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1. Introduction - Joint introduction and welcome to the Families in Partnership Newsletter

Hello and welcome to the new look FAQ for Parent Carers from:



- Helen Bond, Coordinator at Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum;
- Amanda Henderson, Head of Services for Children with Additional Needs (GCC); and
- Jess Glenn, Head of Integrated Commissioning – Children and Families, GCC / Gloucestershire CCG.

At the start of the Covid pandemic Gloucestershire County Council (GCC), Gloucestershire Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum (PCF) worked together as Strategic Partners to respond to the challenges faced by families in lockdown. We all recognised that families with disabled children or those with Special Educational Needs would need information quickly in a recognisable format from trusted sources. Since April 2020 we've issued 5 editions bringing information to you from Education, Health and Social Care.

As we begin to move out of the current restrictions, we've been looking at how we might continue to bring information to Parents and Carers on a regular basis and address any questions which might arise. Our plan is to issue shorter, more frequent, editions of this repurposed Newsletter, "Families in Partnership" during the school year to bring you relevant and timely information.

In this latest edition, for example, we've a section from the Police Service on how to keep our children safe online. As schools return and some of our youngsters move up to Secondary School, we want to bring you information and advice on what to look out for and how to help your children navigate what for some is a new space.

Our aim will always be to respond to the issues raised by Parent Carers whilst bringing you up to date news about the things we at the Parent Carer forum are working on, on your behalf, with Gloucestershire County Council, the NHS and other partner organisations or agencies. GCC and CCG provide joined up services a part of the Children and Families commissioning hub, this service and all other services strive to ensure that services are joined up across health, social care and education, and we are delighted to work in partnership with the Parent Carer forum so that we actively co-produce in order to shape services for the future.

Don't forget that membership of Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum is free to all parents of children aged 0-25 with a disability or with special educational needs. You can join us via [our website](#) and if you're on [Facebook you can be part of the conversation](#). Come and join us working together to make things better for our children and young people.

We'd welcome your feedback on this new format so please do get in touch.

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2. Education

2.1 Introduction from Kirsten Harrison, Director of Education, Gloucestershire County Council

I am delighted to be joining GCC as the new Director of Education. After 32 years working in schools, starting my education career in Wiltshire as an English Teacher and going on to work in Lancashire, West Yorkshire and then coming into Gloucestershire in 2004. In Gloucestershire I have worked in three different secondary schools in the west and south of the county as well as Gloucester city, leading two of those schools as Headteacher.



I have worked as a South West region Ofsted Inspector for 6 years as well as serving as the Chair of the 15 Gloucester City schools' heads' cluster, the Vice Chair and Chair of the Gloucestershire Association of Secondary Heads; sitting on Schools Forum and serving on the governing body of my children's primary school, the management committee of an alternative provision setting and on a range of Local Authority working groups; all of which I hope, illustrates that education and working for children and young people has been my life's work and it is an absolute privilege to undertake this role to continue to do so.

Everyone recognises that the last 18 months has been tough for us all, but it has presented particular challenges for our children and young people. They have had to cope with school closure, learning in new ways receiving lessons on-line and for those facing GCSEs and A levels, they have had to cope with all the uncertainty around exam cancellation and then Teacher Assessed Tasks to determine their final grades. Children and Young people have faced isolation and loneliness, uncertainty about their futures, reduced access to exercise and their usual social activities and the mixed benefits and concerns by increased online activity. It is so pleasing, therefore, to see our children back in school and to see the enthusiasm with which children have returned this September to work with their teachers on their recovery curriculums and to get back to 'normal' schooling with as little impact from the ongoing pandemic as schools and other settings can manage.

Our children and young people have shown their resilience and adaptability and we are all working together to support them to achieve success in all its different forms despite the challenges the last 18 months have presented.

Kirsten Harrison

2.2 Update on progress EHCP service redesign and opportunities to get involved

Peopletoo have been supporting Gloucestershire County Council to redesign the EHC Pathway to help make it a clear, transparent and positive experience for children and young people and their parents and carers. We are redesigning the process with 4 clear principles in mind:

- A pathway where children and young people are at the heart of planning, with their voice heard as part of the assessment and planning process



- A relational approach with parents and carers, whereby they are supported end to end and where all have equal opportunity to understand and navigate the process and have their voice heard throughout
- A collaborative approach with schools based on meeting the child / young person's needs in the most appropriate way - it doesn't necessarily have to be via an EHCP if we can meet the needs through a My Plan / My Plan +
- A process that is easy to administer, with the minimum number of hand-offs and places where information is stored or created – a “one stop shop” approach which enables an at-a-glance view of a case at any one time, by all key stakeholders with appropriate permissions to view and input as required

We have been working closely with a range of stakeholders including parents and carers to design the new pathway and the processes that fit within it to meet these principles, including being clear about how the EHCP service can meaningfully engage with families, and changing some of the processes and documentation across the assess – plan – review pathway.

We are now in a position to share some of the detail of this, and will be planning some more sessions with Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum. We will keep you informed when these sessions are planned where you can come along and give us some valuable feedback that will further inform our work.

If you are interested in getting involved please contact [Mark Gray](#) or [Helen Bond](#).

2.3 Update on Education, Health and Care Needs Assessments

I want to update you on the EHCP Service and how it is managing the very high numbers of requests for EHC Needs Assessments from parents and education settings. Over the last 18 months we have become used to hearing the word 'unprecedented' in relation to Covid-19 but I'm afraid it very much applies to this increase in requests locally and nationally also. This increase could be partly the result of Covid-19 but also as a result of a rise in the identification of SEN more generally. To give you an example, from June 2021, we have seen an increase month on month on the same period last year as follows:



2019-2020	Number rec'd	2021-2020	Number rec'd	Increase	% increase
June	56	June	85	29	52%
July	57	July	88	31	54%
August	20	August	25	5	25%
September	36	September	56	20	56%

Our EHCP Service is working very hard to meet this increase in demand but we know that we are not meeting the statutory timescales and this is extremely frustrating for all involved. The team of Casework Coordinators and Educational Psychologists are dedicated to providing a quality service that helps children's SEND needs to be understood and met within their education setting.

The process of assessment depends on a team of people providing information and data to inform it. Information provided by the family, school and other professionals, including Psychological advice and information from an Educational Psychologist and practitioners within Health and Social Care, where applicable. The numbers of Educational Psychologists

admitted onto training courses and qualifying each year is capped nationally. Local Authorities across England seek to employ Educational Psychologists every year but demand is far outstripping supply.

So what are we doing to manage this situation? We have a plan to increase capacity while ensuring we continue to meet quality standards for EHC Needs Assessments and Plans as per the SEND Regulations (2014), Children and Families Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015), by:

- Appointing additional agency Educational Psychologists to increase the capacity of our existing team of Educational Psychologists;
- Appointing additional agency EHCP Casework Coordinators to increase the capacity of our existing Casework Teams;
- Arranging for fortnightly updates to individual families about the progress of their child's EHC Needs Assessment (including when there is no progress to report)

This is not going to be a quick fix but we will do everything in our power to get on top of this situation as soon as possible. We know how stressful and challenging the EHCP process can be for parents and we want to help, not make it worse.

There has also been an increase in the number of complaints received by the Service, which is understandable. While we always respond individually to every complaint we receive, we will for now respond in a more standardised way. This is so that we can prioritise the team's time on the assessments and plans that need to be done.

Amanda Henderson,
Head of Services for Children with Additional Needs

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3. Police

3.1 Cyber safety

Over the last 20 years we have become increasingly reliant upon the internet and the myriad of technological advances that have accompanied it.

However, whilst the internet affords us tremendous opportunities for children to learn and have fun, it is vital that as parents we empower them with the skills and security measures to help them navigate this virtual world safely.



Below are some of the latest Cyber Safety guidance that parents and carers should be aware of to help keep children safer online:

Passwords – we hear so often that Passwords should be strong, but often parents are left bemused about what that actually means. The latest advice places more of an emphasis on length rather than complexity. So, for example, a password such as Greenconcretetrousers would be stronger than U3*d5#b.

When choosing a password, use three or four words selected at random. Ensure they are in no way inspired by your interests or family life which could be guessed by someone.

Have a different password for each account in order to prevent 'daisy chain attacks' where offenders break one password and then have access to all that persons accounts due to a recurring password.

It can be helpful for parents/carers to know their children's passwords. With so many different accounts that can soon become quite a long list. Many people are finding it much easier to use a Password Manager Service. There are a number of these on the market and some are free.

To add an extra layer of security when on social media or when gaming, children can benefit from having 'Two Factor Authentication' in place. Step-by-step guidance for turning this on can be found at authy.com.

Children benefit from playing games that are suited to their age group. Rating agency, [PEGI](https://www.pegi.com), provides age appropriate guidance for games. A number of sites provide further reviews of game suitability, such as [Common Sense Media](https://www.common-sense-media.com) and [askaboutgames.com](https://www.askaboutgames.com).

On gaming and social media apps, Privacy Settings should be used, with the option 'Friends Only' selected and these should be friends who children know and trust in real life, and be approved of by parents/carers. Gamers should ensure that their Usernames do not reveal personal information and so, similar to passwords they should be chosen using words selected at random.

There are occasions where children sometimes encounter Cyber Bullying, it is important that children understand how to Mute, Block individuals and together with parents they can Report to the administrator of the site. Further advice on Cyber bullying can be found on the [NSPCC website](https://www.nspcc.org.uk).

Increasingly, more and more children under ten years old are being given their own Smart Phones. Children should be taught to be wary about scam calls including scam text messages or emails urging the user to click on a link. Similar to adults, children need to be wary of clicking on links or downloading attachments unless they are certain of their validity,

as it can allow offenders to take control of devices or download malicious software such as viruses.

In terms of Social Media, we are aware that even very young children are using services designed for those over the age of 13, such as TikTok, Snapchat and Instagram. These platforms can contain content that is not suitable for young children, so we would advise all parents and carers to wait until your children are at least 13 years old before allowing them to open an account.

We know many young people accept friend / follow requests from people they don't know – it is vital young people know that not everyone online is who they say they are, so they should avoid this. Many social media platforms also use location services, such as Snapmaps on Snapchat, these can reveal a young person's location so we would strongly advise parents to check their children's settings to keep them safe. If parents/carers are unsure if an app is suitable for their children, there a number of sites which can help , [including Common Sense Media](#).

Whether gaming or using apps, children should be wary of not revealing personal information and have a clear understanding of what personal information would be. Sometimes, small amounts of personal information get revealed over a period of time, for example when playing online over a few weeks through direct chat or messaging. On many games chat functions can be turned off.

Linked to many games is the capacity for 'In app purchases', some children have been able to run up big bills, so it is important that parents/carers are vigilant to the capabilities of different apps and the access children may have to financial accounts.

Limiting the amount of time that children are online and indeed playing games can be a real challenge for parents and carers. Rather than putting time limits in place, some parents and carers find that it is more productive to consider game time from the perspective of the child completing levels. This allows the child to complete the level and comprehend that the activity has come to an end, avoiding escalating conflict within the home.

Parents and carers can use Parental Controls to make children's online experience safer. 02 & NSPCC run a helpline which parents and carers can ring for guidance on setting up Parental Controls and other online safety advice. You do not need to be a 02 customer to access the helpline which is available on 0808 800 5002. Alternatively, visit [Internet Matters](#).

Overall, parents and carers benefit from being part of their children's online lives, whether that be gaming together or just ensuring they know that should they ever have a problem online you are there to support them. Digital Parenting is here to stay.

In the event that something does go wrong online, Schools now have a great deal of experience in online safeguarding and many parents and carers have made good use of the advice and guidance available within School Pastoral Teams.

With regard to contacting Police – if it is an emergency then parents/carers should call 999, if not, then call 101.

From a local perspective, the Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs) are engaged with their communities providing advice and guidance on a whole range of crime prevention matters including Cyber Safety. Please contact [Darren Peters](#) (Digital Harm Reduction Officer) if you have any questions.

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4. Social care

4.1 Update on short breaks and opportunities to get involved

This short article is aimed at explaining what GCC intends to do now and in the future in commissioning short breaks for disabled children, young people and their families.

Responsibility for the commissioning of short breaks for disabled children, young people and their families transferred into the Integrated Children and Families Commissioning Hub earlier this year. Since that time, we have spent time getting a better understanding of the needs in the County, working closely with the Gloucestershire Parent Carer Forum, listening to providers, sourcing provision and getting agreement at a senior level for our plans.

We know that the provision available at the moment does not meet the needs and wishes of children, young people and their families as well as it could, nor does it meet the aspirations of providers. This is partly to do with the pandemic, partly to do with the closure of popular provision and also increasingly, a lack of staff in the sector.

So, what are we doing?

- 1) We have joined up with our colleagues in Proud to Care¹ in running a recruitment event at Gloucester Rugby Club on 17 October from 10.00 am – 1.00 pm aimed at recruiting more care staff to support short breaks. At the event we will be joined by 35 local providers across Adults and Childrens services all of whom have jobs available.
- 2) We will shortly be going out to tender for more short break services, these have been designed on the following principles;
 - a) Accessible – not only in the traditional sense but also in terms of travel time;
 - b) Inclusive – where appropriate and exclusive when required;
 - c) Sustainable – providers should be financially sound and well regulated.

To this should be added the need to identify 'core time' when services run and the availability of services to a wider age range. As a result, the following will also be central to new contracts;

- d) The age range for services should be 5 – 25 unless dictated by regulation or specified in the contract;
- e) Core time for any service will be between 10am – 4pm unless dictated by regulation due to age. A day session will consist of a minimum of 4 hours within this timeframe unless the needs of the child or young people dictate otherwise and require a shorter session. If shorter sessions are offered evidence must be provided that the children and young people and parent/carer user groups have been consulted and the eventual offer co-produced;

¹ Proud to Care Gloucestershire is a joint NHS and County Council initiative promoting opportunities available within the social care and health sector in Gloucestershire.



- f) The service will be delivered in suitable venues in the operating area.
- g) We hope to offer a Saturday club as part of each locality contract that will eventually be offered on 48 weekends/year staffing permitting. The specific weekends at the providers discretion
- h) As part of the locality provision we aim to run playschemes during Christmas, Easter and Summer School Holidays for up to 25 days annually, staff permitting;
- i) Where indicated a provision may only be accessible via referral from the Disabled Children & Young People's Service (DCYPS).

The localities in which we aiming to set up these provisions are;

- Cheltenham
- Forest of Dean
- Gloucester
- Stroud and South Cotswolds
- Tewkesbury and North Cotswolds

Both of the latter schemes will include mobile provision to ensure that as many children, young people families are reached who live in more rural areas of Gloucestershire.

We realise that these plans may not be to ideal for all but we believe them to offer the best balance of coverage and accessibility for Gloucestershire.

To afford these extended schemes we will be putting a greater percentage of the available funding into direct provision, discussions will be had with individual families where appropriate to change from direct payments to the new direct provision.

In future months we will begin to consider how more specialist provision can be co-produced and commissioned.

[Adrian Wells](#),

Interim Head of Service: Short Breaks Commissioning

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5. Health

5.1 Update on Autism Pathway and opportunities to get involved

The development of the Social Communication and Autism Assessment Team (SCAAT) is underway, with the Operational Lead for the Team having now been appointed. The interviews for this role took place in partnership with the Parent Carer Forum. The role of the Operational Lead will be to review the current processes across the different pathways for children and young people aged under 18, begin implementing improvements to reduce wait times for assessments and make the assessment process easier to use for families. Once the rest of the Team have been appointed and begin in their new roles, these changes will start to be seen in the assessment pathway. Whilst recruitment continues for the Team, autism assessment will carry on with the Owl Centre for many children who are placed on the age 5-11 pathway.



5.2 Covid vaccination information for children 12 yrs+ who are EHE

Please contact the immunisation team can on 0300 421 8140 or email [GHC immunisation](#). They will be able to confirm what you need to do regarding vaccinations and give advice. There is also a [vaccination schedule](#) so families can see what is due when.

Gloucestershire County Council's public page also has some [information about immunisations](#).

If you have any queries please contact the NHS directly on 03004217063 or email them at GHCCovidMassVaccine@ghc.nhs.uk.

5.3 Vision screening for electively home educated children in Gloucestershire

In Gloucestershire all children aged 4-5 years old are eligible for a free vision screening test.

The test is quick and simple and carried out to determine if your child has normal vision. If following the screening test a problem is suspected, your child will be referred to either an accredited local Optician or to the Orthoptic service at Cheltenham or Gloucester hospital.

We will be holding 3 clinics this year at The Rikenel Health Centre on 15 November 2021, 22 February 2022 and 18 May 2022.

If you would like to attend, please call 0300 421 8225 to book.

If you have any questions relating to vision screening please contact your local School Nursing team. You will find all of their contact details on the [School Nursing website](#).

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6. Local Offer

6.1 Update on plans regarding the Local Offer and opportunities to get involved

Every local authority must publish a Local Offer. The Local Offer tells you what support the local authority expects to be available for children and young people with special educational needs (SEN) and/or disabilities. It must include information about education, health and care provision. It should also tell you about training, employment and independent living for young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities.

Gloucestershire's Local Offer has been available to families since its introduction in September 2014. [View the current offer.](#)

The Local Offer has been in its current form since its inception and is due a complete overhaul; parts of it are not easy to navigate and need to be updated. GCC is just about to start on a review of the entire offer and are keen that children, young people and their parents are involved in its redevelopment.

If you would like to contribute to the project, we would love to hear from you. Your contribution can be tailored to the amount of time you have available, from carrying out research to attending meetings. If you would like to know more about the project, please email [Sarah Poultney](#).

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7. Young people and preparation for adulthood

7.1 Update on Future Me and opportunities to get involved

What is Future Me Gloucestershire?

Future Me are a team of young people from across Gloucestershire who came together as Future Me Youth Representatives in August 2020 to be representative of young people across the county, but more importantly to connect with other young people to allow them to share their views and experiences of growing up in the county. Information is power, and we want to transform the way young people aged 13-25 years access information and inspiration to help them on the road to becoming adults.



Our mission is that Future Me Gloucestershire is for young people, about young people and by young people.

As Youth Representatives, we are producing interactive resource packs designed to share information and links to helpful support, resources and information on a range of topics, such as:

- Mental Health and Wellbeing
- Education, Training and Employment
- Building Independence

We are also working with projects that impact on young people such as:

- EHCP service redesign
- Transition to employment
- Gloucestershire's Local Offer

There are many ways to get in touch with the team of Youth Representatives:

- Email: futureme@gloucestershire.gov.uk
- [Future Me webpages](#) - (see our resource pack survey)
- Instagram, Facebook and Twitter @futuremeglos

Please share this with young people you know.

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