

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

– 30 January 2026

Local Area Partnership Monitoring and Priority Action Plan

Report by Director of Children's Services

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. The Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - a) Note the progress made by the local area partnership in addressing the issues raised by the 2023 SEND inspection. Thank all partners, particularly Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum and the SEND Youth Forum for their participation and hard work.**
 - b) Recognise the continuing challenges faced by the local area partnership, acknowledging that some of those challenges are national and some are specific to Oxfordshire.**
 - c) Note the new SEND Priority Action Plan to further progress our improvement journey in Oxfordshire.**

Executive Summary

- 2. This report outlines progress made by the special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) local area partnership since the previous report to Scrutiny in February 2025.**

Progress

- 3. We have been working closely with partners to strengthen SEND services in Oxfordshire since the SEND inspection of 2023 which highlighted 'systemic failures' in the local area partnership.**
- 4. Following the SEND inspection, the Department for Education issued an improvement notice to Oxfordshire County Council, which remains in place. This required the creation of our SEND Improvement and Assurance Board as well as regular priority action deep dives and stocktake reviews to oversee and monitor progress against the identified areas for improvement. This has been supplemented by our Ofsted annual conversations.**
- 5. Following the inspection in 2023, a Priority Action Plan was developed to address the areas of significant weaknesses. The plan formed part of a wider SEND improvement programme which was designed to bring together the key**

stakeholders in the partnership to ensure a step change in our approach to SEND.

6. At the centre of this is a commitment to the voice of children and young people and parent carers. Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum (OxPCF) is an integral part of the local area partnership and is represented on all working groups, themes and boards, including the SEND Improvement & Assurance Board (SIAB). The SEND Youth Forum likewise is a core part of our improvement journey and we work closely to design services and hear young people's feedback.
7. In September-October 2025, we had a local area SEND monitoring inspection. The inspectors found that the local area has taken "effective action" to address all five areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection ([link to full report](#)). Ofsted and CQC recognised strengthened governance, improved communication and enhanced opportunities for children, young people and their families to contribute to service planning and evaluation.
8. We know there is still more we can and must do to further improve SEND services in Oxfordshire for every child and family. As such, we have prepared an updated Priority Action Plan to respond to latest feedback and to take us forward on the next stage of our improvement progress. This is attached as an appendix.
9. Our transformation programme is currently grouped into four themes:
 - (a) Theme 1: Right Support, Right Time
 - (b) Theme 2: Right Plan, Right First Time, Every Time
 - (c) Theme 3: Right Provision, Right Time
 - (d) Theme 4: Preparation for Adulthood

The new Priority Action Plan proposes some minor changes to the scope of the themes to align work areas and to simplify the theme names.

10. The remainder of this report outlines the five key areas for priority action identified in 2023, the progress made to date, and the planned next steps to further strengthen services.
11. **Area for Priority Action 1:** Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should urgently prioritise systems to gather the views of children and young people with SEND effectively. Leaders should use these views to inform their strategic planning for, and evaluation of SEND services that improve the outcomes and experiences of children and young people with SEND and their families.
12. Good progress has been made with establishing our SEND Youth Forum, this now meets regularly with a core group of children and young people who are passionate about improving services. There are opportunities for children and young people to directly shape the strategic direction of services, including

through connection with SIAB and Scrutiny. We work with Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum (OxPCF) to help the voice of children, young people and families to be heard, including through the co-design of our new SEND vision and strategy. We have also developed our SEND local offer and provide more accessible information to families about our services. Our Education, Health and Care Plans aim to place the child at the centre and we take proactive steps to hear their voice.

13. The next step is to consider ways we can broaden and expand the group of children and young people that we hear from to shape our SEND services, including through working in partnership with schools. There is also some work planned to strengthen the voice of every child in the annual review process for Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans.
14. **Area for Priority Action 2:** Leaders in the local authority, ICB and education, health and care providers should develop communication systems across the partnership to improve the efficiency and quality of their information-gathering processes to ensure that children's and young people's needs are understood and met effectively through coordinated approaches.
15. Inspectors found that we have put in place "clear communication structures to improve partnership working". Our board structure and theme working groups are working effectively, and we are beginning to see the impact from professionals and services working together more closely. For example, our SEND Together conference in the Spring was a success in bringing together approximately 200 partnership professionals and parent carers to share information about services, and received highly positive feedback.
16. We know there is more we can do to strengthen our shared partnership communication approaches and to embed our values in each interaction, so that every family has a positive experience. This will be a priority area for the coming year.
17. **Area for Priority Action 3:** Leaders across the partnership should establish rigorous processes to help ensure the improved timeliness and quality assurance of EHC plans. Leaders should use this learning to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans.
18. Since the inspection in 2023, we have introduced a new quality assurance framework for Education, Health and Care (EHC) plans. The waiting times for needs assessments has improved, as has the timeliness of issuing new plans.
19. However, there is still more we must do to improve timeliness and increase consistency in the quality of plans, as well as to strengthen partnership contributions to the annual review process. We are progressing this work through theme 2 of our improvement plan and with our multi-agency quality assurance forum.

20. **Area for Priority Action 4:** Leaders across education, health and care should improve the commissioning of services to ensure that children, young people and their families receive sufficient support to better meet their needs and improve parental confidence in the SEND system.
21. Inspectors found that “the local area partnership has jointly commissioned a range of appropriate services since the last inspection [...] Leaders have created improved oversight to ensure that children and young people with SEND use suitable and safe provision that meets their needs more effectively. This includes placements in residential special schools and alternative provision.” We continue to progress this work including to ensure sufficiency and sustainability of specialist services.
22. Initiatives such as our enhanced pathways, special school outreach and further work to embed the graduated approach across all schools and settings, mean that the needs of more children and young people with SEND are being met effectively in mainstream settings. A review of school place sufficiency is currently underway which will enable more mainstream schools to effectively support children’s SEND needs.
23. We have piloted a speech and language screening tool to help identify children’s needs earlier. However, we know the wait times are still too long for some health services, and we are beginning to explore how as a partnership we could move to a needs-led approach, drawing on national best practice.
24. **Area for priority action 5:** Leaders, including education, health and care providers, should identify the steps that they will take to collectively monitor and measure the impact of their strategy and actions. These plans should be co-produced with and communicated clearly to children, young people and their families so that their experiences and outcomes improve.
25. We monitor and measure the impact of our work through the four theme groups, reporting to Partnership Delivery Group and the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board. Power BI data dashboards have been developed to monitor key metrics and key performance indicators have been agreed for each theme. Work is ongoing to co-design our new SEND strategy, and we have worked closely with children, young people and their families on priority priorities.
26. We want to bring all children, young people and families with us on our improvement journey and provide meaningful opportunities for engagement. As such, widening the reach of our co-production and engagement activity is a key priority for the coming year. We also have some work planned to strengthen the way we capture and measure impact, including qualitative metrics.

Next steps

27. The revised Priority Action Plan to be progressed, with a robust programme management approach to delivery. All four themes will continue to provide

monthly highlight reports to the SEND Improvement & Assurance Board, including tracking key performance indicators and impact.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

28. Progress on our SEND improvement journey is absolutely a core part of how we deliver our fairer and healthier Oxfordshire vision. The partnership work ongoing by the SEND local area partnership falls under the broader strategy set by the Health and Wellbeing Board and the Children's Trust Board.

Financial Implications

29. The updated SEND Priority Action Plan (PAP) is addressing the statutory recommendations arising from the Ofsted SEND inspection. The local authority is required to secure improvements where weaknesses are identified. While the quality improvements set out within the revised PAP are necessary to ensure compliance with these statutory duties, the financial implications of the improvements delivered to date have not been explicitly costed within this report. Likewise, the further amendments proposed to the SEND PAP have not yet been fully quantified and will have implications across the General Fund and the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).
30. Indicative budget pressures for 2026/27 have been identified in relation to SEND statutory services, including the £0.8m for the SEND Casework Team and £1.0m for the Educational Psychology Service. These pressures arise from increased statutory demand associated with EHCP assessment and review activity, quality & timeliness improvements.
31. The updated SEND Priority Action Plan contains statutory improvement requirements that will continue to have financial implications for both the DSG and General Fund. To ensure full regulatory compliance and financial transparency, all impacts arising from the SEND improvement programme must be incorporated into the forthcoming review of the DSG Management Plan and the Council's 2027/28–2029/30 budget planning cycle.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

32. The local authority's approach to SEND is governed by a variety of legislation, including the Children and Families Act 2014, supporting regulations and codes of practice in particular the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice (the 'SEND' Code of Practice).

33. This report provides an update on the outcome of the most recent Area SEND monitoring inspection, and the Priority Action plan in place to address the concerns identified by the Inspectorate in 2023. Whilst the Inspection report identifies that the '*local area has taken effective action ... to address all the areas for priority action identified at the initial inspection*' the report also states that this '*does not mean that the area for priority action is no longer a concern or that the local area can stop taking action to address it*'. Accordingly, this report further sets out the actions proposed to continue to address areas for improvement and ensure ongoing progress.

Comments checked by:

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Staff Implications

No staff implications.

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Equality & Inclusion Implications

34. The improvement work that the local area partnership is progressing will make a positive difference to the experience of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Sustainability Implications

35. There are no sustainability implications.

Risk Management

36. For each theme, risks and their mitigations are recorded on a monthly basis. In addition, risks are escalated to the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board if appropriate. The overall programme risk is also recorded monthly on the Council's risk register.

Lisa Lyons
Director of Children's Services

Annex: Annex 1: Priority action plan 2026-2029

Background papers: Local Area Partnership SEND update February 2025 (link: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75280/Report%20to%20EYP%20OSC%20-%20Local%20Area%20Partnership%20SEND%20Update.pdf>)

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