Background and context

ECC Service Transformation

Essex County Council

- upper tier local authority (social care, no bins)
- 1.5m population
- 8000 employees

The Service Transformation team:

- set up in 2019
- multi-disciplinary team including design, product management, delivery, developer etc.
- responsible for some key products (essex.gov.uk, Intranet, web platform) and support the council to deliver other products like this one
- We care about helping the council deliver great digital services and connecting digital to real world experiences

Background

The 2019 local area Ofsted inspection stated that the current SEND local offer was adequate, but noted that:

- It isn't well understood and the existing website and support resources are difficult to navigate
- Parents often don't know it exists and so don't look to the website when they need to find information

In 2021, we carried out a Discovery and Alpha over about 3 months. We did this mostly with an in-house team, with one content designer contractor.
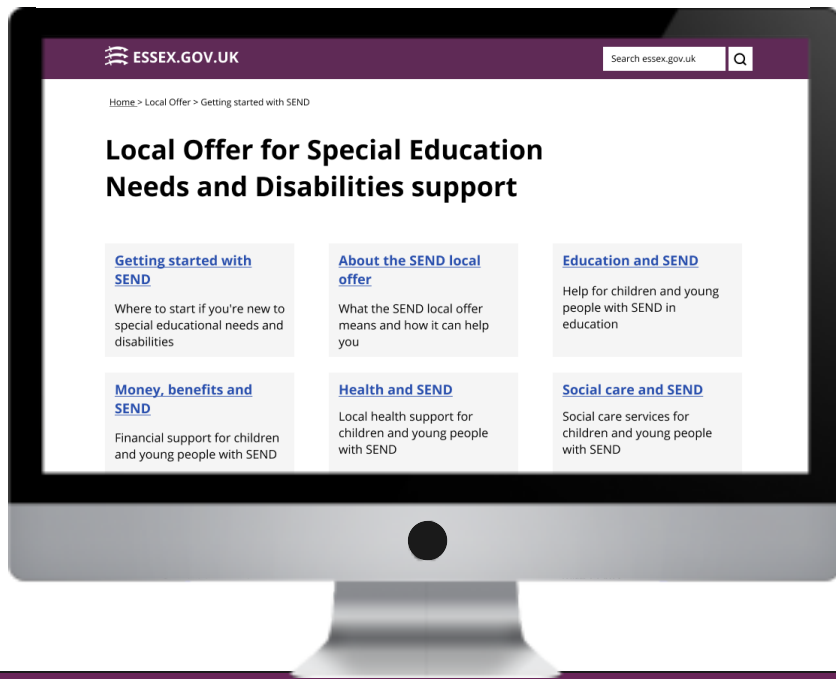
What we did

- Spoke to lots of people! Council employees, NHS, voluntary sector, Family Forum (representative group), other local authorities
- Interviews with young people with SEND needs and their families
- Developed and tested prototypes
- Explored technology options
- Took recommendations to a board to get funding

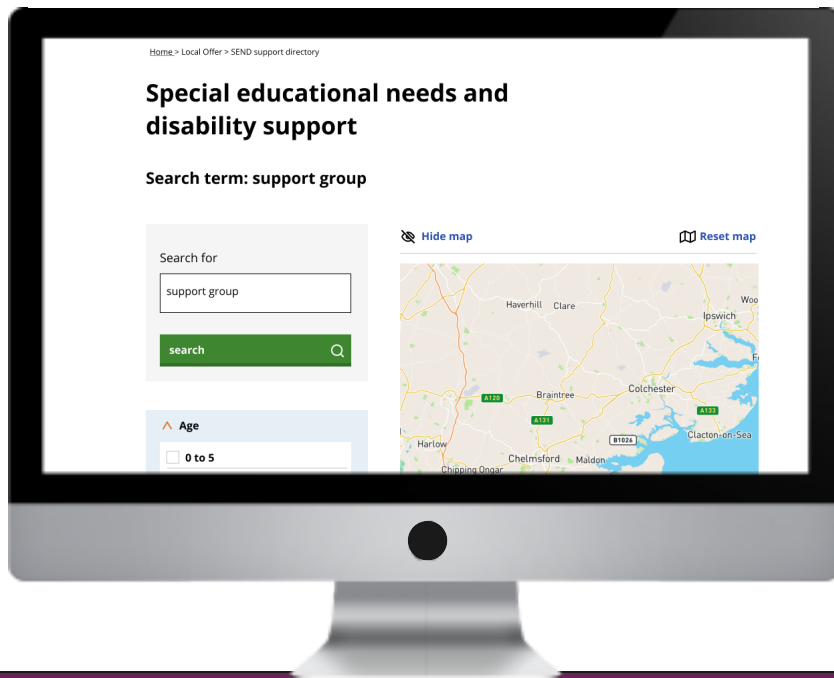Essex County Council

What we proposed...

A hub for information

- A dedicated area for SEND Local Offer, but closely integrated with essex.gov.uk
- Information organised in categories which have been informed by user testing
- Accessibility standards baked in and existing content design standards

ESSEX.GOV.UK

Search essex.gov.uk

Home > Local Offer > Getting started with SEND

Local Offer for Special Education Needs and Disabilities support

Getting started with SEND

Where to start if you're new to special educational needs and disabilities

About the SEND local offer

What the SEND local offer means and how it can help you

Education and SEND

Help for children and young people with SEND in education

Money, benefits and SEND

Financial support for children and young people with SEND

Health and SEND

Local health support for children and young people with SEND

Social care and SEND

Social care services for children and young people with SEND

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A directory for services

- Improved user experience
- Options to filter by location, age, type of service and other criteria specific to SEND families

Home > Local Offer > SEND support directory

Special educational needs and disability support

Search term: support group

Search for

support group

search

Hide map

Reset map

∧ Age

☐ 0 to 5

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Prototyping a new local offer website

What we were testing

Research questions:
- How do users feel about Local Offer moving to Essex.gov.uk?
- What is important when searching for information?
- Are users able to navigate between a directory and information, advice and guidance?

We were not testing:
- The taxonomy and content

How we tested:
- Looked at another Council's Local Offer with a scenario task
- Looked at our ECC proposed prototype with a scenario task

Resources we retrieved our content from
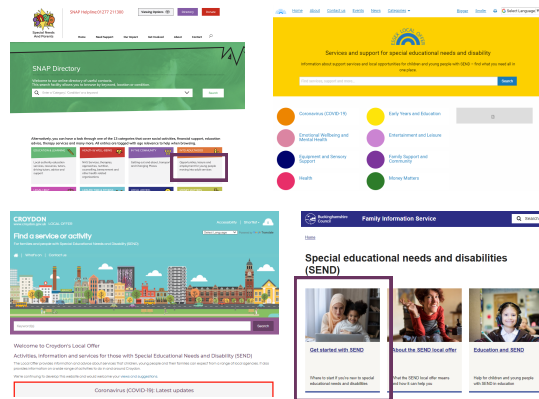
Families feedback

Look & feel

Branding/location:

- Most users didn't mind where it sat or how it was branded as long as the content was useful.
- How much users trust the council depends on previous experiences and how helpful the information is. Trust forms over time.

Colour & imagery:

- Most users felt that the first look we tested felt too corporate and not friendly enough.
- Large bodies of text feel overwhelming. Use of colour and imagery help break those into manageable pieces.
- Consistent branding makes users feel everything is in the same place

"Too corporate"

"Not friendly"

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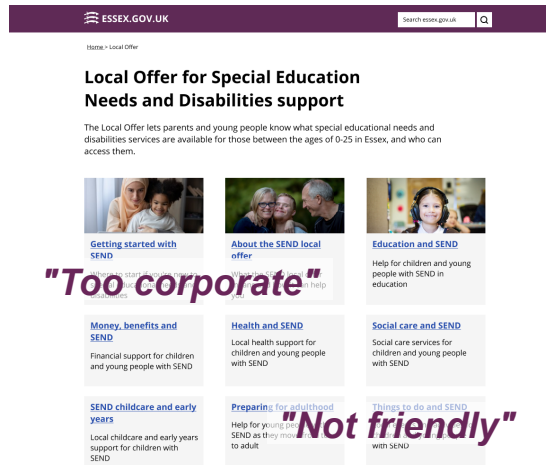
Families feedback

Searching for information

Information:

- People tend to browse to see what's available and will only search when they haven't found what they're looking for.
- The categories and order of those is important.

"You don't know what you're looking for until you find it"

Directory:

- Most people search the directory by geographical location and will travel different distances for the right service.
- Important search categories: Location, age, need/impairment, cost, activity type, days/term times or holidays.
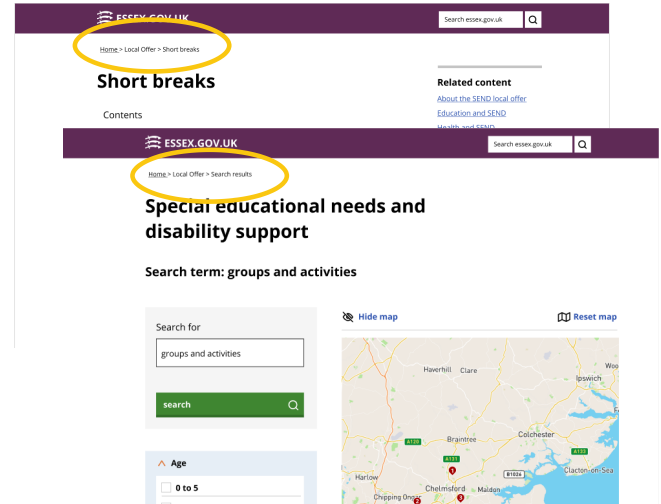- Maps aren't useful.

Families feedback

Navigating between pages

Navigation

- Most navigated between information and the directory seamlessly. Some did notice that the structure of the page changed but didn't mind it.
- Breadcrumbs are important when navigating between information, the directory and listings.


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Families feedback

Language

- Most users felt that the language and tone was very important (compassionate, relatable, no jargon).
- The language used to distinguish categories needs to be clear and descriptive enough to know what to expect.
- The content tested felt incomplete and would need to be iterated on and tested further.

"Getting started with SEND implies that I know that SEND is"
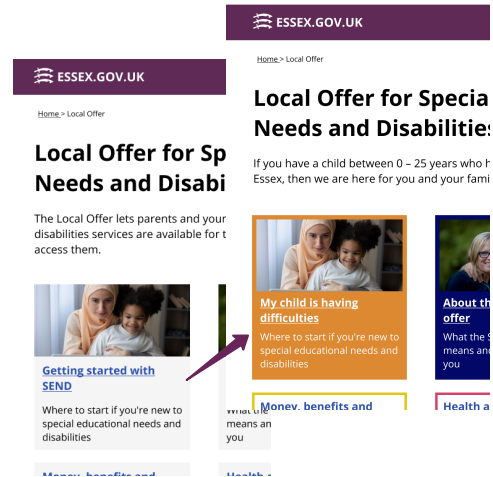
Prototyping a smart answers approach

What we were testing

Research questions:
- Where should we direct families in certain situations?
- Does the concept of an online survey tool guide families who are new to SEND?
  - Can parents naturally find the tool from the homepage?
  - Do families find value in the outcomes given?
  - Is the language and content clear, easy to read and understand?

How we tested:
- Tested the survey tool prototype outcomes with professionals
- Using a scenario task with families who have little SEND knowledge, we looked at the proposed homepage and prototype

Smart answers

Screen 1

ESSEX.GOV.UK

Search essex.gov.uk

Home > Local Offer > My child is having difficulties > Explore support

Explore your options

As a parent, you're often the first person to notice when something is not right. You might have a concern about your child's behaviour, development or learning.

We're here to help you find the right help for you.

Answer a few questions to get recommendations about the next steps to take.

Before you start
These questions are not an assessment tool but are here to guide you to some of the available options.

You will be asked about:
- your child's age
- if they go to a nursery, school or college
- who you've spoken to so far.

Start

estimated time

Footer

Screen 2

ESSEX.GOV.UK

Register | Login

Search essex.gov.uk

Home | Online forms

What is your primary concern?

Your child may have more than one area they need help with.
To help us show you where to start, please tell us your main concern.

○ I'm worried about my child's behaviour or ability to socialise, for example they struggle to make friends

○ I'm worried about my child's physical or emotional health, for example they have difficulty walking or high anxiety levels

○ I'm worried that my child might need help with learning and development, for example their reading and writing level is low for their age

○ I'm worried that my child finds it hard to communicate, for example, you may have noticed your child has difficulty with speech

○ My family has an urgent crisis. For example, a parent is ill and cannot provide care, or my child's needs have greatly increased and it's difficult to cope

Next

Footer

Screen 3

ESSEX.GOV.UK

Search essex.gov.uk

Home > Local Offer > My child is having difficulties > Explore support > Your options

Suggested next steps

You've told us:

Your child is aged (0-1)

You have **not** spoken to your school

You have **not** spoken to a doctor or healthcare professional

We recommend that you:

Speak to your local health services

The support your child can get will depend on their individual needs. Your local health services such as your GP can work with you and your child to find the best help.

Here is some guidance on how to prepare for a conversation with your GP.

Other actions you could take:

Speak to your child's school

If your child is at nursery or pre-school, there will be help available that you can access now. Ask to speak to the special educational needs co-ordinator (SENCO).

They will work with you and professionals to plan support for your child. In Essex we call this **One Planning**.

Here is some guidance on how to prepare for that conversation with your school.

Contact the Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service

There are child and family services throughout Essex that are free at the point of delivery.

These can include:
- family wellbeing and parental support
- help with speech, communication and with feeding
- physiotherapy and movement difficulties.

Essex Child and Family Wellbeing Service can help you find them.

To access the Service, you would need to find your nearest family hub.

Find a local support group or charity

There are charities and local groups in Essex that can help children with many different needs. Their help can include things like:

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Families feedback - Homepage

Impressions of the homepage:
- The homepage feels focused on education
- It doesn't look like a government website and this feels friendlier to a new user

Where would parents look for information:
- Parents looked for information in 'My child has difficulties' or 'Support for parents'

What information are they looking for:
- Help identifying if your child is SEND
- Advice on how to support your child better

"Because it is SEND, you immediately focus on the educational part"

"I would have liked to have seen practical advice though, like 'why not try talking to your child when there are no other distractions, or a routine is important...try a dedicated time of day...a reward chart..."

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Families feedback - Concept

Answering the questions:
- The questions are on topics you would expect to be asked about but the categories of primary concern feel blurry

Confidence in the outcome:
- The outcomes are logical and provide reassurance to parents

Next actions they would take:
- There is a lot of information provided, families may struggle to take all of it in and only remember the first option
- Parents felt that they would likely follow the advice given

"It asks the right questions and it is reassuring that it sends you to the places you would expect to go"

"There is a lot of information to take in, could there be an option to have the outcomes emailed to you?"

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Families feedback - Language

What does SEND mean to you:
- To person without experience of SEND, it represents severe learning disabilities that have a significant impact on a person's life

It is Education focused:
- The term Special Educational Needs and Disabilities implies that support is centred on education

Understanding Health services:
- The term local health services does not give people a specific place to go and is less reassuring than some of the other outcomes

SEND is too big a jump:
- Families who are very early on in their journey do not feel comfortable with labelling their child as SEND

"I am not sure this is for me. If my child hasn't started school yet I can't set up help for them - can I? How would I know what they need already?"

"There is a level of "well my child isn't as bad as someone with severe autism" and that's what you conjure up when you think of disability"

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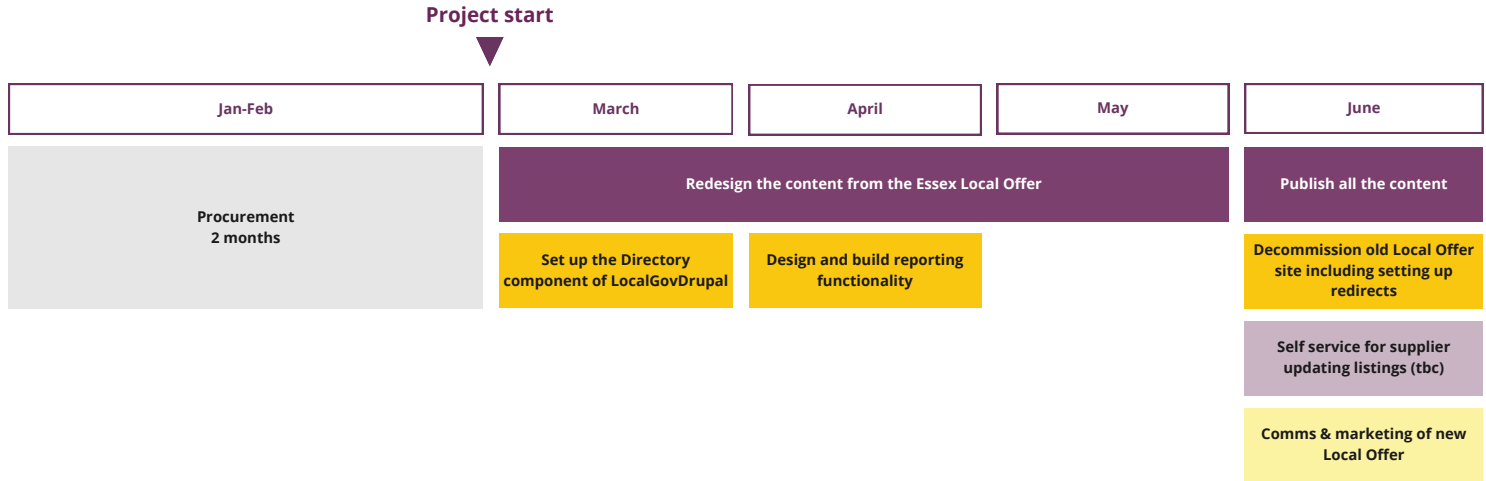
What comes next

Beta epics

The team have identified the following areas of work required in Beta:

- How location based search will work
- How users want to filter and interact with a directory
- How we can handle duplicate directory entries (data quality)
- Page by page content rewrites
- Defining ongoing content support model

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High level Timelines

Project start

Jan-Feb	March	April	May	June
Procurement 2 months	Redesign the content from the Essex Local Offer			Publish all the content
	Set up the Directory component of LocalGovDrupal	Design and build reporting functionality		Decommission old Local Offer site including setting up redirects
				Self service for supplier updating listings (tbc)
				Comms & marketing of new Local Offer

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Thanks!