

SEND improvement plan – quarterly progress update January 2025

In the first update for 2025, we are sharing with you the progress we are making against actions being taken to improve services for children and young people with SEND and their families, as outlined in our [Priority Action and Improvement plan](#).

We are also able to provide an update following the recent Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) Stocktake which details the progress made across **both priority action areas**, which you can read via the link below. Additionally, we've included updates on the five improvement areas on the following pages.

The Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) conducted a 'stocktake' between September – October 2024 to assess the Local Area Partnership's progress in delivering the Priority Action & Improvement Plan. This review was a requirement following the Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) Area SEND Inspection.

The [summary report](#) highlighted that significant progress has been made across all areas of the Priority Action Plan (PAP), including a key focus on progress evidenced across both Priority Action areas. This is in line with the expected urgent focus on improving in Priority Action areas, with impact in improvement areas expected to take longer. The DfE and NHSE report also highlighted that whilst improvement work is beginning to have an impact on experiences of some children, young people, and families, it is too early for impact to be widespread.

The review confirmed that the local area partnership has established much **stronger governance and joint working arrangements** since the inspection. It highlighted the **development of the data dashboard**, designed and utilised by the partnership, which will continue to be instrumental in informing the SEND work that the local area does. The review also provided clear **recommendations for further focus** that align with our Improvement Plan, which we remain committed to delivering.

Whilst progress continues to be made across all areas of the improvement plan, we recognise that the impact of this work upon the experiences for children, young people and families across Hertfordshire will not yet be widespread.

We are continuously exploring ways to seek feedback on their lived experience to assess the impact of actions.

We are reporting on improvement areas 1 and 4 together because a lot of the work happening in our improvement services contributes to both these aims.

Improvement Area 1: Leaders across the partnership should address the variability in children and young people's access to health services that exists in different areas within the local area so that all children and young people with SEND in Hertfordshire have an equal opportunity to access appropriate provision and support that meets their needs.

Improvement Area 4: Leaders should further address the gaps and delays in service provision to autism, ADHD, mental health, audiology and speech and language.

- There has been a **99% reduction** in the number of children and young people **waiting more than 6 weeks for the Education Health and Care (EHC) Needs Assessment Speech and Language Therapy Report** compared to baseline (Sep 23 to Nov 24).
- There has been an **improvement** in the **speech and language therapist vacancy rate** (number of posts to be filled) over the last 12 months, from 25.4% a year ago, with the vacancy rate being 4% in Jan 2025.
- Expansion of the [Neurodiversity Hub](#) which provides support to families and professionals regardless of whether they have a diagnosis has led to a **19% increase in usage**. It has been confirmed that funding will be provided for a further 3 years.
- There is a new [Neurodiversity Service Directory](#) for parents, carers and professionals to support neurodivergent children and young people, and a 'Supporting your Neurodivergent Child' handbook that has been developed by parents for Hertfordshire parent carers and professionals: [Neurodiversity Handbook](#)
- Young people over the age of 14 and on the learning disability register are entitled to a free annual health check. In East & North Herts there has been a **rise** of 4.7% in the number of young people eligible having an [Annual Health Check](#) and a corresponding 8.7% rise in South & West Herts.

Improvement Area 2: Leaders across the partnership should act to improve the quality of new and existing Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans and ensure that plans meaningfully capture the voice and experience of children and young people with SEND and their families.

- **20-week timeliness for EHC Needs Assessments is at 54%** for the year to the end of December 2024, above the previous year (40%) and national average (50%). This performance is against a backdrop of a 27% increase in the number of EHC Needs Assessment Requests agreed for the year to the end of December 2024, meaning we have completed more EHCPs, and more in within the statutory timescales. We recognise there is more to be done; our ambition is to support all children in a timely way.
- **Annual Review timeliness** is 20% for 4 weeks and 20% for 12 weeks, **improving on 2023 performance** (9.5% and 15% respectively). Whilst we have not yet met our milestone (40%), **we have made 57% more Annual Review decisions in the year to Dec 2024 compared to last year** and are prioritising a backlog, so we expect performance to continue improving.

- In the most recent quarterly **auditing of new EHC Plans** (Oct-Dec 2024), 50.6% of EHC Plans were graded 'good' or 'outstanding'. **This is a 14.4% improvement on the previous quarter** and above the national benchmarking that compares over a third of LAs using the Invision 360 tool to complete their audits.
- **There has been an increase in compliments, particularly those related to communication.** In the last quarter (Oct-Dec 2024) 142 compliments were received, making it the second quarter in a row in which then number of compliments received is higher than complaints received during the same period. We have been working hard over this quarter to live up to our [ACT Framework](#) (Accurate, Compassionate and Timely approach to communication).
- The partnership ran its first **SEND Festival of Practice in October 2024**, bringing together practitioners from across Education, Health, and Social Care to learn about practice on the theme 'Voice of the Child and Young Person'. This event included input from young people and a survey to attendees has highlighted its positive impact.
- A recent **survey of staff** within the Making SEND Everyone's Business (MSEB) programme had significant engagement from staff who support with statutory SEND processes. Feedback **showed high levels of commitment for the organisation and staff feeling well supported** by colleagues and their managers. Having a committed, supported and skilled workforce is key to providing good support to our children young people and families.

Improvement Area 3: Leaders should take action to ensure that pupils with EHC plans are attending the provision as stated on their plans, that the provision is effective in meeting needs, and that the use of part-time timetables is appropriate and is carefully managed and monitored.

- The partnership continues to prioritise identifying suitable provision for children who are waiting, working with schools to identify creative solutions. As of October 2024, the **number of children waiting more than one year has decreased by 63%** compared to baseline at September 2023.
- The partnership is also developing a **new SEND Sufficiency Strategy** that that will set out how Hertfordshire County Council and our partners intend to ensure that there is sufficient high-quality specialist provision in both mainstream and special school settings to meet the future needs of children and young people with SEND in Hertfordshire. A focus will be on with a whole system graduated offer of support working closely with both mainstream and special schools, early years settings and colleges to ensure that children and young people can access provision that is inclusive and effective in meeting their needs.
- Informing this new strategy is a commissioned **review of special schools**, draft recommendations have been shared with school leaders and the SEND Executive and a period of engagement is underway with education settings, [Herts Parent Carer Involvement](#) (HPCI) and key stakeholders across education, health and social care.

Improvement Area 5: The local area partnership should act to address parents' and carers' concerns at an early stage to reduce dissatisfaction and eliminate the need for parents and carers to have to follow formal routes.

- **A review of the Resolution & Reconciliation (R&R) service** who address and resolve disagreements at an early stage relating to SEND (for children with EHCPs, and those families who are applying for an EHCP) has been completed which has highlighted good practice and areas for development; actions are being governed by the SEND Improvement Programme.
- **The appeals rate has started to reduce** from a peak in 2023 of 4.5% to 4.1% in December 2024. The partnership is focused on earlier resolution with families and the recommendations from the R&R review will support this work.
- The new [EHC Online Portal](#) was launched (in a phased way) from mid-October. This portal is a way for families to track the progress of their EHC Needs Assessment. Parents and young people can use it to see documents relating to their application, timelines, and receive updates from their EHC Coordinator.