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4.0 Identifying additional needs

For many babies and very young children, additional needs may not be apparent and only start to emerge as the child gets older. Whilst other children's needs may be identified before birth or picked up in the first few months of life.

If a family is already known to local services because of their child's additional needs, then the family may have become accustomed to attending meetings about their child, either as part of ongoing assessment of their child's needs or for therapeutic treatment. These meetings can be emotionally draining as families often have to tell their child's 'story' multiple times. Therefore, it is vitally important that the very first meeting they have with a prospective childcare provider is a positive experience and leaves them feeling optimistic about their child starting early years provision.

For children with identified needs, the SENCO or manager is usually the first person that the family has contact with at the setting. Ideally the first meeting will be with the SENCO and held at the family home because this will help put parents/carers and their child at ease and start to establish an important trusting relationship. It also allows the child to meet the SENCO in a relaxed familiar environment.

If a home visit is not possible then the length of the first meeting in the provision will need to be flexible and determined by the family. It may be appropriate for some parents/carers to have a ten minute chat at this stage, whereas others will prefer to share their information and complete paperwork all in one go. If the parents/carers are particularly anxious or the child has complex needs then it is advisable to plan for another meeting to collect more information.

Education, Health and Care plan

If the decision of the EHC assessment is to draw up an EHC plan, the local authority will use the information gathered to:

- establish and record the views, interests and aspirations of the parents/carers and child
- provide a full description of the child's special educational needs and any health and social care needs
- establish outcomes across education, health and social care based on the child's needs and aspirations
- specify the provision required, and how education, health and care services will work together to meet the child's needs and support the achievement of the agreed outcomes

The local authority should collaborate with the parents/carers in the preparation of the EHC plan. This aims to ensure that both their views and their child's preferences are taken into account, for example, requesting a specific placement for their child. If a provider is named in a plan and the local authority agrees with the request and agrees the placement with a provider, they must fund that provision. However, the local authority cannot require an independent, private or voluntary provider to admit a child, unless the provider agrees. Education, health and care plans can be issued for a child from birth up to the age of 25.

The plans should positively describe what the child can do and has achieved to date. The plans must be SMART and focus on short term outcomes and long term aspirations for the child, including family and community support.