



Woodhatch Place
11 Cockshot Hill
Reigate, Surrey
RH2 8EF

4 July 2025

The Rt Hon Bridget Phillipson MP
Secretary of State for Education

Dear Secretary of State,

Investigation into Surrey County Council's SEND Service

I am writing to you to voice my support for an independent investigation into Surrey County Council's SEND and Alternative Provision Service. I would be grateful for some of your time to discuss this in more detail.

I chair the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture (CFLLC) Select Committee at Surrey County Council. However, I would like to be clear that I am not writing in my capacity as Chair, but as an Independent Councillor with no national party affiliation.

I wholly disagree with the Chief Executive of Surrey County Council when, in his letter to you dated 13th March, he advised that the issues with the Surrey's SEND Service are in the past. My experience in my role corroborates the poor performance highlighted in the letter to you from Surrey's Liberal Democrat MPs dated 25th February. These issues are current.

I also disagree with Surrey County Council's narrative that the issues we are experiencing with SEND are simply reflective of the national picture. Many are the result of internal processes, procedures, and attitudes. The Select Committee has heard many heartbreaking experiences of the harm wrought on children and families by a Surrey bureaucracy that prizes its position over the well-being of children. The following case study illustrates some of the issues.

Child X, with an EHCP detailing several complex conditions, including ASD, was allocated to a mainstream school, despite expert advice. The child was overwhelmed and became severely absent. The parents made continual determined efforts to source education provision and support, but none was provided. One parent had to give up work to care for the child at home. The child became reclusive, their mental health deteriorated, and they started self-harming. Nearly a year later the child was still without education and any support.

The family is now on the verge of break up, driven to despair and exhausted by dealing with a Surrey bureaucracy that is opaque, ignores their input, fails to communicate, loses correspondence, and takes decisions based on information and reports that are out of date, inaccurate and incomplete.

Surrey's SEND Service is failing too many families and children. These failures have a profound human and societal cost. They also deepen inequality. The children with parents and carers who are less articulate and less capable are further disadvantaged. I do not have confidence in the ability of senior leaders and managers in the Children's Service to resolve these issues despite improvement programmes which have been running for several years.

I look forward to discussing this situation in more detail.

Yours Sincerely,

Fiona Davidson
Surrey County Councillor for Guildford South East
Chair, Children, Families, lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

Cc.

Chris Coghlan MP

Cllr Clare Curran, Deputy Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, SCC

Will Forster MP

Zoe Franklin MP

Monica Harding MP

Helen Hayes MP, Chair, Education Select Committee

Cllr Jonathan Hulley, Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning, SCC

Helen Maguire MP

Al Pinkerton MP

Cllr Catherine Powell, Leader, Residents' Association and Independents Group, SCC