

JUNE 2025

BNSSG SENDIAS SERVICE RECOMMISSIONING

Parent Carer Feedback





INTRODUCTION

The SENDIAS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support) Service is being looked at across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire (BNSSG) to make sure it is working in the ways that families need, while still meeting national standards.

To help with this, the Parent Carer Forums (PCFS) across BNSSG hosted a joint online listening event with staff from Bristol and South Gloucestershire councils. Bristol Parent Carers also held a smaller in-person session and gathered views passively via online bookings for other events.

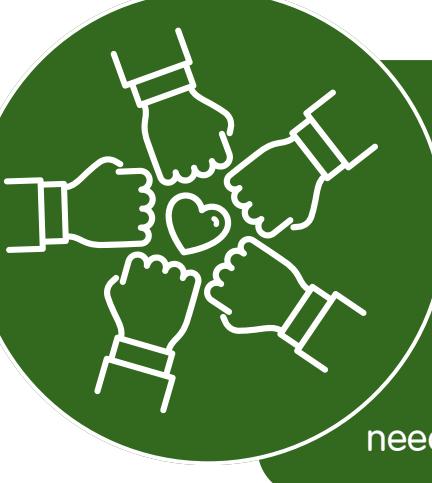
PCFS across BNSSG usually try to give families 6-8 weeks notice for events, but due to local commissioning schedules, the events had a shorter lead-in time of just 4 weeks.

17 parent carers signed up and 12 attended the event to share what had helped them and what worked well. Another 32 parent carers from across BNSSG filled in a short survey via a Microsoft Form to give their views. Separately, 56 parent carers in Bristol shared their thoughts when booking onto Bristol Parent Carer practitioner-led sessions, and 65 families gave feedback during peer support sessions.

EXPLORING THE JOURNEY

During the in-person and online events, parent carers shared their experiences of using the SENDIAS Service, which is currently provided by SEND and You across Bristol, North Somerset and South Gloucestershire.

Parent carers provided valuable feedback on the support they received, highlighting the most important aspects of the service for families. This input will help ensure the recommissioned service best meets the needs of local families, while also delivering the minimum SENDIAS Service requirements.



We would like to thank all the parent carers who attended the listening events, as well as those who completed the survey and registered for Bristol Parent Carers sessions.

Parent Carer feedback is invaluable and will play a key role in shaping the recommissioning of the service to ensure it meets the needs of local families as effectively as possible.

How were the events planned and advertised?



The events were advertised four weeks in advance on each Parent Carer Forum's Eventbrite pages.

The dates and times of the sessions were shared directly with families in each area via direct mail and on social media, with at least two updates in each area. The events were also shared with schools and practitioners working across social care and health, as well as 14 SEND groups in Bristol, who were asked to pass the information on to their members.

Families could provide their views by completing a Microsoft Form or by attending a joint online session with the BNSSG Parent Carer Forums. Bristol also hosted an in-person session and gathered views passively from families booking onto other events provided by Bristol Parent Carers.

What did parent carers at the listening events tell us?



“There should be a dedicated person to support families”



“The current provider goes above and beyond”



“The website can be hard to navigate unless you know what you are looking for”



"Working full time is a real barrier to getting the help we need"



“It sometimes seems impossible to find the right advice”



"Accessing the service is a bit of a lottery"



**“Reading
information
online doesn’t
really help me”**



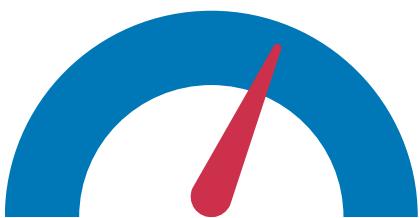
"The service has been so flexible and responsive"

Audience Metrics & Responses

49

Parent carers across BNSSG registered to take part in the listening events or filled in a short survey via a Microsoft Form. 12 registered for the online session and 5 registered to attend the in-person session in Bristol. 12 attended. 32 parent carers completed a Microsoft Form.

62% of the 49 parent carers who registered to attend the listening events or completed the Microsoft Form were from seldom-heard groups.

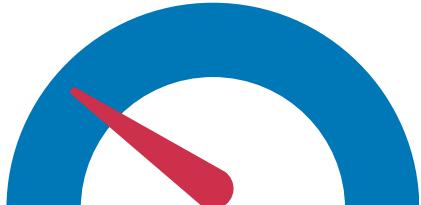


121

Parent carers booked onto Bristol Parent Carer information sessions or webinars, and Bristol families contributed their views on the recommissioning in a passive manner.

Parent carers in total contributed their views on the SENDIAS Service recommissioning.

170



22% of the parent carers who shared their views via Bristol Parent Carers were from global majority groups.

What's the most important thing the SENDIAS Service should get right for families?

We asked parent carers who booked onto the listening events and completed the Microsoft Form (49 responses) the same questions. Families who registered but couldn't attend (5 responses) and those attending practitioner-led sessions (56 responses) also answered 3 key questions related to the recommissioning. Additionally, 65 families shared their views on one key question during peer support sessions hosted by Bristol Parent Carers.

Clear and Accessible Information

Families want simple, step-by-step advice to help them understand SEND law, fill in forms, and know what support is available. It is important that the information is easy to find and makes sense, and that there is someone consistent to talk to.

Support for Families Before Crisis

Parent carers told us it is vital to get help early, before a child starts missing school or reaches crisis. They want to understand their options and feel confident asking for support, and they want to know about the SENDIAS Service as early as possible, right from the start of their journey with SEND.

Improved Communication

Families said having contact with the same person who knows their story makes a big difference. It builds trust, saves them from repeating everything, and helps them feel supported rather than alone.

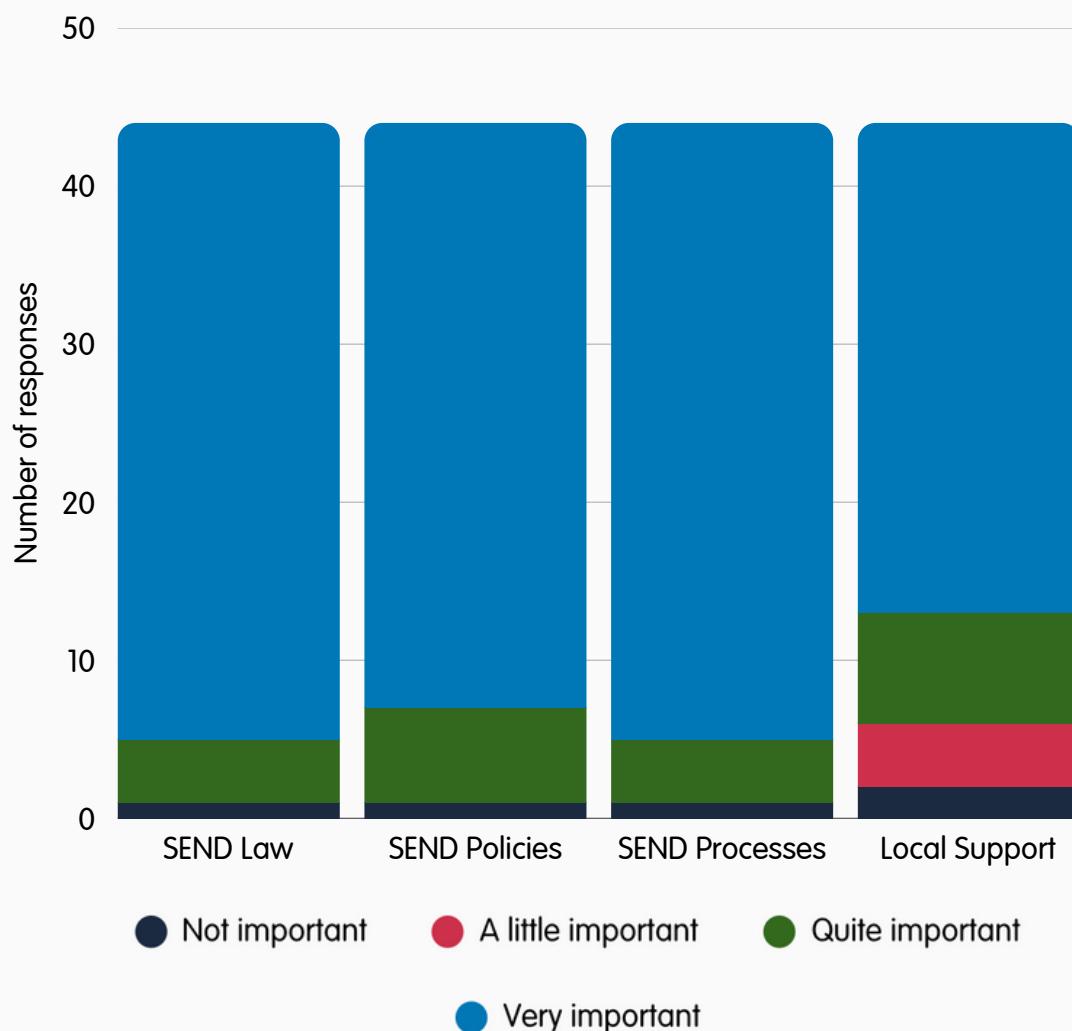
Understanding Needs and Removing Barriers

Parent carers told us they value services that recognise the impact of trauma, understand neurodiversity, and are aware of how systems may not always work well for every family. There is an opportunity to build on the strengths of the SENDIAS Service by continuing to invest in staff training around trauma-informed and neurodiversity-aware approaches, ensuring information is consistently clear and accessible (including support with forms), and supporting families to navigate systems with empathy and understanding.

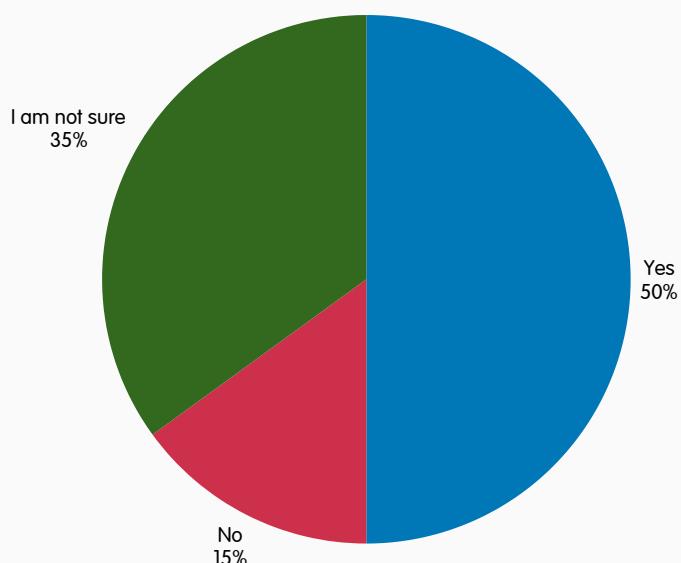
Respect for Lived Experience

Families want their knowledge to be taken seriously. They ask professionals to work with them, not against them, and to understand they are doing their best in a system that is hard to navigate. They would like the service to help other practitioners understand this.

How important is it to you that the SENDIAS Service gives clear and easy-to-understand information and training to help you learn about...



Do you feel that the SENDIAS Service provides impartial advice and support?



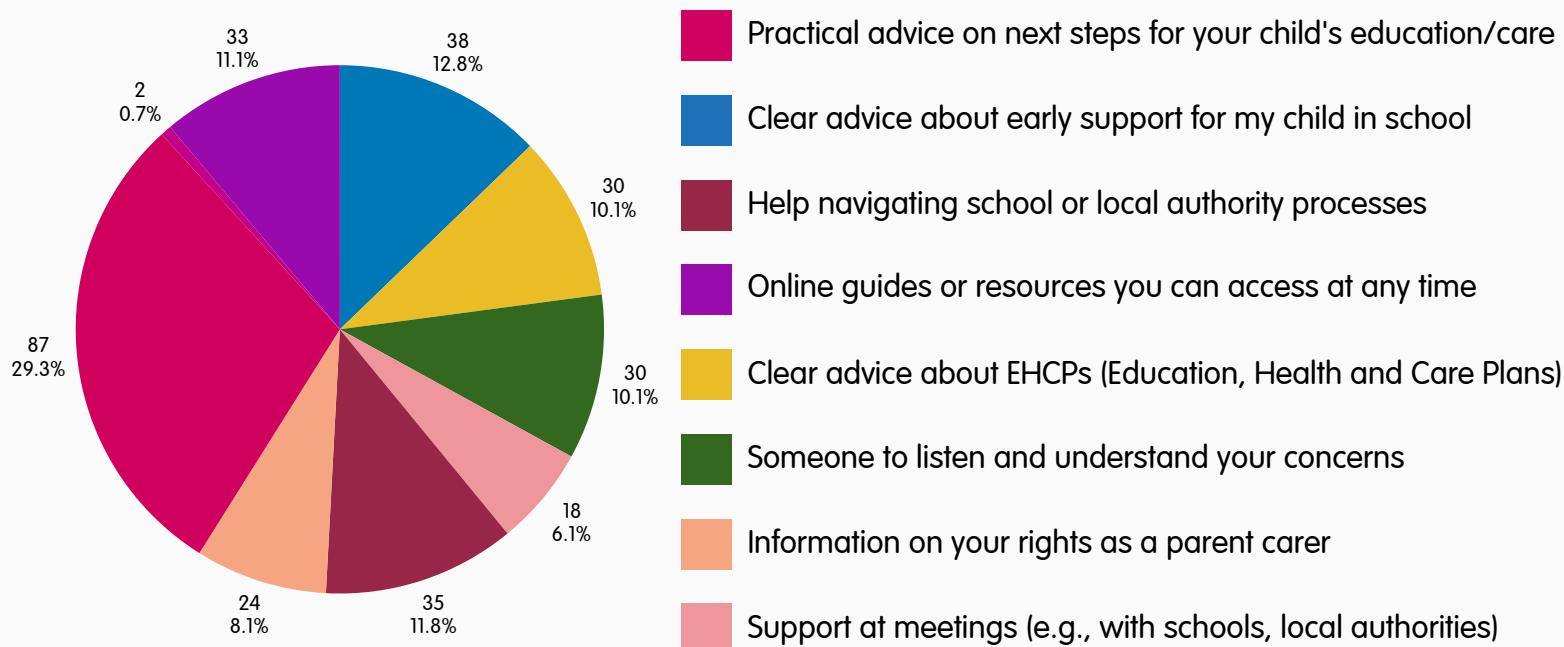
"This system can make you weary as there is so much misinformation – it's hard to know who to trust"

"It was really helpful to speak to someone who wasn't taking sides – just giving me clear information so I could understand what my options were"



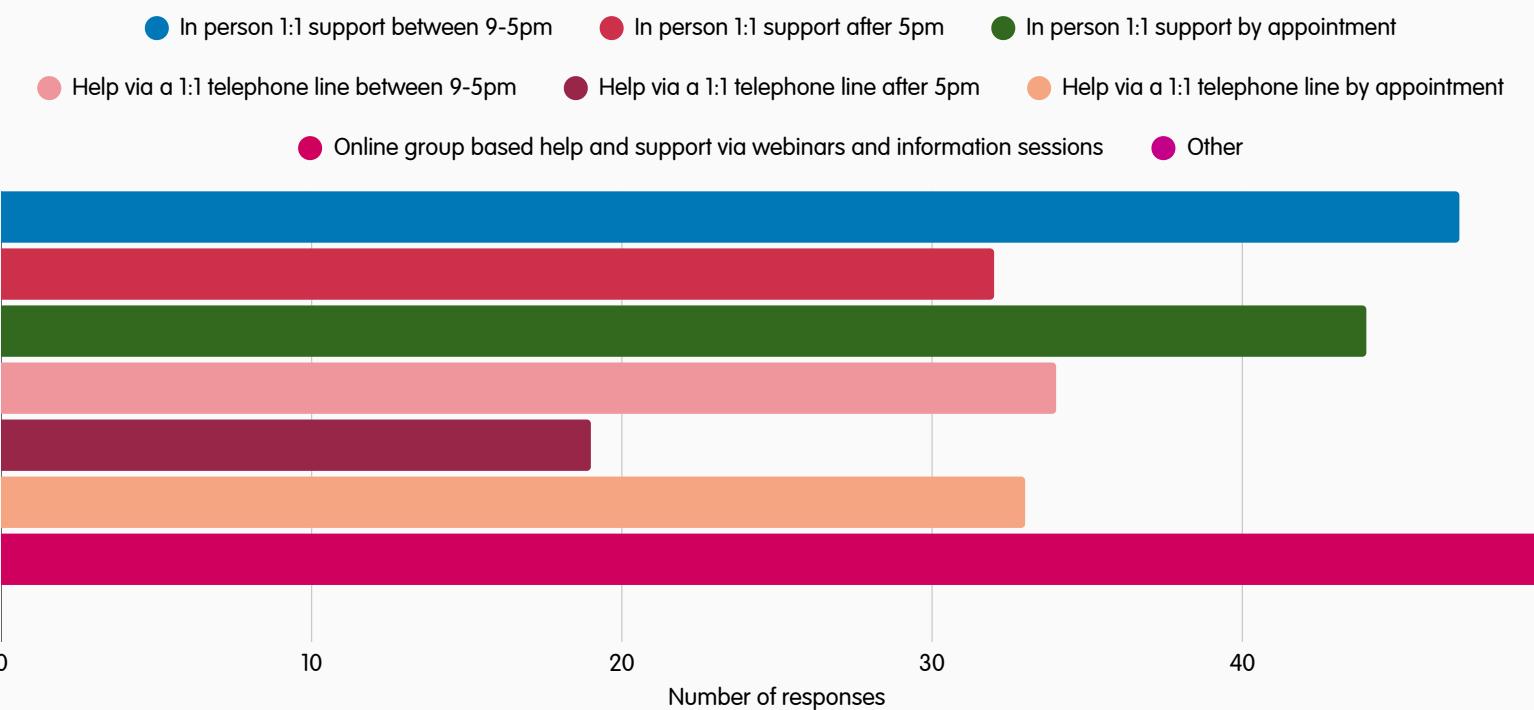
What support and/or advice is most important to you as a parent or carer, from the local SEND advice and support service? (122 responses)

Parent Carers' Priorities



What would be your preferred method of accessing support and advice from SEND and You? (165 responses)

Parent Carers' Top Priorities



Thinking about the SENDIAS Service; what's the biggest issue facing families like yours when trying to get help for your child or young person?

“

Getting the right help within the school, and them understanding how important the disability is (even though you might not see it)

”

“

I did not manage to get through the process to appeal an EHCP to the tribunal in time because I couldn't work out how to get a mediator in time

”

Getting consistent accurate information

“

Zero support and progress with the NHS and the only thing they can say, speak with school, my kid is struggling with ADHD and unable to learn properly

”

“

Unconscious bias and general discrimination, institutionalisation of schools. Conflicting priorities between families and schools, lack of interest in coproduction

”

Communication with the family, 1:1 visits to make a connection with my child and family, support in the outside world, getting my daughter involved in activities outside of the home

What's the biggest issue facing families like yours when trying to get help for your child or young person?

“

There are not enough SEND schools out there, also there is not enough funding for organisations to help and support families like mine

”

“

CAMHS thresholds being so high and pushbacks between school and services

”

“

Lack of support from school and local authority. Schools not having the funds or resources to meet children's needs

”

“

Knowing where to go and understanding how to navigate the journey ahead

”

Access to real life people to speak to with the skills and experience in SEND needs

Next steps

Shaping the recommissioning process

We will share what families told us directly with commissioners. This means the commissioners can think carefully about how the SENDIAS Service recommissioning could best be shaped to meet local needs.

Improve early awareness

We will explore how the recommissioning of the SENDIAS Service can strengthen stakeholder awareness earlier in the SEND journey. This could include working with schools and other services to clearly explain what the service offers, what it does not provide, and how families can access support.

Responding to early needs

Families told us they want support earlier, before problems escalate. We will explore how local services can respond more quickly and effectively, so that SENDIAS Service resources are not so heavily drawn into statutory work. This would help free up the service to support families earlier in their journey, as intended in the national SENDIAS Service standards.

Working together and feeding back

We will continue working closely with commissioners throughout the process. Once this report has been reviewed and the outcomes of our engagement considered alongside feedback from children and young people, we will create a clear "You Said, We Did" document. This will help families understand how their voices have influenced the recommissioning of services.

Informing wider co-production work

Parent carers raised issues that go beyond the SENDIAS Service. We will also use this feedback to shape our wider co-production work with local SEND services and decision makers.

What will happen as a result

of the listening events and how will parent carer participation shape next steps?



Active Involvement

By attending the events and hearing a wide range of parent carer experiences, the commissioning team gained a better understanding of what matters most to families and what they need from the service.



Family centred approach

We worked with families across BNSSG to ensure their voices shaped the future SENDIAS Service through events, surveys and peer support sessions, focusing on what support matters most to them.



Doing with, not to or for parent carers

Local parent carer forums will share what families said with service planners across BNSSG, so the updated SENDIAS Service is designed with families, based on what matters most to them, not planned for them without their input.



Looking at the problem

Commissioners listened to families' feedback to identify key areas for developing the existing SENDIAS Service, ensuring it continues to meet the evolving needs of local families.



Transformation that works

The feedback from families will ensure that changes are focused on areas that work for local families and supports their needs effectively.

More information

The commissioners and parent carer forums across BNSSG will meet to discuss what families have told us.

All feedback will be carefully considered to help shape the focus of the new service offer, aiming to reflect what matters most to families.

SEND and You are the current SENDIAS Service provider across BNSSG and will continue in this role until March 2026.

The retender process will conclude in May 2026 and a new agreement for the next 3 years will be put in place.

Thank you to all the families who shared their valuable insights and experiences, helping shape services that truly meet local needs.

To stay up-to-date, sign up to your local parent carer forum newsletter:

Bristol: <https://bit.ly/3UGAyCG>

North Somerset: <https://bit.ly/3FlwuaC>

South Gloucestershire: <https://bit.ly/4k35M04>

