



**Stockton-on-Tees**  
**Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)**  
**Strategy 2021-2023**

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## Foreword

### **From the Chair of the Health and Wellbeing Board.**

We are delighted to introduce the Stockton-on-Tees Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy 2021-2023.

The strategy has grown from the collective voices of our SEND system and provides an overview of the Borough's strategic priorities and a set of commitments which will inform the plans and work for Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council, NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group, Stockton Parent Carer Forum and wider partners. The principles of co-production are at the centre of our approach and we are committed to continuing to value, listen and learn from our children, young people and families.

Significant work has been undertaken as part of our improvement journey and, as a Board, we are committed to working in partnership to improve outcomes to make Stockton-on-Tees a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and are supported to be the best they can be in life.

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## 1. Introduction

Welcome to our strategy for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), which sets out the vision and strategic priorities for the Stockton-on-Tees area during the period 2021-2023. This timeframe aligns with the review date for the Health and Wellbeing and Children and Young People's strategies. The SEND strategy outlines our commitment to driving developments across our system and the services within it so that collectively we support children and young people with SEND to achieve the best possible outcomes and to become successful and happy adults.

This strategy is the culmination of our transformation and improvement journey so far, building upon the learning from the local area inspection in 2019, and brings together our previous strategic implementation plan and action plans into a single, shared and long-term vision.

Partnership is key and our ambitions for children and young people with SEND will only be realised by working collaboratively with full commitment at all levels. We are determined to focus on improving outcomes across the system with the lived experience of children, young people and families being central to our developments and co-production being fundamental to our way of working.

Our partners include:

- Children and Young People with SEND
- Parents/Carers of Children and Young People with SEND
- Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council
- Stockton Parent Carer Forum
- NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group
- Mainstream and specialist education settings
- Providers of NHS services including Harrogate and District NHS Foundation Trust, North Tees and Hartlepool NHS Foundation Trust and Tees, Esk and Wear Valleys NHS Foundation Trust
- Voluntary and Community Sector organisations

We are publishing this strategy at a time of significant change with the COVID-19 pandemic impacting on all aspects of everyday life, and public services facing increasing demands and financial pressures. Whilst the pandemic has affected everyone, its impact has been greater for some sections of the population, including children, young people and families with additional needs. The priorities and work programmes identified will support us to ensure that we are well placed to meet this ever-changing landscape.

## 2. Our Vision

Our vision for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities is the same as for all children and young people: ***that Stockton-on-Tees is a great place to grow up, where children and young people are protected from harm and supported to be the best they can be in life.***

Whilst we recognise that there is work to be done to achieve our vision, we have high aspirations and a shared commitment to improve our system by working in partnership with children, young people and their families, professionals and our local communities.

From listening to our families, we know it is vital that:

- the views of children and young people and their parents/carers are actively sought and their voices heard.
- services are joined up, accessible and responsive, with reduced waiting times and good information sharing in place so that families can tell their story once, know what is happening at all times and have someone to guide them.
- Children and young people are supported to live 'gloriously ordinary lives', and identify their ambitions and aspirations for the future by education, health and care services, whilst ensuring progress is measured and outcomes improve.

We believe that every child and young person from Stockton-on-Tees should be supported in the community where they live, where this is possible. This should be through access to high quality early years provision, schools and further education settings. In addition to learning and education opportunities, children and young people should be offered access to local health and care support which is appropriate to their assessed needs. We are committed to our assessment of need placing a focus on the identification of individual strengths and understanding children, young people and families' skills, knowledge, confidence and resilience.

### **3. Our plan for improvement**

We have identified six key priorities in this strategy which provide our focus for driving system-wide change and improved outcomes for children, young people and families.

We are committed to:

#### **Priority One**

##### **Working in Partnership with Families**

- This means...we will work with families as equal partners in all that we do to improve the system, whether this is a decision about what support is best for their child or a decision on how we should offer and deliver services and make best use of our resources. Our co-production charter, 'Start Together, Stay Together' will ensure that the voice of children, young people and parents/carers is central to our improvement - from initial thinking through to the review, evaluation and re-shaping of provision and support.

We will:

1. Further develop the co-production charter to become a quality standard/charter mark for providers.
2. Work with parents/carers to further develop the Local Offer to ensure it has information that is high quality, user friendly and accessible.
3. Develop a communication strategy to engage and update key stakeholders on progress to improve the SEND system.

#### **Priority Two**

##### **Understanding the needs and strengths of children, young people and their families**

- This means...we will work together, using shared processes, to identify and understand children and young people's needs and strengths as early as possible. This will start in the early years with high quality health and development reviews and early notification of children with SEND following through into schools and settings describing and meeting the needs of their pupils. We will ensure that our workforce have the skills, knowledge and confidence to work alongside parents/carers to identify education, health or care needs and help put in place timely, person-centred planning and support that helps children and young people make good progress towards their aspirations and ambitions.

We will:

1. Embed the use of Valuing SEND as the Borough's clear approach to describing needs and strengths of children and young people, families and provision.
2. Develop and embed person-centred planning processes across all partner agencies

3. Develop a new EHC assessment, plan and review system that ensures children and young people's outcomes and aspirations are improving.

### **Priority Three**

#### **Developing a system which meets children, young people and family's needs and is accountable for improving outcomes**

- This means...we will hold each other to account – across the system - through the joint monitoring and management of performance and will refresh our governance arrangements to ensure that support and challenge are provided. We will use data and intelligence to develop a shared understanding of current and future need and use this to jointly plan, develop and evaluate services, provision and the pathways into them. We will establish a culture where Education, Health and Care services work supportively together to join up the system so that children, young people and families only have to tell their story once.

We will:

1. Refresh our governance arrangements to ensure they reflect the scale of our ambition and strategic priorities.
2. Develop a joint strategic performance dashboard to support us to monitor progress and identify and respond to areas for improvement.
3. Develop the Joint Strategic Needs Assessment for SEND to describe current and future health, care and wellbeing needs.
4. Refresh the joint commissioning strategy to ensure that we continue to identify opportunities for joint commissioning of services and provision to make the best use of resources

### **Priority Four**

#### **Ensuring that most children and young peoples' needs can be met in local, inclusive mainstream schools**

- This means...we will provide strong leadership, training and support to our local, mainstream educational settings to ensure that they are effectively identifying needs and rigorously putting strategies and interventions in place to help children and young people to develop, participate, learn and achieve the best possible outcomes. Where possible, we want every child's needs to be met within their local community.

We will:

1. Co-ordinate and deliver a workforce development programme for senior leaders, teachers, SENCOs, teaching assistants, pastoral staff, early years practitioners and support staff, linked to the Valuing SEND assessment of setting readiness to meet need. This will promote and enhance inclusive practice and close gaps between need & setting readiness. This commitment to a change in culture and development of practice will be strengthened through seeking external, independent facilitation and perspective to provide

constructive challenge and support. We are working with the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI) to support this process.

2. Ensure that the workforce development programme is accessible to staff across the health and social care system to further develop their understanding of inclusive practice within mainstream education settings and our ambition to meet children and young people's needs within their own community where possible.
3. Strengthen the advice and guidance provided for mainstream settings from the SEND team and Designated Clinical Officer.
4. Promote opportunities to use the skills and knowledge in our special schools and settings to support the improvement of practice in mainstream education settings.
5. Embed high quality annual review processes and ensure these lead to support and challenge where needed.

### **Priority Five**

#### **Developing and maintaining a range of local, high quality specialist provision for those who need it**

- This means...we will strive to meet the needs of children and young people with the most complex needs within or close to Stockton-on-Tees. This will reduce the number of children and young people placed in out of Borough provision, away from their family, friends and local community. This will mean the development of local, high quality specialist provision alongside our work to enhance the capacity of mainstream schools and settings.

We will:

1. Develop a SEND sufficiency strategy which sets out the needs of children and young people with SEND, evaluates how well our existing provision meets these needs and helps us to further plan and develop our provision over the next 3 years.
2. Further develop opportunities to develop specialist provision within the Borough, with a particular focus on provision for children and young people with autism.
3. Work with regional partners to develop a more efficient and cost-effective way of sourcing independent placements ensuring children and young people's needs are met and outcomes are improving.
4. Ensure effective transport is in place and promote independent travel where possible.

### **Priority Six**

#### **Ensuring children and young people achieve their potential and ambitions, and live as independently as possible**

- This means...we will support children and young people to achieve in their learning, work and community – building the foundations for them to be



successful, healthy and happy adults who have purpose and choice over how they live their lives. This will drive and shape our services from the early years onwards. We will strengthen our support to young people who are approaching adulthood by improving the education, employment and training opportunities available across our Borough to provide greater choice and flexibility.

We will :

1. Ensure there is an effective transition process between children's and adult's services across education, health and social care.
2. Promote independence, choice, rights and inclusion for all young people through a person-centred approach.
3. Co-produce a *Preparation for Adulthood* vision with children, young people, parents/carers and practitioners.
4. Work with local education settings, providers and employers to increase opportunities for training, supported internships, paid employment and volunteering.

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## **4. Where are we now?**

Our self-assessment is described within the OFSTED lines of inquiry. We are making progress towards many of our areas of improvement as described below, but recognise that there is more to do to ensure we deliver on our ambitions for children, young people and their families.

### ***How effectively does the local area identify children and young people who have SEND?***

#### ***What are we doing well?***

- At a strategic level, we have undertaken a detailed health needs assessment and know our overall picture and story.
- We have developed a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment which sets out our priorities.
- We have developed a system for early years notification and are embedding this alongside a shared understanding and responsibility for the continuation of support.
- We are working to refine how we identify and respond to need as early as possible at system level and are testing an approach to this.
- We have undertaken a programme of training and awareness raising for staff working within prevention and early intervention services, strengthening the community response to build resilience and independence.
- The Parent Carer Forum has increased its engagement and reach across the Borough and is connecting with families at an earlier stage of need.

#### ***What do we need to improve?***

- Whilst we have undertaken a programme of training with schools and settings to identify needs and support at the earliest opportunity, we recognise that this needs to be embedded as a continuous process.
- At system level, we need to give our workforce the knowledge, skills and support to have early and meaningful conversations with families about the needs, aspirations and future plans for their child.
- We are working to develop processes which will enable SEND cohort specific data to be shared between organisations and across the system. This will help us to build a more detailed understanding of our cohort of children and young people who have an Education, Health and Care plan.
- We recognise that there is sometimes a lack of consistency in our approach to early identification and this can lead to the system feeling disjointed and lacking integrated process.
- Whilst we have a range of mechanisms in place, we are not able to quantify the extent to which some pathways work effectively as they need time to mature.

## ***How effectively does the local area assess and meet the needs of children and young people who have SEND?***

### ***What are we doing well?***

- The Local Offer has been re-designed and is continually refreshed and updated by partners across the system.
- We are working with our partners to continually improve the range and accessibility of online health information, advice and guidance and to develop wider parent/carer engagement mechanisms. This work is being co-produced with the Parent Carer Forum.
- We have introduced a multi-disciplinary, multi-agency quality assurance framework for EHCPs and associated advice and reports.
- We have developed a digital solution to support partner organisations to provide advice and reports for the EHCP process in a secure and timely manner. Whilst challenges have been encountered along the way, we have worked to develop information governance arrangements alongside training and support for professionals to use the portal system.
- We are continuing to refine the way we commission schools to provide additional support through an enhanced mainstream school model, and this has resulted in fewer children moving between schools.
- We have seen some positive work through the commissioning of Occupational Therapy support for children and young people in education settings.

### ***What do we need to improve?***

- The Joint Commissioning strategy needs to be reviewed and refreshed in line with our strategic priorities.
- We need to develop an accountable process to prioritise and commit to shared resources to meet identified and assessed needs of children and young people across education, health and care.
- Whilst there has been an increase in the flow of information and communication with parents/carers, we need to further develop the quality and clarity as part of our graduated approach.
- We are committed to working more effectively as a system to identify and meet the needs of children earlier to enable needs to be met within their local community wherever possible.
- We need to strengthen our work with parents/carers with a clear focus on empowering, enabling and our shared responsibilities.
- We are looking to develop support services for schools and settings to help them develop skills, confidence and use of consistent strategies and approaches to ensure they have the ability to include and support children and young people.

## ***How effectively does the local area improve outcomes for children and young people who have SEND?***

### ***What are we doing well?***

- Overall, children and young people with SEND in Stockton-on-Tees attend good or better schools and have good attendance.
- We have strengthened the range of opportunities available to children and young people to ensure that their views are heard and taken into account.
- Whilst outcomes in Education, Health and Care Plans tend to define educational measures and outcomes, we have developed a new format which places a greater focus on education, skills and employment; care and independence; health, wellbeing and friends; and relationships and community.
- We have a range of mechanisms for seeking feedback from families on whether they think things are improving and have committed to using them consistently across the system.

### ***What do we need to improve?***

- We have more to do to embed our newly-developed system wide approach to outcomes to ensure it is effective and can accurately inform system change and enable us to describe if, and how, things are getting better.
- We know that many children and young people's needs could be met through SEND support rather than through an Education, Health and Care plan. There may be a lack of confidence that older children and young people's needs can be met within mainstream provision as in recent years there has been an increase in requests for special school places – particularly at transition to secondary school. We are committed to the further development of partnership working between mainstream and specialist provision to develop staff skills and confidence and use of consistent, evidence-based strategies and approaches to ensure they are able to support children and young people to achieve their outcomes.
- We need to develop a system that allows the achievement of personal outcomes for individual children and young people to be measured, recorded and reported.

## ***How effectively do partners work together?***

### ***What are we doing well?***

- We have reshaped our governance to be more streamlined, focused and accountable. (See Section 6 for Governance structure).
- We have worked together to develop a co-production charter which sets out our commitment to share power with the children, young people and families who use services, and to make decisions together.
- We are working together, alongside our partner, the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI), to strengthen our ethos and culture of inclusion,

and to enhance practice, teaching, learning and leadership. Through this system wide work, we are building understanding of children's human rights to inclusive education and how this is beneficial for all.

- We have worked together as a SEND system to co-produce the format of the Education, Health and Care plan and will test and refine this during 2021.
- We have worked in partnership to transform the autism diagnostic pathway into a needs-led neurodevelopmental pathway which enables families to access support for their child's needs, whilst reducing waiting times.
- We are working in partnership to develop a Dynamic Support Register to ensure that we are planning care collaboratively for children and young people with autism, learning disabilities or both, where there may be increasing risks to their safety or wellbeing.
- We have jointly commissioned a family support service and a sensory programme which have provided support for families to understand their child's neurodevelopmental needs.
- As part of the response of partners to COVID-19, we have worked together to manage risk, vulnerability and needs alongside children, young people and families. This has included enhancing data sharing arrangements and flexing and adapting service provision, where appropriate, to meet needs.

#### ***What do we need to improve?***

- We are developing a shared outcomes framework, but need to ensure that we work together to develop a collective understanding and ownership of our performance and understand what's working well and where we need to take further action to ensure we improve.
- Whilst we have made a clear commitment to share power and make decisions together, we need to continue to create a culture across our partnership where the values and behaviours outlined in the co-production charter - including clear and effective communication, transparency, honesty, respect and compromise - are the norm across our system.

## 5. How will we know if we are making a difference?

### Our outcomes

We have looked across our system, and taken advice and guidance from external inspection, external evaluation and our own self-evaluation, and identified eight key outcome areas which describe what we want our system to look like. Our outcomes are:

- Parental involvement, engagement and co-production is evident
- Needs are identified early
- Needs are met, are reviewed, and reduce where possible
- Planned outcomes are achieved
- Mainstream schools can meet most needs
- The system is joined up and supportive not oppositional
- There is a range of local and high quality provision
- Young people are effectively prepared for independence in later life from an early stage

We will use the following sources to help us assess how we are performing against our outcomes - to understand what's working well and where we need to take further action to ensure we improve. A SEND strategic outcomes framework will be developed as part of the delivery of this Strategy.

### Data and Performance Measures

A SEND strategic dashboard is in development which will be reported to the SEND strategic group on a quarterly basis. The dashboard will present a variety of data including the number of children and young people receiving SEND support or with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) by age group and primary need, the number of requests for EHCP assessments, the timeliness of advice received from education, health and care services and the timeliness of completion of plans where needed. The dashboard will also include the type of provision where children and young people access education, individual outcomes assessed as being met at annual review and the rate of young people in education, employment or training. It is anticipated that within the lifetime of the Strategy, accurate and timely health and care performance data will be included within the dashboard.

### Qualitative Measures

Multi-agency audits are being developed to evaluate the quality of our work with children, young people and families. Findings from these audits will be reported back to the SEND strategic group.

## **Feedback**

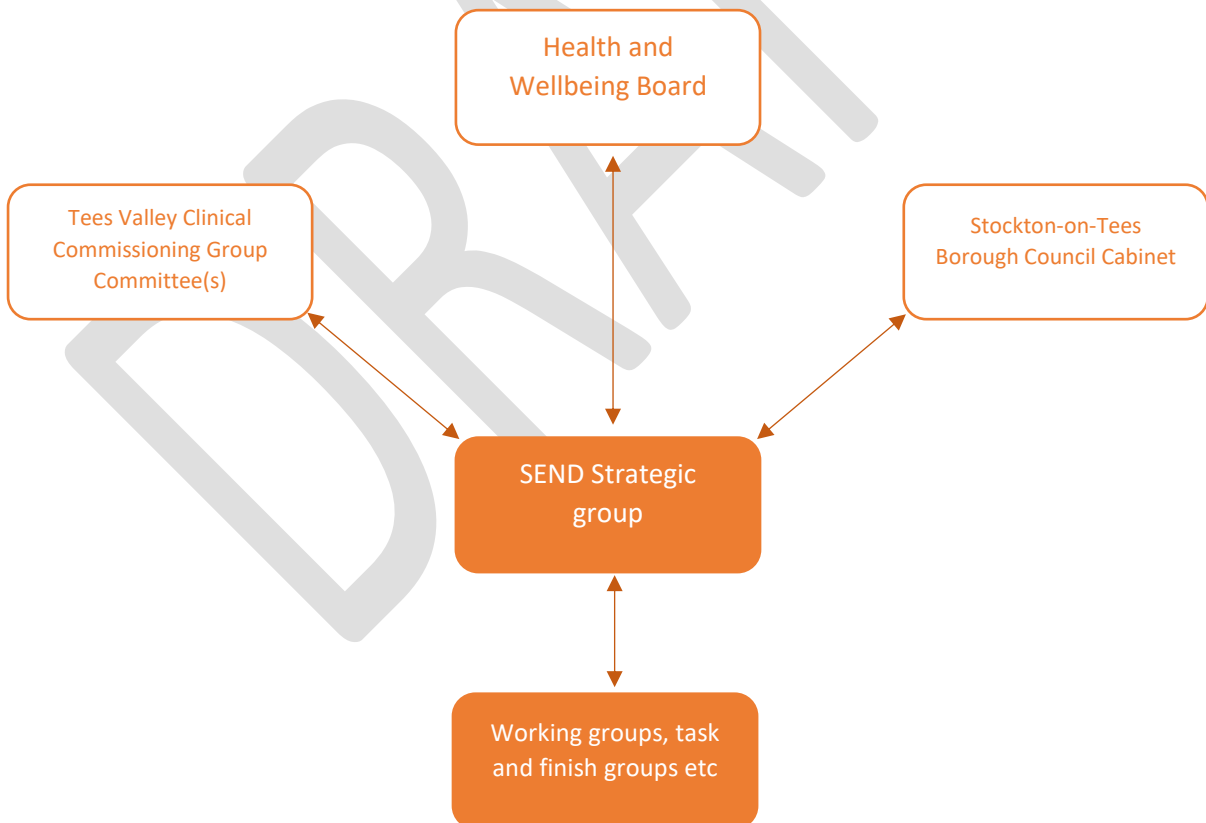
Feedback from children, young people and families and practitioners from across the system will continue to shape further developments with the oversight of the SEND strategic group. The annual Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) and parent/carer co-production surveys will continue, whilst mechanisms for gaining feedback on the EHCP assessment process will be developed and established. Practitioners views will be sought through the regular multi-agency SENCO briefings.

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## 6. Delivering the Strategy

The delivery of the Stockton-on-Tees SEND strategy will be overseen by the SEND Strategic Group which brings together partners who will work to deliver our shared vision and strategic priorities. Working groups and task groups will be developed as needed to drive work and deliver improvements. Progress against the strategy will be monitored and scrutinised by the SEND Strategic Group on a quarterly basis to ensure that outcomes for children and young people are continuously improving. We will revisit and refresh our priorities during 2023, co-producing them with children, young people and families.

The SEND Strategic Group is accountable to the Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Board, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council Cabinet and the Executive Committee of the NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group for the delivery of the strategy. This group is co-chaired by the Director of Children’s Services, Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council and the Head of Commissioning, Strategy and Delivery for Children and Young People, NHS Tees Valley Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and draws its membership from Stockton Parent Carer Forum, the Local Authority and the CCG.





## Annex 1 – Legal Context

The Children’s Act (2014) and the SEND Code of Practice (2015) set out the legal context for how we support children and young people with SEND and their families.

We must also have regard to the following:

- Children Act 1989, 2004
- Autism Act 2009
- Autism Strategy 2010
- Equality Act 2010
- Care Act 2014
- Stockton-on-Tees Health and Wellbeing Strategy

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## **Annex Two – Defining Needs**

Following consultation with colleagues in Education (both internal and external to the Council), Health and Social Care, together with the Parent Carer Forum, the Valuing SEND tool has been adopted to be used across schools and settings in Stockton-on-Tees.

This will provide the opportunities to develop more clarity when describing the individual needs of the child/young person and pinpoint the specific support they require to have their needs met.

Schools and settings are all different and the experience of teachers and support staff varies too. It is our vision in Stockton-on-Tees that regardless of which school/setting a child or young person attends, their needs are defined and understood with reasonable adjustments made to meet those needs. Within the Valuing SEND tool, this is categorised as setting readiness to meet need. In Stockton-on-Tees, we commit to a partnership with schools and settings, to empower them with the opportunities to build knowledge, skills and experience to meet the needs of their diverse cohorts in an inclusive Borough.

Valuing SEND supports the local area ethos and vision for our children/young people to have their needs met in their local community, within a mainstream environment wherever possible and accessing mainstream services if required. The tool helps us all to understand the level of need of a particular child or young person and assists professionals describe those needs in a consistent manner across the Borough.

### **SEND Assessment of Need**

It is important that schools and settings can identify needs as soon as they present and from Easter 2021 it is intended that they will use the tool to evaluate progress and effectiveness of their interventions during the Assess, Plan, Do, Review stages of SEND support.

Should the school/setting require support, advice and guidance from the Local Authority through One Point Panel for children categorised as requiring SEND Support the tool will also be utilised. Schools will complete the profile to show the readiness of the setting in meeting the child or young person's needs and this will facilitate the good conversation with the child's family and other professionals involved in formulating the SEND support plan. A 'What Matters Island' format will also enable the views, wishes, feelings and aspirations to be explored so that all involved with the child/family have a good understanding of the needs and provision, the effectiveness of the support in place and the progress the child or young person is making. The Assess, Plan, Do, Review cycle is integral to SEND Support in schools and settings and the Valuing SEND profile will assist settings to evaluate progress and success.

The tool is already part of a number of statutory assessments following a test phase during 2020 where feedback for the format was positive and the approach is included within the Person-Centred Planning elements pre-application for a Statutory Assessment. From Easter 2021 it will be a requirement of every new statutory

assessment and will directly feed into the new EHCP Format in terms of needs, provision and outcome.

This profile of need can be completed prior to application, during the 4 week decision making window of whether to initiate a Statutory Assessment or during the assessment. The school/setting completes the profile collaboratively, with support where needed from the SEND team. Any previous Valuing SEND profiles from SEND support stage will be vital to show progress and effectiveness of previous support and the improvement the child/young person has made over time.

## **Reviews**

The Annual Review documentation is currently being revised to align with the new EHCP format, the Person-Centred Planning discussion prompts and the amended statutory assessment process. Completion of the VSEND tool will be integral to each review and will inform the next steps for the child/young person, their parents/carers and their schools/settings. This will be a requirement for all Annual and Interim reviews after May half term 2021.

## **Parents/Carers**

The Valuing SEND tool was tested during 2020 and since then there have been a number of jointly identified opportunities to successfully ensure parents/carers are aware of what support is being implemented to meet their child/young person's needs and how they can mirror/re-inforce these interventions at home. It also helps to identify any areas of support that may be required to assist their readiness to meet need and awareness of their child/young person's individual needs.

The Valuing SEND tool is integral in Stockton-on-Tees as the foundation for planning support for children at all stages of the identification of need spectrum and will highlight training and support needs of settings and for families to be able to meet children/young people's needs as soon as they are identified. We will use the tool for monitoring effectiveness, progress and evaluating support therefore enabling more coordinated, individually specific support and ultimately facilitating the aspirations of children and young people across their lives and into adulthood.

## Annex Three – Stockton Parent Carer Forum



Stockton Parent Carer Forum (SPCF) was established in 2016 and has seen year on year growth in its reach to families. SPCF focus on the parent/carer voice for families with Special Educational Needs and/or Disabilities (SEND) aged 0-25 years, and do this through engagement, participation and co-production. Our services are offered in person, via phone/email and virtually.

SPCF organise coffee mornings and social events alongside open forums/focus groups and targeted work stream discussions. Parent/carer listening events happen regularly with a variety of service providers to support this.

SPCF sit on various boards to ensure parent/carer voices are heard, recognised and considered, and to ensure services that are planned and delivered meet the needs of Stockton parent carers and families.

SPCF are currently working to co-produce:

- A revised EHCP format
- The refinement of the neurodevelopmental pathway
- Short Breaks Grant
- Social Care reviews
- A system wide co-production charter.

SPCF are also working with partners to develop a Best Start in Life strategy focused on pregnancy through to the early years and the development of a Speech, Language and Communication Needs pathway, and regularly take part in reviews of commissioned services to ensure the voices of parent/carers are heard.

We have developed strong working relationships with the Local Authority, Clinical Commissioning Group and other service providers, building strong equal relationships which has allowed for collaborative working.