

Parent Carer Forum Annual Report 2026

We are a voluntary group of Parents & Carers in Cheshire West & Chester who have children / young people with special education needs and / or disability (SEND).

Our purpose & main aims are to...



Voice

Be the voice of as many parents/carers as possible.



Partnership

Work in partnership with providers of Education, Health Care and Social Care services to influence decisions about gaps in services



Advice

Provide advice and information links to Professionals and Voluntary Organisations.



Improve

Co-produce improvements to Services so that all children and young people in the Borough with SEND are given the chance to achieve the best possible outcomes.

Summary of 2025/26

The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) continues to evolve as a strong, influential, and deeply committed voice for families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Cheshire West.

Each year brings its own unique balance of familiar challenges and new opportunities. This past year has proven to be truly exceptional in terms of our growth, engagement, and collective impact.

Our community is stronger than ever. Over the last 12 months, our newsletter membership has grown from 850 to over 1,200 families. Our social media reach has soared to over 500,000 - allowing us to connect with parents in every corner of the borough.

PCF engagement in the last 12 months

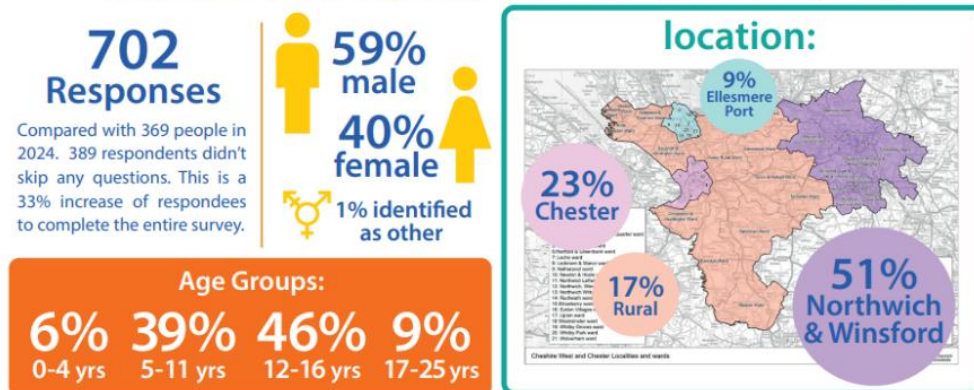
The Cheshire West and Chester Parent Carer Forum (CWaC PCF) represents families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). We are a member of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) and are funded by the Department for Education.



This incredible growth was most powerfully felt in our recent Parent Carer Survey, where over 700 of you took the time to share your stories. Your feedback gave us a vital, honest look into your daily lives. It showed a 23% rise in families navigating dual Autism and ADHD diagnoses and highlighted that nearly half of you (42%) are managing the complex world of EHCPs.

2026 Survey results – Demographics

of the children and young people with SEND from our survey results



While you shared heartwarming praise for the dedicated school staff and SENDCos who go above and beyond, you also told us how exhausting it is when system failures mean agreed plans aren't followed through. Please know that your voices are at the heart of everything we do. This year, we have taken your real, lived experiences and escalated them directly to the highest levels.

From day-to-day meetings with our local NHS and Authority partners, to feeding back directly to Ofsted inspectors and helping shape the government's national SEND reforms. This report highlights the vital work we have undertaken together over the last 12 months and looks ahead to our plans for the coming year.

Your Voices Shared

Since our last AGM report we have had several opportunities to share your voices, experiences and challenges.

Survey 2026 – The ‘Big One’ Read full Survey [here](#)

What You Shared with Us in the 2026 Survey

Reading through your survey responses, we were deeply moved by your honesty, your strength, and the clear picture you painted of life as a parent carer in Cheshire West.

Your feedback strongly echoed what the recent Ofsted and CQC inspectors found: that the support families receive across our area is far too 'hit-and-miss'. On a wonderful note, so many of you shared heartwarming praise for individual school staff especially SENDCos - who go above and beyond every day to make your children feel safe and cared for.

However, we also heard how exhausting it is when agreed plans aren't followed through, when recommended strategies aren't put into place, or when you simply feel like your voice isn't being heard.

Your responses also helped us better understand the changing needs of our wonderful community. More than 60% of the families who reached out to us are caring for a child with Autism, ADHD, or both. This last number has grown by 23% since our last survey.

Additionally, nearly half of you (42%) are currently navigating the often complex world of EHCPs. Please know that your stories are not just numbers on a page to us. We are taking everything you have shared and using it to sit down directly with the Local Authority and health leaders. Our aim is ensuring that your real, everyday experiences are at the very heart of the plans they make for our children's futures.

External Scrutiny and Inspections: Amplifying Your Voices

Late 2025 brought two major opportunities for external bodies to look closely at SEND services in Cheshire West. In both instances, the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) was at the table, ensuring that your real, everyday experiences directly shaped the findings.

1. Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Review

An LGA Peer Review involves leaders from another local authority acting as a “critical friend,”. Its purpose is assessing local services to offer practical recommendations for improvement. This is a separate process from an Ofsted inspection. During this review,

we shared your families' experiences to ensure parent perspectives were front and centre. We were absolutely delighted that the LGA recognised the PCF as a strong, credible, and vital partner, noting in their final feedback:

"The parent carer annual survey is impressive and is being used to inform people about practice and service decisions."

2. Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection

Just a month later, in November 2025, Ofsted and the CQC arrived to conduct a full, three-week inspection of our Local Area SEND services. This was a critical moment for our community. The PCF played a key role in ensuring family voices were heard clearly, accurately, and without filters.

During the intensive three-week inspection, the PCF actively represented you by:

- Meeting Face-to-Face: Attending direct, targeted meetings with the inspection team.
- Sharing Lived Experiences: Passing on the raw, honest feedback gathered from hundreds of parents through our community events, school representatives, and third-sector partners.
- Providing Real-World Examples: Highlighting exactly where support is making a positive difference, and being equally honest about where families are still experiencing exhausting difficulties.
- Shaping Local Accountability: Working closely with local leaders beforehand to ensure parents' views were accurately reflected within the Local Area Self-Evaluation Framework.

To find out more you can read our blog [here](#) and the Ofsted report [here](#).

2026 Survey results

We felt it was important to break down the feedback by service area to better understand families' experiences.

Education Feedback

Social Care Feedback

Health Feedback

System Failures

Inclusion in Cheshire West and Chester

Our findings closely reflect themes identified in the recent Ofsted inspection, which reported that **services in Cheshire West and Chester "lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs."**

This inconsistency is clearly reflected in the voices of families. Many describe education settings as a safe and supportive environment where their children are understood and valued. Others, however, report feeling unheard, with their children's needs not fully recognised or met.

Next Steps: Driving Change and Holding Partners to Account

Since publishing our survey results in May 2026, we have actively shared our findings across all levels of governance. This has included the Department for Education (DfE), local councillors, and our local MPs. We have secured a firm commitment from both the Department for Education and the SEND Partnership Board that our data is being directly integrated into the upcoming SEND Improvement Plans, and the local Ofsted Recovery Plan. The Parent Carer Forum remains at the absolute centre of these crucial conversations. Your experiences drive true systemic change and strategic accountability.

Shaping the SEND Reforms

As a Forum, we have dedicated a significant amount of time over recent months to high-level advocacy. This has included attending strategic meetings and webinars with Education Minister Georgia Gould and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) - using our local survey data to help navigate and influence national change. Furthermore, local MPs have utilised our survey findings to inform their own SEND consultations.

Closer to home, the PCF has been integral to crafting the Local Area's response to the "Expert at Hand" initiative - and shaping the future SEND Reform plans. You can read our submission to the Government [here](#).

Championing Co-Production and Culture Change

We have remained relentless this year in our push for true co-production and a deep culture change across the Local Area. While this journey can often feel like taking one step forward and two steps back, we are steadily making meaningful progress. Crucially, we are now seeing your voices written directly into local accountability measures. Thus, ensuring that senior leaders are held to the standards our families deserve.

Real change is slow, but it is happening. Below is a snapshot (though by no means an exhaustive list) of the co-produced projects and initiatives we have shaped alongside our local partners in Cheshire West and Chester this year.

Want to dive deeper? You can read the full stories and updates behind each of these projects in the **Blogs section of our [website](#)**.

1. **Knowing Me Tool** – [Read our latest blog](#)

PCF CWaC has been part of the Knowing Me Neurodiversity profiling tool journey from the very beginning. That involvement continues as the work moves into an exciting new phase. From the early co-production stages through to where we are now, parent carer voice has been central to shaping this tool. We're delighted that families from Cheshire West and Chester have been part of that process, and we want to keep you updated on what's happening next.

We are very proud of our Vice Chair Lucy Kennerley who was asked to present at the Centre for Autism, Neurodevelopmental Disorders, and Intellectual Disability ([CANDDID](#))

2. The Commitment – [Read our latest blog](#)

The SEND Commitment is about setting the right tone for how everyone in the SEND system works together. It's a set of shared promises, created with families, professionals, and young people. It makes sure everyone feels included, respected, and focused on making things better.

A working group of different partners is now embedding the Commitment across CWaC. This group is supported by an outcomes framework to measure the difference it makes in practice.

3. Ordinarily available inclusive provision (OAIP) Reasonable Adjustments - [Read blog here](#)

Working alongside the Principal Educational Psychologist and colleagues from across education, health and care to co-produce the infographic on Reasonable Adjustments.

4. Short Breaks Strategy

We have been working with the Local Authority over a number of years. And sharing your views on the feeding them into the Local Authority New Short Breaks Strategy. This has just been launched you can read more on the council's website [here](#).

5. Partnership for the Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) Project

This year marked the second and final year of the PINS project. During this period, three mainstream primary schools in Cheshire West and Chester took part in the initiative. They were Charles Darwin Primary School and Witton Church Walk CE Primary School in Northwich, and Wharton CE Primary School in Winsford.

Each of these schools successfully completed a comprehensive self-assessment. They identified key priorities to further develop their staff's skills and knowledge in inclusion and neurodiversity. To support this journey, the Parent Carer Forum (PCF) facilitated collaborative coffee events at the schools. These sessions provided a welcoming space for parents to connect, ask questions, and understand exactly how their child's school is working to improve its neuroinclusive practices.

Navigating Financial Growth and Sustainability

Each year, the Parent Carer Forum receives a grant of £17,500 from the Department for Education. This funding is administered by the charity 'Contact', which provides oversight to ensure that each Forum operates with transparency and accountability.

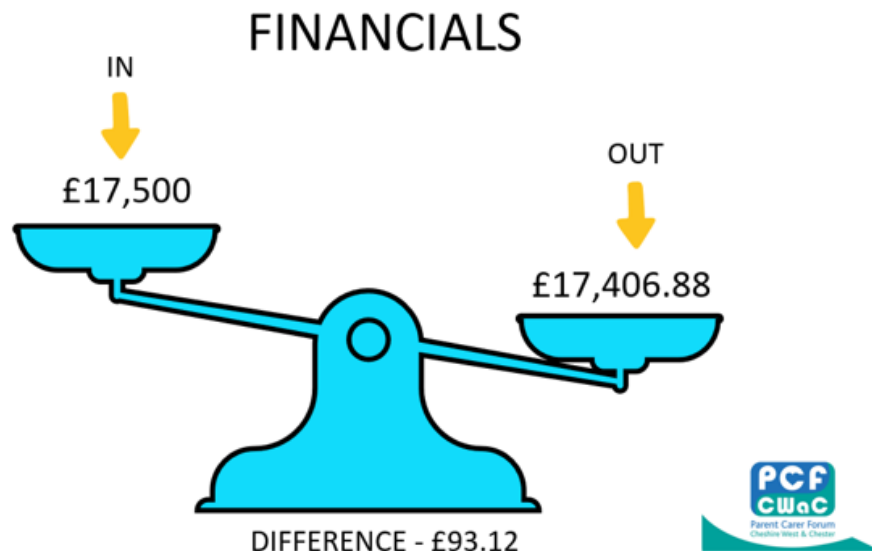
As our forum has expanded, our operational costs have naturally grown alongside our membership. The standard Department for Education grant is no longer sufficient on its own to cover the full scope of our expanding activities.

This year, for example, we were only able to deliver our three hallmark in-person Forums because the Local Authority stepped in to fully fund the Preparation for Adulthood event.

While we are absolutely delighted to be reaching and supporting record numbers of parents, managing this growth requires having sustainable funding.

To ensure we can maintain this vital momentum, we have successfully secured additional infrastructure and event funding from the Local Authority for the coming year. This critical support will allow us to confidently deliver our upcoming schedule and keep our services accessible to all.

A full breakdown of our actual expenditure from the past year is detailed below.



Our full budget breakdown for 2026 is as follows:

£1612.00	Events
£12,298.55	Staffing
£1115.98	Infrastructure
£1238.32	Resources
£900	Web
£201.22	Expenses
£17,406.86	Overall SPEND

2026 Forum highlights

Here is a reminder of the Forums we have hosted this year. Our 3 in person Forums have attracted record attendances, especially our Preparation for Adulthood event that we hosted in conjunction with the Local Authority. Over 100 families attended. Over 525 parents have logged on or sipped a brew with us this year. We are delighted that so many parents are finding our Forums useful.



We want to hear from parents and carers

Come along and listen to our speakers, share your views and experiences, get support, connect with other parents and carers... at any of the following events...

In-Person Forums

Neurodiversity Forum

Thursday 13th November 2025

9:30am – 1:30pm

Hartford Golf Club, Northwich

Preparation for Adulthood

Thursday 26th February 2026

9:30am – 1:30pm

Civic Hall, Ellesmere Port

Education, Inclusion & Mental Health

Tuesday 12th May 2026

10:00am – 2:00pm

Vicars Cross Golf Club, Chester

Online Forums

PCF Who Are We? & Meet the Directors

Tuesday 30th September 2025

10:00am – 11:30am

Early Years – Sleep & Toileting

Thursday 4th December 2025

10:00am – 11:30am

Benefits & Support

Wednesday 11th March 2026

10:00am – 11:30am

Short Breaks & Charitable Support

Tuesday 9th June 2026

10:00am – 11:30am

Drop-Ins & Coffee Events

Wharton Children's Centre, Winsford:

Fri 10th Oct 2025, 10am-12pm

Lache Children's Centre, Chester:

Fri 23rd Jan 2026, 1.30pm-3pm

Stanlaw Abbey Children's Centre, E Port:

Fri 12th Jun 2026, 10am-12pm

Neston Community Centre, Neston:

Fri 1st May 2026, 10am-12pm

We will be attending other Coffee Events in 2025/26 so please check our website for updates.

Online Parent Training

Empowerment & Communication

Tuesday 14th October 2025

1:00pm – 2:30pm

Help to navigate the SEND system

Tuesday 13th January 2026

10:00am – 11:30am

Support in Education

Thursday 30th April 2026

10:00am – 11:30am

All events are free and everyone is welcome.

In-person and online events require booking. All information about our events will be on our website.

www.pcfcheshirewest.org

We know that attending in Person Forums is impossible for our working parents. To combat this we have recorded and built up a resource bank of our online Forums or our on line training, they can be watched in your own time, they can be found on our [website](http://www.pcfcheshirewest.org).

Focus for 2026/27

We have asked for your feedback on the topic that you would like to know more about next year. We have also spoken to our Partners and asked them what specific topics they would like to share with our parents next year. With this in mind, we have crafted a schedule of topics for the next academic year.

Virtual Forums:

1. Who We Are and What We Do

- Welcome and introduction to PCF CWaC — our role, how we work, and how to get involved
- Director of Education: priorities and plans for the academic year ahead
- SEND Reform update: what's happening locally and what it means for families
- Contact adviser: how PCF CWaC connects into the national NNPCF network
- Q&A

2. Virtual: Children and Young People's Mental Health

- CYPMHS / MyMind — referral pathways and what to expect
- Mental health support in schools and education settings
- Early intervention and crisis support
- What parent carers can do to support their child's mental health
- Q&A / signposting

3. Virtual: Technology and Digital Resources

- Digital tools and apps that can support children and young people with SEND
- Online resources for parent carers
- Navigating online services and support
- Q&A / signposting

4. ADHD — Training Session

- Delivered by specialist training provider
- Understanding ADHD — strategies, support, and what to ask for
- Provider to be confirmed

IN-PERSON EVENTS

5. Social Care, Family Support and Short Breaks

- Families First / Family Hubs — what's available and how to access
- Neighbourhood Hubs — what they are and where to find them
- Short Breaks: what families are entitled to and how to apply
- Direct Payments — how they work and how to get support navigating them

6. Education, Health and Wellbeing

- Education: EHCPs, annual reviews, transitions, school support
- Behaviour and Emotional Regulation — understanding it, consistent approaches, and what specialist support is available locally
- Health services and therapies:
 - Speech and Language Therapy
 - Occupational Therapy (OT) — including Sensory OT
 - Children and Young People's Mental Health Services
- Panel Q&A / marketplace

7. Preparation for Adulthood

- Transitions from education to adulthood
- Employment, supported internships, and skills
- Housing and independence
- Adult social care and health transitions
- Marketplace / provider stalls

8. Support for Me as a Carer

- Early navigation and support pathways — how to find help early and who to contact
- One or two short presentations on carer wellbeing and self-care strategies
- Carer assessments and your rights
- Marketplace format — move around and explore local services and activities
- Crafts, wellbeing activities, and wellbeing packs
- Signposting to local carer support

9. Carer Wellbeing Training Programme

- Six-week programme delivered by an external specialist provider
- Focus on being a carer and looking after yourself

As soon as we have confirmed venues and date we will publish via our social media platforms.

Volunteer Training

Although we have some paid support, the majority of the work that we do is driven by volunteers. In fact, even our paid team members do many volunteering hours!

Next year we would like to expand the team again and are hoping to run comprehensive volunteer training. If you are interested in helping to grow our forum - or volunteering your time at a coffee event or even sharing our news/events at your school - please get in touch.

A Final Message of Thanks from Our Chair

As we look back on everything we have achieved together over the past year, I am filled with immense pride and gratitude for this incredible community. The rapid growth of our forum now connecting with over 1,200 members and reaching over half a million impressions online is a powerful reminder that while our journeys as parent carers can often feel isolating, we are never truly alone. Our strength is entirely rooted in our numbers and in our shared commitment to making Cheshire West a truly inclusive place for our children to thrive.

This year's report marks a very personal milestone for me, as I will be stepping down as Chair at the end of this year, marking the conclusion of my 6-year term. Leading the forum has been one of the greatest privileges of my life, and as I look back on this 6-year journey, I am filled with deep emotion. I want to share a truly heartfelt thank you to all of our families for completely trusting me with your deeply personal stories, your struggles, and your victories. It has been an honour to carry your voices into the rooms where decisions are made.

I am also endlessly grateful to the wonderful parent volunteers who have stood by me and supported me throughout this journey. While we are fortunate to have some paid administrative support, the vast majority of what the Parent Carer Forum achieves is powered entirely by volunteers who generously give their time, energy, and passion often on top of their own demanding caring responsibilities. To our local authority and health partners, thank you for working alongside us to build a culture of co-production.

As the forum moves into a busy 2026/27 schedule under new leadership, I know that this community will continue to be fiercely committed to championing your views, amplifying your voices, and standing right beside you every step of the way. Thank you for your continued trust, support, and dedication over the last six years.

Warmest wishes,

Jules