

Parent Carer Forum Annual Report 2025

Summary of 2025

The Parent Carer Forum (PCF) continues to evolve as a strong, influential, and committed voice for families of children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) in Cheshire West. Each year brings new challenges and opportunities, and 2025 has proven to be an exceptional year in terms of growth, engagement, and impact.

Our membership has expanded significantly, increasing by over 20% from 700 to more than 850 members. This growth reflects the growing trust and recognition of the PCF's role among families. At the same time, we have invested in our communication strategy, launching a new blog platform that has become a vital tool for sharing information, personal stories, and key updates. As a result, our social media reach has grown to over 20,000, and our website has received more than 12,000 visits in the past year.

This heightened visibility has not only expanded our audience but has also led to a notable increase in parent volunteers, who are stepping forward to be trained and take on leadership roles within the Forum. It has also resulted in stronger and more meaningful co-production relationships with our local strategic partners. These collaborative relationships are central to how we influence and shape local services to reflect the real-life needs of families.

This report is designed to celebrate our achievements while acknowledging the continued challenges that families face. We remain committed to ensuring that the lived experiences of families with SEND are at the heart of decision-making across services.

Role of the Parent Carer Forum

The Parent Carer Forum is a volunteer-led, parent-run organisation working to represent the voices of families of children and young people with SEND in Cheshire West. We provide a space where parent carers can connect, share their experiences, and influence how services are developed and delivered. Our primary role is to ensure that parent and carer experiences are not only heard but actively used to shape services across education, health, and care.

Our influence extends beyond the local area. As members of the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF), we contribute to discussions at a national level, working with government ministers and stakeholders to influence policy and service delivery across England. This two-way communication ensures that national developments

inform local action and, importantly, that local experiences shape national understanding.

Recognition at National Level

This year, the Forum was recognised nationally for its work in embedding parent voice into local service development. We were invited by Contact, a national charity, to share our experience of using our annual survey data to drive change. This work has become a model of best practice, demonstrating how data gathered directly from parents can lead to measurable improvements in service delivery. It's a powerful affirmation that when parents are meaningfully involved, outcomes improve for everyone.

You can watch back [here](#)

Financial Overview

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 and ensures that each Forum operates with transparency and accountability. The PCF is required to submit detailed annual financial reports that outline both actual spending and future cost projections.

This year, we have faced significant financial pressures. Rising operational costs—including increased staff wages due to changes in the National Minimum Wage, higher National Insurance contributions, and escalating venue hire rates—have stretched our budget further than in previous years. Despite these challenges, we have managed to maintain our core services.

One key to this has been the additional funding we received through the **Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)** project. This funding allowed us to deliver the **Neurodiversity in Person Forum** separately from our Department for Education grant. This diversification in funding has helped us remain resilient and ensured we can continue supporting families effectively.

Our full budget breakdown for 2025 is as follows:

£4,317.50 was spent on events,

£11,309.22 on staffing,

£75 on meetings,

£603.26 on infrastructure,

£830.90 on resources and development,

£280 on web development.

Of the £17,500 allocated, we spent £17,415.88—leaving a small underspend of £85, which will be carried forward.

What's New in 2025

➤ Blogs Page

One of the most exciting developments this year was the launch of our [Blog Page](#). This was created in direct response to feedback from parents who wanted more visibility into our work and impact. The blog is a dynamic platform for sharing updates, advice, and real stories from families and professionals. It has become a hub of practical information and emotional support—where information meets inspiration. From collaborative pieces with professionals to personal insights from parents, the blog showcases the lived experiences that drive change in our local area.

Read more [here](#)

➤ Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) Project

The **PINS project** was another key development. Backed by NHS England, PINS aims to create better partnerships between schools and parents of neurodivergent children. Two parent representatives from the PCF committed substantial time and energy to help implement the project across four schools in Cheshire West. The PCF is an active member of the PINS Steering Group, working alongside NHS and Local Authority colleagues. The success of the project locally has led to our selection as a pilot site for **PINS 2**, which will roll out in the next academic year.

Read more [here](#)

➤ Evening Coffee events

We also responded to calls for more accessible engagement opportunities by launching **evening coffee events** for working parents. Six events were held throughout the academic year, providing an informal space to connect, share, and learn. These were delivered alongside our ongoing **SIP and Learn** sessions, which featured guest speakers from a wide range of services including IASS, legal experts, health professionals, and charities.

➤ Bite Size Survey

In response to concerns raised around the inclusion of SEND children in mainstream high schools, we conducted a **bite-size survey** focused on parental confidence in mainstream education. The findings were presented at the newly formed SEND Partnership Board, where we highlighted key recommendations around staff training, infrastructure improvements, and better communication between schools and families.

➤ SEND Summit

October 2024 saw the first **SEND Summit**, where the PCF was invited to present on the challenges facing families within the current SEND system. We shared recommendations based on our consultations and surveys. A follow-up summit in June 2025 allowed us to reflect on the progress made—and there has indeed been progress. Our focus moving forward is to continue pushing for lasting systemic change and ensuring that family voices are not only heard but acted upon.

➤ Parent Training

To support this work, we launched a six-week **Parent Carer Volunteer Training Programme**. This initiative was designed to equip parents with the knowledge and confidence needed to represent the Forum, work alongside professionals, and advocate for change. We were thrilled to welcome a new cohort of trained volunteers, some of whom have now joined our Parent Management Board.

You Said, We Did

Acting on your feedback is at the heart of everything we do. We believe that the most meaningful change happens when it is driven by the voices of those with lived experience.

Over the past year, we carefully reviewed the topics and concerns raised by parent carers—particularly the areas where they needed more support, information, or clarity.

In response, we delivered a **comprehensive programme of events** tailored to those needs. These sessions were designed not only to inform and educate, but also to empower families with the confidence and tools to navigate the system more effectively.

You said...	We did...
Information on EHCP and SEND law	Two 'Sip and Learn' coffee events with the Information Advice and Support Service (IASS)
Information on mental health services	An in-person forum on mental health with professionals and lunch
Information on autism in girls and masking and PDA	An online training event for autism in girls, masking and PDA
Understand the EHCP panels and decision-making	A virtual forum titled "What is panels and how decisions are made"
Learn more about neurodevelopment conditions and pathways	Hosted a neurodevelopment forum in person
Learn about short breaks and wraparound care	Two coffee events bringing the short breaks and wraparound care team along
Find out more about health services	A coffee event bringing health services along such as sensory processing service, speech and language
Find out more about charity support	A coffee event bringing the charities along
Information on preparation for adulthood	In person preparation for adulthood event
You were unsure what the PCF stands for and what we do	Launched the blog page to educate, inform, amplify and communicate all that we do!

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Topics ranged from understanding the EHCP process and preparing for transitions, to exploring mental health support, legal rights, and inclusive education strategies. We also brought in professionals from a variety of sectors—education, health, legal

services, charities, and local SEND providers—to offer expert advice and answer questions directly from parents.

We have adopted the same approach for 2026. You will be able to see our planned programme of events in more detail on our website as soon as venues and presenters have confirmed.

Improvement in Co-Production

Listening to families is central to everything we do. Over the past year, parents have told us they want better communication, greater involvement in decision-making, and more accountability from services.

➤ **Recruitment**

In response, we have taken significant steps to improve working relationships with local partners. PCF representatives have played an integral role in recruitment panels for key positions within the Local Authority. This involvement allows us to ask critical questions and ensure that candidates demonstrate the values and understanding needed to engage effectively with families.

➤ **SEND Strategy**

We have also been invited to sit at the top table in shaping the future of the SEND strategy. Our place within the strategy development process means we can directly challenge decisions, share lived experiences, and ensure that policy reflects the realities that families face. We are proud to say that this work has been collaborative, with leaders open to feedback and committed to change. We are also proud that the PCF survey results are written into every area of the final strategy ensuring that parents experience will be used as a measure of success or failure when they are reviewed next year.

➤ **National SEND/Alternative Provision Leadership Programme**

In a direct effort to improve Co-Production between the SEN team and parents. The local authority invested in a National SEND Leadership programme where both senior managers and PCF leadership would attend. Karen Cove, SEN Team Manager, and Lucy Kennerley, Vice Chair were endorsed by the Director of Children Services to embark in the National SEND/AP Leadership Programme led by the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTI). This program's focus on systemic transformation, collaboration, and co-production providing timely insights to complement the recommendations from the PCF survey. [Read Lucy's blog here..](#)

➤ **Co-Production Communication and Culture Delivery Group**

PCF representatives are now members of every **delivery group** under the new SEND Strategy. In fact, one of these groups—the **Co-Production, Communication and**

Culture Delivery Group—is co-chaired by the PCF. This group is working to tackle longstanding issues around poor communication, inaccessible language, and a lack of mutual respect. One key initiative is the development of a **Pledge**—a shared agreement across ICBs, schools, the Local Authority, and families that outlines how we will communicate and collaborate going forward. This pledge aims to build a shared culture based on respect, trust, and accountability.

Looking Back at 2025

➤ The Power of Volunteering

As the visual below clearly shows, an enormous amount of volunteer time and energy has been dedicated over the past year to improving the experiences of parent carers in Cheshire West.

reflects not just deep creating a more inclusive, and system.

We are incredibly dedication shown each one a parent chosen to use experience to others. Whether meetings, forums, or helping shape scenes, our been at the very success we've

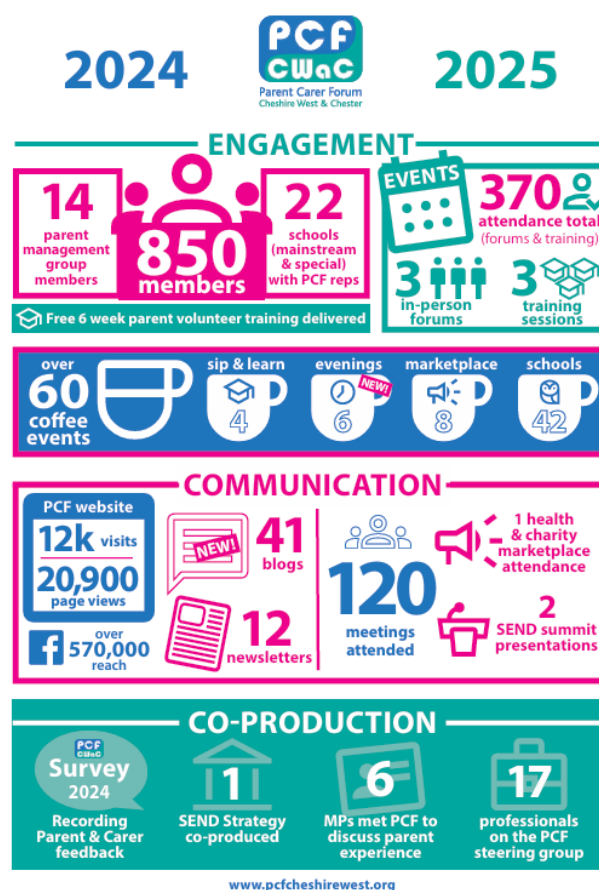
Without their perseverance,

progress simply would not have been possible. Their voices have brought authenticity to our advocacy, and their actions have helped ensure that the concerns and needs of families are taken seriously at every level. We owe a huge debt of gratitude to every one of them.

This collective effort hours logged, but a commitment to supportive, accountable SEND

proud of the by our volunteers—or carer who has their lived drive change for attending strategic contributing to supporting events, policy behind the volunteers have heart of every achieved this year.

time, passion, and much of our



Plans for 2026

Looking ahead to 2026, our focus remains steadfast: to continue building strong, trusting relationships with families, professionals, and partners across the system. At the heart of our work is a deep commitment to listening to the voices of parents and carers—and ensuring those voices are not only heard, but acted upon at every level.

We recognise that this means having honest and, at times, challenging conversations. As a Forum, we are not here to simply endorse existing practice—we are here to question, to challenge, and to help shape better policy and practice that reflects the lived realities of families raising children and young people with SEND in Cheshire West.

One of our key priorities for the coming year is the delivery of our bi-annual Parent Carer Survey, which will launch in January 2026. This survey will be a critical tool for gathering updated insights into the experiences of families across education, health, and care.

The results will serve as key indicators of change, allowing us to measure whether the parent carer journey has improved, remained the same, or worsened over the last two years. By collecting this quantitative data, we will be able to track progress, highlight areas of success, and more importantly, spotlight the areas that still require focused attention and improvement.

To ensure this survey delivers meaningful insights, we will be asking every parent carer, professional, and partner organisation to share the survey widely within their networks. Achieving a robust and diverse response rate is vital—it gives us the evidence we need to influence change and hold systems to account.

Ultimately, our goal for 2026 is simple but powerful: to continue pushing forward. To be the voice at the table that keeps asking the right questions. To be the bridge between families and services. And to ensure that every step taken by the local system is one that moves us closer to a more inclusive, responsive, and compassionate SEND landscape.

Forums and Coffee Events – Plans for 2026

Our Forums have continued to prove invaluable—not only as a way to bring parents together for peer support, but also as a space where professionals can engage directly with families to help navigate the often complicated SEND system in Cheshire West and Chester.

In the year ahead, we are excited to be building on the success of this format, offering a range of **in-person and virtual forums** to reach as many families as possible.

We plan on hosting 3 in person Forums again next year. Due to the financial pressures on the PCF next year, we are working with the Local Authority to see if they are able to gift rooms and refreshments to us to enable us to continue to deliver 3 in person forums again. The topics you have requested are:

In Person Forums Topics

1. Preparation for Adulthood
2. Neurodiversity – Where to go to get support
3. Education and Mental Health Forum – Support if you child can't access school, mental health services to support your child.

Coffee Events

We know how important it is for parents to connect, share experiences, and feel part of a supportive community. That's why we are continuing to expand our **coffee event programme** across the borough in 2026. We are delighted to be partnering once again with a number of **Third Sector organisations**, all of whom are committed to supporting SEND families.

Koala North West will be hosting **weekly coffee events** at venues throughout Cheshire West and Chester, offering regular opportunities for informal conversations, advice, and community building. These sessions are open to all and provide a welcoming environment for parents to come together, speak with professionals, and get signposted to helpful services.

In addition, the Parent Carer Forum will continue to host coffee events at **local children's centres**, focusing on themes such as early years support, transition planning, and mental health. We will also be introducing **topic-specific sessions**, featuring guest speakers and Q&A opportunities with professionals.

To ensure that you never miss a session, we encourage all families to follow us on **Facebook** and check our **website regularly** for the latest event listings and updates. You can also sign up for our monthly newsletter [here](#).

Virtual Forums

We understand that not everyone can attend in person, so we will continue to offer a programme of **virtual forums** throughout the year. These will cover key issues identified by parents—such as EHCP processes, inclusive education, neurodiversity, and navigating health pathways. Sessions will include presentations, breakout discussions, and expert panels.

Our goal for 2026 is to ensure that all families, regardless of availability or location, have access to the information and support they need. These forums will be recorded where possible, allowing families to access them at a time that suits them best.

Virtual Forum Topics

1. Who is the PCF, what do they do? Meet the Directors, what do they do?
2. Empowerment and Communication – Empowering Parents in meetings, understanding how to effectively co-produce.
3. Early Years in SEND, Toileting and Sleep top tips
4. Understanding what benefits you can access. What Short Breaks are available.
5. Education law
6. Transport – what to expect for the year ahead.

Looking Ahead

The progress made in 2025 is a testament to the strength of our community and the power of collective action. Our work this year has demonstrated what is possible when families, professionals, and local systems come together with a shared vision for improving the lives of children and young people with SEND.

However, we know the journey is far from over. Families across Cheshire West continue to face complex challenges—from navigating fragmented systems to accessing timely and appropriate support. As a Forum, our mission for the year ahead is clear: to keep listening, to keep challenging, and to keep making space for the voices of parents and carers to be heard—loudly and clearly—at every level of decision-making.

We remain deeply committed to driving change through co-production, building meaningful partnerships, and ensuring that no decision about SEND services is made without the input of the people who use them.

Together, with our families, volunteers, and professional partners, we are building a better, more inclusive future—one where every child and young person with SEND has the opportunity to thrive, and every family feels supported, valued, and empowered.

Thank You

This year has not been without its difficulties. Like many of the families we represent, we have navigated uncertainty, increasing demand, and financial pressure. Yet, as we reflect on the year, we can confidently say that we are ending this academic year in a stronger, more hopeful place than where we began.

This progress would not be possible without the incredible contributions of our **parent volunteers**. To every parent who has taken the time to share their story, attend a meeting, complete a survey, or speak out—we thank you. Your voice matters, and it is making a difference.

To our **parent representatives**, who have given countless hours to attend strategic meetings, challenge decisions, and push for change—your dedication, insight, and

resilience continue to inspire us. Your work is creating a better system not just for your own children, but for many others.

We would also like to an huge thank you to both LIVE, SPACE and Down Syndrome Cheshire who have allowed us to use their premises this year free of charge, allowing us to host more events to reach parents.

We would also like to extend our sincere thanks to our colleagues and partners across the **Local Authority, Integrated Care Board**, and other services. Thank you for actively listening, responding to parent feedback, and demonstrating a willingness to work differently. Your openness to collaboration has laid the foundations for real and lasting change.

Together, we have made significant progress—but most importantly, we’ve shown that **positive change is possible** when families and services work in partnership.

We look forward to continuing this journey with you in 2026.