

February 2022

# Being Clear

An initial desktop review of LA EP service websites

edpsy

# About us



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Community. Engagement. Creativity. Sustainability

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This year we're celebrating our 5th birthday!

edpsy.org.uk is an online space for educational psychologists and anyone interested in education and psychology. We provide a community space to share, debate, and showcase research and practice. We do this to enhance the visibility and impact of the EP profession, with the hope that it makes a positive difference to the lives of children, young people, their families and communities.

## What we offer

1. [Blogs](#) and longer reads – personal reflections and fully referenced articles about practice relevant topics from a range of contributors, across disciplines
2. [Jobs](#) – An open, accessible and wide reaching jobs board to advertise EP vacancies for only £300
3. [Events calendar](#) – allowing anybody running a course that might be relevant to educational psychology, to advertise it for free
4. Information about [training to be an educational psychologist](#)
5. [Interest groups](#) – information about groups that might interest educational psychologists in the UK and further afield.



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## This project

# Why review LA EP service websites?

Increasingly Local Authority Educational Psychology (LA EP) services are using the internet to communicate with people. This includes an increase in the number of EP services that use social media platforms such as Twitter or YouTube. 'Digital by Default' is the current approach of UK Government services (Cabinet Office, 2012), and many Local Authorities are shifting to web-based approaches to communicate information to citizens (LGA, 2014).

To date, and to the best of our knowledge, there has been no broad exploration of LA EP service websites, how these sites are organised, and the information provided on them for parents, carers and education staff.

The aim of this project was to explore features of these webpages, particularly focusing on accessibility and ease of recognition / access. We adopted this approach with parents/carers and educational staff in mind. We used the GOV.UK service manual, '[Designing good government services](#)', and local user research undertaken by the first author in a LA context, to inform the assumptions we made as to what good looks like:

- LA EP services should have dedicated and specific web pages and sites
- It should be immediately clear to people that they have landed on a page that provides information about the EP service for that locality / local authority
- People should be able to contact EP services, and find this information easily, particularly given the current context influenced by COVID-19, building closures and remote working
- People should know how they can contact relevant management or service leads if they have queries, concerns or complaints, and who they should be contacting.

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## What we did and didn't look at in this review

This project focused solely on some of the basics of a 'good' web presence. As discussed in the introduction section, we used GOV.UK principles and learning from local research to inform what 'good' means.

We looked at the basics because it became apparent that many EP services aren't doing these things on their websites or web pages.

Our focus on the basics is also about what is achievable in a review like this. Accessibility is a critical factor, but it would not have been possible for us to run an accessibility audit for 51 different EP websites.

In this initial review we were not attempting to come up with a 'cookbook' type approach to building an EP website. Decisions about the **content** of EP service websites should come from detailed user research with the people who will use that site. This can be a marked shift away from how EP services have conceptualised their use of the web, moving from 'what we want to tell people', to enabling people to complete the thing they set out to do as seamlessly as possible.

There are likely to be a number of reasons why the basics aren't being done. Very often LA EP services have very little control over their web presence and this can be frustrating for service leads, EPs, and people who use or need that service.

We are under no illusion as to how tricky implementing some of the changes suggested in this report, might be, for some EP services. We think that this report will enable EP services to begin to have informed conversations with LA IT or Digital teams, to get the basics right.

## Our findings in brief

1. The majority of EP services have a specific and dedicated web presence
2. 55% of EP services have their web presence as part of the main LA website
3. Only half of EP service sites make it clear that you are 'in the right place'
4. It was usually much clearer that we were looking at information about a specific EP service when the web pages were part of the main LA website
5. Two thirds of services with a web presence have contact information on their main landing page...
6. ...of those services that did not have contact information on their main landing page, nearly three quarters had none within one click
7. The type of service contact information shared with people varied
8. The majority of EP services do not share any information about who leads or manages their service

## What you can do: considerations for EP services

Although our review focused only on LA EP service webpages, the findings and considerations are applicable to all types of EP service.

Based on the initial findings of this activity we would encourage all EP services to reflect on the following considerations.

### Ask the questions in this review, of your own service webpages

We would encourage service leads or those with responsibility for managing and curating EP service webpages to ask themselves the 7 questions we set out to answer in conducting this review (see page 12).

### Make sure you have a web presence

4% of our sample did not have any identifiable web presence for their service. Given the strong shift towards delivering services and information to citizens via digital channels, we would encourage all services to ensure they have a dedicated web presence.

- Identify the right team in the LA to speak to (IT, Communications, Digital)
- Know where, in the larger LA website, you want the EP service webpages to 'live' e.g. 'Education' or 'SEN Support Services'
- Start small. Aim for one EP service webpage that can do some of the basics i.e. make it clear who you are, provide people with contact details (you can iterate and expand when you have the time)
- Explore whose responsibility it is to manage individual service webpages. Is it the central LA team, or are services expected to have this responsibility?
- If the service has responsibility, someone (an EP or admin) needs time to fulfil this role
- Ask if named people can be given access to the Content Management System (CMS) and trained how to use it

## Ensure it is clear to people visiting your webpages that they are in the right place

People often come to service pages trying to solve a problem and it is important that people are confident that they can get the information they need. Services should strive to ensure that their webpages make it clear that someone is in the right place.

- One way to achieve this, as suggested by our findings, is to ensure that the EP service webpages are part of the main LA website.
- Use clear and descriptive page titles and headings

If your service webpages are not part of the main LA website:

- You may need to make your connection with the LA clear in your main page title e.g. *'Oxton Council Educational Psychology Service'*

## Consider the impact of not providing service contact information

Where there is limited access to service contact information, services should consider the impact that this might be having on parents, carers, SENCOs and others. Not having this contact information is unlikely to stop people trying to contact a service. It does however make it more likely that the process to get those details takes more time and is frustrating.

## Have contact information easily visible and accessible

Contact information is likely to be one of the most frequent bits of information people look for and when it's easy to find it can save time and reduce frustration.

- Have contact information prominently displayed
- Link back to contact information on every page

There may have been organisational decisions not to provide contact information, based on assumptions about frequency of contact being unmanageable for staff (EPs or admin). We would encourage services to ensure that these decisions are based on evidence from the local context. Experiment with what happens when information is provided. To what extent do numbers of emails increase? Does phone call volume and time increase? Trial different solutions and monitor the impact.

## Consider providing people with information about who leads the service, and how they can be contacted

Providing information about who leads a service and how they might be contacted can offer reassurance to people who need to use EP services. Having this information available speaks to organisational transparency, openness and accountability.

There may be legitimate concerns about having contact information for service leaders, such as an unmanageable amount of incoming emails or phone calls. If organisational openness is an aim, then publishing contact information could be trialled, and the impact of this trial then evaluated. If service leaders receive an unmanageable amount of contact the decision to share contact information can always be reversed.

If there is a concern with sharing a named email address, services leaders may seek to establish generic leadership contact information such as '[principal-ep@oxton.gov.uk](mailto:principal-ep@oxton.gov.uk)' - any such enquiries would then be separate from other service lead work and they could be accessed by a central administrative team.

# Methodology

## Our methodology - what we did

1. We used [information from GOV.UK](#) to determine that there are 149 local authorities in England, the vast majority of which offer EP services. This number includes:
  - Metropolitan districts (36)
  - London Boroughs (32)
  - Unitary Authorities (55)
  - County Councils (26)
2. We decided to sample approximately one third of these local authorities<sup>1</sup> and to explore their web presence. To make our sample representative, we used random stratified sampling. This means that we made sure that each type of LA was fairly represented as a proportion in our sample - as in table 1, below.

	Total number	Proportion of total	Number in sample
<b>Metropolitan districts</b>	36	24%	12
<b>London Boroughs</b>	32	22%	11
<b>Unitary Authorities</b>	55	37%	19
<b>County Councils</b>	26	17%	9
<b>Totals</b>	149	100%	51

3. To choose which LA EP service websites to review, each type of authority was numbered e.g. London Boroughs were listed alphabetically then numbered 1-32. We then used a random number generator to select the appropriate number from each type of LA<sup>2</sup> (Metropolitan, London Borough, Unitary and County Council).
4. Once we had randomly chosen the LA EP service websites to review, we listed them in a Google Sheet ready to gather data in line with seven different questions.
5. To find each LA EP service web presence we googled '*Location* Educational Psychology Service

<sup>1</sup> We ended up sampling 51 local authorities due to rounding.

<sup>2</sup> If the same number was randomly generated more than once, we ignored that one and kept going until we had the number of LAs that we needed for that particular LA type.

## Our questions - what we wanted to know<sup>3</sup>

We had seven questions that we asked when looking at the 51 LA EPS websites:

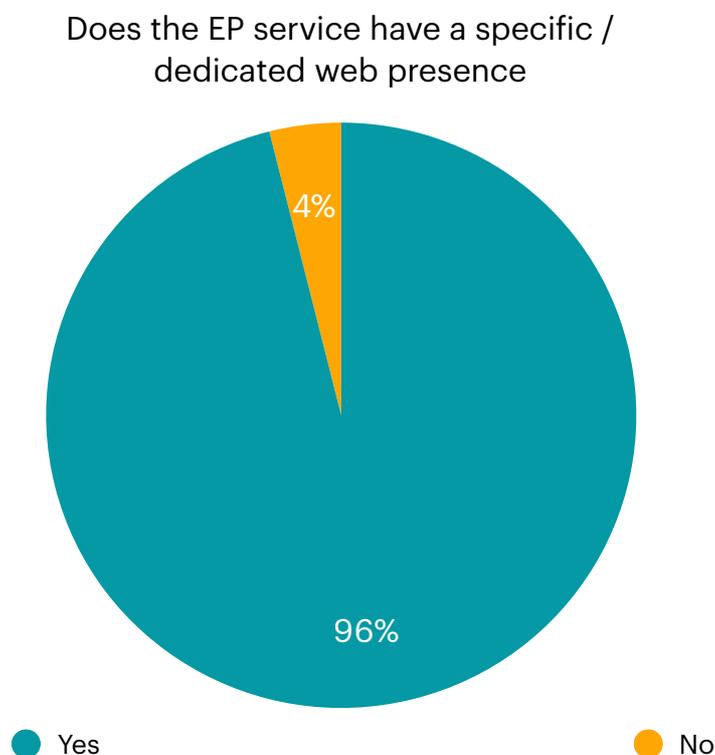
1. Does the service have a specific, dedicated web presence i.e. a website or webpages?
2. Is this web presence part of the main LA website?
3. Is it clear that this EP service web presence is for the local authority / location it services e.g. for the imaginary LA of Oxton, is it visually and textually clear that a person has landed on the EP service webpages *for Oxton LA*.
4. Is the service contact information available on the landing page?
5. If the service contact information is not available on the landing page, can it be accessed within one click?
6. What level of contact information is provided (if it is there)?
7. Is a visitor able to locate information about who leads the service and how to contact them?

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<sup>3</sup> You can find more information about why we asked these specific questions in Appendix 1, page 30.

# Detailed Findings

# 1. The majority of EP services have a specific and dedicated web presence



## What we mean by 'specific EP service web presence'

By 'specific web presence' we mean the EP service has a dedicated and specific website, web pages or web page that provides more information about that service. This might look like following a link from the LA homepage, to the 'Education' section of that site, and then a specific link that brings people to the pages for the Educational Psychology Service. Alternatively, this might be a page or pages people see after they Google 'Location Educational Psychology'

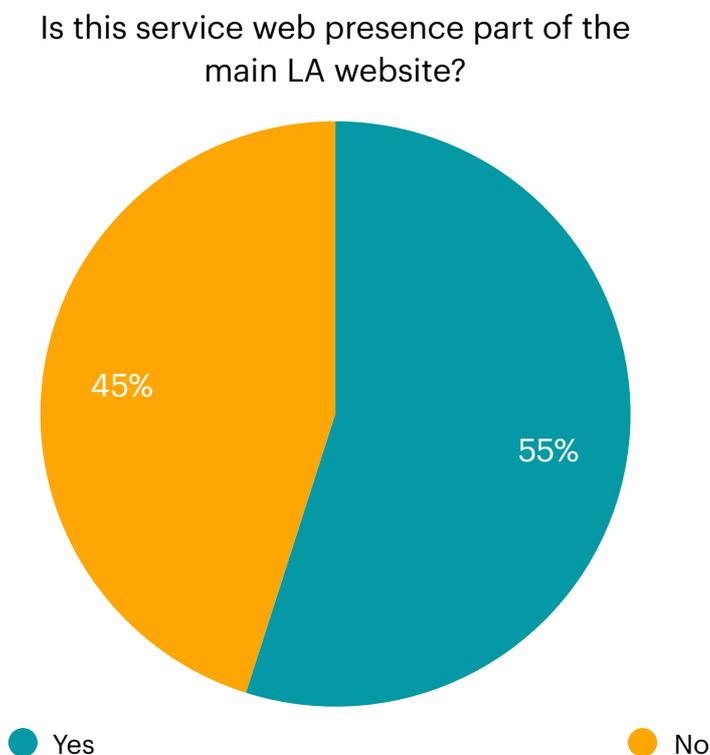
The alternative to this, 'no specific web presence' might mean that the EP service was mentioned or referred to on a main 'SEN Support Services' webpage, but no more.

We found that the vast majority of services (96%) had a specific web presence i.e. dedicated EP service website, selection of web pages or a web page that provided people with more information about the service.

It is important to note here that we are not providing commentary on the quality of the information available on those web pages.

Given that 96% of EP services in our sample had a specific web presence, we took this as evidence to support our hypothesis that EP services are using the internet to communicate to people.

## 2. 55% of EP services have their web presence as part of the main LA website



Whether or not an EP service had its web presence on the main LA website was a more complex picture.

In our sample, 55% of EP services had their specific web presence as part of the main LA website, where as 45% did not.

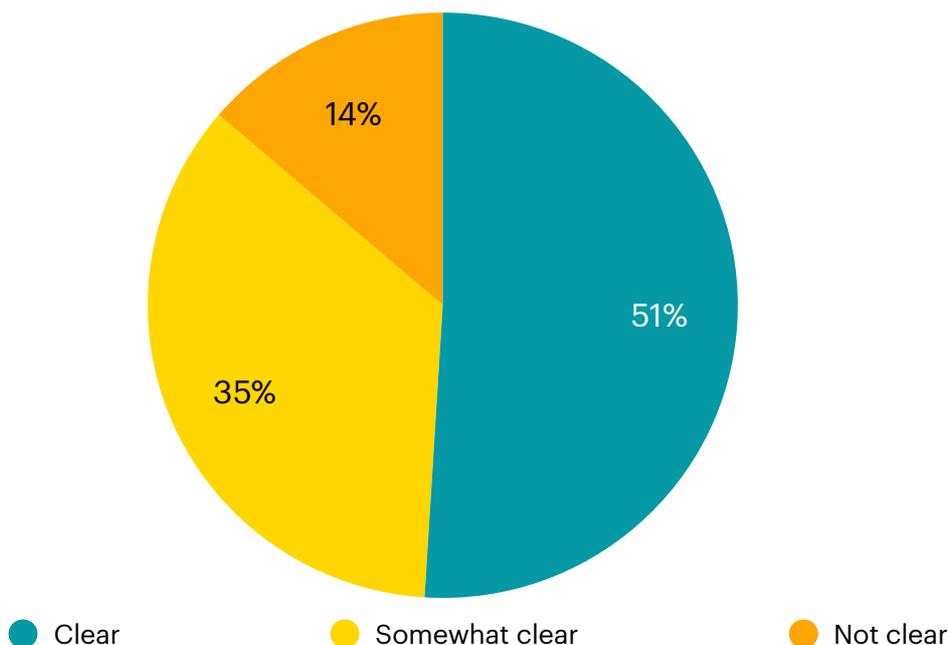
This is important as changes between websites, for users, need to be carefully managed to ensure they are confident that they are still 'in the right place'. There are reasons why EP services may have dedicated webpages outside of the main LA site. It might be that the flexibility of LA webpages is limited and cannot offer what the EP service needs. Alternatively, traded EP services might have pages on a 'marketplace' type website that allows clients to purchase LA services - here the decision might have

been taken not to have EP service information in two places (i.e. in the 'marketplace' and on the LA website).

We recognise that the location of a specific EP service's webpages might not have been a choice for service leads.

### 3.1 Only half of EP service sites make it clear that you are 'in the right place'

The extent to which it is clear that you are 'in the right place'



Here we aimed to explore how clear it might be to a person that they have landed on web pages that are going to give them information about a specific LA EP service. For example, if a person wants information about the imaginary Oxton LA EP service, then it should be visually and/or textually clear that the web pages the person has landed on are about **Oxton** EP service.

We should highlight here that to some extent, this question rested on relatively rapid subjective judgements based on knowledge and expertise about the web and how people use the internet<sup>4</sup>.

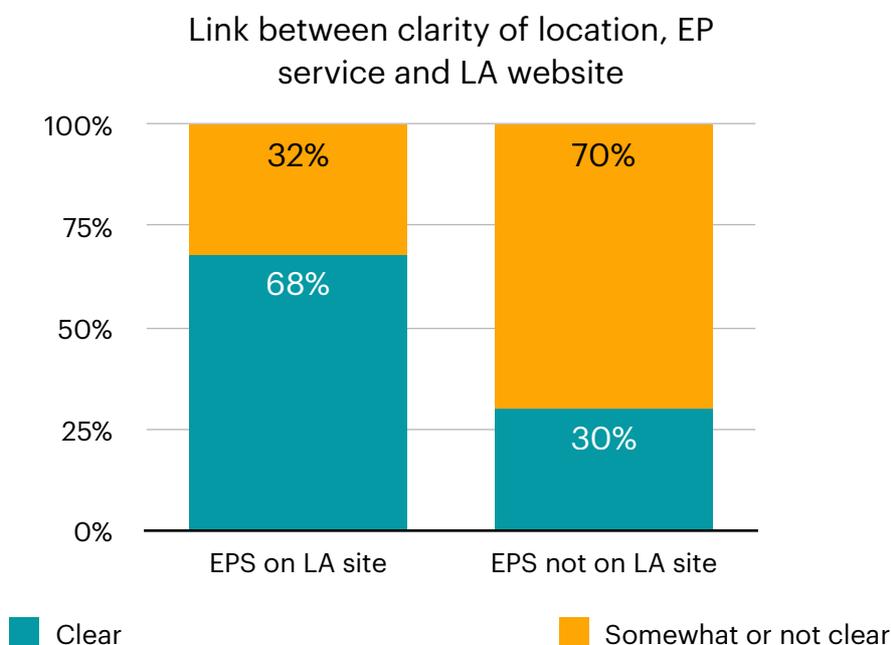
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<sup>4</sup> Table 2 in Appendix 2 (page 32) outlines some of the criteria developed to decide whether an EP service site is clear, somewhat clear or not clear.

- Half of EP service web pages made it clear that their web presence is for the local authority / location it serves
- For the other half, it was only somewhat clear (35%) or not clear (14%) that we were in the right place e.g. no reference to LA name, no reference to the 'Educational Psychology Service'

During the process for gathering information to answer question 3, there was an emerging sense that whether or not EP service pages were clear about being in the right place, seemed to depend on whether or not those pages were part of the main LA website.

## 3.2 It was usually much clearer that we were looking at information about a specific EP service when the web pages were part of the main LA website



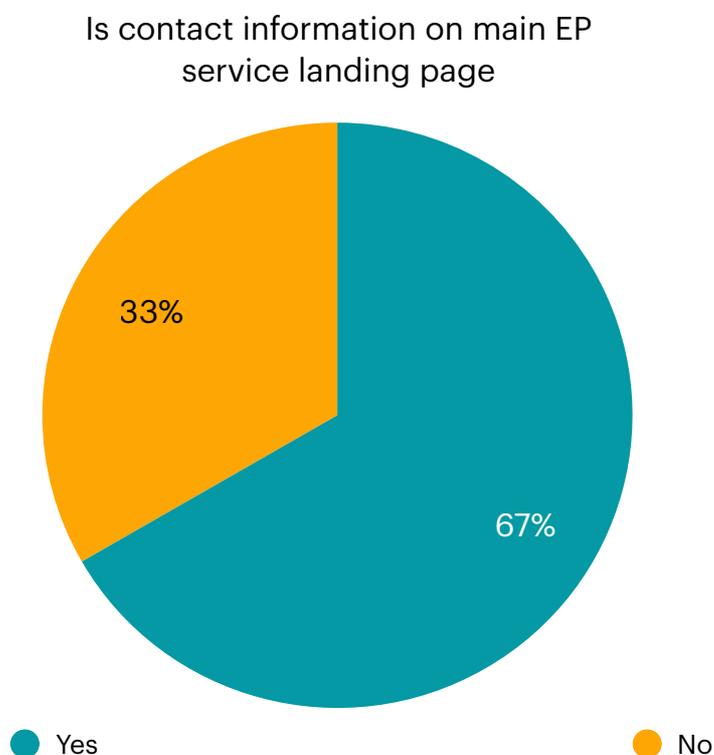
During our review there seemed to be a correlation between EP service specific web pages being clear about what LA they are part of, and those web pages being on the main local authority website.

We haven't conducted any inferential statistics to explore the strength of this correlation but the descriptive statistics still offer useful information:

- Of those EP web pages that were part of the main local authority website, 68% were clearly identifiable as the site for the EP service for the location / LA that it serves
- Of those EP web pages that were not part of the main local authority website, only 30% were clear regarding the service and location / LA

These descriptive statistics suggest that it is more likely to be clear to a person that they are visiting a particular LA EP web site when those web pages are part of the main LA website.

## 4. Two thirds of services with a web presence have contact information on their main landing page...



Contact information is important for any service (educational psychology or otherwise). Readers will have experienced the frustration that can arise when you want to contact a company or organisation, to talk to someone, but the relevant contact information is either not there or hard to find. This is frustrating enough if you're seeking to talk to someone about your toaster... but even more so should you be a parent wishing to talk to someone from a statutory service.

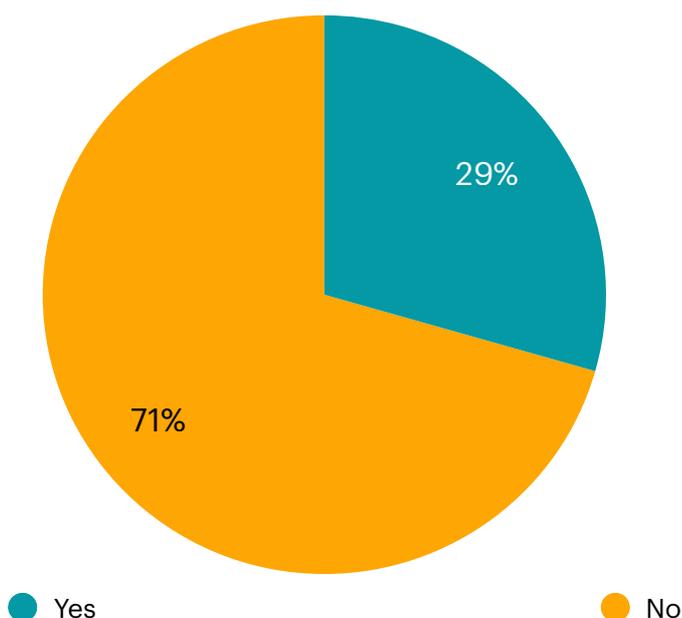
Local user research carried out by the first author of this report, in his previous LA, highlighted that the number one thing that parents and SENCOs wanted on the EPS website was easy and accessible information about how to contact the EP service. The type of information requested differed. SENCOs wanted an email address, where-as parents requested a telephone number so that they could speak to someone (question 6 explores the type of contact information provided in more depth).

In our sample, two-thirds of EP websites had contact information available and visible on their main landing page. This means that one-third did not, which might prompt people to begin searching elsewhere for that contact information.

There may of course be organisational decisions leading to no contact information being provided, but it is likely that people will still search for this information, except the experience has now become more difficult.

## 5. ...of those services that did not have contact information on their main landing page, nearly three quarters had none within one click

Contact information accessible within one click of main landing page



We looked at those EP service websites that did not have contact information on their main landing page, to try to determine if this information was accessible within just one additional click. This might be clicking a link that says 'contact us' or 'get in touch'.

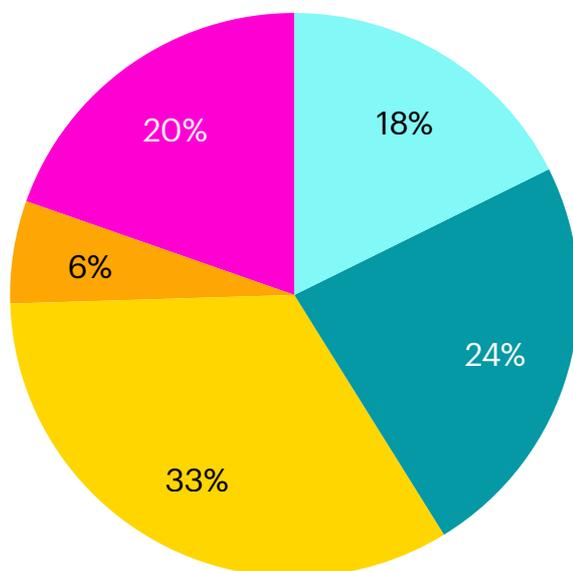
Nearly three quarters of those services that did not have contact information on their main landing / home page, did not have this information accessible within one click either. Often we followed links such as 'About the service' or 'More information' or 'Who we are' to try to find this information.

Sometimes contact information was findable, but this process was not easy. For example we might have had to delve much deeper in to the EP website to find it, by following multiple links e.g. 'Who we are -> About us -> Contact Us'.

**A key finding was that if EP services did not provide contact information on their main page, or within one click, there was unlikely to be any contact information at all.**

## 6. The type of service contact information shared with people varied

Type of contact information provided



● Generic ● Email or telephone ● Address, email and telephone ● SEP or PEP direct ● None

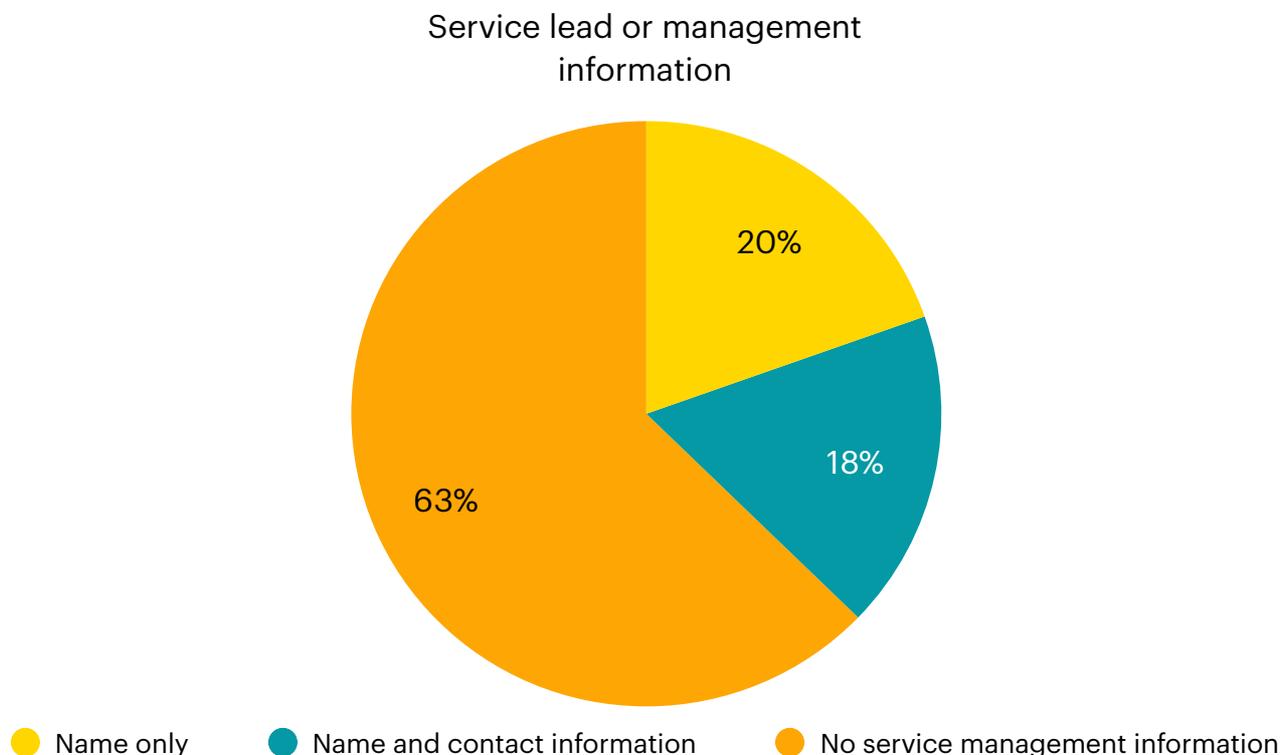
From our analysis it was clear that the type and quality of contact information provided was variable:

- One fifth of services shared no contact information for the EP service anywhere on their website.
- Just under one fifth of services listed generic contact information such as a generic local authority email address e.g. [customers@oxton.gov.uk](mailto:customers@oxton.gov.uk), rather than specific contact details for the EP service.
- Nearly a quarter of services shared either an EP service email address **or** telephone number
- One third of services shared an EP service specific telephone number **and** email **and** postal address.

- 6% of services provided the details of a senior or principal EP as the way to make contact.

In considering this variability we would suggest that we don't know what route people are most likely to want to take in order to contact an EP service. We do think however that people will be looking for this information and even if it is not provided, people will still try to find this information.

## 7. The majority of EP services do not share any information about who leads or manages the service



- Nearly two-thirds of services provided no information anywhere on their websites about who leads or manages the EP service.
- One-fifth of services provided people with the name of the person who manages the services
- Only 18% of services provided a name and contact information for the service manager, on their websites.

As highlighted earlier in the report, we believe that people should know who leads an EP service and how they can contact those people. Providing this information in our view speaks to transparency, access and accountability and is particularly important for people who may have queries, concerns or complaints.

# Summary

## Our main considerations

In light of these findings, we think there are 6 considerations that EP services might take forward (these considerations are explored in more depth on pages 6 and 7)

- Ask the questions in this review, of your own service webpages
- Make sure you have a web presence
- Consider the impact of not providing service contact information
- Ensure it is clear to people visiting your webpages that they are in the right place
- Have contact information easily visible and accessible
- Consider providing people with information about who leads the service, and how they can be contacted

# Appendices

## Appendix 1: Rationale for each question

We had seven questions that we asked when looking at the 51 LA EP service websites:

1. Does the service have a specific, dedicated web presence i.e. a website or webpages?
  - This initial question allowed us to determine the extent to which EP services have their own, dedicated web pages or website
2. Is this web presence part of the main LA website?
  - All Local Authorities have websites and these are often used to communicate information to citizens about services that the LA provides. General familiarity with EP service websites suggested that not all were part of their main LA website. We wanted to develop an appreciation of how many services had webpages or sites external to the main LA website.
3. Is it clear that this EP service web presence is for the local authority / location it services e.g. for the imaginary LA of Oxton, is it visually and textually clear that a person has landed on the EP service webpages *for Oxton*.
  - Initial browsing of various LA EP service webpages/sites suggested that it was not always clear that a person might be seeing information about the EP service for a specific location / local authority. Sometimes the 'look and feel' of the webpages changed dramatically (e.g. when moving from the LA to the EP service webpages) and occasionally there were no visual or text markers to easily identify what service was being presented or for what LA that service was part of. We wanted to develop an initial, albeit subjective, measure to determine how clear it might be that a person is 'in the right place'.
4. Is the service contact information available on the landing page?
  - Local user research carried out by the first author of this report, in his previous LA, highlighted that the number one thing that parents and SENCOs wanted on the EPS website was easy and accessible information about how to contact the EP service. Contact information seems even more important currently, given that many professionals are working from home, LA buildings have been closed

for some time and the frequency of EP remote working has increased, within the context of COVID-19. Contact information for services is also good practice.

5. If the service contact information is not available on the landing page, can it be accessed within one click?
  - Sometimes the range and scope of the format of webpages can be limited, particularly within LA websites, and so it might not be possible to display contact information on the main EP service webpage. Alternatively, EP services may have taken the decision to focus on what the service does or what 'educational psychology' is. We wanted to determine how easy contact information was to find, if it was not prominently on the main EP service webpage. Within this question we have used the proxy of 'number of clicks' to review the ease of accessing this contact information, although we know that this isn't a perfect measure.
6. What level of contact information is provided (if it is there)?
  - This question developed somewhat later in the study - we did not begin with this question. In answering question 4 and 5, it became clear that there was considerable variability regarding the type of contact information the EP service provided on their webpages. We added this question in later, and re-looked at EP service website to try to get a sense of, and categorise, the type of contact information available.
7. Is a visitor able to locate information about who leads the service and how to contact them?
  - LA EP services form part of a range of public services that Local Authorities provide to schools and citizens. One assumption underpinning this desktop review was that people should know who leads an EP service and how they can contact those people. We wanted to understand if services provided this information and how. There were no limitations to the number of 'clicks' necessary in our attempt to locate this information on an EP service website (unlike question 5), it just had to be there, somewhere.

## Appendix 2: Criteria for site location clarity

Clear	Somewhat clear	Not clear
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LA name clear on page</li> <li>• Clear 'Educational Psychology Service' or 'Educational Psychology' heading</li> <li>• Visual consistency with other parts of the website</li> <li>• Clear logical web address e.g. <a href="http://www.oxton.gov.uk/educational-psychology">www.oxton.gov.uk/educational-psychology</a></li> </ul>	<p>These pages had only one or two of the criteria listed in the 'Clear' column.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No visual consistency with other parts of the website</li> <li>• No clear heading for the webpage</li> <li>• Absence of Local Authority name on the page</li> <li>• Overwhelming quantity of text or images</li> <li>• Key information (Location EP service) not given prominence</li> </ul>