answerable to the public, our communities and patients we serve. As part of our statutory duties under the Health and Social Care Act 2012 and the - we must always consider the involvement of our population in our work, and seek feedback about services we commission. It is also our duty under the 2014 SEND reforms to involve families and young people as much as possible in decisions that will affect them.

'Public involvement is about enabling people to voice their views, needs and wishes and to contribute to plans, proposals and decisions about services.' (NHS England, 2018)

Working together with families and colleagues is important when developing and implementing this strategy, and will be vital to its success. Stakeholder groups, families and children will be involved in shaping how communication channels work and SEND services are improved. This is to ensure the most positive outcomes possible for children and young people in York.

Through a series of joint partnership workshops and feedback via communication channels, the engagement process below will be implemented.

The engagement process -	
Insight	What do we already know? Service user and families' experience, data, feedback compliments and complaints, engagement events and conversations.
Listen, analyse and co-design	Work with our stakeholders and communities to understand their needs and involve them in developing and care and support being part of the solution.
Influence – behaviours and perceptions	Develop and manage relationships, build trust, communicate in the right places at the right time.
Leadership and sustainability	Monitor and feedback – close the loop and tell people how their feedback has made a difference. Create community resilience and support.

'Don't feel heard. My son has an EHCP. I was sent the review paperwork to complete. I asked when the review meeting was taking place and told there wouldn't be one, they just update it from the paperwork.'

'All the information has to be chased heavily (and sometimes unsuccessfully) by parents. These issues add unnecessary stress to families and take away trust needed for effective co-production.'

'We are just starting the journey with a third child. We hope the process of improving engagement will only help in that journey as we consecutively continue on the path with the other two children.'

'It depends on the message, if it's positive things then yeah it would work'

'It all depends on the language, and if we can understand it'

'We are more likely to feel valued if we are involved and have our say'.

External communication channels

The communications tactical plan will explain how each of these will be used.

Channel	Description
SEND newsletter	Stakeholders can sign up to receive regular updates
Social media	Promotion of service, updates, events through CYC, CCG and partner channels. Opportunity for Q&A's, live broadcasts etc.
Podcasts	Involving support groups, SEND professionals, young people and carers
Webinars	Involving support groups, SEND professionals, young people and carers
SEND website	Creation of a SEND website to host information, case studies, videos etc.
CCG and CYC websites	Host up to date information and link to SEND website
CYC 'In our city' residents magazine	Feature 'latest news' on SEND transformation journey
Videos	Support and information videos from members of the SEND team
Press releases	Keep the media informed of service improvements and changes
Conferences and events	To reach a wider range of population, provide updates, promote services and share messages
Posters / leaflets / postcards	For community settings, GP surgeries and providers
Schools, providers, SEND Services	Sharing messages with parents or members of public who use service

Anticipated outcomes

- ❑ Increased parental awareness of strategic planning process and how to be involved in the improvement journey.
- ❑ Different forms of communication reaching parents, carers, children and young people.
- ❑ 50% increase in the amount of people engaging in strategic development and being communicated with.
- ❑ Consistent messaging processing that will celebrate success and improvement.
- ❑ Improved platforms for engagement and joint partnership opportunities.

Communication and engagement risks

Risk	Management
Promoting the service may create a surge in referrals, which will be hard to manage and contribute to longer waiting lists	Tailor messages which go out in any communications to aim at stakeholders already involved in the service
Increase in negative feedback through existing and new communication channels	Monitor channels regularly and signpost any negative comments to haveyoursay@york.gov.uk
Managing negative media	Maintain a good relationship with key journalists who will support the improvement journey
Increasing engagement and communication channels needing to be managed may lead to over committing staff capacity.	Use other services/schools/providers to share messages on CYC and CCG behalf
Events/some areas of plan may be covid-19 dependant	Events/engagement will be held virtually if needed. Areas will be considered in relation to covid-19

Thank you

This is a joint approach between NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and City of York Council (CYC) to implement communications and engagement channels to meet the strategy objectives.

We would like to give thanks to those within the CCG and CYC teams and also the York Inspirational Kids for their review, advice, and overall feedback.

Signed: 

Maxine Squire, Assistant Director, Education and Skills, City of York Council (CYC)

Signed: 

Michelle Carrington, Executive Director of Quality and Nursing, NHS Vale of York Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG)

Signed: *Ruth Thompson*

Ruth Thompson, Managing Director, York Inspirational Kids (YIK)