



‘Empowering Parent Carers, Enabling Potential’



ANNUAL REPORT

2024-2025

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1. Introduction

2024/2025

West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF) is an independent, parent carer led charity dedicated to empowering families of children and young people (0-25) with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).

We work in partnership, bringing our SEND families views to positively influence and improve local services for children and young people with SEND. In 2024/25 alone, over 2100 parent carers directly shared their views with us, asking for more support, better access to information, stronger representation and crying out for systemic change.

WSPCF began life in 2008, in the sitting room of a parent carer, and in the beginning was run out of a carrier bag! This initial small group of parent carers quickly became involved in supporting parent participation; helping to shape services for disabled children and their families, and the rest as they say is history.

*You're brilliant;
your work influences,
supports, informs and
impacts in positive ways
for our community. I am
so glad that you are
there”
Parent Carer*



1. Introduction

2024/2025

WSPCF is a charitable company limited by guarantee, no. 07955164 and a registered charity, no. 1156360.

Our company was established under a Memorandum of Association which established the objects and powers of the charitable company and is governed under its Articles of Association adopted on the 16th August 2013, and amended subsequently on the 19th January 2024.

We are a member-led charity with over 2000 members, and we believe that active participation from our members is the foundation of our impact. Parent carers and professionals in West Sussex can join by signing up to become a member and then getting involved.

“The West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (PCF) takes an active role in representing the families of children and young people with SEND... to challenge partnership leaders when services and provision are not good enough.”

Ofsted.

2. Our Vision & Mission

2024/2025

Vision:

A West Sussex where children and young people with SEND thrive in a culture of inclusion and understanding, and where parent carers - fully informed, equipped, and representative , are empowered to shape services and challenge systems that impact their families.

Mission:

To build strong, respectful relationships between parent carers, professionals and services, co-producing inclusive solutions, improving visibility, and influencing change through active and ongoing participation.

The charitable purposes of WSPCF are:

To relieve the needs of children with disabilities and/or additional needs and their parents and families in West Sussex, through participation in shaping local services, the provision of information and support.



The Trustees have paid due regard to guidance issued by the Charity Commission in deciding what activities the charity should undertake.

3. Our Objectives

2024/2025

In 2024/25 WSPCF focused on delivering three main priorities

- Strengthen our Advocacy, Influence, and Strategic Representation
- Expand and Diversify Our Offer to Families and Services
- Build Organisational Capacity and Sustainability

Achieving these priorities is underpinned by our five values which shape how we work.

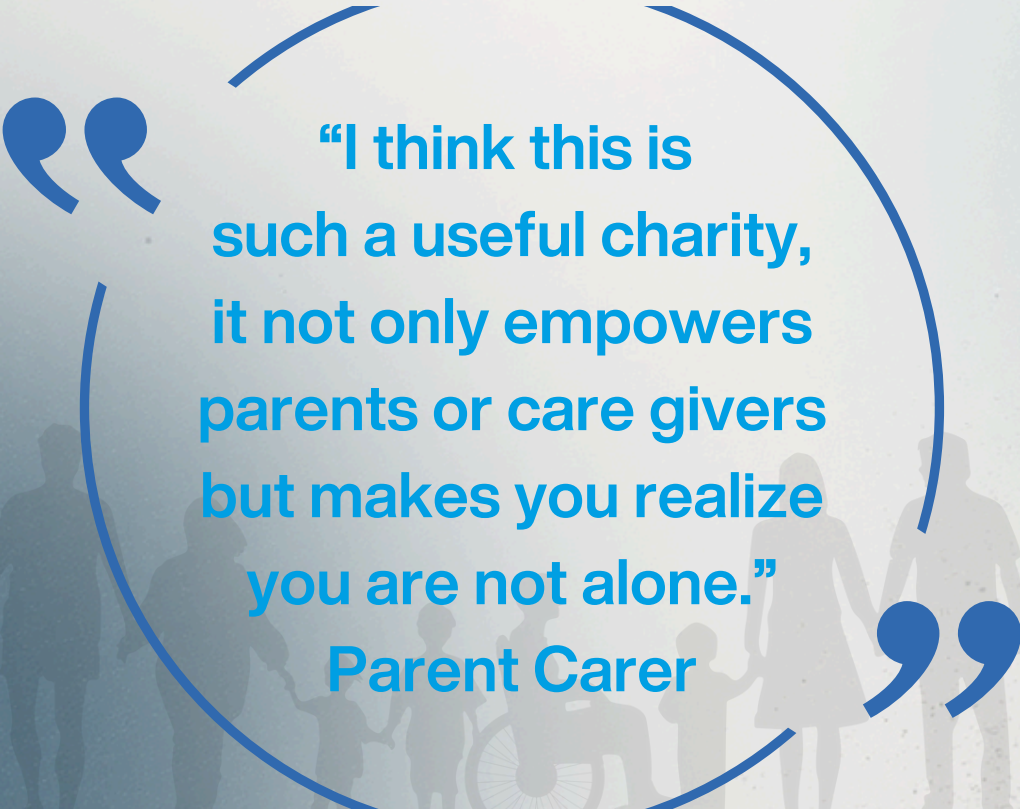
Positivity - We focus on solutions, not just problems

Empathy - We understand the challenges families face

Integrity - We act with honesty and transparency

Innovation - We embrace new ideas to make a difference

Coproduction - We work together with parent carers and professionals



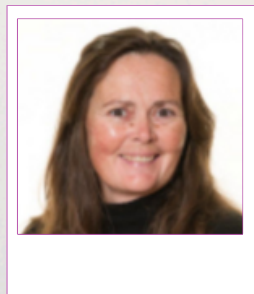
**“I think this is
such a useful charity,
it not only empowers
parents or care givers
but makes you realize
you are not alone.”
Parent Carer**

4. Structure and Governance

2024/2025

The Board of Trustees

The company's directors are also charity trustees for charity law purposes. Under the Articles of Association, the trustees are appointed by ordinary resolution. The recruitment of new trustees will be informed by the skills and experience gaps identified by the skills matrix and a search conducted for trustees able to strengthen the current Board of Trustees. None of the trustees has any beneficial interest in the company. All trustees are members of the company and guarantee to contribute £1 in the event of a winding up.



The Board of Trustees has worked collectively to strengthen the governance of the Forum, with a shared focus on transparency, accountability, and strategic oversight. Their efforts have centred on ensuring the Forum remains aligned with its mission and continues to deliver meaningful outcomes for families of children and young people with SEND.

4. Structure and Governance

In September 2024, after serving the Forum for nearly 1 ½ years, Natasha Boulton resigned as a trustee to focus on her legal career. The Board would like to thank Natasha for her work and support and wish her well.

Between October 2024 and January 2025, the Forum welcomed two new new trustees: Sally Clarke, a former Primary Headteacher with a strong interest in SEND, and Sally Kean, a Speech and Language specialist who works with children and young people in West Sussex and has also worked strategically with NHS Sussex.

The trustees at the end of the 2024-2025 year are:

- John Clifton (Chair) - Resigned 29/10/25
- Lindsey Butterfield (Secretary)
- Maria Hughes (Treasurer)
- Sam Taylor
- Sally Clarke
- Sally-Anne Kean

The day-to-day running of the Forum is undertaken by the CEO on behalf of the Board. Since stepping into the permanent role in April 2023 following a successful interim post, Rowan Westwood has been instrumental in driving the Forum's growing achievements. Her energy, strategic insight, and unwavering commitment to the families the Forum serves have been key to its progress.

4. Structure and Governance

2024/2025

Rowan's leadership has brought clarity, momentum, and a renewed sense of purpose to the organisation. She has also played a vital role in strengthening relationships with strategic partners across education, health, and local authority services, helping to elevate the Forum's influence and visibility. Notably, the Forum's work received positive acknowledgement from Ofsted, recognising its contribution to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND in the region.

To support more effective governance, the Forum adopted a revised structure that includes two dedicated sub-committees; Management and Finance - comprising trustees and senior management. Now fully embedded, the sub-committee structure has brought greater agility and depth to the Forum's governance. Their outputs are reported to the full Board at quarterly meetings, ensuring continuity, accountability, and strategic alignment across the organisation.

Combined with strong leadership and strategic planning, this framework has enabled the organisation to respond proactively to challenges, seize new opportunities, and maintain a clear focus on improving the lives of the families it serves.



It gives me great pleasure to present the Chair of Trustees' report for 2024–25. This year has once again shown the strength, resilience and dedication of our community of parent carers across West Sussex. The Forum continues to grow as a collective voice, representing the lived experiences of families who care for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities.

Throughout 2024–25, we have:

- Strengthened our engagement with local families, ensuring their voices are heard in shaping services.
- Worked closely with the Local Authority, NHS, and other partners to influence decisions that directly affect our children and young people.
- Delivered events, workshops and consultations that empowered parent carers with information, support and opportunities to be heard.
- Continued to build our volunteer base and provide training so that parent representatives feel confident and supported in their roles.

There have been challenges too. The demand on families continues to grow, and many parent carers face significant pressures navigating education, health and social care systems. Despite this, the commitment of our members to come together and create positive change remains unwavering.

5. Chair's Report

2024/2025

I want to thank our parent carers, volunteers, staff team, trustees, and partner organisations. Your time, expertise and compassion have been central to everything we have achieved this year.

Looking ahead, we will continue to reinforce our current priorities by strengthening and increasing coproduction with statutory services, widening our reach to more families across West Sussex, and by ensuring that every parent carer feels informed, valued and represented.

Together, we remain committed to creating a stronger voice for families and better outcomes for our children and young people with additional needs and disabilities.

*John Clifton
Chair of the
Board of
Trustees*



6. Financial Overview

2024/2025

The financial statements that accompany this report have been prepared in accordance with the accounting policies set out in note 1 to the financial statements and comply with the charity's Memorandum and Articles of Association, the Companies Act 2006 and "Accounting and Reporting by Charities: Statement of Recommended Practice applicable to charities preparing their accounts in accordance with the Financial Reporting Standard applicable in the UK and Republic of Ireland (FRS 102)" (effective 1 January 2019)

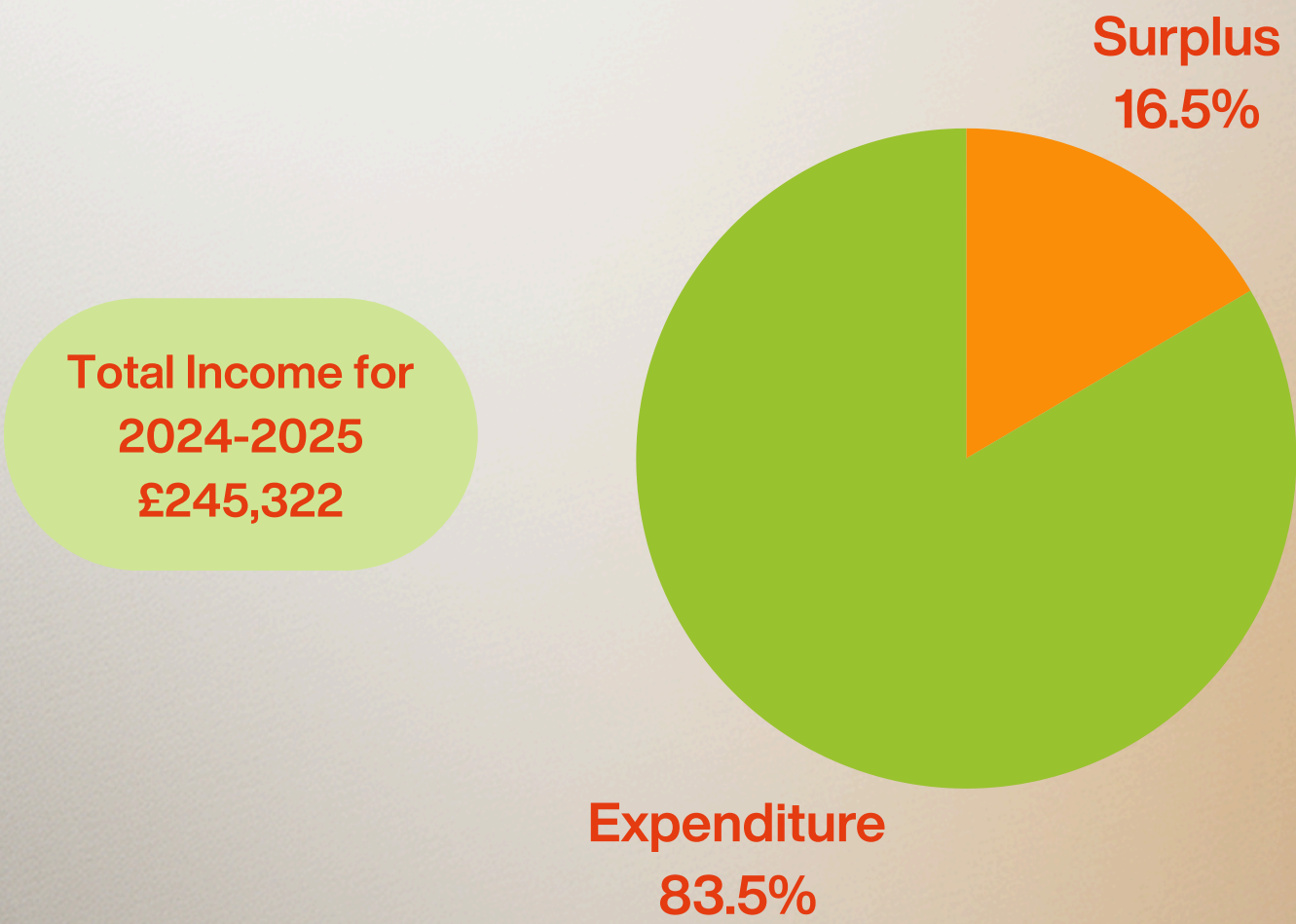
We are delighted to share that the year ending 31st March 2025 has seen us maintain a strong and healthy financial position. In a year of change and progress, we have ended with a welcome surplus, strengthening our reserves and giving us the confidence and stability to keep driving forward our work.



6. Financial Overview

As we look ahead, we proactively preparing for the potential impact of Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), which may bring structural changes to how services are commissioned and delivered across the county. While the full implications are yet to be seen, we are preparing to adapt proactively to ensure our voice remains central in shaping future systems.

Our financial resilience puts us in a strong position to navigate these changes, continue advocating for parent carers, and maintain the quality and consistency of our support.



Reserves Policy

The Trustees had previously established a targeted reserves figure of £85,000. Following a review this year, the figure has been increased to £100,000 to better reflect the charity's evolving needs and financial landscape. In determining this revised figure, the following five key elements were considered:

- An analysis of existing funds
- The reliability of current income sources and new income opportunities
- Expenditure on planned activities
- Future needs, contingencies, and risks
- The consequences of being unable to meet forecasted needs

The reserves at this year end were **£176275**.

Our current policy aims to maintain unrestricted reserves at a level necessary to ensure the charity can function effectively for an interim period of six months (and also to cover any lease costs for the remainder of their term/s) in the event of financial difficulties beyond our control. This level equates to our core costs. The reserves also need to allow flexibility for the fluctuation in workflow and funding. The Trustees have assessed the major risks to which the charity is exposed and are satisfied that systems are in place to mitigate these risks effectively.

6. Financial Overview

2024/2025

We continue to receive the Parent Participation Grant funding from the Department for Education, administered through the national charity Contact. This important funding defines us and our work specifically as a Parent Carer Forum for West Sussex. It provides a valuable contribution to the charity's core costs, and this year it enabled us to strengthen Infrastructure and Communications including refreshing our branding and updating our marketing materials and merchandise.

In addition to this, we were also awarded a Priority Grant from the Department for Education, further recognising the importance of our work and supporting our capacity to deliver targeted initiatives such as parent carer Wellbeing and Mental Health support

We also received funding to help deliver other impactful projects, which align closely with our mission to improve outcomes for families and children with SEND.

The majority of our funding continues to come from a three-year Partnership Agreement (2023–2026) with West Sussex County Council and NHS Sussex. In addition, we receive project-specific funding for our participation and delivery in key programmes such as Autism in Schools and PINS which allow us to contribute meaningfully to system-wide improvements.

6. Financial Overview

2024/2025

Employee costs remain the charity's largest expense, totalling £168,296 this year. However, they are also our most valuable asset. We take pride in being a disability-confident employer, offering flexible working arrangements and paying a living wage. The majority of our team are parent carers themselves, which not only provides meaningful employment opportunities but also ensures our work is shaped by lived experience and genuine understanding.

Our employees, trustees, and volunteers are spread across the county, and the decision to maintain a physical office has proven beneficial. It enables our growing team to come together for collaborative and focused work, strengthening internal communication and cohesion. Core costs are continuously evaluated for value and necessity, with adjustments made whenever opportunities for improvement arise.



Future Plans

We remain committed to strengthening our Partnership Agreement by actively cultivating and maintaining relationships with key individuals at all levels. While this can be challenging at times, our commitment to remaining independent in purpose, it remains essential to ensuring effective collaboration and shared outcomes.

This Agreement commits all three organisations to work together collaboratively and effectively as equal partners, in a sustainable, transparent relationship built on trust, that is ambitious to ensure better outcomes for SEND families, and to improve the lived experience of all children and young people with SEND across West Sussex.



Over the past year, we have seen the value of strong partnerships through initiatives such as the Together for Change panel, which brought together parent carers and professionals to co-produce solutions and improve service delivery. This panel has been a powerful example of how collaborative working can lead to meaningful change.

6. Financial Overview

2024/2025

We will continue to apply annually for the Parent Participation Grant, which remains a vital source of support for our core activities.

In parallel, our CEO is strategically focused on identifying new opportunities for project funding that align with our objectives. We are also developing a Fundraising Strategy to diversify our income streams and raise our profile as a charity. This proactive approach is key to ensuring our sustainability and resilience in the years ahead.

The surplus from 2023–2024 enabled us to invest in the development of a comprehensive Case for Support. This internal document has become a cornerstone of our fundraising and communications strategy, articulating the urgent need for our work and the impact we deliver.

It has helped us shape funding proposals, engage new partners, and prepare for diversifying income streams. The Case for Support reflects our values, our evidence base, and our commitment to amplifying the voices of parent carers across West Sussex.

This prudent financial management has enabled us to deliver a year end surplus of £40,510. This surplus will be reinvested into strengthening our reserves and ensuring we remain well positioned to respond to the needs of our community, adapt to future challenges, and continue making a meaningful difference for families across West Sussex.

7. CEO Report

2024/2025

2024–2025 has been a pivotal year for the West Sussex Parent Carer Forum (WSPCF). As CEO, I am proud to reflect on a period of strategic growth, deepened partnerships, and renewed commitment to our mission of empowering families and influencing systemic change.

This year, we have continued to embed parent carer voice at the heart of service design and delivery. Our Together for Change Co-production Panel has become a cornerstone of inclusive participation, enabling parent carers to shape decisions across education, health, and care.

We also launched Have Your Voice Heard sessions, providing direct feedback opportunities with senior leaders at WSCC. These sessions have been praised for their authenticity and impact, and we plan to expand them further in the coming year.

Our team has represented families in over 2,000 hours of strategic meetings and delivered lived experience training to more than 845 professionals who work with our children and young people, including Sussex Police, Early Help, and Social Work teams.

These efforts have strengthened our influence and helped build a culture of empathy and understanding across services.

7. CEO Report

2024/2025

Internally, we have focused on building a resilient and empowered team. Despite challenges faced by parent carers in the workforce, our staff adapted with flexibility and determination. We introduced a new health and benefits package, prioritised wellbeing, and delivered targeted training to build capacity and confidence. Staff received training in emotional wellbeing, impact reporting, and leadership.

We've held multiple team development days, trustee strategy sessions, and management planning events.

These gatherings fostered cohesion, strategic clarity, and a renewed sense of purpose. Our team; largely composed of parent carers continues to be our greatest asset, bringing empathy, insight, and authenticity to every aspect of our work.

*Rowan
Westwood
Chief Executive
Officer*



Communications & Engagement

Membership

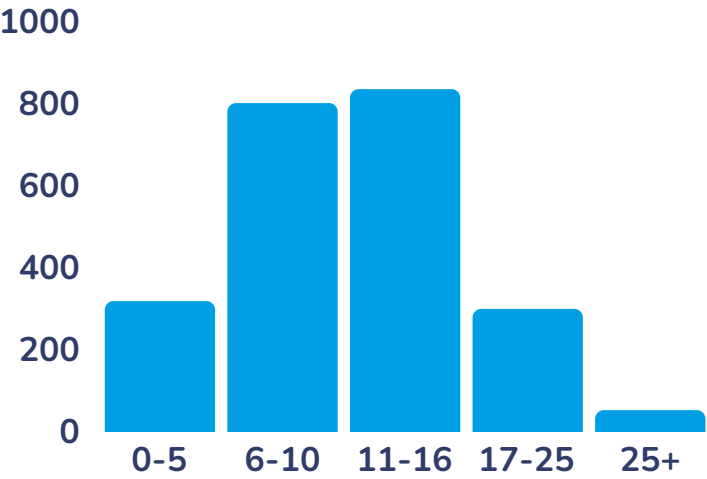
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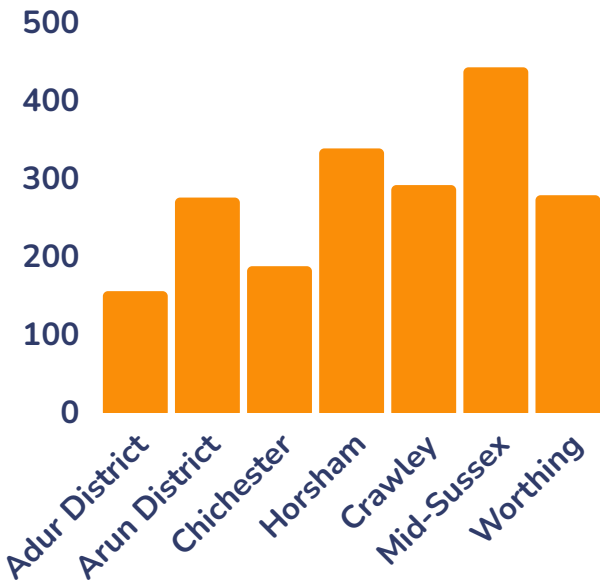
PARENT CARER MEMBERS

21% ↑

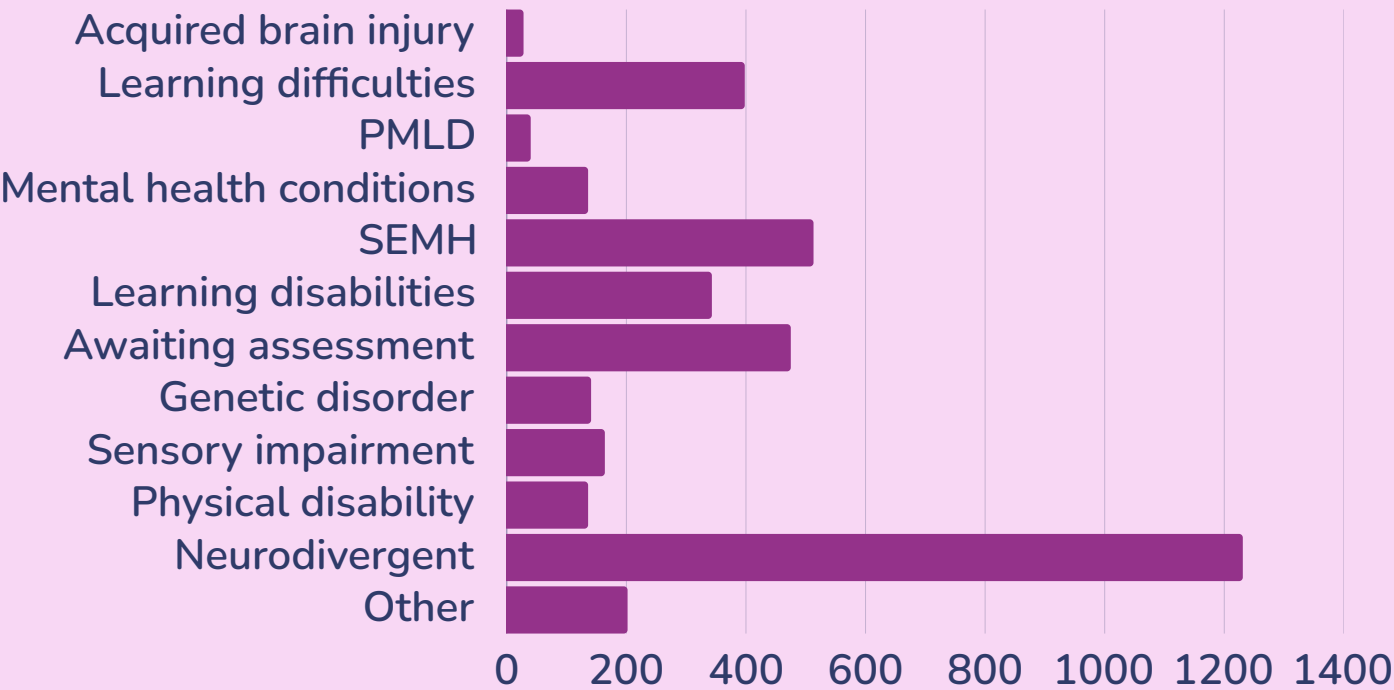
MEMBER'S BY THEIR CHILD'S AGE



MEMBER'S BY THEIR LOCATION



MEMBER'S BY THEIR CHILD'S SEND NEED



Communications & Engagement

Membership

Ensure professionals and services are better informed and trained in relation to SEND and the lived experience of the families they work with

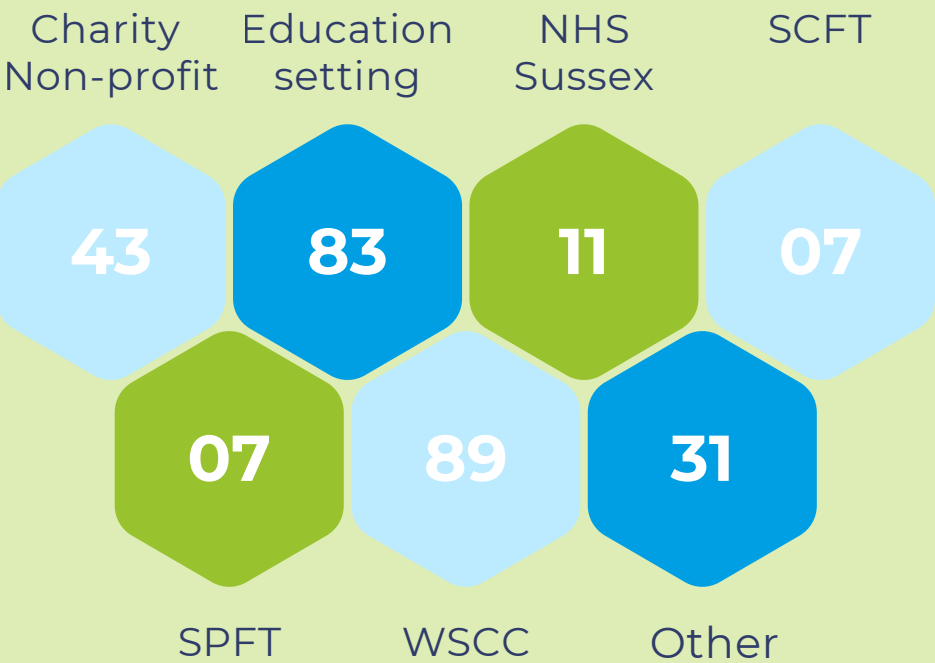
261



PROFESSIONAL MEMBERS

48% ↑

Our professional members



“WSPCF’s continued contribution is vital to keeping children and parents at the heart of what we do.”

Vince Clark, WSCC DCS

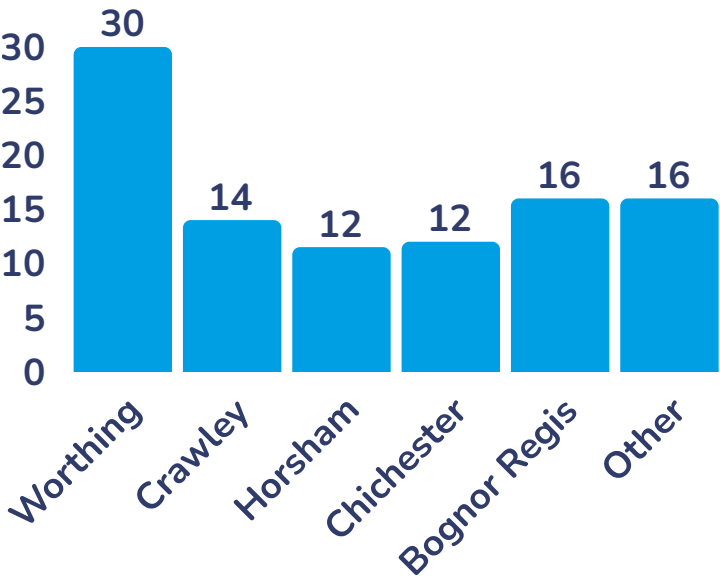
Social Media



FACEBOOK

5770 FOLLOWERS
5382 INTERACTIONS
18,359 VISITS
398 POSTS

% Followers by location



INSTAGRAM

277 FOLLOWERS
372 POSTS
99 STORIES
496 VISITS

% of Followers by location



464
FOLLOWERS

62
POSTS

346
REACTIONS

TOTAL SOCIAL MEDIA FOLLOWERS:



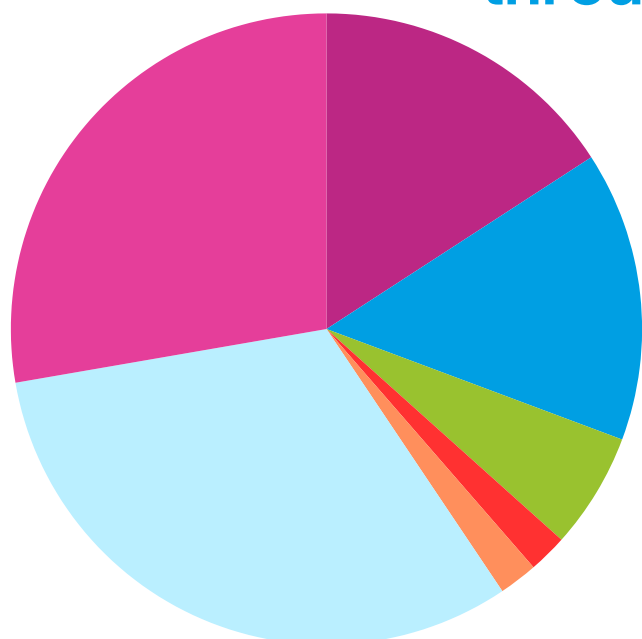
6,511



8. Activities & Achievements

2024/2025

Over **1,000** parent carers were supported through **98** events



- Chat & Chill - 16
- Information sessions - 15
- Wellbeing - 6
- Mental Health - 3
- Have your voice heard - 2
- Autism in Schools - 32
- Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) - 28

Over
2100

Parent Carer
feedback
responses



We responded to
over 200 direct
parent carer enquiries

Over
1000

Parent Carers
attended our
events

*"The presentation was
really informative.
We were able to share
our lived experiences in
a safe space with no
judgement."*

-Attendee.



What do our members think about what we do?



“You're brilliant; your work influences, supports, informs and impacts in positive ways for our community. I am so glad that you are there”

Parent carer comment

HOW ENGAGING WITH US HAS MADE A DIFFERENCE!

- I've gained useful information to help me navigate services 20.6%
- I feel more supported and less alone in our journey 19.4%
- I've accessed helpful resources and support 16.9%
- I feel more confident / empowered to advocate for my child 10.6%
- I feel more empowered to make informed decisions 7.6%
- I feel more able to navigate my own well-being as a parent carer 6.2%
- I've built connections with other parent carers who understand 6%
- I've had opportunities to share my views where I feel heard 5.7%
- I've had opportunities to share my views and influence change 4.9%
- Other 2.1%



Influence and Change

2,000
Hours

of meetings
attended
representing
parent carer
views

845

professionals
received lived
experience training
to help them better
understand the
parent carer
journey

Representing Parent Carer voices on:

- WSCC Education, Health & Care Assessment Panel
- WSCC Resource Allocation Panel
- Mental Health Transitions Panel
- Disability Transitions Panel
- SEND & AP Board

Influencing Strategic planning with:

- The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment, shaping local priorities with families' voices.
- Ofsted and DFE - representing families real experiences

“

“I don't know of any other Parent Carer Forum that does as much as yours.

You are phenomenal.”

Brian Pope, Independent Chair, SEND & AP Board

”

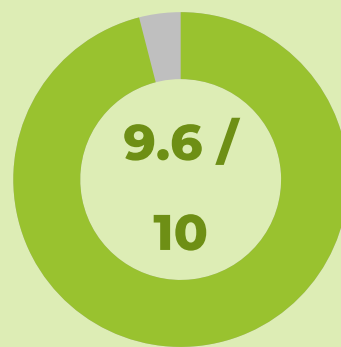
Together for Change Panel

This year, we launched the Together for Change Panel, a 'doing space' where parent carers can actively shape the services their children and young people need.



84%
of submitters said the
process positively
impacted their work

**Average Usefulness Rating
from Attendees**



**How involved the
panel felt**



3.8 out of 5

All respondents would return & recommend the panel!



"It's so lovely to observe, how constructive, calm & positive the discussions were. I haven't experienced anything else where its been like this. Having the participation and engagement happening live in the session rather than saying 'we need to go away and do that separately', it's so fruitful. It just makes sense "

Professional observer from Surrey County Council



Autism In Schools Project (ASP)

This project is an NHS funded Project which aims to create Autism Affirming Schools. The project offers training to all staff in the school and support for pupils and parent carers

32

sessions for parent carers hosted, creating safe spaces to connect, share experiences and learn together

"I have found the coffee mornings extremely useful to feel connected to school and other parents facing similar issues. I have learnt some useful information and have a better understanding of SEN support in school"

Parent Carer

Staff gained greater confidence in adapting environments and approaches to meet autistic learners' needs

Parent carers reported feeling more connected to their school, better understood, and more informed about support available.

Schools and families described more positive and collaborative relationships.

9. Our Projects

2024/2025

PINS Project

The PINS Project aims to foster inclusive, needs-led support for neurodiverse students in mainstream schools by strengthening collaboration between education, health, and parent carers.

Families told us they often felt judged or dismissed when discussing their child's needs in school.

We hosted **28** in school coffee mornings and surveyed **382** parent carers to better understand and support experiences.



"I Found it very informative and felt very supported and safe to discuss my children and their needs without judgment"
Parent Carer



Schools reported more constructive and trusting conversations, and families felt heard and valued.



Change Programme

The Change Programme is a national initiative testing reforms to improve the SEND and AP system. It aims to ensure consistent, timely support for children and young people with SEND or in alternative provision.

We worked across several Change Programme workstreams, including Early Language Support for Every Child, Alternative Provision, and the Specialist Task Force.

Our role focused on



Our input helped ensure reforms considered real family experiences. Parent carer voice helped shape how early support is designed, and highlighted what helps families feel included rather than overwhelmed.

Mental Health First Aid Courses

Our Mental Health Project supported parent carers in understanding and responding to their child or young person's mental health needs, providing practical response skills and the confidence to act during a mental health crisis.



Parent carers told us they often face mental health crises without support, feeling unsure how to respond or access help for their child or young person.

26 parent carers attended our training sessions developed in response to needs identified by families.

100% of our attendees reported greater confidence in responding to crisis situations, supporting emotional needs, and seeking help.

The sessions also helped reduce isolation by creating safe shared learning spaces

“Great course, really well presented and the course content was very informative and practical. I feel I've learnt a lot and would have more confidence in a mental health emergency. Thank you!”

Parent Carer Wellbeing Project

Our Wellbeing Project supported parent carers through offering guidance, support, and resources to improve their wellbeing.

Why this matters:

Many parent carers told us they were managing chronic stress and isolation, often placing their child's needs above their own.

What we did:

We co-produced wellbeing resources, hosted in-person workshops, and created practical signposting packs.

What changed:

90% of attendees reported improved wellbeing, increased confidence to advocate for their needs.



“I feel my wellbeing has improved attending these sessions and I've really looked forward to these sessions and the support and encouragement they provide as well as new knowledge I've gained”

Health Inequalities Project

Funded by NHS Sussex, this project aimed to reduce health inequalities experienced by children and young people with SEND and their families.

What we did - collected your views to highlight and inform priority issues, including:

- to keep you up to date about ADHD medication shortages
- finding out about your views on specialist Dental access
- what was important to you in terms of waiting list support
- updating paperwork for Annual Health checks for young people with learning disabilities

Health partners gained clear insight into your lived experience, leading to:

- Improved communication approaches
- Clearer and more accessible information
- New ways of involving parent carers in health service planning



“Hearing these lived experiences helps us understand what families are actually facing and how small changes in communication can make a big difference.”

Health professional reflection from feedback



10. Looking Ahead

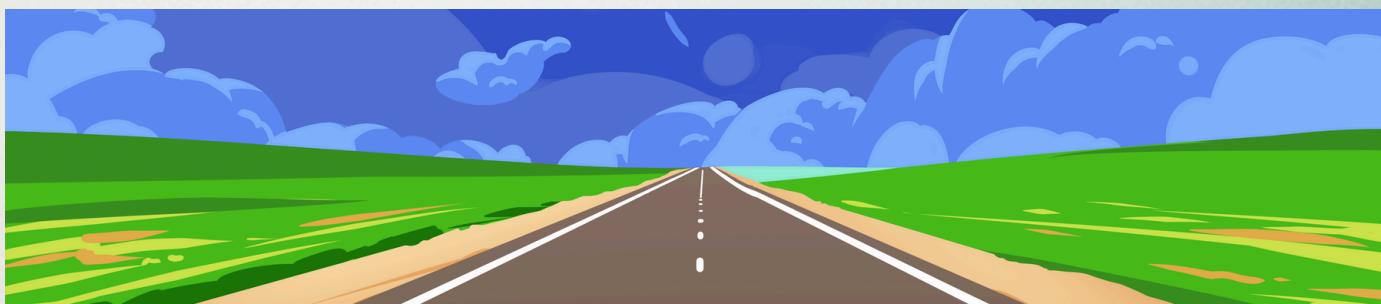
2024/2025

This financial year, we began developing a new, stronger Strategic Plan to guide the Forum through the rest of this decade. As part of this work, we have already refreshed our vision, mission, and values, outlined at the beginning of this report.

We are intentionally holding back on finalising the full strategy until there is greater clarity around external developments, including the ongoing implementation of the SEND and AP Improvement Plan and the anticipated Schools White Paper.

We also need to consider the Law Commission's review of disabled children's social care and SEND law, published in September 2024. This review has brought renewed attention to the legal frameworks underpinning SEND provision, and its recommendations, expected in Autumn 2025, are likely to influence future policy and practice.

At the same time, we cannot disregard the pressures on the systems that must be better equipped to support our children and young people with SEND. These pressures include high-needs funding deficits, workforce shortages, and a lack of joined-up support, all of which contribute to the challenges families face.



Together, these national reforms and systemic strains could significantly reshape how services are commissioned, delivered, and accessed by SEND families.

As such, we remain proactive and focused on readiness, not only in response to national developments, but also in recognising the local picture in West Sussex that continues to shape our priorities and strategic direction.

In West Sussex:

- The number of children with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has continued to rise, reflecting growing and complex needs across the county.
- The local SEND inspection in November 2023 found that children and young people experience inconsistent outcomes.
- Families have told us they often feel unheard, face long waits, and struggle to access timely help.

In this context, our strategy must be more than a plan, it must be a commitment to SEND families - to listen deeply, act boldly, and continue to champion inclusion, equity, and lived experience.

We are filled with determination to make a positive impact on the lives of children and young people (and their families) with SEND in West Sussex. With your continued support, we look forward to achieving even greater milestones in the year ahead.

11. Acknowledgements

2024/2025

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to our dedicated team, volunteers, members, parent carers, and social media followers. Your commitment has been instrumental in our success.

We also express our thanks to all of our funding partners and project supporters, as we couldn't do this without your help.

The Trustee report was approved by the WSPCF Board of Trustees.



Maria Hughes

Board of Trustees
West Sussex Parent Carer Forum
Date: 13.11.2025

***Thank you
for being part of the
West Sussex Parent Carer Forum journey.***