



What is the Children and Families Bill?

The Government is changing the law to make sure that children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities get more consistent support. The changes are designed to give them and their families a greater say over what support and services are available locally, and what support they personally receive.

Welcome

This is the first bulletin for parents and carers of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities about the Children and Families Bill – a new law that the Government is currently writing. An important part of the new law is to improve services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We'll be writing regular bulletins to keep parents and carers of children with SEND informed of what is happening in Norfolk as a result of this new law. The bulletin will also include information about how parents and carers can be involved in working out how services should change locally.

So what are the main changes in the Bill?

The Local Offer – helping people to understand what services are available

Parents and carers tell us that one of their biggest issues is understanding what services are available in Norfolk to help support children and young people with SEND. In future we will have to publish a 'local offer' that sets out in one place information about the support and services available for children and young people with SEND in Norfolk. The local offer will:

- Include information about education, social care and health services, as well as services provided by voluntary and community groups.
- Provide information about services for children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans, as well as those without.
- Set out clearly the criteria for getting support.
- Be published on the internet, as well as be available in other formats.

Education, Health and Care Plans

Education, Health and Care Plans will replace Statements of Special Educational Needs and Learning Difficulty Assessments (Section 139 Assessments). They will gradually be phased in from 1 September 2014.

The plans will still be legal documents local authorities have to follow but they will include information and support around health and social care, as well as education. The plans will start from a child's birth and continue into further education and training, and for some young people until they are 25 years old.

In future there will be one school-based category of SEN. However there will not be a reduction in the funds for schools to support children with SEN. This is not a number cutting exercise. The Children and Families Bill will not reduce the legal responsibility for children and young people's SEND needs.

Key Workers

Children, young people and their parents and carers tell us that it is really important to them to have a trusted person to work with who understands their needs and is someone they can talk to about what help is available.

In Norfolk we are planning to introduce Key Workers, who will lead discussions with children, young people and their families to understand and support their needs. A Key Worker could be someone you already know and work with, for example a Portage Worker, Social Worker, Children's Community Nurse or a Guidance Adviser. We are in the process of developing how this role will work – we will provide you with more information in a future edition of the bulletin!

What will happen next?

It is still the Children and Families Bill, which means that there could be changes to the legislation before it becomes an Act of Parliament and part of the law. It is planned that the changes will start to come into effect from 1 September 2014. Whilst this will be the start of the changes, we want to make sure that we are working with parents and carers to continuously improve services.

How you can get involved

We have already asked children and young people with SEND and their parents and carers what they think of how services are currently organised and how support can be improved. But there will be plenty more opportunities for people to work with us on how services should change locally.

One such opportunity to hear more about these changes and work with us is at the Family Voice Conference on 15 March 2014. For more information about the event please visit www.familyvoice.org.uk/. To book your place, please email admin@familyvoice.org.uk or call 07950 302937.

As the changes in the law start to become clearer and the law is nearing to being finalised, schools are starting to understand what it will mean for them. Schools will want to make sure that the support they put in place for pupils with SEND works for the children and young people, as well as meets the requirements of the new law. This means there may be opportunities for you to work with your local school to help them develop their plans.

You can read more about the Children and Families Bill and what is happening in Norfolk on our website: www.norfolk.gov.uk/SENDchanges. We need your help to make sure that it is easy to understand what services are available locally and ultimately that the support in place is effective – so please get involved.