

# PARENT CARER PARTICIPATION 2023 / 2024

A POWERFUL MOVEMENT FOR CHANGE IN CHALLENGING TIMES



contact

*For families  
with disabled children*

Annual National Conference of  
Parent Carer Forums 2023/24

#LetsParticipate24



National Network of Parent Carer Forums  
'Our Strength is our Shared Experience'  
[www.nnpf.org.uk](http://www.nnpf.org.uk)



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Delivery partner of



# We are Contact, the charity for families with disabled children

## A YEAR OF INCREASING CHALLENGES FOR FAMILIES WITH DISABLED CHILDREN

The ongoing cost of living crisis, increasing pressures on schools, and the NHS and social care workforce crisis have been felt disproportionately by the families that Contact supports.

### Here when families need us

Throughout a year of change, Contact has been there for families when they need us, and whatever their child's condition, to provide transformative information, advice, and support.

### Reaching more families with disabled children than ever

We are now reaching more families with disabled children than ever before through our digital services, helpline and online, and face-to-face programmes of workshops, family events, and our work in hospitals.

In the financial year 2023/2024 we:

- **helped 413,000 families with disabled children with information, advice, and support**
- **received over 1.3m visitors to our website**
- **supported 1,374 families in hospital**
- **welcomed 2,712 children and their parents to our family events.**

## How we work

Contact works alongside individual and groups of parents and carers to ensure their voices are heard when and where it matters – and despite the challenges of political uncertainty and continued austerity this year, we have helped secure some significant changes for the families we support.

### Helping families navigate the maze of support

After finding out their child is disabled or has additional needs, many families simply don't know where to turn and are faced with a confusing maze of routes to navigate to get support for their child and themselves. It's a time that can be stressful and emotional when everything, from getting a diagnosis, receiving equipment and adaptations to the home, as well as finding a suitable place at school, can feel like a never-ending battle. And the battles parent carers face are getting harder year on year. That's why Contact's support – helping families navigate those mazes, providing information that is specific to them, and much needed emotional support – is more important than ever.

For information on Contact's support offer for Parent Carer Forums, visit the participation pages of our website: [contact.org.uk](https://www.contact.org.uk)



# Participation and Family Support Consortium

## CONSORTIUM PARTNERS

Contact is the lead partner in a multi-organisation consortium delivering a three-year Department for Education (DfE) funded Participation and Family Support programme. Partners in the consortium are:

- **Contact and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF):** the strategic participation of parent carers of children and young people aged 0 – 25 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND).
- **Kids and the Council for Disabled Children (CDC):** local and strategic participation of children and young people aged 0 – 25 with SEND.
- **Contact and CDC - Information, Advice, and Support for families:** Contact provides a national helpline and online support for families, and CDC delivers support and training to local SEND Information Advice and Support services (SENDIASs).

Each organisation in the consortium is a long-standing SEND delivery partner with vast experience in their respective fields. Contact has supported the development of parent carer forums (PCFs) and administered their annual DfE parent carer participation grant over the last 16 years.

## EMPOWERING FAMILIES TO INFLUENCE SERVICES

By providing families with the right information, advice, and support at the time that they need it, their knowledge and confidence is increased. In time many parent carers and children and young people are empowered to become advocates for their own families, and to influence service development locally, regionally, and

nationally by becoming involved in young people's participation groups, parent carer forums (PCFs), local support or campaign groups like Contact's Changemakers.

## EFFECTING CHANGE IN DIFFERENT WAYS

By using different approaches they each effect change for SEND services across England as well as shaping policy and legislation in different ways.

The parent carers and children and young people involved in PCFs, FLARE and the Collective (two groups of young people with additional needs) work constructively and proactively in a solution-focused way with SEND partners in education, health, social care, local organisations, the DfE, NHS England, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC), and other government departments to co-produce changes, acknowledging the value, experience and expertise of everyone involved. They work across services, are pan-disability, and focused on bringing about systemic change.

## CONTACT'S SUPPORT FOR FORUMS

During 2023-24 Contact's parent carer participation team and Associates provided over 5,968 hours of support to the 153,249 parent carer members of (up to) 153 parent carer forums working strategically in local areas across England.

For information on Contact's support offer for parent carer forums, visit the participation pages of our website at: [contact.org.uk](https://www.contact.org.uk)





# A word of thanks



With each passing year, the landscape in which Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) operate becomes even more challenging. Yet, they are still striving hard to have influence on local, regional, and national services, and policy. The environment is tough, the ask bigger each year, yet still we are witnessing some amazing outcomes and learning of some of the achievements from PCFs that continue to make such a difference to families. Some of these case studies can be found on our Success Stories page. Our thanks to each and every

member of each PCF in England for your hard work, determination, and dedication. Without you, many more families would struggle to be heard, and service providers and politicians really need to hear what you have to say!

**Carolyn Deveney, Assistant Director of Parent Engagement, Contact**



Parent Carer Forums have continued to enhance and develop parent carer participation in their local areas and beyond. They have worked tirelessly with parent carers and strategic partners to influence for services that are responsive to the needs and aspirations of families with children with SEND. Together, and through their National Network of Parent Carer Forums, they are a powerful movement for change, championing genuine parent carer participation and co-production. Thank you to all those who work so hard to run their forums, actively listening

to what we know are too often heartbreaking experiences, and working with services and systems under extreme pressure. We are looking forward to continuing to work together to support parent carer participation.

**Kate Lovelace-Collins, Head of Parent Carer Participation, Contact**

# Our year in numbers



Forum membership has grown significantly, from 127,921 to **153,249** parent and carer members an increase of 19.79%

**1,238**

parent carers were directly involved in running the forum or in organising parent participation work



**141,604**

parent carers shared their knowledge and experience via drop-in sessions, surveys, consultations and more, providing crucial insight to help forums influence local decision-makers



**1,871**

parent carers represented families strategically in local meetings with service providers and partners, an increase of just over 1,000 from 2022/23

The largest increase was to forums' online reach, which has gone up by just over 100,000 to a staggering

**427,848**



# The case for change

## UPDATED POSITION ON THE SEND AND ALTERNATIVE PROVISION IMPROVEMENT PLAN

2023/2024 was another year fraught with challenges, with the continuing underfunding of services meaning more families failing to get the support they are entitled to.

### Local authority services in crisis

Change Programme Partnerships and Safety Valve attempted to stabilise the finances of local areas with many entering or teetering on the edge of bankruptcy. We saw high tribunal rates and services seemingly blaming parents for the crisis due to their not unreasonable requests for adequate support for their children and young people.

### Parent carer forums continue to influence change

Despite these challenges, Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) across the country continued to work in co-production to ensure that providers kept the needs of children and families at the front and centre even when making difficult decisions. .

PCFs' resilience has been tested to the limit since the pandemic, and now more than ever with inflation and the cost-of-living crisis meaning that PCFs' funding must go even further than before.

## A glimmer of hope

July's General Election resulting in a new government and the promise of change, the recognition from government that the SEND system is in crisis, and the welcome boost in investment in SEND in the government's Autumn budget have all delivered a glimmer of hope that the work forums continue to do will result in meaningful change, and better services, for children.

### Working as key partners of the new government

Parent Carer Forums and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) will be key partners of the new government, helping to pave the way for much needed systemic change and cultural shift towards an inclusive education system that meets the needs of all children and young people.

# Local area SEND inspections

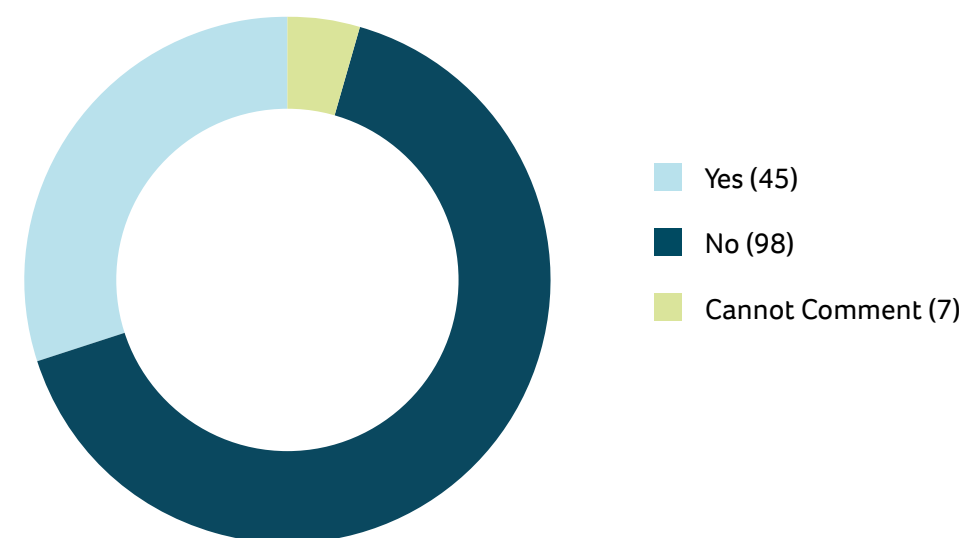
The new local area SEND inspection framework began this year and 33 Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) reported that their area had been inspected during 2023/2024.

All PCFs in the inspected areas were involved in the process, with more than three-quarters being fully involved.

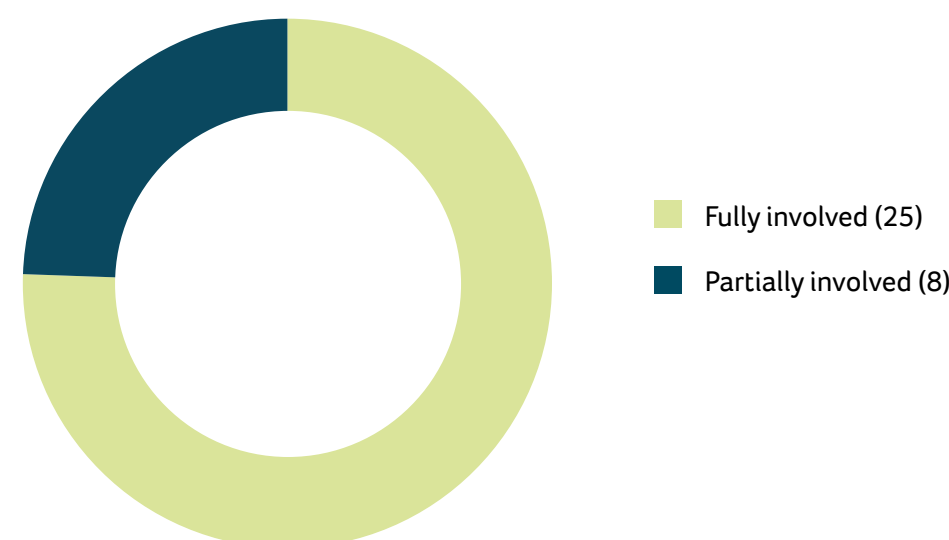
## Managing the extra work

60.6% of PCFs struggled with the additional work involved in the inspection, whilst 30% felt that it was manageable. Some forums were unable to attend all meetings involved in the inspection.

Areas going through a local area SEND inspection during 2023/2024



How involved forums were in the inspection or revisit process

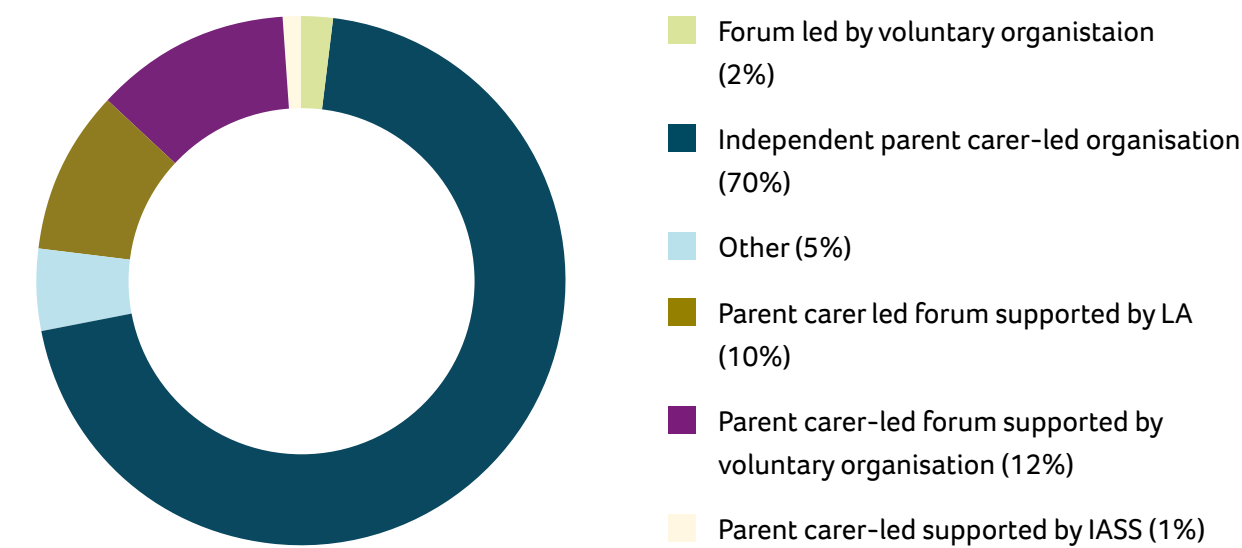


# Forum statistics 2023/2024

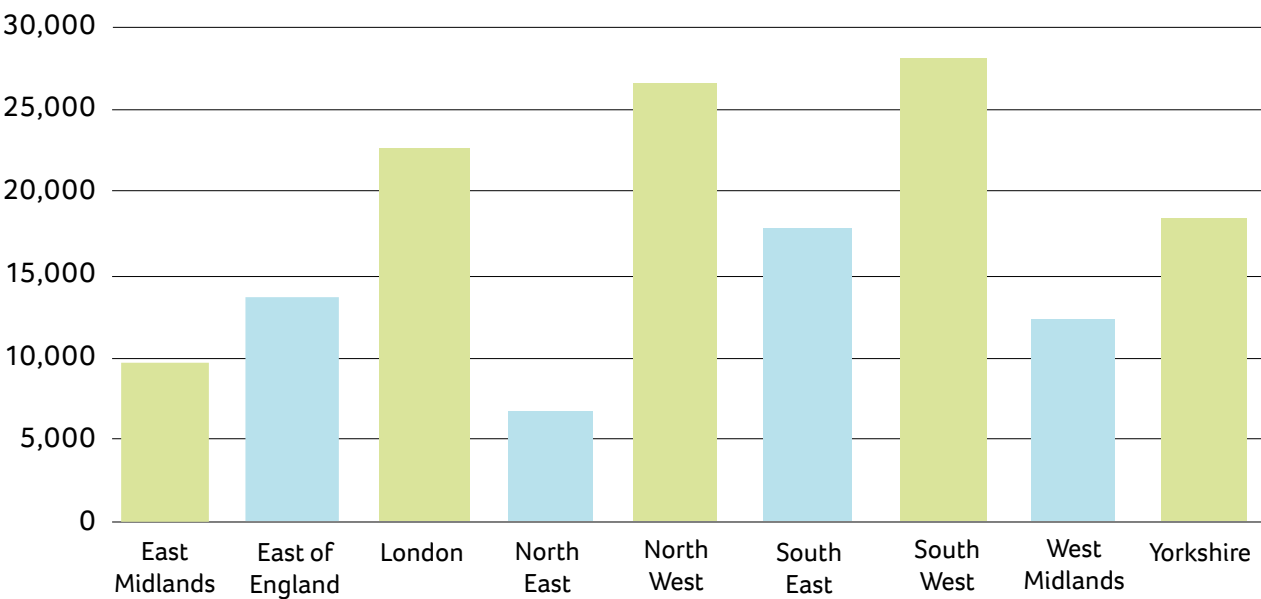
## FORUM STATUS 2023/2024

Forum statuses remained static during 2023/2024. 70% of PCFs remain fully independent organisations, up from 68% during 2022/2023.

Parent carer forum status 2023/2024



Parent carer forum membership by region



## FORUM LEGAL STATUS 2023/2024

Forums' legal structures changed during 2023/2024 with more PCFs becoming Charitable Incorporated Organisations, Community Interest Companies or charities, and a 5% decrease in those who are constituted groups.

There was a small increase in the number of unincorporated associations and PCFs with no legal status. Some of these are newly established forums.

Charitable Incorporated Organisation (CIO)	10%
Community Interest Company (CIC)	21%
Constituted group	43%
None	4%
Other	5%
Registered Charity	15%
Unincorporated Association	2%
Total	100

# Strategic engagement of parent carer forums locally

There was a slight decline in the number of forums co-producing with their local strategic partners, except for Parent Carer Forums’ relationships with health, which saw an upturn in co-production to 41.6%. The figure for co-production and participation combined remained static.

## EDUCATION PARTNERS

The percentage of Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) co-producing with their education partners declined slightly during the year to 43% (from 46.3%). However, the same number as last year were either co-producing (41.6%) or participating (30.9%) with education partners.

## SOCIAL CARE PARTNERS

This year 16.8% of PCFs were co-producing with social care colleagues, and 32.9% are participating.

There was a drop in co-production with social care of 3.2%, whilst 32.9% were participating with social care partners. This is the second year that co-production with social care colleagues has fallen, which is concerning. It is also concerning that 10% of PCFs still report that they have no working relationship with social care.

## HEALTH PARTNERS

There was an upturn in co-production with health partners to 41.6%. The figure for co-production and participation combined remained static.

## SENDIASS PARTNERS

There was a 4.3% increase in the number of PCFs co-producing with their local SENDIAS services to 38.3% (57 PCFs) and a further 28% (42) are participating – the same as 2023/2024.

Six forums (4%) report not having a working relationship with SENDIASSs, up 1% from last year. 94% of forums said that they had a positive relationship with their local SENDIASSs, up 5% from last year, but only 20% have a formal working agreement. This is down by 2% from last year.

## ENGAGING CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE

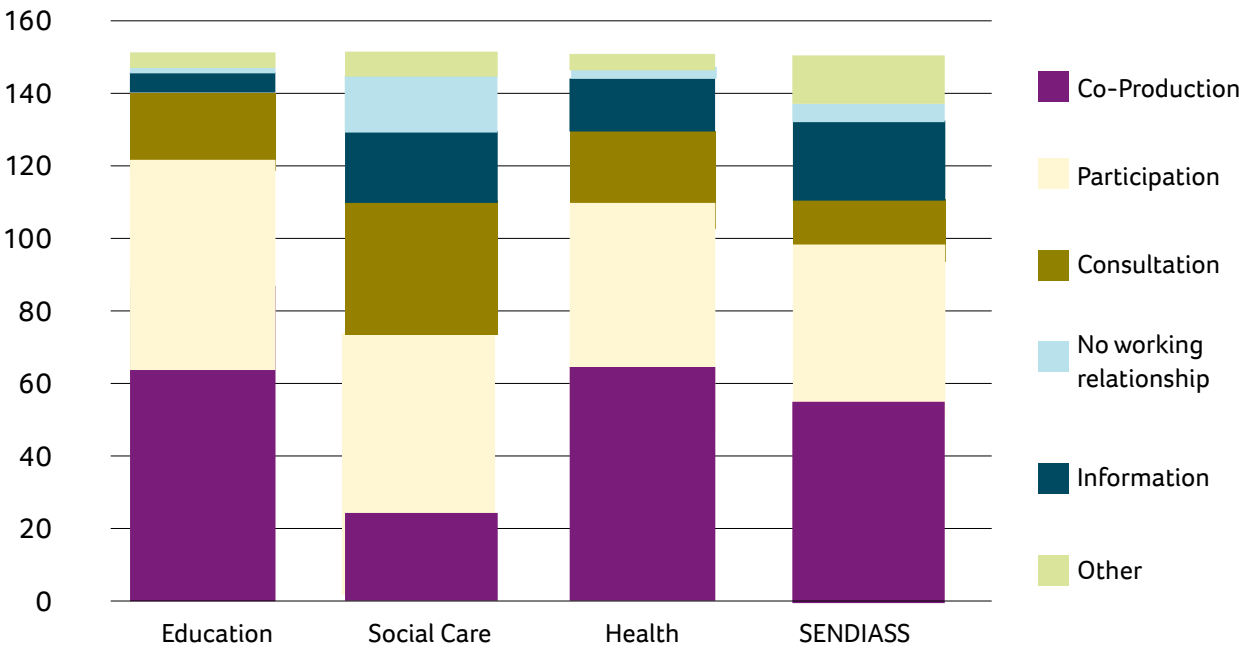
88.6% of PCFS are aware of efforts locally to engage children and young people and the majority of PCFs are connected with and promoting the inclusion of children and young people.

## KEY STATS

- **Education:** co-production down by 3.3%
- **Social care:** co-production down by 3.2%
- **Health:** co-production up to 41.6%, slight decrease in the numbers participating.



How forums described their relationships with local partners in 2023/2024





# Inclusive and welcoming Parent Carer Forums

The Department for Education, local strategic partners, and Contact wish to ensure that all Parent Carer Forums are as representative of the local population as possible so that they can include as many views as possible when co-producing with local partners.

### COLLECTING FORUM MEMBERSHIP DATA

It can be difficult for some Parent Carer Forums (PCFs), who are small and often voluntary organisations, to collect, store and secure personal data and comply with General Data Protection Regulations. However, around half of PCFs do collect and store membership data, even if anonymously, to aid their efforts with outreach and offer insight into the communities that they have not yet engaged.

Demonstrating that they are inclusive and welcoming affords PCFs with credibility among their local partners and population. Local partner organisations can also support PCFs to reach out further by promoting the PCF, its events, meetings, and its impact.

### USING CONTACT’S DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EXPERTISE

During 2023/2024, Contact’s full Diversity and Inclusion toolkit was downloaded 103 times by PCFs. The summary version was downloaded sixty times.

### Equality, diversity and inclusion workshops

During 2023/2024, Contact offered further equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) peer-led workshops to all forums, as we did last year.

At the sessions, PCFs are introduced to:

- *template EDI policies that they can adapt*
- *support to use the Diversity and Inclusion toolkits*
- *peer networking and support*
- *sharing good practice, successes, and any challenges.*

Each session was led by the unique experiences of the participants and offered a safe space for shared learning.

### Developing equality, diversity and inclusion plans

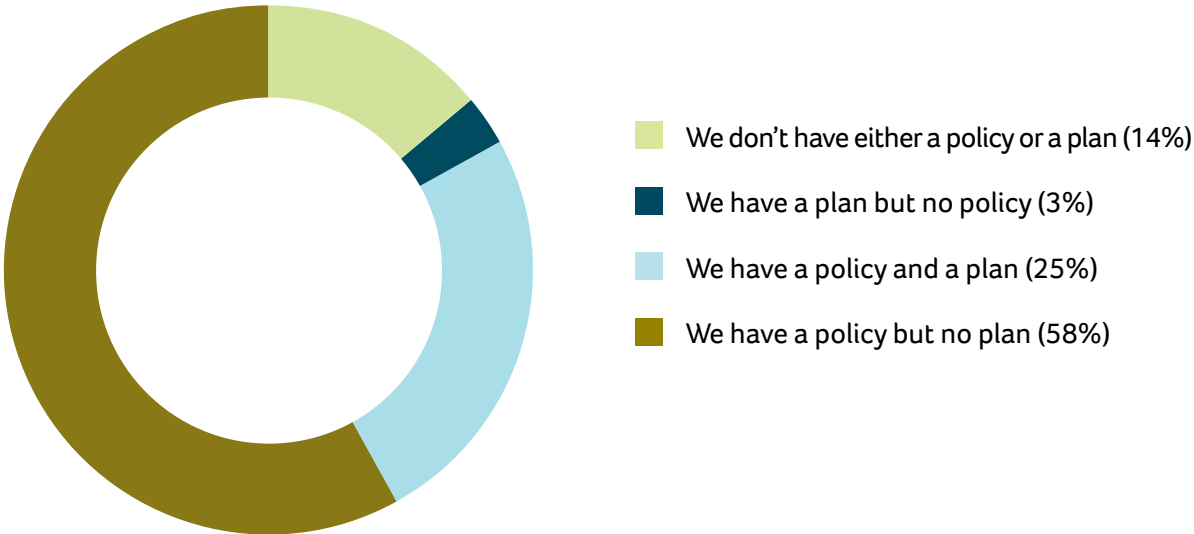
There was a 5% increase in the number of forums with a policy, and 3% increase in those with both plan and policy in 2023-2024.

Three percent of PCFs have an EDI plan without a supporting policy, and there was a reduction of 5% in the number of forums without a policy or plan.

### Future support for forums

There will be further interactive EDI sessions for PCFs during 2024/2025 where support to develop policies will be offered.

Does your forum have an Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion policy and plan in place?

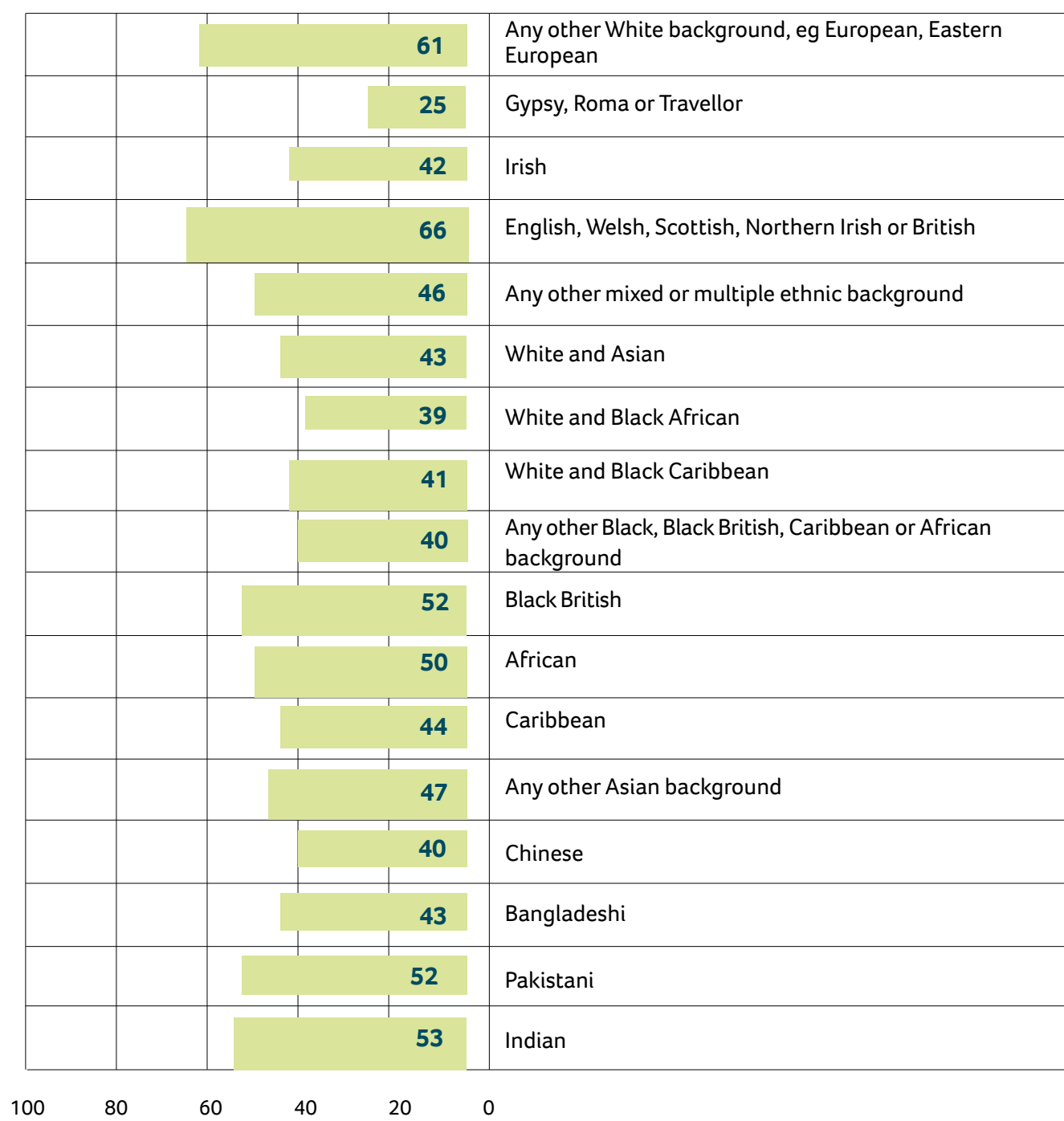




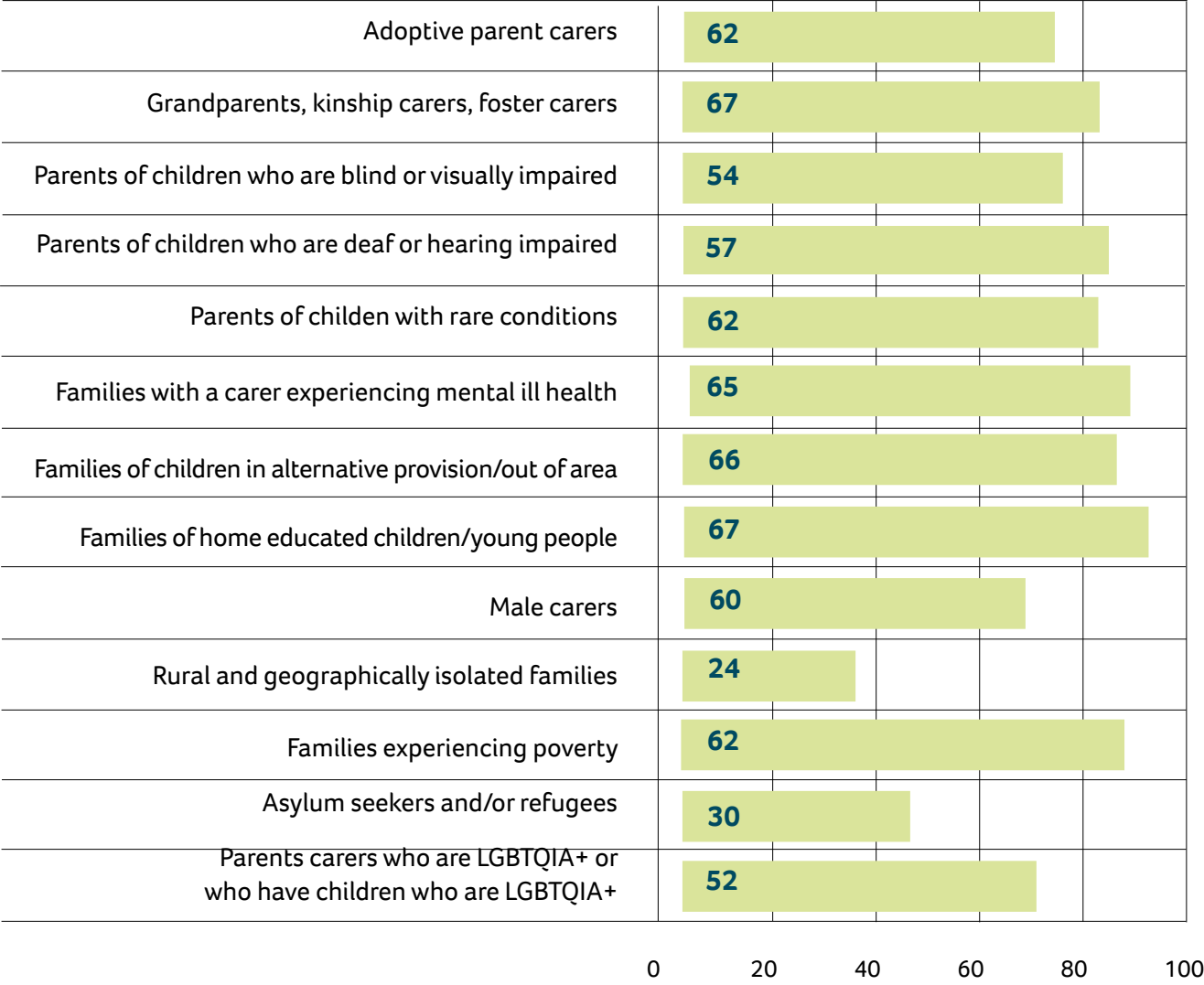
# Diversity data 2023/2024

Half of parent carer forums collect diversity data and the graphs below show how many forums are reaching different ethnic groups and other under-represented communities.

Percentage of forums that record diversity data engaging with the following groups



Number of forums engaging with under-represented communities



Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller, geographically isolated, and Asylum seeking and refugee families remain the groups that are most underrepresented in PCF work.

# Participation matters!



The following examples are a small snapshot of the Parent Carer Forum impact stories on our web page:

[Success stories: parent carers making a difference](#)

There are many more forums showcasing their work both with their core DfE grant, other funding, and local collaborations.

A huge thank you to all the forums who wanted to highlight their work – and to those not mentioned here.

## FOCUS ON FORUM ACHIEVEMENTS

During 2023/2024 we were able to secure some additional funding outside of the DfE contract which enabled us to proactively focus on impact and reaching out to Parent Carer Forums (PCFs) to:

- *find out their biggest achievements during the year*
- *learn about the things they were most proud of*
- *learn about the co-productive and collaborative partnerships they had developed and nurtured, and*
- *hear the difference their work had made to local families and services.*

## Impact stories across all forums

Some of the impact stories are from PCFs whose only source of funding is the £17,500 DfE grant, whilst others were from larger or more established forums with other income, highlighting the diversity of the PCF model, the stages of development, and that all PCFs offer something unique to their local areas.

We aim to keep updating our webpage, highlighting PCF success stories, and encourage all PCFs to share their achievements with us, the DfE and other forums. The web pages have been a big hit and prove just how powerful the PCF network across England is!

Some of the highlights of PCFs using their DfE grants to make a difference are on the following pages.



## SPECIAL NEEDS ACTION PANEL (SNAP) BEDFORDSHIRE

The Parent Carer Forum in Central Bedfordshire worked in co-production with families and partners to make sure there was a common understanding of Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), helping to get the condition recognised and included in Education Health and Care plans, and getting the right support in place for local children and young people. This work was funded by the DfE grant.

## DUDLEY

Following a period of growing frustration with the lack of understanding of genuine co-production, Dudley PCF's participation advisor recommended contacting Genuine Partnerships, who offer co-production training for local areas, along with support to address their concerns.

Using their DfE grant, the forum commissioned some consultancy and training for forum representatives on the 'Four Cornerstones' approach, which was inspiring and recognised as the right path forward. The

training was essential to refresh the forum's relationship with local authority (LA).

## Training for practitioners to participate

Following the forum's lead, the LA arranged four separate sessions for 70 staff across education, health, and social care and strongly encouraged them to participate. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, and in some cases, attitudes shifted almost immediately; real co-production began to take place, with the PCF being included from the outset.

Building on this momentum, the LA extended the training to schools, offering them a shorter online version. Unfortunately, the condensed training didn't have the same impact, and it was agreed that further groundwork with schools to break down barriers and help them see the benefits of adopting co-productive approaches and ways of working, was required.

## Encouraging progress

Partners across Dudley have begun to work on a revised version of their 2021 Co-production Charter to reflect the 'Four Cornerstones' approach. Overall, the forum's collaboration with Genuine Partnerships has been one of their most positive initiatives. With the LA's support, they now have a much stronger system for working co-productively. Whilst perfection may be unrealistic, the area is in a far better place than 18 months ago, and that progress is significant.

The initial training for the forum was funded by the DfE grant. The LA commissioned the training for practitioners.





### **NORTH SOMERSET PARENT CARERS WORKING TOGETHER**

The forum created a project to help reduce anxiety amongst their parent carer community and make sure parents felt better equipped to deal with the challenges they face. This work was funded by the Integrated Care board.

### **BRINGING THE WORDS ‘YOU SAID, WE DID!’ TO LIFE IN ESSEX**

Essex Family Forum introduced a ‘Graffiti Wall’ and encouraged parents to pin their concerns to it. Parents post comments on the virtual graffiti wall and the forum convey this feedback to the local authority who review the feedback and address concerns. There has been a big increase in parental engagement because families feel heard, echoing the Essex Family Forum’s ‘You said, We did’ ethos and commitment. The Neurodiversity Packs were funded by the Essex Joint Commissioning Group – funding coming from the 3 Essex Integrated Care Boards (Mid South Essex, Herts & West Essex, Suffolk & North East Essex) and Essex County Council.

### **WARWICKSHIRE PARENT CARER VOICE**

The parent carer forum in Warwickshire, Warwickshire Parent Carer Voice worked with their council and University of Warwick Law students to co-produce a video helping parent carers to understand the legal processes behind school exclusions. The parent carer participation was funded by the DfE grant but the film costs were funded by the University Law in the Community (LinC) group (with pro bono legal support as credited in the film). Watch their [School Exclusions film](#)

### **BEDFORD BOROUGH PARENT CARER FORUM, THE FORMER FORUM IN LUTON, AND SNAP PCF**

The former forum in Luton and SNAP PCF developed an online Diagnosis Support Pack for children, young people and their families running up to or following a diagnosis of a neurodiversity such as autism or attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD). Watch [The Positives of Neurodiversity](#) on Vimeo. This work was funded by the NHS trust.



### **BEDFORD BOROUGH PARENT CARER FORUM (BBPCF)**

BBPCF tackled a community challenge head-on: the lack of accessible playparks for local families. BBPCF seized an opportunity when Bedford Borough Council’s Mayor’s Fund offered grants and successfully secured £100,000 to refurbish a playpark, turning it into a welcoming and inclusive space for children with special educational needs and disabilities of all ages.

### **Co-producing transformation**

BBPCF collaborated with the local authority to co-produce the transformation over the course of a year starting with signage to raise awareness of SEND and then installing a wheelchair accessible roundabout, trampoline, and a sensory garden. The finished playground, which celebrated its first year last September, not only caters for diverse needs it has also become a symbol of community inclusion.

### **FAMILIES AND CARERS TOGETHER (FACT) BUCKINGHAMSHIRE**

This forum worked with SENDIASs to improve support for families of children with SEND by feeding in the views and experiences of parent carers to help transform the local SENDIASs and the support families receive. As a result, waiting times for families seeking support have halved, the number of families getting help has doubled and families can easily access quality information and great online resources. Their work has ensured the service is year-round (rather than term-time only) and has increased staff time to support more vulnerable families. The dialogue work was funded by a DfE grant, with the follow up work funded by a council grant.





## NORTH TYNESIDE'S NEW 'EARLY YEARS INCLUSION SERVICE' (EYIS)

Not all North Tyneside services were as joined up as they should be, and children and families were often lost in gaps between services. North Tyneside Parent Carer Forum played a key role in designing and co-producing a new [Early Years Inclusion Service](#) (EYIS) which ensures that early years settings and schools develop the expertise and confidence to support children with SEND, so that:

- **every child is accepted and included into Early Years settings/schools**
- **parents/carers will have a clear understanding of how their child's needs will be/are being supported and have access to a key professional to support the family's needs**
- **children will be well prepared for the next phase of their educational journey.**

The forum's work on this was funded with the DfE grant.

## Co-production in action

North Tyneside PCF were equal partners in the process, being involved from outset to launch by:

- **facilitating sessions for parent carers to gain their views, perspectives, and experiences to shape the service and procedures**
- **co-producing a parent information leaflet, and**
- **bringing parent carers, educators, and health professionals together to co-produce the service.**

By reflecting the principles of inclusivity, shared decision-making, and mutual respect, they created supportive environments that ensure the best outcomes for children with additional needs.

The EYIS has only recently launched, but the forum is certain that more children will be identified, correctly signposted, and less families will fall through the 'cracks.' The service's feedback loops, where the PCF, families, and professionals regularly review progress and adapt plans, ensure the service remains dynamic, flexible, and responsive.

## Better outcomes for everyone

North Tyneside's commitment to co-production demonstrates how collaboration can lead to better outcomes – not just for children, but for the wider community. By building trust and empowering families, the EYIS is laying a foundation for long-term success and inclusion and highlighting the importance of every voice in the conversation, proving that together, more can be achieved for the youngest learners.



## 'TOGETHER WE CAN' BRISTOL

Bristol Parent Carers have come a long way in the last couple of years and cemented their progress by finalising a co-production charter 'Together We Can', a collaborative effort between Bristol Parent Carers, Bristol City Council, and NHS Bristol, North Somerset, and South Gloucestershire Integrated Care Board (ICB). The Charter underpins the local collaborative and inclusive working culture and the forum's values of integrity, transparency, honesty, respect and being realistic.

The forum explains the importance of the charter for families:

- **The co-production charter is an important milestone for families in Bristol. It has been designed to empower parent carers like you, your voice matters.**
- **The charter ensures that your experiences and insights as a parent carer will be valued and considered in decision-making processes regarding services for SEND Children.**
- **The charter has reciprocal empowerment at its core. It will foster a two-way relationship where families and service providers**

**empower each other, contributing to positive changes in the SEND community.**

- **By collaborating authentically we can create more effective, tailored services that truly meet the needs of your child and family.**
- **The charter promotes open lines of communication between families and service providers, ensuring that your concerns and feedback are heard and addressed.**
- **With your input shaping local SEND services, you can feel more confident that the support your family receives is relevant and beneficial.**
- **The focus on co-production means that local SEND services will be designed with care, compassion and understanding, prioritising the well-being of your child and family.**

As well as their core values and principles, the forum ensures active and respectful listening to the diverse voices and experiences of parent carers to ensure the wellbeing of all involved, shared decisions, and co-designed services leading to reciprocal empowerment, and trust between local partners, to improve the outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

The charter has supported the forum's work with Bristol services on a draft 4-year SEND Strategy. For further information about the forum's achievements, growth in membership, priorities and focus on future sustainability, involvement in Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS), accolades at the national SEND awards with colleagues from South Glos and North Somerset PCFs, and case studies from parent carers about the positive impact of becoming involved in the forum, see their [2023-24 annual impact report](#).

# Empowering change in Cheshire West and Chester

## GATHERING INSIGHTS FROM PARENTS

Cheshire West and Chester Parent Carer Forum's (CWaC PCF) 2024 survey highlighted challenges and concerns faced by families and evidenced the need for improvements within the area's SEND system. Critical insights gathered from 369 parent carers included these pressing issues:

- **Significant delays in Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP) processes:** with compliance rates falling below national averages.
- **Communication breakdown:** parents felt unsupported due to inconsistent and unclear communication channels between the SEND Team, schools, and families.
- **Inconsistent support across educational settings:** variations in inclusivity and support, particularly during key transition periods, left families feeling overwhelmed.

## HOW WE ADVOCATED FOR CHANGE

CWaC PCF played a pivotal role in advocating for change through:

- **Data collection:** conducting the comprehensive survey to gather firsthand accounts from parent carers.
- **Collaboration:** working closely with the SEND Accountability Group and other stakeholders to analyse survey data and develop actionable recommendations.
- **Advocacy:** presenting the findings during the public scrutiny process, ensuring that the voices of families were heard by council leaders and the SEND Strategy Board.

## ADDRESSING CHALLENGES

As a result of CWaC PCF's work, the SEND Scrutiny Report was approved, encompassing 45 recommendations aimed at addressing the identified challenges.

Key recommendations included:

- **Strengthening collaboration:** establishing clearer communication mechanisms between the SEN Team, schools, and families.
- **Transparent processes:** creating a clear roadmap for families to navigate the SEND system, simplifying EHCP processes, and implementing effective tracking tools.
- **Supporting schools and SENCOs:** providing robust training and resources to empower schools to offer early and effective support for children with SEND.

## WHAT WE ACHIEVED

The implementation of these recommendations has led to:

- **Improved communication:** families now experience more consistent and transparent interactions with education and support services.
- **More timely support:** reduced delays in EHCP processes have enabled children to receive necessary support more promptly.
- **Enhanced educational experiences:** increased inclusivity and support across educational settings have improved daily life for children with SEND and their families.

## DRIVING CHANGE BY WORKING WITH PARENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS

The proactive engagement and involvement of CWaC PCF has been instrumental in driving systemic changes within the local SEND system. By amplifying the voices of parent carers and collaborating with

key stakeholders, the PCF has facilitated meaningful improvements that enhance the wellbeing and educational experiences of children with SEND in the community.

For a deeper understanding of how CWaC PCF's survey served as a powerful tool for change, [take a look at this film](#).

This work was funded by the DfE grant





# Contact's support for Parent Carer Forums

## SUPPORTING AND EMPOWERING FORUMS

During 2023-24, 98% of forums reported that they were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with the support provided by their parent carer participation adviser.

99.3% of forums were 'very satisfied' or 'satisfied' with how Contact dealt with their enquiries about the grants process.

98.7% of forums were happy with the communications from Contact, including our quarterly joint bulletin with the NNPCF.

*"Always very helpful and responsive. Support this year has been excellent and very much appreciated in terms of consultancy around governance and forum refresh to ensure the PCF survival."*

*"We do find it helpful that Contact as an organisation understand the time and other pressures faced by parent carers, and the realities of running a parent carer forum - it's not easy. It's great that all the forms we need are easy to find on the website and we get lots of reminders about deadline dates."*

## IMPROVEMENTS TO THE GRANTS PROCESS

The grants and adviser teams made some improvements to the grants process based on PCF feedback from the grant monitoring and we were able to offer the grants learning session for the 2024-25 year during March to enable early applications during March, with payment in early April. This enables PCFs with staffing, rent and other overheads to minimise any gap in their funding. Forums feedback that being able to save a PDF copy of the forms before submitting them would help them to share drafts with other forum members before final submission. The application and monitoring forms now have the option of saving as drafts enabling PCFs to have a PDF copy to amend before submitting for approval.

*"Thank you to everyone at Contact for your support and advice and know that you are there is wonderful!"*

*"Everyone from Contact that has supported us through the disaggregation of the old forum and set up of the new forum has been fantastic, thank you for all of your support through a difficult time!"*

*"Our Parent Participation Adviser is ALWAYS on hand when needed; she is always extremely helpful and supportive of our efforts. Our advisor regularly and proactively sends us information to make sure as a forum we don't miss useful information and opportunities."*

*"The forum feels very well supported by Contact, both regarding funding and any other support we need. Information about funding application and reporting is always very clear and relevant. Queries and emails get responded quickly and information/help provided is always very good."*

*"Always grateful for advice and help. Knowing that there are options available is a relief."*

*"I would like to personally thank our participation adviser... for supporting us this year with the grant and enabling us to redistribute funds to different budget lines which has been an incredible support in enabling us to deliver for families."*

*"Nice to see the improvement to the monitoring form and has been easier to complete as a region this year."*

*"We have always had prompt responses from the Grants Team, which has eased pressure. Myself, our admin and Treasurer had a meeting with...and we all found this really helpful (our admin was pleased to know she was already doing many of the things suggested re spreadsheet)."*

*"Always very supportive and we know we can go to them with any issues or areas of concern."*



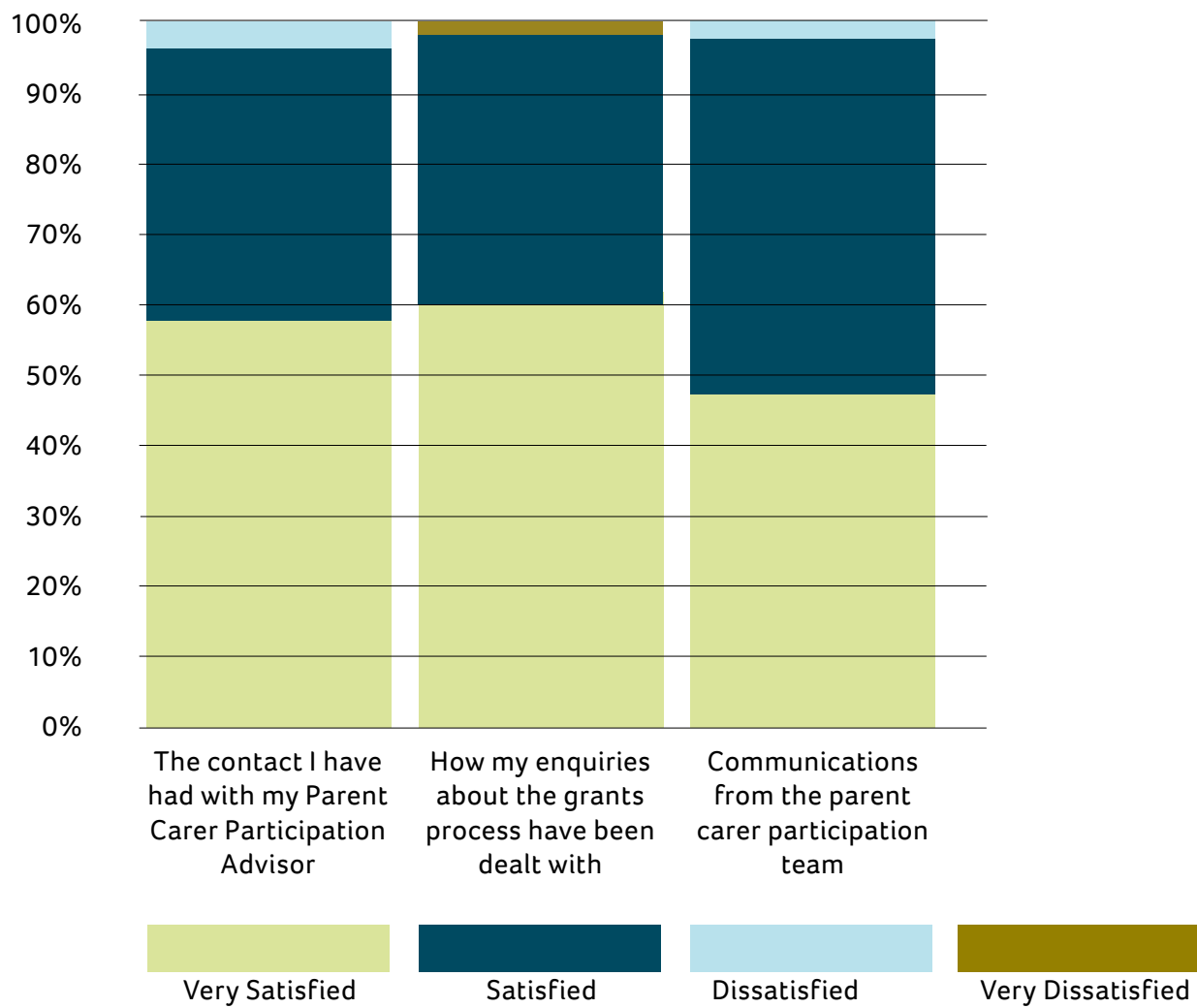
**SATISFACTION LEVELS WITH CONTACT'S SUPPORT RISE**

Overall, the satisfaction levels with Contact rose slightly during 2023-24 with more Parent Carer Forums very satisfied with our support, grants service and our communications.

**A strong Parent Participation team at Contact**

This is testament to the team as we often deliver difficult or unpopular messages, as well as celebrating Parent Carer Forums' successes.

What forums thought of Contact's support in 2023/2024



# ONLINE LEARNING AND TRAINING

As part of our core support offer, Contact provides learning and development opportunities to all PCFs. During 2023-24 we hosted ten online learning sessions on a variety of key topics, along with more in-depth training programmes on Being a Parent Representative and Leading your Forum. The training provides PCF members with the opportunity to further develop some of the skills required to be an effective parent rep and forum leader.

Online learning sessions were on:

- **Using your DfE Grant**
- **Employer responsibilities**
- **Financial planning for the transition to adulthood**
- **Small forums and contracts**
- **Supported living for people with learning disabilities and autism**
- **Self-Evaluation Framework, Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value**
- **Leading a forum through change**
- **Tell me about...Parent Carer Forums**
- **Parent Participation Matters! series of four films.**

A small selection of the feedback received is detailed here:

*"Really useful knowledge. So glad I attended. A lot of the questions I had in my head were answered"*

*"All good and a knowledgeable presenter - lots of questions taken and answered."*

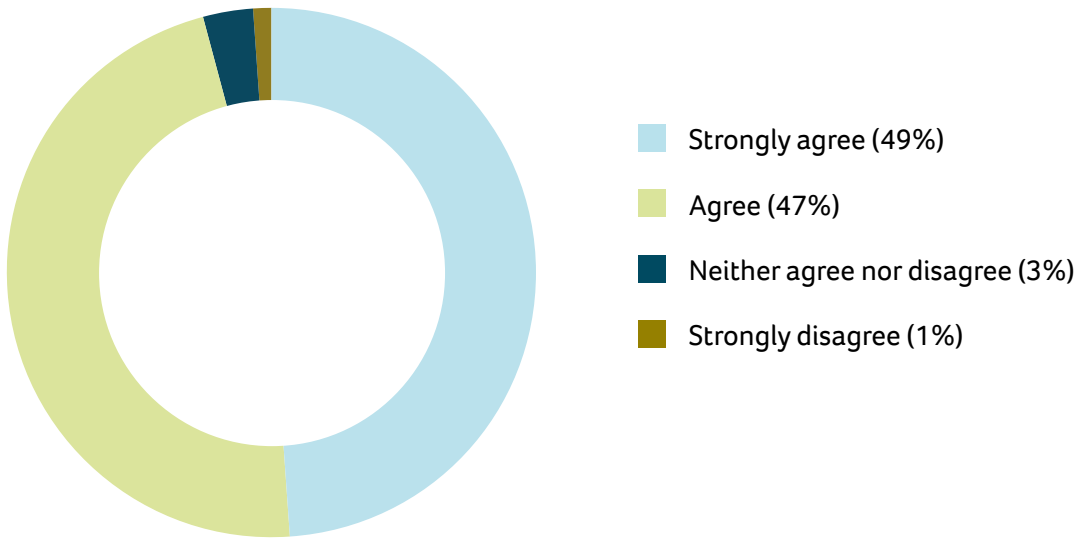
*"Presenter was knowledgeable and interesting and didn't rely on over complicated PowerPoint - kept me focused."*

*"Easy read minutes of the meeting, with explanations on key words."*

*"It was great to have a chance to hear some different ideas how forums can be successful and survive. It was easy to join and use the Jam board, also topics in the chat were discussed There were quite a few people on the webinar, but it still felt personal and there was the opportunity to ask questions."*

*"All good and a knowledgeable presenter - lots of questions taken and answered!"*

I would recommend contact online learning sessions to others



Overall, 96% of parent carer attendees would recommend Contact's online learning sessions to other forum members.





**PARENT REPRESENTATIVE TRAINING**

94% of the 54 Parent Carer Forum members who attended the Parent Representative training rated it as good or excellent.

Feedback included:

*“Trainers were fantastic, friendly, so passionate and such a wealth of knowledge and experience which is invaluable to learn from. It was good to meet and speak to other PCF members and hear their experiences etc, as a new member I have found it insightful ”*

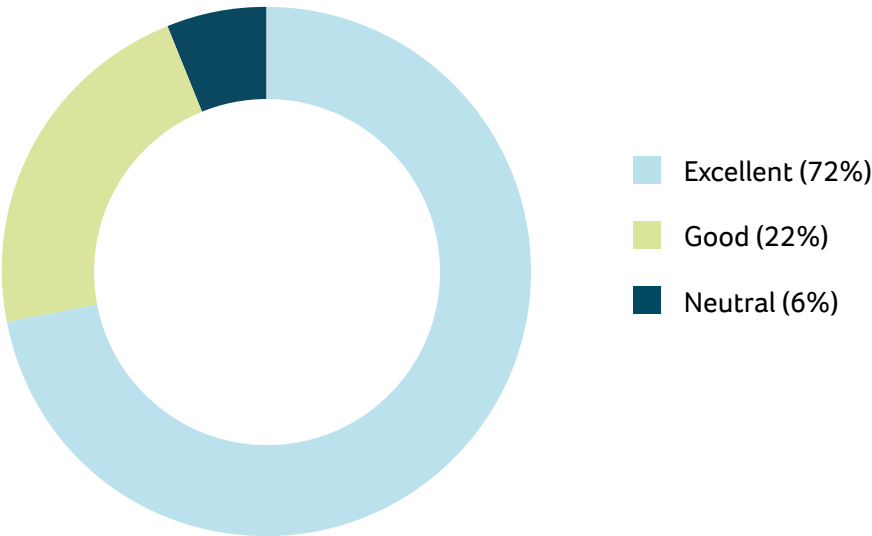
*“Thank you to the facilitators for being so welcoming, making the training easy to follow and for bringing all the forums together.”*

*“Brilliant presenters with a huge breadth of experience and knowledge.”*

*“...are wonderful. clear, confident, caring, knowledgeable. they were always on top of every comment being made, every hand raised. they included everyone in a kind and caring way and allowed people space to get involved without putting anyone on the spot if that was better for them. they kept the sessions moving. the pace was lovely”*

*“It was a very useful workshop, and I took away a lot of ideas.”*

Parent representative training feedback 2023/2024





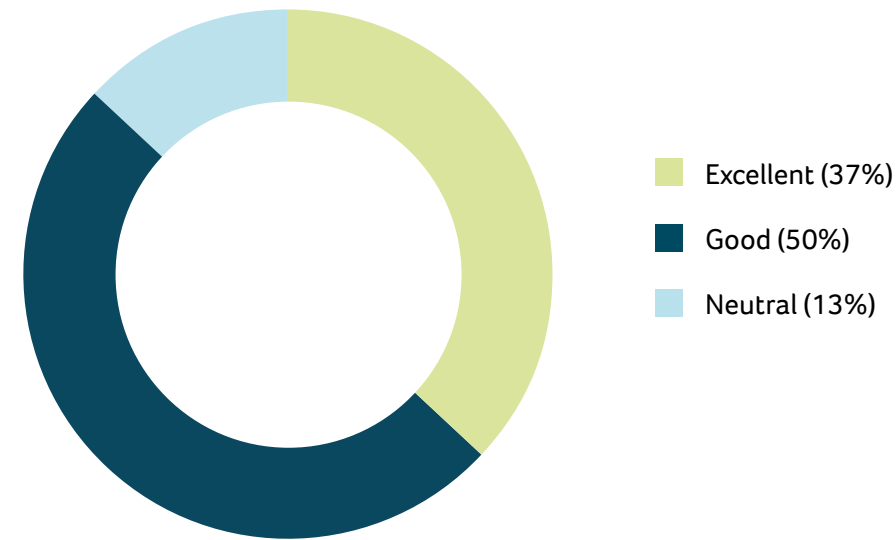
LEADING YOUR FORUM  
TRAINING

Eighty-seven percent of the twenty parent carer leaders attending the six sessions of Leading your Forum training rated the course as good or excellent

*“Everything was excellent.”*

*“Thank you, fabulous training and trainers.”*

Feedback for Leading Your Forum training 2023/2024



EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY  
TRAINING

To support PCFs’ outreach and inclusion of parent carers from underrepresented groups, we ran two online interactive sessions, which also supported PCFs to utilise Contact’s Diversity and Inclusion toolkits, and the development of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion policies. The sessions also offered forum members peer support, networking opportunities, and the sharing of good practice and challenges. Ninety-seven percent of attendees rated the sessions as good or excellent. Comments included:

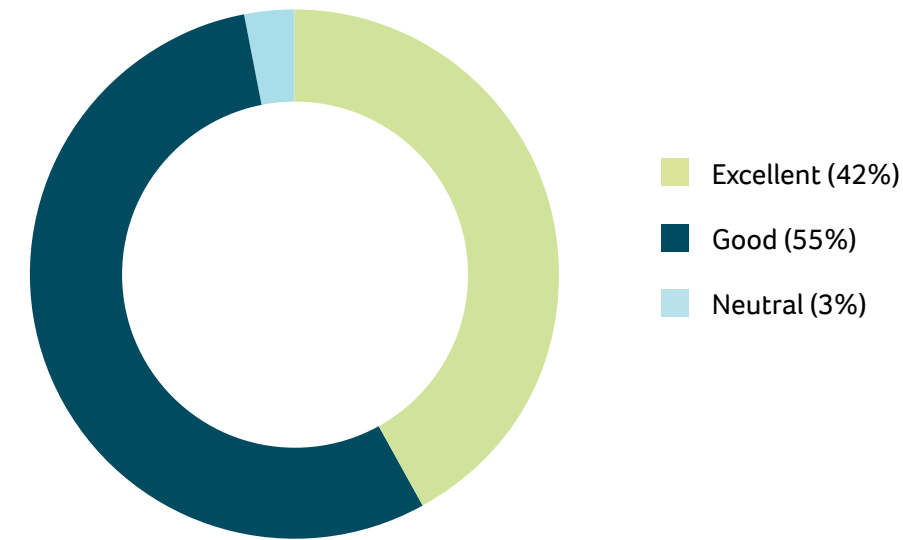
*“Very great training, informative and calming.”*

*“It was a very useful workshop, and I took away a lot of ideas.”*

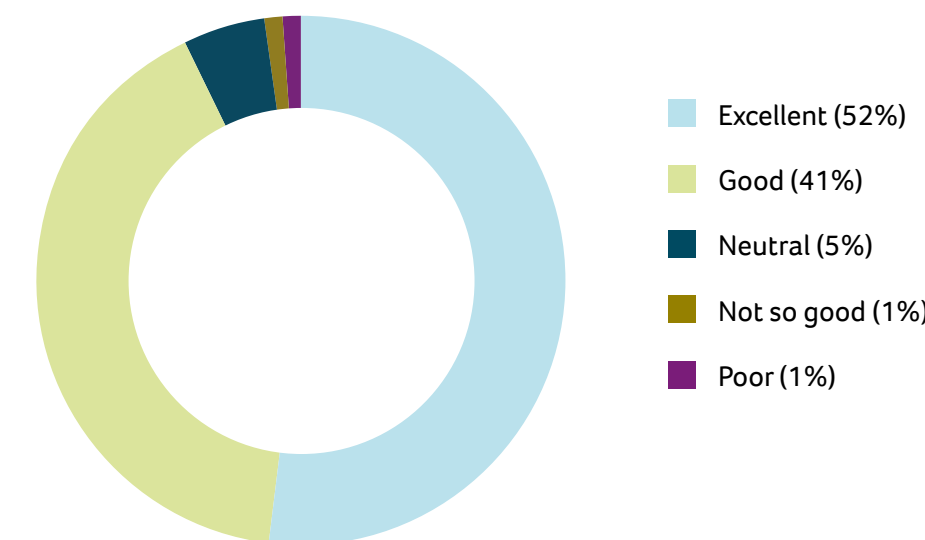
*“I found it very informative and interesting, and it has fired me up to make a difference and change what we do.”*

*“Thank you for a great session, it was brilliant to get the opportunity to chat to other forums about their difficulties and ideas for the subject.”*

How would you rate the EDI training overall?



How would you rate the 2023/2024 training overall



JOINT CONFERENCE

The joint annual conference consisted of a virtual week of sessions during late January to early February 2024, and a face-to-face conference in Newcastle on February 29th, 2024. The theme of the conference was ‘Working Together.’

Virtual conference

The virtual conference consisted of eight sessions delivered over a three-day period attracting a live audience of 284 forum members across the week.

Five of the sessions were recorded and uploaded to our Parent Carer Forum YouTube channel, attracting a further 403 views to date.

The sessions included:

- *Introduction, Minister’s speech, and Change Programme Partnership*
- *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion interactive session*
- *Health and SEND*
- *PCF peer support*
- *NNPCF SGM*
- *NNPCF drop-in*
- *Preparing for Adulthood, and*
- *What can Educational Psychologists do (and what are they anyway)?*

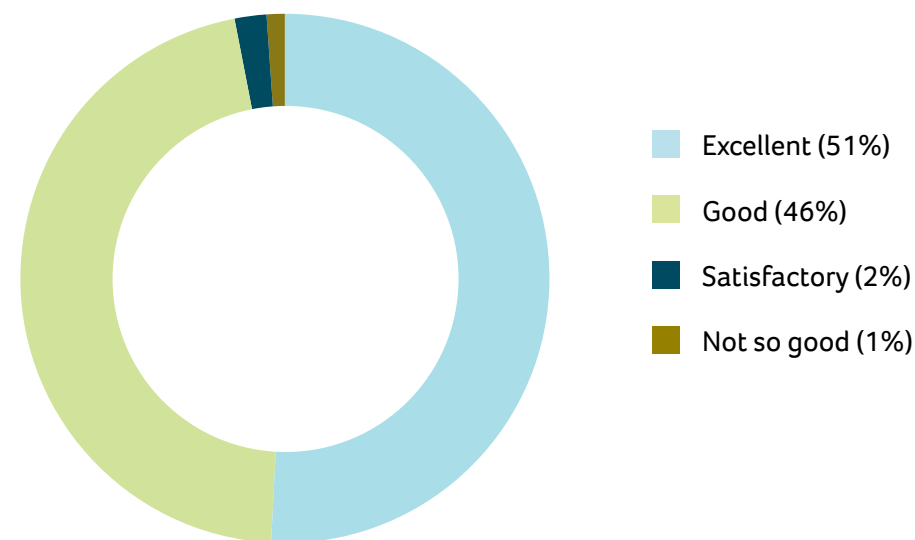
The face-to-face conference attracted 186 in person attendees and 55 virtual attendees who took part online via a livestream. Agenda items included:

- *Current and future priorities for parent carers*
- *Participation Matters!*
- *SEND Area Inspections a year on*
- *Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) and trauma informed practice training*
- *Ministerial Keynote address from David Johnston MP, then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children, Families and Wellbeing*
- *Department for Education, Department of Health and Social Care and Department for Work and Pensions’ interactive workshop and input into the transitions guidance*
- *Law Commission review of Social Care*
- *Parent carer wellbeing, and*
- *A Reflective Overview from the outgoing Co-Chair of the NNPCF, Tina Emery.*

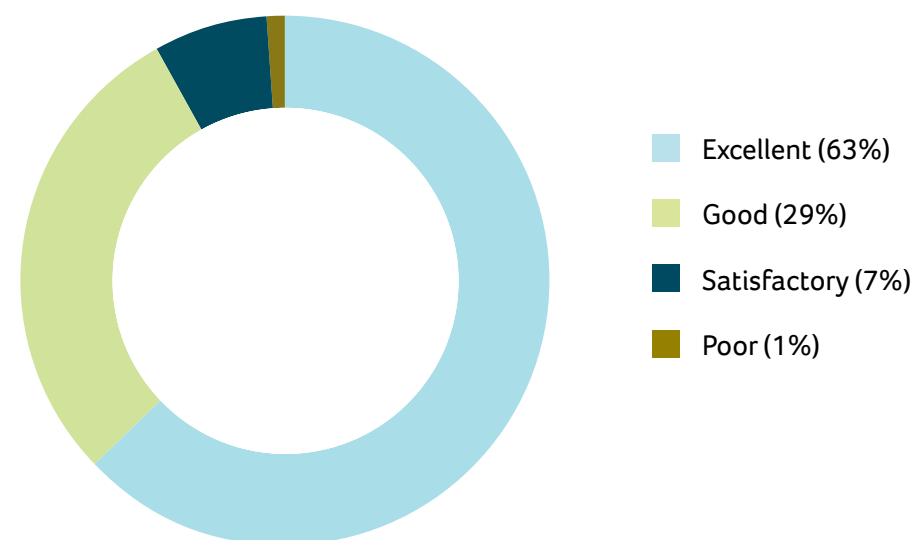
Seven of the sessions from the event were recorded and have been added to our PCF YouTube channel and have been viewed a total of 579 times to date. Our Highlights film of the event was shared and has now been viewed 340 times.

Feedback from the virtual attendees was 100% positive for both the relevance of the content, and the planning and execution of the day.

### Combined feedback on virtual conference sessions



### Relevance of conference content overall



### Feedback from the Conference included:

*"The speakers and presentations were very informative and exciting in some cases."*

*"I always come away feeling inspired. It is really great coming together and remembering the bigger picture that we all are a part of in our small satellites around the country."*

*"I felt the environment was really energising, and especially in the marketplace area being able to see others connecting over a shared experience."*

*"What a day!!! I loved it I left feeling lighter and and relieved. Knowing i am not alone and support and included."*

*"Lovely to see and speak with so many forum leads and members and see such a great wealth of expertise and knowledge amongst parent carer forums."*

*"Really enjoyed the conference. Great opportunity to meet up and spend time with like minded people who all have the same ideals, passion and lived experience who just want to make it better for generations after this one"*

*"All very inspiring and thought provoking."*

*"A connection to other forums and other parents/carers experiencing the same issues."*



# Funding and impact of forums' work

Stories about the impact of forums' work are vital to their continued funding as they evidence the difference that forums make.

Participation Matters! really helped to highlight the impact of Parent Carer Forums' (PCFs) work during 2023-24. Forums have so little capacity that they are often too busy 'doing the work,' to be able to shout about their achievements. By reporting on the difference that they make locally to families and by supporting their local strategic partners to improve their services, provides their funders with the evidence required to support their continued funding. However, it is vital that PCFs are not viewed in the same way as statutory services and that they are not seen to be propping up failing systems. Contact has been sharing more case studies, films, and resources from forums this year as they also serve to inspire others, and to encourage the PCFs in areas with weaker co-production to keep going when things are tough.

## FORUM FUNDING

Like all organisations, due to the extremely high inflation rates over the last few years, PCFs must make their core DfE grant of £17,500 go a lot further. However, there was a 4% decrease during 2023-24 in the number of forums receiving additional funding from the previous year with 58% of forums receiving additional funding, from a variety of sources. The most prevalent additional funder being the local authority, either as a sole, or joint funder with other organisations.

Did the forum receive additional funding?



## ADDITIONAL FUNDING

Of the 58% of PCFs in receipt of additional funding to support participation work, forums received on average £31,382.82, an increase of about £4,000 from 2023-24, though to fewer forums. However, amounts ranged from as little as £408 to £181,431, highlighting a huge range and variation in the funding. with outliers at either end of the scale impacting on the average.

Considering that over half of PCFs receive no additional funding at all, and are wholly reliant on the DfE grant, the average amount of additional income received by all PCFs is £19,169.75. We do not ask about funding to support other areas of PCFs' work such as for running services.

## Cost of living increases

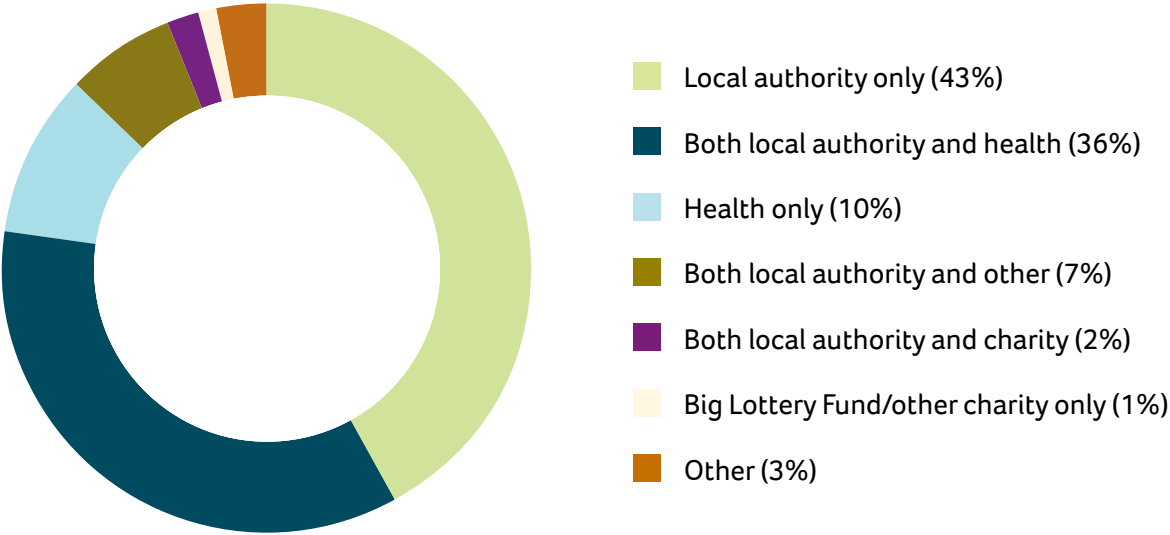
It is apparent that there is a different funding picture across the regions. The core DfE grant must stretch a long way in areas with no other funding, especially since there has been a 17% rise in the national living wage since 2022 and utility and services costs have increased significantly.

## Value for money

The data provided by PCFs in their grant monitoring evidences not only what they achieve with their grant and through their local work, but their value and worth. Forums provide excellent value for money as they provide the government with the genuine voice and experience of families accessing services and being impacted by failings in the system.

Contact and the NNPCF continue to support the case for further central funding increases.

Where the additional funding came from



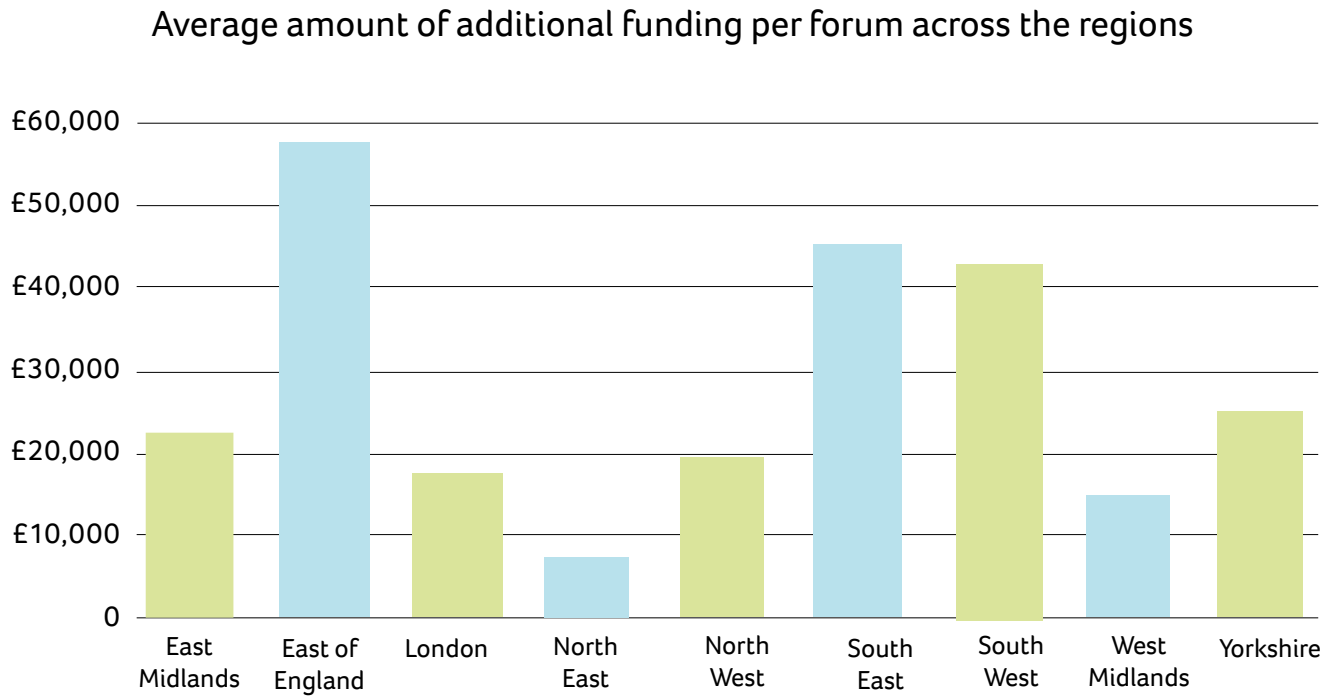
**ADDITIONAL FUNDING FOR PRIORITY WORK**

During 2023/2024, 58 priority grant applications were received from forums and regions to enable them to conduct additional priority work. This process utilises in-year underspend from PCFs not applying for their full grant allocation and supports other PCFs to access additional funding for urgent projects or work. Contact approved a total of £291,811.82, an average of £5,031 per forum or region that applied. As £3,000 is ringfenced for each of the nine regions to support regional development, some priority grants funded regional coordination and administration for PCF regional networks.

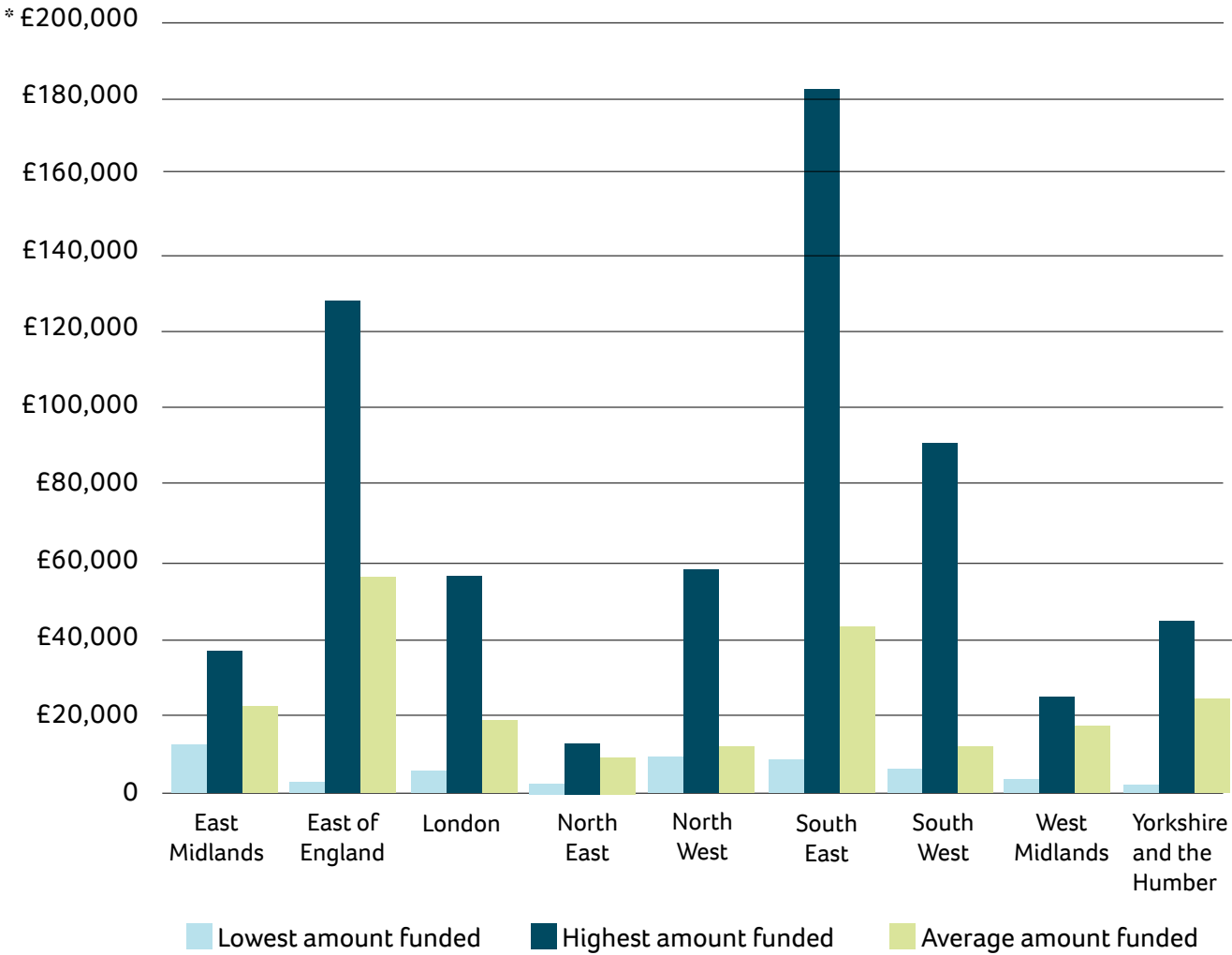
**PAYING FORUM WORKERS**

The number of forums paying workers to support their work and development dropped by 1% during 2023-24, to 80%.

Forum workers provide additional capacity for PCF members and enable many parent carers to focus on participation rather than administration, but as wages have increased so sharply, many will be forced to consider reducing hours.



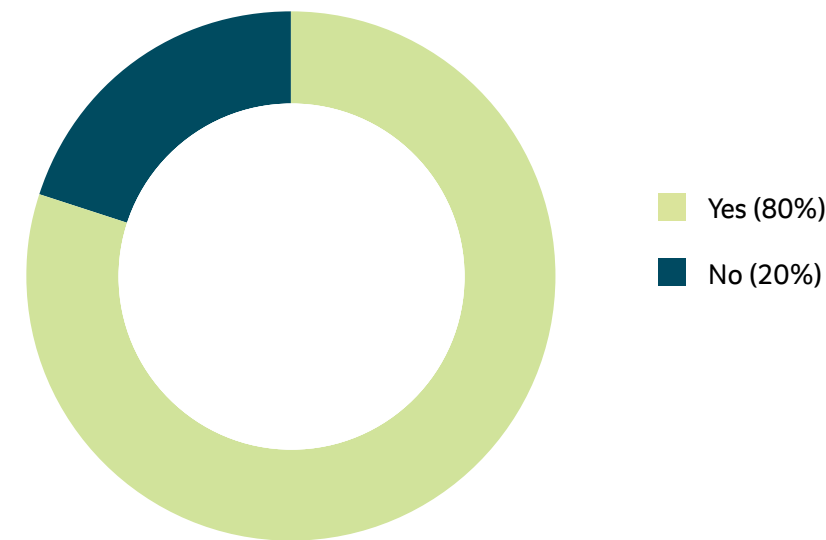
**Regional forum funding picture**



\* Highest and lowest amount of additional funding for participation work per region, with the caveat that some PCFs get no extra funding at all.



Percentage of forums with paid workers supporting their administration, development work or coordination



# Hope

## FAMILIES HOPING FOR REAL CHANGE

The year 2024/2025 will be the final year of the current contract and all eyes will be on the future. Families are hoping for real change and for the results of the Change Programme, Safety Valve and Delivering Better Value to become evident. At the moment, families are fearful – their children and young people’s needs are not being met. Rights are being eroded and there is growing frustration in local areas with services, who are in most cases trying their best with extremely limited budgets.

In 2024/2025 we will see the introduction of PINS (Promoting Inclusion and Neurodiversity in Schools), which will offer a chance for Parent Carer Forum involvement in primary schools in most areas of the country, yet which will further test their capacity.

## A NEW ERA

We are entering into a new era with a new Government and a renewed focus on inclusivity and of the outcomes and wellbeing of all children and young people, including those with SEND. The Education Secretary has a vision for bold reform to improve inclusivity and expertise in mainstream for pupils with SEND. The Curriculum and assessment review also has the potential to create a more supportive environment for SEND learners.

## Renewal of funding for forums

We hope there will be a renewal of the funding for PCFs and the contract to support them and the NNPCF for 2025 and beyond, alongside recognition that they achieve a lot with the funding that they have and are affecting change, but that they can only do so much with the limited resources that they have. This is especially true of the 40% of PCFs whose only source of income is the DfE grant.

## INVESTING IN SEND SERVICES

Radical change and much increased investment in SEND is needed. We hope that it is not too far away so that parents’ trust in the system is restored and all students are enabled to thrive.



We are Contact,  
the charity for  
families with  
disabled children.

We support  
families, bring  
families together  
and help families  
take action  
for others.



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