



Family Voice Surrey Engagement Session

New SEND Communication Arrangements

Meeting Summary

Date: 14 July 2026

Overview

Family Voice Surrey hosted an engagement session with Surrey County Council to provide parent carers with an opportunity to share their experiences of the new SEND communication arrangements introduced approximately six weeks earlier.

The discussion highlighted significant concerns from parent carers regarding communication, responsiveness and confidence in the new system. Whilst Surrey County Council acknowledged that implementation had not been without issues and apologised for shortcomings in communication, parents consistently reported that the new arrangements had increased uncertainty and made it more difficult to access timely support.

Although many examples related to individual cases, a number of consistent themes emerged across the meeting.

Key Themes

1. Communication about the Changes

This was the strongest and most consistent theme throughout the meeting.

Many parent carers stated they were **not aware the communication system had changed** until after implementation.

Parents reported finding out through:

- Family Voice Surrey social media
- Other parent carers
- Local councillors
- Schools (often weeks later)

Several parents said they had received **no direct communication** from Surrey County Council.

There was widespread agreement that communication should have been clearer, more direct and delivered before implementation.

Surrey County Council acknowledged communication had not reached all families as intended and accepted improvements were needed.

2. Delays and Lack of Responses

Parents consistently described:

- emails not being answered
- repeated chasing
- multiple emails needing to be sent
- no acknowledgement of receipt
- uncertainty about whether correspondence had been received.

Several families reported needing to:

- submit formal complaints
- involve solicitors
- begin Judicial Review proceedings
- escalate through Be Heard

before receiving any response.

Many felt communication had become slower rather than more efficient.

3. Loss of Named Contacts

A significant concern was the move from direct communication with individual case officers to generic area inboxes.

Parents described:

- feeling disconnected
- not knowing who was responsible for their child
- uncertainty over who was dealing with their case

- difficulty building relationships with staff.

Many felt the loss of a named contact reduced accountability.

4. Caseworker Changes Happening Alongside the New System

Many parents highlighted that communication changes occurred simultaneously with widespread caseworker reallocations.

This resulted in:

- schools not knowing who their SEND Case Officer was
- annual reviews without council attendance
- delayed decision-making
- confusion over ownership of cases
- parents receiving conflicting information.

Several parents reported being allocated multiple different case officers within a short period.

5. Lack of Clarity Around Escalation

Parents repeatedly stated they did not know:

- who to contact when emails went unanswered
- how to escalate urgent concerns
- what constituted an escalation route
- whether escalation emails were actually monitored.

There was a strong request for a **clear, transparent escalation pathway**.

Surrey County Council agreed this required further work.

6. Impact on Children and Young People

Parents emphasised that communication difficulties were not simply administrative concerns but had significant consequences for children and young people.

Examples included:

- children remaining out of education

- delayed EHCP amendments
- uncertainty over September placements
- delays to annual reviews
- missed opportunities for specialist placements
- disruption to alternative provision
- tribunal and complaint delays.

Many parents spoke emotionally about the impact prolonged uncertainty was having on family wellbeing.

7. Generic Inbox Concerns

Several parents questioned the use of generic email addresses.

Concerns included:

- confidentiality
- GDPR and consent
- uncertainty over who could access sensitive information
- discomfort sending highly personal information to shared inboxes.

Some schools reported password-protecting documents because of these concerns.

Surrey County Council confirmed information remained within secure SEND teams and was not being shared beyond existing staff groups, although parents continued to express concern.

8. Time-Sensitive Communication

Parents explained the current system was not suitable for urgent communication.

Examples included:

- arranging meetings
- responding to deadlines
- submitting panel paperwork
- annual review deadlines
- urgent placement issues.

Parents felt the five-day response target did not work where immediate dialogue was required.

Surrey County Council agreed this was an important issue requiring further consideration.

9. Schools Also Experiencing Difficulties

Parents reported that schools had also experienced challenges, including:

- incorrect email addresses
- uncertainty over new caseworkers
- consultations being delayed
- paperwork appearing to be lost
- fortnightly meetings not taking place
- inconsistent information.

This suggested communication difficulties extended beyond families.

10. Need for Proactive Communication

A recurring message was that communication should not rely solely on parents chasing updates.

Parents wanted proactive updates when:

- cases moved to panel
- caseworkers changed
- annual reviews progressed
- decisions were made
- information was required.

Many felt they were expected to continually monitor and pursue their own cases.

Surrey County Council Responses

During the meeting Surrey County Council:

- acknowledged communication regarding implementation could have been better
- apologised for the difficulties experienced
- confirmed the new arrangements remain under review
- stated improvements are already being made
- committed to reviewing escalation processes
- agreed to consider urgent communication routes
- offered to investigate individual cases shared during the meeting
- committed to providing Family Voice Surrey with updates that can be shared with parent carers.

Overall Messages from Parent Carers

Across the discussion, parent carers consistently expressed that:

- confidence in the new communication arrangements is currently low
- communication has become less clear rather than more accessible
- parents feel they spend significant time chasing responses
- uncertainty is creating additional stress for families already navigating complex SEND processes
- improvements need to focus on responsiveness, transparency, accountability and proactive communication.

Despite frustrations, parents welcomed the opportunity to speak directly with Surrey County Council and appreciated the acknowledgement that improvements are needed.

Agreed Actions

- Surrey County Council to review all feedback from the meeting and chat transcript.
- Family Voice Surrey to share the themes arising from parent carers' experiences.
- Surrey County Council to provide an update outlining improvements being implemented.

- A follow-up engagement session to be arranged in the autumn term to review progress and gather further feedback.
- Family Voice Surrey to continue sharing updates with members as they become available.