



Cheshire and Merseyside



Speech, Language and Communication Joint Commission Consultation & Engagement

Background

This report gives details on the engagement and consultation carried out with key stakeholders for a speech and language service review.

Engagement and coproduction is a key part of service change, being the centre of quality improvement and delivering high quality patient focused care. The initial engagement carried out as detailed in this report is only the beginning of the co-production journey and following this, stakeholders will continue to be involved in the process to ensure true co-production.

Another model which we have worked with in this engagement process is the Lundy Model of Youth Participation which emphasises a child's right to participation and decision making. This model highlights the importance of a feedback process and to ensure that this is continued to be followed up.

Local context

Cheshire East Council and the ICB have a statutory duty to ensure children and young people between the ages of 0 to 25 years, have the appropriate services to meet their education, health and care plan (EHCP) needs. This includes therapies such as speech, language, and communication support.

Due to the service pressures and emerging new demands arising from the planned expansion of local authority maintained special school provision, the local authority and ICB are planning a joint recommissioning that will ensure that children, young people and their families/carers are at the heart of the service redesign.

As part of the joint commissioning, consultation and engagement is a critical and continual process for commissioning as it provides the intelligence that inform the strategy, policy, quality assurance and performance of all our services. Cheshire East parents, children, and families alongside professionals have been and will continue to be engaged with as part of the service improvement and redesign. It is intended that the new service model will be co-produced with parents/children and families, professionals, and key stakeholder e.g., schools, health visitors, school nurses.

Process

To inform the process of engagement with target audiences, initial scoping was done linking with neighbouring places, West Cheshire and Staffordshire, who had recently been through service reviews. Scoping supported in forming the questions for the surveys in Cheshire East. Key factors were considered such as survey length and questions style to be suitable for the key audiences; children and young people, professionals, teachers, and parents/carers.

With support from Cheshire East Council the surveys were produced and shared with contacts and networks from the council, NHS and third sector organisations.

To support with promotion and collection of feedback, a number of user groups were attended including, the Parent Carer Forum, Jigsaw Youth Group, Little Stars Parent and Child Groups and a Parent/Carer group at Ruby's Fund. These user experiences gave the depth to support the survey results.

Results - Surveys (Open 1st December 2023 – 24th January 2024)

Professionals

A total of 30 professionals completed the survey. Some key figures of demographics are included below:

- 19 from East Cheshire Trust, 9 from CCICP and 2 from the 0-19 Health Visiting service. This means a higher proportion of respondents worked in the north locality of Cheshire East.
- 20 respondents were Speech and Language Therapists, with the other 10 being a mix of health visiting team, school nurses and practitioners.
- 2 respondents represented special schools

Key themes identified in the survey from professionals:

- 22 people agreed that they fully utilise their skills in their role with the main theme for those who don't agree being understaffing and long waiting lists.
- Strong sense of how technology and digital systems could be used more to support with appointments in all areas; in delivery of appointments, use of apps, email communication, text messages and digital training.
- A positive response on how Speech and Language therapy services offer a high degree of flexibility for families and focus on building the relationships, in particular the support that is offered to the more vulnerable families and children.
- Staffing and capacity in the teams is a running theme for improvement throughout the survey. This would improve the current offer, with more appointments and a high degree of flexibility to offer additional time for the more complex or venerable children.
- Appetite for more training to be provided for parents and settings at a universal level to support whilst families are waiting to access the service, with increased signposting to key resources.

- A strong desire for more community and clinic space to be available to improve the service offer.
- Additional training in schools would be beneficial both to support children but also in what the Speech and Language service offers and clarity in referrals.
- To look at single cluster admin support and digitalised administrative process (reducing admin for the professionals).
- Therapists are overall happy with the effective and caring service they run, not ignoring the waiting lists and the impact that this does have on their role. Respondents have commented on how capacity has impacted their opportunity for CPD.

Schools

A total of 18 respondents completed the surveys from schools, key figures and demographics are below:

- 10 respondents are from the South locality (covered by CCICP) and 8 from the North locality (covered by East Cheshire Trust) of Cheshire East.
- 9 people are in the role of SENCOs, 4 Head Teachers, noting that there was 1 teacher and 1 TA who completed the survey.
- Majority of participants worked with primary school age, 2 people working with the ages 11-18

Key themes identified in the survey from Schools:

- An emphasis on how digital platforms can improve the service, e.g., online SCLN Support Hub and SALT apps, appointment systems.
- Feedback is generally positive of the relationship with therapists and the service they offer but due to capacity of therapists there is often lack of availability of therapists to support and less regular visits.
- Opportunities to build the communication with therapists around updates after follow-ups with children and informing of future appointments would be beneficial.
- Positive feedback about Cheshire East Chatters and the training that has been provided by Speech and Language therapists.
- Those children on EHCP plans get better and more regular support but there is room for improvement in the offer to other children.
- Out of the 16 that answered, 6 people have identified that they don't feel that the school has the suitable training to meet the needs of the child – there is a theme throughout the survey that additional training at all levels would improve the offer.
- Out of the 16 that answered, over 50% would consider buying in additional support, with 3 schools already purchased.

Parent Care Surveys

A total of 7 people completed the parent and carers survey which is lower than anticipated. Key demographics of respondents are below:

- 6 of the participants were from the north patch of Cheshire East, under Cheshire East Trust. The other person is under the services provided by CCICP.
- 3 people are currently on a waiting list, 3 accessing and one person not yet referred.
- There is an equal split between primary school and secondary school age.

Some of the key themes identified in the survey from parents and carers with as follows:

- Communication is one of the main problems between providers, schools and families, and is a consistent theme through the survey. Respondents reported difficulties getting in contact with the service.
- On the whole parents and carers reported a positive response to the venues.
- Therapists were seen positively – professional, friendly and supportive.
- There has been mixed feedback on face to face and virtual appointments, understanding the benefits but the difficulties technology can sometimes raise.
- Improvements suggested is for better communication and involvement with parents.
- All respondents reported having no support or resources whilst waiting for their initial appointment.

Results – Face to Face engagement

Little Stars

Little Stars is a group is for children with additional needs and their parents. There are activities provided to support the child’s development in a fun and relaxing group.

Little Stars Oakenclough

At this group 5 families were in attendance, 4 of which had accessed speech and language therapy services in Cheshire East North, under East Cheshire NHS Trust. One key theme of feedback was around the wait time with 3 out of 4 parents reporting that they had waited for around a year for the initial appointment. 2 of these children had SEND needs.

Another key theme identified was around the lack of support and communication during wait times, with suggested exercises given with the initial referral letter but then not receiving any communication until the appointment almost a year later.

All these children were attending a group at the Family Hub but non had accessed the ‘Talking Walk In’ group at the Family Hubs where SALT professionals are available to support.

Little Stars Monks Coppenhall

The Little Stars group at Monks Coppenhall in Crewe was a busy session with the practitioners reporting that there are considerations to host additional sessions.

9 families were in attendance with 6 accessing speech and language services in Mid Cheshire under CCICP.

The feedback given around waiting times ranged from 2 months - 6 months and general feedback was quite positive on initial contact with the service. Overall parents/carers have been happy with the service they have received, support given, and the relationship with the therapist.

Jigsaw Youth Group Macclesfield

The Jigsaw Group is a SEND Youth Forum that any child or young person with additional needs can attend from the age of 13. Children and young people have the opportunity to have their say and make positive changes about services that affect their lives, make new friends and take part in fun activities including life skills.

Around 6 children attended this group, 3 of which had accessed speech and language services. Feedback regarding the service was overall positive, reporting that they enjoyed sessions with their therapist and that their language had improved. One of the key take away messages from this session was the preference to have their speech and language sessions in school rather than a healthcare setting.

One of the suggestions of improvement was that they would have appreciated more sessions more regularly to help progress quicker, or longer sessions.

Rubys Fund

Ruby's Fund run a number of sessions aimed at parents/carers and children with SEND aged 0-18. These run throughout the week, ranging from drop in session, social sessions and short breaks. Attending the 'SEND cuppa in the café', there were a number of parents in attendance, 2 of which had used speech and language services in Cheshire East.

Both parents engaged with had children who were non-verbal, one who used services through CCICP and one through East Cheshire Trust. Both reported positive experiences overall with short waiting times to access the services. Areas of suggested improvement were communication, reporting that communication as is often quite delayed following sessions. The appointments for both children were every 2/3months which parents reported they ideally would like more often. None of the parents reported use of digital or virtual technology. Both parents has had consistency in therapists and had built relationships.

Springfield Special School

Springfield School caters for children and young people between the age of 4 – 19 with severe learning difficulties and complex needs. Working with the speech and language therapists based at Springfield School, 6 children with complex needs were engaged with using communication methods including communication cards and

communication books. The children were aged between 6 – 14 years old and were overall very positive about their experiences of speech and language therapy. Children used communication cards to place under pictures of a happy, not sure and sad face to describe how they feel about different elements. All children showed happy feelings when going to the speech and language therapy room and majority of activities used in the session. There was some uncertainty around the use of communication methods at home which can support feedback received around communication and engagement from parents and carers.

Speaking with the speech and language therapists who work with the children at Springfield School, improvements identified were around training and engagement with parents. The therapists said that home visits and support to parents would benefit the children, but capacity means that this doesn't happen. The SLC therapists do have access to digital software through Springfield school which does support communicating and sending information to both teachers and parents. Therapists also provide some training to teachers but agreed that this isn't enough and feel that they would benefit from additional training. Another gap identified were inconsistencies between CCICP and ECT SALT services which has been identified when working with the Springfield School in Wilmslow.

Final steps

As previously mentioned, it is important that true co-production is carried out as part of the joint commission and therefore key partners will continue to be involved in the process. Continuous feedback on progress made will be important.

Following the feedback received from the surveys and groups attended, a number of targeted focus groups will be set up for a deeper dive into some of the key themes. All feedback and information will feed into development of service specification for the future recommission.

In development of the service specification, further workshops have taken place with council and ICB to ensure feedback from all stakeholder has been sought and taken into consideration. This has been concluded with three further events to review the following themes:

- SLCN Early Help Offer
- SLCN Schools and Special School Expansion Offer
- SLCN The offer for children out of the area, not in education or elected home educated.