The Family and Childcare Trust is the charity created from a merger of Daycare Trust and the Family and Parenting Institute. Together we bring over 40 years of experience in campaigning and research into family life and childcare.

The Family and Childcare Trust works to make the UK a better place for families. Our vision is of a society where government, business and communities do all they can to support every family to thrive. Through our research, campaigning and practical support we are creating a more family friendly UK.

Want to find out more?
Family and Childcare Trust
2nd Floor, The Bridge,
81 Southwark Bridge Road,
London, SE1 0NQ
Call us 020 7940 7510
Visit our website
www.familyandchildcaretrust.org
Email us
info@familyandchildcaretrust.org
Follow us on Twitter
@FamChildTrust
Introduction

This collection of case studies has been developed to highlight the breadth of work being carried out by Family Information Services (FIS) across England to support families with children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).

This resource draws on examples of innovative practice, collaborative working, stakeholder engagement and the role of the FIS in leading on or being crucial to developing the Local Offer. It also highlights different styles of working depending on the experience, capacity and expertise within teams and departmental structures.

The case studies are not exhaustive and have been developed with the intention of sharing ideas and sparking discussions locally, regionally and in the wider NAFIS context.

They give an overview of how FIS are meeting the challenges of the current tough economic conditions in local authorities; of placing their services at the heart of the new reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014; and of striving to develop authority-wide services that support, inform and advise all families but in particular those with children with special educational needs and disabilities. Above all they highlight how FIS are responding to and meeting the needs of local families in creative and dynamic ways. Collecting case studies such as these is invaluable to NAFIS to provide evidence of the impact FIS have for families; to be able to contribute, with solid examples, to consultations such as on the recent SEN Code of Practice and to inform the on-going work of NAFIS and the Family and Childcare Trust.

The services included were recruited through a variety of routes: Some FIS were contacted following a survey we conducted in July 2013 regarding the introduction of personal budgets for children and young people; some FIS contacted us directly following requests in the NAFIS e-bulletin and others were recommended by colleagues. All those who have been included have completed extensive phone interviews and have sent additional information via email.

Thank you to the Sobell Foundation for funding the production of this collection and also thank you to all the Family Information Service Managers and staff who have given their time to develop this resource.

We hope that this resource will be of value to you and if you have feedback, please respond via NAFIS:

anthony@familyandchildcaretrust.org

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A Parent Champion approach: using parents of children with special educational needs and disabilities to support other parents and ensure they know what services are available.

2014 sees the launch of an innovative scheme in Wandsworth to work with parents and carers of children and young people with SEND to raise awareness of local services and information. Wandsworth is developing the Parent Champions scheme, designed by Family and Childcare Trust, to work with parent volunteers who act as peer advisers to other parents in their communities, with the aim of making sure as many families with children with SEND in Wandsworth know about the support that is available to them and are making the most of it. Wandsworth FIS have been laying the groundwork for the volunteering scheme for many months. As well as attending Family and Childcare Trust training about the Parent Champions, the FIS have been working hard to involve council colleagues in the scheme. Lucia Daniels, the project co-ordinator, highlighted the importance of “creating a sense of ownership and excitement from the outset of the project”. Wandsworth’s Enhanced Children’s Centre and the training department have been involved from the initial scoping stages and partnership with these teams is continuing through recruitment of volunteers, securing training venues and developing a comprehensive package for volunteers. Senior officers and members are also very supportive of the project as a means of consolidating success of the popular WAND card. Senior managers are also being involved in setting some of the parameters for evaluating the scheme to make sure that the evaluation gives information about the scheme’s impact on local priorities.

Wandsworth launched its WAND concession card in 2012, enabling significantly disabled children and young people aged 0–19 who are on the Disabled Children’s Register to get extra support at shops and venues throughout Wandsworth. Local parents asked for the concession card to be established and it is now recognised at leisure centres, local cinemas, Battersea Park Zoo, local hospitals for parking concessions, shops and supermarkets in the borough.

Raising awareness in the wider community

The WAND card is also an important tool in raising awareness of some of the challenges faced by children with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. The FIS was conscious that many children have conditions that are not visible but who may still have special needs or behavioural difficulties and often going shopping or on day trips can be challenging for families. Signing up to the WAND card is an opportunity for local businesses to learn more about SEND and how they can better support customers. Wandsworth describe this as closing the “communication gap” where businesses may not be aware of customers’ additional needs and customers and their families may feel awkward about flagging it up. A local shopping centre who have signed up to the WAND card have recently commissioned Wandsworth FIS to run 5 half-day disability awareness training sessions for their security staff to help them to provide the right kind of support and understanding to all of their customers.

The FIS team felt that engaging local parents in the promotion and development of the WAND card scheme would make it more robust and sustainable. Therefore, another element of the volunteers’ role will be to recruit more local businesses to the scheme. For example, the FIS is keen to recruit volunteers from Asian communities in Tooting as a means of encouraging Asian shops and restaurants to sign up to the WAND card. Volunteers will also be working to get more local families of children with SEND to put their names on the Disabled Children’s Register, sign posting families to the FIS or other local services and participating at networking events in the borough.

Recruitment for volunteer Parent Champions began in January 2014 with a mailing to all 500 families on the Disabled Children’s Register. Networking sessions have been set up to give people more information about the role and training is also planned with the expectation that volunteers will be out in their communities, taking to parents and business by April this year.

One of the lessons the FIS has taken on board from other local authorities who have run Parent Champion schemes is the importance of providing ongoing support to volunteers. The scheme is co-ordinated by a member of staff who has one day a week allocated to this project and other members of the FIS team will each take on buddying of Parent Champion volunteers.

Wandsworth FIS was inspired to set up this project by an awareness of the challenges some parents of children with SEND face in returning to work which were highlighted in a recent employment project run in the borough. It is hoped that, as well as supporting families who are unaware of the support available for them and their children, this Parent Champion scheme will provide an opportunity for parents of children with SEND to gain experience and confidence to help on their journey back to employment.

For more information about Family and Childcare Trust Parent Champions project: www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/parentchampions or email: chloe@familyandchildcaretrust.org
The success of My FIS+ is not just down to effective marketing; it’s also given focus and drive by a specialised Information Officer. York FIS have three information officers and each one has a specialism which reflects priorities in York: parenting, childminder support and disability. The Information Officer with a specialism in disability ensures that the scheme works for families of children with SEND. Its success means that many more families of children with SEND are getting access to information about services designed to make their lives smoother as well as opportunities to enjoy a range of life-enhancing family days out in their local area.

Campaigning for families

Like many other FIS, York also has a role lobbying and advocating on behalf of families including those with children with SEND. Recently the School Transport Service in York set up a new contract which had a big impact on families of children with SEND ability to access transport to after school childcare. FIS and other services from the council met with CANDI and the transport providers to work together and develop a transport structure that suits the needs of families with disabled children.

A sophisticated registration and sign-up system and partnerships with other local disability organisations enable York FIS to maximise the numbers of families with disabled children who know about what’s on offer for them in York.

York has been running a scheme called My FIS since 2006 and they now have over 2500 families on their database. My FIS is billed on their website as their “world famous information scheme” with the strapline that promises “no advertising, just useful information when you need it.” Families who sign up to the scheme will receive information about family life in York including childcare, parenting support and details of local activities and events. Families with children with SEND are encouraged to sign up to an additional scheme called My FIS+, which provides enhanced information and an additional newsletter. Around 400 families have signed up so far. The enhanced MyFIS+ was launched in 2011. Both My FIS and My FIS+ are tailored so that families receive helpful information that is relevant to them. Families signing up to My FIS+ are also automatically signed up for a Max Card which gives families free or discounted entry to local attractions. For families of children with some disabilities or special educational need, having the reassurance that they can reschedule a special day out with minimal cost implications if it doesn’t work out, reduces the stress and financial burden and can make a real difference to families. The Max card also works as a great incentive to get people to sign up for My FIS+.

York FIS have strong partnerships with CANDI (Children and Inclusion), the name of York’s parent-led forum that supports parents and carers of disabled children and young people. CANDI and York FIS have set up a joint registration system through myFIS and jointly promote each other’s work.

Just wanted to say a very big thank you for all your efforts organising a Max card for our daughter, we have received it and already been out to visit Castle Howard which was wonderful – filled with Christmas trees and lights. I am so grateful, having the Max card makes a very big difference to us as frequently our daughter decides she doesn’t like somewhere within 5 minutes of getting in, which can be very frustrating if we have all just paid our entrance fees! Now we can just abandon and come back another day. We are aiming to work our way through the list of places :o)
The approach to developing the Local Offer, information and services for families with children with SEND in Cambridgeshire has centred on the involvement of local families. It has been driven by the distinct and complementary approaches of the Family Information Service (FIS) and Parent Partnership Service (PPS) teams, working closely with the SEND Strategy Development Manager, responsible for developing information for families and practitioners. This is underpinned by a commitment to understand and build on each other’s strengths. Like most FIS, the local team has expertise in providing effective information online and in hard copy, coupled with a solid background in marketing and market research to involve a wide range of parents in consultations. The PPS has a clear insight into the problems that parents of children with SEND face as they are the team that parents turn to when things go wrong. They also have invaluable experience of effective parental consultations, strong local contacts and networks and a range of existing consultation opportunities to draw from.

In 2013 the PPS led consultations to understand more about parental need. Parents were involved in planning and delivering these consultation events and this involvement led to a number of improvements, including how the Local Offer plans and process were explained. It also gave a more realistic sense of how parents would want to be engaged and a realistic timescale. These large scale consultations were supported by regular attendance at existing PPS events and at events run by Pinpoint, a local voluntary sector organisation with a contract with Cambridgeshire County Council to support parental participation. The FIS and the PPS work closely together but remain in different directorates within Children, Families and Adult Services in Cambridgeshire County Council. This has not inhibited close working between FIS and PPS on the Local Offer and a lot of legwork was put into building strong and effective relationships at the beginning of the project. Early on in the process, the two teams met every two – four weeks to plan how to approach things. As the relationship developed this has become less frequent but that initial investment of time at the outset of the project provided a solid basis for understanding each other’s approach and shared commitment.

In this approach, built on strong parental involvement, has made a real difference to the way the Local Offer in Cambridgeshire will be delivered. All SEND information will now be found on one section of the County Council website and the structure is based on feedback from parent consultations. This has ensured that the website will be organised in the way that parents search for information and the types of queries that they have, rather than being service-driven and set out in the way that the County Council structure is organised.

One of the key learning points from the extensive consultation is the need for parents to receive small chunks of information to begin with and then provide details about how to go deeper to get more information, if and when required. New materials, both online and in hard copy, have been developed in line with these principles and are now being tested. An early request from parents was for transparency and clear detail on decision making panels. These are now online.

Next steps are to focus on getting information structured around searches by age and stage, as well as by need. An online Family Information Directory has been introduced and work is now underway to extend search functionality and widen the content from across the whole local authority and partners, including detail on services for adults, such as substance abuse and carer support. Focus groups of interested parents from earlier consultations are engaged in supporting the development of online navigation and taking forward work with schools on their offer. PPS are now leading work to consult with young people on their needs and interests.

Drawing on the strengths and expertise of the FIS and PPS has led to meaningful involvement of families; relevant and accurate information and subsequently developing a robust Local Offer which has already seen a 90% increase in website page views.
Redcar and Cleveland

Good local partnerships with professionals and families has resulted in life-changing support for some families.

Partnership working, a flexible approach and making the most of new technology are at the heart of Redcar and Cleveland FIS approach to supporting families of children with SEND.

Redcar and Cleveland has a dedicated Disabled Children’s Access Officer. The role is designed to help families who have children with additional needs and disabilities to access short break services, activities and childcare. Managing the Disability Register is also a key part of the role. Good relationships with other professionals in the area have raised the profile of the Disability Register so that social workers, health visitors, portage workers, family support workers and others all regularly add children on to the Register as they recognise that it is a good resource. Over 500 families are now on the Register.

The technology supporting the Disability Register has recently been enhanced, to enable the FIS to filter by age group and by type of additional need. Messages and texts are tailored accordingly so families only receive information relevant to them – for example only those families with children on the autistic spectrum will receive information about autism specific clubs and activities. This helps to keep communication targeted and relevant.

Kellie Myers, the Disabled Children’s Access Officer has found that texts are ‘not intrusive and parents can look at them when they have time. People often respond to texts and choose to seek help this way’. The FIS Facebook page is also popular with over 300 ‘likes’.

School holidays were proving to be challenging for one family in the area. Both parents are on the autistic spectrum and their child has a global developmental delay and severe learning disabilities. Following a referral from social services, the Disabled Children’s Access Officer worked closely with them, identifying that the school holidays were a crunch point. Options for school holidays were discussed and parents were reassured that the staff working on the holiday playschemes were trained and experienced in working with children with a range of complex additional needs. Meeting the mum and child at the venue on the first day of the playscheme was also a big help and since then their confidence has grown and the child has happily attended every playscheme since the initial visit.

Another parent was able to access a health and social care NVQ course thanks to help in arranging childcare for her baby with complex additional needs. The family were put in touch with one of the Aiming High childminders who has had specialist training and is experienced at working with children with additional needs. The first session was supported by a Portage worker to facilitate settling in and the childminder has now received additional training with the family in the family home. Mum was able to attend the course and now has more options when the family need respite care or, if she opts to return to work in the future.

Face to face promotion of the service is still important and being seen as much as possible in places where parents of disabled children are likely to be – including parents’ evenings at special schools and activities at children’s centres with portage teams – is a priority. The Children with Disabilities team newsletter, Family Focus, remains popular too with its mix of stories about local families, benefit updates and holiday activity information. The magazine goes to everyone on the Disability Register as well as all school SENCOs and other professionals.

Good local partnerships with professionals and families have resulted in life-changing support for some families. Crucial to this has been the development of strong partnerships with different social work teams, to ensure that all children, regardless of whether they are in mainstream school or specialist education, are aware of the services available to them. The Disabled Children’s Access Officer also works hard to build relationships with teams across the council by attending team meetings – including social work, early support and portage teams – and sharing desk space with different teams throughout the week. This has been hugely beneficial in building relationships, promoting the service and improving information flow – all things which have the knock-on effect of improving the experience of families in Redcar and Cleveland who are seeking help and support in living their lives with a child with SEND.
Like most FIS, Ealing uses a range of approaches to ensure their information reaches local families. The FIS plays a key part in running the Children with Additional Needs Education Fair for children and young people aged 0 – 25 which attracts over 300 people each autumn. The Fair has been running for two years and gives people the opportunity to speak to staff from the council, voluntary and community organisations, the health service, local schools and private companies operating locally.

Partnerships with the local voluntary sector are also a key element to their success. These include:

⚫ Managing the Ealing’s Children with Disabilities Awareness e-learning suite hosted by the charity Kids. This e-learning suite gives a basic level of understanding to practitioners and families of different types of disability as well as policy and legislation.

⚫ Part funding a website, run by a local parent on behalf of Ealing Mencap to ensure other families are up to date with services, events and local support.

⚫ Training local Homestart volunteers, as many of the families who qualify for Homestart support could also benefit from the support of the FIS.

⚫ Training and supporting Early Years SENCO in nurseries.

Maintaining these key partnerships within and beyond the local authority has been crucial to providing a joined up, responsive service for local families of children with SEND and a service where other local practitioners will turn to for training, information and advice.

In 2009, Ealing Council recruited for a one year pilot post of Disability Information Officer. The post was established as a result of work on Aiming High for Disabled People and was located in the FIS. Ealing Parents and Carers Forum played a significant part in designing the role, and two members of the Parent and Carers Forum, with their own personal experience of supporting a child with SEND, were recruited to share the job. One of these parents remains in post, in what is now a vital part of Ealing’s strategy to support families of children with SEND.

The Disability Information Officer started the service by using the ethos and principles of FIS and combining these with the expertise and experience from the Parents and Carers Forum to create a unique and personalised service. Ealing’s Disability Information Officer, has a deep commitment to providing a service which is personalised and tailor-made to individuals. She works with a broad spectrum of parents, including: those for whom English is not their first language, parents who have learning disabilities and those who are just too exhausted and need extra support. She believes that passion is the key to her success along with an unrelenting approach to promoting the service. To do this, Marianne Sherlock, the Disability Information Officer says: “I make sure I talk to everybody. Listening is also vital to the role to help me unpick what the real issues might be.” As a parent of a child with autism, she finds that this can help to bring down barriers when talking to other parents.

The difference that supportive and effective FIS services can make to people is illustrated by the experience of a mother who got in touch with Ealing FIS after her child with autism and ADHD was excluded from school. Within weeks of contacting the FIS, the family had been put in touch with Ealing FIS after her child with autism and ADHD was excluded from school. Within weeks of contacting the FIS, the family had been put in touch with the right staff and received direct grant payments to fund some respite care that the family desperately needed at a very challenging time.

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Jackie Griffin, Barnsley’s Family Information and Involvement Officer for Disabled Children says “Most of my role is around information-creating it, answering queries one-to-one or via outreach and working on a multi-agency basis to do so”.

Reaching more families

Barnsley FIS are at the beginning of their journey using social media to reach and support more local families. Using their Family Services Directory, alongside more traditional methods such as posters, enabled them to respond to over 300 disability queries in the first ten months of 2013.

Supporting new voluntary groups who support families of children with SEND is also an important part of the FIS work. A new group providing support for families living with ADHD and emotional and behavioural difficulties has been set up by a local dad and grandparent. This group was kick-started by one of the specialist schools and is now run by parents and carers who have been supported by Voluntary Action Barnsley on some of the technical aspects of running a group. The Family Information and Involvement Officer for Disabled Children has been attending the group since it was launched thanks to an existing strong working relationship with the school, and it has already enabled some effective 1-1 outreach to take place with one of the group attendees recently being awarded some much-needed short break hours. The Aiming High newsletter is also an important source of information for families and professionals and is written and edited in conjunction with local families.

Barnsley’s approach to supporting families with children with SEND benefits from a staffing structure that encourages joint working and a multi-agency approach to their work.

Barnsley’s Family Information and Involvement Officer for Disabled Children is based alongside the Family Information Service in Early Childhood Services and also in the Integration, Assessment, Disability and Inclusion team. This staffing structure has enabled strong cross-team relationships to be developed which supports good information flow across relevant teams. Working across two teams also improves access to information, giving automatic access to social care systems which means information can be checked easily which could not happen if the post were located solely in the FIS.

The location of the Information and Involvement Officer for Disabled Children across two key teams is part of a borough-wide commitment to ensuring joint working and collaboration. This is driven by a commitment from senior managers to multi-agency working, encapsulated in Barnsley’s ‘One Path, One Door’ strategy for services for families with disabled children. Co-location, which sees all council services located across two large council buildings, also underpins this strategic commitment to joint working and enables effective working relationships to develop.

Multi-agency working also extends across the borough. Barnsley is finalising work on an autism pathway, which brings together a range of agencies with clinicians and NHS commissioners, council teams and parents all working together to explore the journey from diagnosis for children with autism and their families. The NHS Commissioners leading on the development of this work are situated in the same buildings which has aided the development of this strategy developed in response to NICE guidance.

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There was some initial concern about confidentiality and impartiality from the local Parent Carer Forum and other stakeholders involved in the merger. However, a number of strategies were put in place to ensure that high standards of impartiality and confidentiality were maintained and to reassure local parents that this was the case. The FIS and PPS have so far retained separate phone numbers and steering groups to support and oversee their work. They have also been helped by the simple fact of office structures: the combined FIS and PPS sit in a different building to services such as education and social care and this has helped to reassure parents about continuing impartiality. As the services move towards a more unified single service, decisions will be made in consultation with the steering groups and partners about service standards, identity, style, referral and contact information.

East Riding FIS highlighted two issues for local authorities considering building closer working between the FIS and PPS. Firstly, they noted that bringing together two teams takes time and effort and that this is vital to lay a strong foundation for future work. Appreciating the different skills, experience and knowledge of other colleagues is also important. Secondly, it is important that any changes in structure such as this are underpinned by clear thinking and strategy and have buy-in at Assistant Director level colleagues.

Involvement of Parent Carer Forums remains important. East Riding will be working closely with colleagues on the local forum to explore how the services can best change and adapt to meet the requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 and the new SEN Code of Practice.

A structure which combines the work of the Parent Partnership Service and Family Information Service under one roof has been in place in East Riding for over four years. In 2008 the Families Information Service Hub (FISH) was commissioned to maintain a register of disabled children and young people and provide the LOOK AHEAD service which keeps families informed about local support. The co-ordinator of the Parent Partnership Service (PPS) has been based with the FISH since 2009. This merging of services was initially driven by resource constraints: the PPS was set up and run with only one paid member of staff. However, bringing together the two services has made it easier for parents of children with SEND in East Riding to access co-ordinated information, advice and support.

The Parent Partnership Co-ordinator found managing the service alone was a quite isolating experience. The involvement of a number of volunteers helped to address this but it was felt that a structure which brought the FIS and PPS services together would help to make the most of limited resources available. While the merger of the two services was initially conceived as a means of boosting support for PPS, East Riding FIS have found it to be a mutually beneficial move, enhancing the skills and knowledge of both services. For example, FIS officers have had an opportunity to learn more about legal matters such as issues around the law covering reasonable adjustments for disabled children in schools and to improve their skills in resolving disagreements.

This merging of services has enabled East Riding to provide an improved service to local residents as parents no longer need to make numerous calls for impartial information and advice about issues such as school meals, home to school transport, SEN support in early years settings and schools.

East Riding FIS have been outstanding in giving information and support to myself and my son since moving back to the UK. They have made the transition for my son so much easier and have involved him in activities.
Darlington Family Information Service is an excellent example of how strong collaborative working between the Family Information Service and the Parent Partnership is an effective way of ensuring the voices of local families are heard.

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Darlington’s People and Families Information and Support team brings together all of the teams providing information advice and support on all aspects of childcare, activities for children and young people, early years support and information on education including children with special educational needs and disabilities. The team can also offer information for adults and older people. The team provides a service developed from the Families Information Service, Adult Public Information team, Schools Admissions Choice Advice and the Parent Partnership Service. The team was established in 2012 and works as an information hub, working at arms-length from Darlington’s education service to ensure independence but with the right connections with teams such as Education and SEND, children’s centres and health visitors. The amalgamated team enables them to provide a better service to families when and where they need it. In the past families would have needed to make separate calls about services such as schools, after school care and holiday and weekend clubs, whereas now only one call is needed. There were initially some concerns about confidentiality and independence but these have been overcome and staff teams and the public are benefiting from having expertise on supporting families in one place.

Darlington is a Special Educational Needs pathfinder and is testing a number of new approaches including the development of the Local Offer. The Darlington People’s Information Point is up and running and has received nearly 60,000 hits between August and October 2013 following the launch of their new directory, including the Local Offer, in March 2013.

With the benefit of the pathfinder experience, they believe that FIS are in a very strong position to develop the Local Offer because of the Family Information Directory; the information it contains and the benefits it brings. During the process of developing the Local Offer and pathfinder activities, it has become evident that many other SEN teams were unaware of the Family Information Directory. With a few minor tweaks, the directory has formed the basis of their comprehensive Local Offer.

Another key learning point from the Darlington pathfinder project is the importance of working with others to help them to develop their information for the Local Offer. Darlington schools have received this kind of support from a dedicated officer supporting SENCOs and school staff to ensure the information about their services on the Local Offer website is the best it can be. Strong relationships were developed with providers and SEND teams to overcome any reluctance to share information and to see the benefit of the Local Offer.

And collaborative work with the Parent Partnership Service has enabled information about new and existing groups to be shared quickly and promoted through the Darlington People’s Information Point.

Darlington Family Information Service is an excellent example of how strong collaborative working between Family Information Service and the Parent Partnership is an effective way of ensuring the voices of local families are heard.

Maximising the benefits of the Family Information Directory and amalgamating services to provide a streamlined information hub drawing on the expertise of the Family Information Service, Parent Partnership, Adult Public Information and Schools Choice Services.
Putting the Family Information Service at the heart of the Local Offer development and delivery.

Trafford is part of the North West Pathfinder Consortium together with Manchester, Wigan, Oldham and Rochdale. Trafford has sought to build its Local Offer onto a newly launched Family Services Directory using the existing infrastructure of this service. As a result, Trafford’s Local Offer has been published online and can be found via the link www.trafford.gov.uk/fsd

An early decision was made that Trafford’s Family Information Service would support the Pathfinder project. The Pathfinder subsequently provided funding to its FIS to create and maintain the online Local Offer. The Local Offer has been published on Trafford’s Family Service Directory (FSD) which was going through a previously scheduled improvement project. The system allows Trafford’s Local Offer team to add services, web pages, and guidance in a user-friendly, accessible, and simple format. To support this work, a part time FSD officer was given a job in FIS to help with data collection and system development. Further to this, Trafford FIS identified a number of key activities involved in developing their Local Offer.

Key to the whole process of publishing the Local Offer online has been multi-agency and stakeholder co-production. Parents, carers and professionals have been engaged in developing the Local Offer in a number of different ways. Beyond including diverse groups within Trafford’s Local Offer task and finish group, the Pathfinder also held a number of stakeholder events to introduce the concept of the Local Offer to core groups and explore any gaps in service provision that the Pathfinder could plug. Interactive sessions have been particularly successful, including a workshop held in January 2013 where attendees provided direct feedback on the online, published version of Trafford’s Local Offer.

Another example of an event held by Trafford was one aimed at the voluntary and community sector (VCS) providers which focused on introducing the Local Offer, demonstrating the Family Service Directory (FSD) and providing VCS providers with the opportunity to give feedback and suggest improvements. The FIS then worked with these providers to get their services listed on the Family Services Directory. Feedback from VCS providers was that they felt the Local Offer would be a useful tool for them to use when working with families as they were often unaware of what services were available. They also requested that this type of event be held again so they can keep up to date with Pathfinder progress.

Numerous different communication methods have been used to ensure local families are kept up to date with the progress of the Local Offer. These include:

- **Publications**: Countdown newsletter for Trafford SEND Pathfinder and progress reports by the different working groups distributed to heads of departments.
- **Social Media**: The FIS has made vital links with service providers, organisations and parents through Facebook and Twitter; the Parent’s Voice meeting has been held as a Webinar with live Twitter feed and updates on the Local Offer is communicated via social media.
- **Face To Face**: The FIS continue to provide targeted outreach to families; drop in sessions facilitated by FIS; presentations provided on the Local Offer at local support groups and other local forums.

**Key challenges**

Managing such a large information resource and ensuring this is kept up to date has been one of the on-going challenges. Service providers have been issued with their own registration details to enable them to manage their own records. They are sent a reminder every three months to check their information and this only requires minimal moderation from the FIS.

Providing information on the Local Offer to families without internet access continues to be a challenge but has been addressed by creating a short paper version with the key information. A short list function on the FSD allows family support professionals to tailor the information depending on a family’s needs and create a report which can be printed off. The information is also promoted through all their face to face channels and promoted widely to other professionals who are working with families.

**Define local offer guiding values**
- e.g. Accessible, informative, sustainable.

**Audit existing information**
- Family Information Service (FIS) audited existing information on Family Services Directory (FSD) and other sources and identified gaps.

**Define minimum information required**
- In consultation with providers and parents, a set of core information required from each service / type of provider was agreed by the group.

**Develop content plan and collate information**
- In consultation with providers and parents, a content plan was developed by FIS identifying key contacts and information required for each subject area. This was further developed after the draft code of practice was published. Data collection initially focused on health, social care, universal activities and opportunities in the community.

**Family Information Service (FIS) development**
- FIS led on developing functionality and design of Family Service Directory (FSD).
- Trafford’s partial local offer was published in April 2012 and there is now an ongoing programme of development.
Isle of Wight’s Gateway card was set up to reduce the amount of registration forms that parents, carers and young people with special educational needs and disabilities are required to fill in to access short break provision on the island.

Previously, a new enrolment form had to be filled in every time a child or young person wanted to attend a short break activity. Now, once the child or young person has filled in the Gateway card form, they are able to use it to apply for short breaks. The Gateway card helps activity providers to recognise that a child or young person has a disability and/or additional needs and may require support to participate within the activity.

The information provided helps the Short Breaks team to track take-up of activities and plan future provisions so that there is a fair distribution across the Isle of Wight.

The scheme is administered by the Short Breaks team but Isle of Wight’s dedicated Learning Difficulties and Disabilities Information Officer works very closely with the team to promote short break activities and help families to access them. The Isle of Wight team understands that one of the most important things to families with a child with SEND is having a single point of contact with the council. The dedicated role within the FIS helps to make this a reality, supported by simple yet innovative initiatives like the Gateway card designed to make life easier for Isle of Wight families with children with SEND.