

## **Kingston SEND Parent Carer Forum Virtual Meeting with Ian Thomas** **23/2/21 9-10pm**

### **Present:**

Ian Thomas (IT) – Chief Executive of Royal Borough of Kingston upon Thames

BP, LS, KJ, AC, RH, CF, RA, CM

### **Apologies:**

NA, CI,

### **Agenda:**

This meeting is to discuss the upcoming Peer Review in Kingston. Steering Committee members also have the opportunity to share and raise immediate concerns regarding support within the borough.

**Chair:** BP      **Minutes :** CM

### **Meeting Minutes:**

BP introduced members of the Steering Committee to IT and discussed the background around the Kingston Peer Review as recorded in the last group meeting and the progression of this. It was originally thought that BP would be joining the Peer Review however this has now changed.

Each member of the Steering Committee introduced themselves to IT.

IT thanked the members of the Steering Committee for their time and invitation to this meeting, and commented on the value of the PCF and the importance of its role in the community.

IT shared his background as a Director of Children's Services in other areas before his current role in Kingston with the group and explained that due to this the topic children's services issues are close to his heart and he takes a keen interest in this. In his first year he set up and chaired the first SEND Partnership Board meeting that was constituted to address the challenging inspection that had occurred in September 2018.

IT apologised for inviting BP to be an insider of the Peer Review in his excitement over this, however the PCF will still be involved and have their voices heard. On speaking with the Local Government Association (LGA) they were keen to ensure that it was about learning from outside. This has not been forced upon Kingston and is something that IT has commissioned with the intention only of improving Kingston's response to Kingston's valuable children. IT does not know anyone from the Challenge team and they are all people from other areas. IT is hoping that the process will enable them to learn from other areas and also to give stakeholders a voice in how we should improve services. What the PCF say to the peer review team will make its way to the recommendations and IT will ensure that that happens.

IT stated that the support that the PCF get should be first class.



The peer review project will be project managed by the Local Government Association; they have a well-established peer review methodology and process.

IT explained that the Peer Review Team would consist of members from outside the Kingston borough.

The peer review team will consist of:

Gail Tolley, DCS Brent, Chair ADCS Educational Achievement Policy Committee and pan London COVID recovery education lead – lead peer reviewer

Peer elected member (councillor) - tbc by LGA Equivalent of Councillor White from another area

Bavaani Nanthabalan, Executive Head teacher, Netley Primary School and centre for autism and Robson House Pupil Support Centre (PRU)

Pete Ruse, Chair, Calderdale PCF

Jackie Wright, SEND Consultant and former DfE advisor

Karishma Parmar, Designated Clinical Officer for SEND, Sutton and Merton, NHS SWL CCG

Michael Hallick, Assistant Director, Business and Resources, Wandsworth Children's Services

Mark Smith, Head of Transitions, London Borough Bromley

In IT's opinion this is a strong team. The review will take place over 3 days at the end of March/early April. The final report will first be presented to Kingston and IT however IT promised to also share this draft with BP as chair of the steering group but until it is reviewed by the LGA and they issue the formal letter it is not a finalised document.

IT stated that he feels that it would be the worst thing for him if the recommendations did not also reflect the thoughts and opinions of the PCF. IT feels that the PCF representative that has been chosen has a good understanding of the systems involved and working towards good progression. There will be a timetable for the peer review team to speak with the PCF and they can say exactly how it is.

### **Key issues from PCF members**

RH:

Raised the issue of the processes around EHCPs and covid vaccinations that a regular assumption is made that his wife is the full time carer of his son, to the point that even after he has had regular interactions with someone via a secure email system regarding his sons EHCP and yet correspondence was sent to his wife instead of him. RH is concerned that there maybe more male carers that are not being 'seen'.

RH has found the systems to have a lot of good but along side that has found things to be quite opaque at times and even with a law degree has found parts of the EHCP process a challenge and feels that it needs to be more accessible to all parents.

CF:

Raised the concerns around the support for children without EHCPs, this is an issue that CF has regularly raised at meetings attended by the PCF. It feels to be a lot harder to access the necessary support for children without EHCPs that have SEN and still require support. CF is finding that despite raising her concerns these are not followed up or any guidance produced but instead she is referred or informed that is it up to the SENCOS at and the choices of individual schools. It appears to be a lottery as to what those individual schools spend their allocated SEN finances on meaning that there is a great variability as to what, if any, support that they decide to use this funding on. There is also a great difference between mainstream and specialist schools.

CF feels that the SEN support line is not always easy to gain information or answers from.

There appears to be a higher focus on children with EHCPs and it appears many parents to be the only way to access support for their child with SEN is to request an EHCP.

CF also raised issues around housing for children with SEN and has previously discussed this with IT she has not spoken to or had an update from anyone since they met and IT will chase this up

KJ:

Agrees with CF on the issues around housing services in the borough. There seems to be a lot of families with children in inaccessible housing or who are unable to use the upstairs of their houses and paying bedroom tax. KJ raised her issues around housing publicly and found that this was the only way to get a response to her issue.

IT responded that he was aware of KJs situation and is hoping that she is pleased with the progress that has been made on her case and the responses received. There is a shortage of housing in RBK and they have been prevented from new builds by the government, this is now slowly making progress.

AC:

Raised that her and daughter has been in the system for 13 years and feels that overall too much factors not involving the needs of the individual child. AC stated that there are great differences on support and resources offered by specialist schools and mainstream schools. There is also a lack of accountability; no one takes responsibility for things going wrong. It appears to be a blame game between schools and local authorities.

AC also raised the issues around the PCF not being given the correct if at all data they request at meetings from the CCG and AFC.

AC mentioned that there also needs to be clarification around therapy provision in EHCPs with regards to the providers of this, should this be given by professional therapists or via trained teaching assessments which then leaves therapists that see the child one to two times a year for reviews without knowing the child. Mainstream schools seem to struggle with complex cases unlike specialist schools.

LS:

LS raised the concern around the lack of support for Dyslexic children in the borough. Even with an EHCP her daughter did not get the support that she needed and so LS had to use her savings to purchase specialist literacy support. There seems to be little literacy support provision available, impacting children's self-esteem as well as their reading and writing development. Unfortunately it seems to be a case of if you can pay for it you can have it if not then you do not get it.

IT agreed that there needs to be earlier intervention even from the age of two to meet the support needs of these children.

RA:

RA highlighted the differences between EHCP and SEN support using examples of 2 of her own children. There is too much emphasis being placed on academic needs of children over the emotional needs. There is not enough support available to those without an EHCP.

RA also raised her concerns around the BAME community. RA runs a support group for around 100 mums in the BAME community and has noted that there is a lack of understanding and communication for these families with SEN children. Covid has highlighted these issues even more. RA mentioned that Kingston does not have the services, infrastructure and networking that seem to be helping Richmond provide a much better service for their SEND families and these are not always available cross boroughs. RA will share her findings on this topic directly via email to IT. IT mentioned that this was unusual due to AFC being responsible for Kingston as well as Richmond.

RA also asked for support from Kingston to spread the message of the PCFs existence and how to access this.

The group also requested that the PCF representative within the peer review may also be able to share ideas and suggestions on improving the PCFs reach.

IT stated that he could see common themes arising from the group's comments and that he had made notes on all of the concerns raised.

AC also requested that it may be beneficial for an RBK representative to attend some of the consortium meetings as Councillor White had only attended a few times in the last year.



**Kingston SEND**  
Parent Carers Forum