

Divisions Affected -

EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 28 February 2025

Local Area Partnership SEND Update Report by Lisa Lyons, Director Children Education and Families

RECOMMENDATION

- 1. The Education and Young People Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to**
 - 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.
 - Recognise the continuing challenges faced by the local area partnership acknowledging that some of those challenges are national and some are specific to Oxfordshire.

Executive Summary

- 2. This report outlines progress made by the local area partnership since the previous report to Scrutiny.**

Progress

- 3. The SEND inspection of 2023 highlighted ‘systemic failures’ in the local area partnership. As a response a Priority Action Plan was developed to address the significant weaknesses. The plan formed part of a wider SEND transformation programme which was designed to bring together the key stakeholders in the partnership to ensure a step change in our approach to SEND.**
- 4. At the centre of this was 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 strategic improvement board (SIAB). Feedback from OxPCF is a standing item on all SIAB agendas.**

5. As part of our work on the voice of children and young people, the SEND Youth Forum was established in July 2024 and has now held 4 meetings. Their purpose in their own words is:
- (a) To change the system, give people better support, and see what young people can achieve if we help them
 - (b) To give people opportunities to tell us their stories, feedback and what they want – online, through schools and at social events
 - (c) To hear about their lived experience – the good and the bad
 - (d) To represent that feedback and make sure we get a response and share the positive work people are doing
 - (e) To make friends and make a difference
6. The key achievements of the Forum to date include:
- (a) An animated video outlining the role of the Forum and how young people can get involved
 - (b) The creation of a SEND Youth Forum ‘quality mark’ – the seal of approval. This will be used to kite mark services across the county.



7. The SEND Youth Forum are an integral part of our improvement arrangements and their feedback at SIAB is a regular agenda item. Areas of change have included parenting support to young parents who have children with disabilities, secured employment opportunities for older young people and the development of the Local Offer pages so that they communicate directly to young people. The SEND Youth Forum has its own work programme and is not just a mechanism for speaking to system leaders and agencies, but is developing as a way of Young People communicating to other Young People about what matters to them.
8. Our transformation programme is currently grouped into three ‘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, Looking to independence
9. Our programme is regularly reviewed and as a result of feedback from stakeholders, a further theme: Theme 4: Preparation for Adulthood has been introduced to enable a greater focus on post -16 and the employment and skills agenda.

10. **Theme 1: Right Support, Right Time**

This theme is co-chaired by the Deputy Director Education and Inclusion and the CEO of ACER academy trust. It includes representation from Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

11. Substantial progress has been made in all the following areas:

- a. *Targeted setting support:* this work encompasses enhanced pathways, the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Co-ordinators (SENDCO) helpdesk, special schools outreach and relational schools. Additional funding for 25/26 has been secured to continue to run these programmes without calling on schools delegated budgets.
- b. *Professional development:* this work includes aspects of supporting professionals and includes the SEND Framework, our Evaluate My School initiative (whereby schools self-evaluate against a leadership framework), and our continuing CPD programme.
- c. *Early Years:* the Early Years Board has a draft strategy which is currently going through the corporate approval process.
- d. *Early Help and Prevention:* the Board has approved the strategy which was co-designed with parents and other stakeholders.
- e. *Banding Framework:* A consultant has been commissioned to lead the Banding Review, ensuring alignment with legislative and consultation requirements. Implementation is scheduled for 1st April 2026.
- f. *Alternative Education Provision (AEP):* A Collaborative AEP Board has been established with membership from the parent carer forum. An internal review of AEP has been conducted. Key findings will shape a targeted action plan for enhancing provision. An expert-led AEP Review has been commissioned. Schools are being supported to develop 'schools lead' AEP: Guidance has been provided to help schools establish and sustain their own alternative education pathways. We have enhanced parent and stakeholder engagement including partnering with Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum to improve AEP awareness and develop a dedicated Parent/Carer guide. Improved AEP Data Collection: Developing a more efficient method for collecting data on school commissioned AEP. And finally, we are expanding therapeutic support in education by collaborating with the Head of Oxford Music Service, writing a business case for a Music Therapist role.

Key risks and challenges:

12.

- a. *Ensuring Impact and Effective Monitoring:* Maintaining rigorous impact assessment and monitoring mechanisms to track programme success.

- b. *Establishing a Financially Sustainable Model:* Achieving consensus on and implementing a financially sustainable model. Embedded our approach to funding through greater involvement of the Oxfordshire Schools Forum including presenting the deficit management plan.
- c. *Demonstrating Impact Against KPIs:* Effectively demonstrating programme outcomes through Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- d. *Building on Current Progress and communication:* Continuing to advance and expand upon the positive progress achieved to date and ensuring that parent/carers are aware of our work. Share best practice and making it the way schools operate in Oxfordshire.

13. **Theme 2: Right Plan, Right First Time, Every Time**

This theme is co-chaired by the Assistant Director, SEND and Inclusion and the Designated Clinical Officer from NHS Oxfordshire. It includes representation from Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

Progress has been made in all the following areas:

- a. *Education Health Care and Needs Assessment/Education Health Care Plan (EHCNA/EHCP) Improvements Timeliness:* Significant improvements were achieved in timeliness previously (in September 2024 our % of EHCPs completed within 20 weeks was running at 40%); however, recent challenges have led to a decline in the number of plans issued within 20 weeks (the December equivalent figure is 20%). To improve this, we are:
 - Expanding capacity: The Assessment Team capacity has been increased. Strengthening Support: Targeted initiatives are underway to increase the number of Educational Psychologists and reduce delays.
 - Ongoing Monitoring: A structured approach is in place to track and assess the impact of corrective actions, ensuring continuous improvement.
- b. *Feedback driving Continuous Improvement EHCNA & Annual Review Surveys in Development:* EHCNA survey is being reviewed and updated. Post-Annual Review survey is in co-design, ensuring it reflects stakeholder needs. OxPCF, health, social care, and education representatives are actively involved in survey design. Parent carers and key stakeholders are testing and providing feedback on survey effectiveness. Surveys will measure experiences of children, young people, parents, and carers to inform service improvements.
- c. *Quality Improvement:* A Quality Improvement Framework is in place and Multi Agency Quality Assurance (MAQA) Forum - terms of reference were refreshed in summer 2024. Through the Quality Improvement Framework, the MAQA Forum is routinely monitoring timeliness of all responses across Education / Health and Social care alongside quality of advice and recommended improvements. Advice checklists: Have been rolled out across Education, Health and Social Care. Advice Audit Tool: New audit

tools across Education, Health and Social Care and checklist have been rolled out for Q3 and Q4 (Jan – March 25), supported by training to ensure effective implementation. Our Invision 360 Tool identifies key areas for quality improvement, fostering a culture of continuous enhancement.

Findings are reported at the MAQA Forum and reviewed quarterly by the Partnership Delivery Group (PDG) and SIAB to inform decision-making. A structured audit timetable ensures regular review, with results shared across services. QI action plans are developed based on findings, and PDG and SIAB oversight ensures measurable impact from the Transformation Programme.

14. **Key risks and challenges:**

- a. *Increasing Volume of EHCNAs:* The volume of Education, Health, and Care Needs Assessments (EHCNAs) requests continues to rise (from 111 in September 2024 to 153 in December 2024 and there has been a 27% increase since 2023). This puts additional pressure on resources and timelines.
- b. *Data Quality Issues:* Annual review data quality is hindering the ability to accurately understand baseline Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- c. *Educational Psychologist Capacity:* The increase in needs assessments have led to EPs leaving LAs to undertake private employment. There is now a national shortage of educational psychologists.

15. **Theme 3: Right Provision, Right Time, Looking to Independence**

This theme is co-chaired by Associate Director of Place – Oxfordshire Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board and Service Director Community Health Services, Dentistry & Primary Care. It includes representation from Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

16. Progress has been made in the following areas:

- a. *Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Support:* The recommissioning of CAMHS contract underway, strong engagement key stakeholders including young people and parents and carers whilst the Emotional Mental Health and Wellbeing Board terms of reference have been updated. The TellMe app is for young people's mental health and has been commissioned in partnership between Health and LA services working collaboratively with partners across the system. There is now a Parent Support training offer. The breadth of engagement with parents and carers has been broadened to ensure that a full understanding of parental experience has been captured and will shape future commissioning.
- b. *Special School Nursing (SSN):* Special school nursing report jointly reviewed Integrated Care Board (ICB), Education, Oxford Health Foundation Trust (OHFT) and special schools. Two initial recommendations made by provider that have been accepted. Wider stakeholder group being established to form further recommendations from

the review. Work continues on dependencies with planning around improvements and availability of resource. This includes implementation of delegated health care tasks.

- c. *Community Wisdom Project*: This project was Launched in February 2025. It is a new project between Community Paediatrics, Children's Community Services and Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum. 10 families of young children waiting for support from the Community Pediatricians have been invited to meet professionals and other families for early universal support – e.g. language and communication, play, interaction, sensory, feeding. Often these families are waiting for the 'specialist support package or diagnosis' and the 'universal' enriched activities are helpful for all children.
- d. *Children's Integrated Therapies*: The WellComm Pilot has been launched in primary schools – 46 schools have signed up and have started to screen children in January 2025. It is expected that children's needs will be identified and supported earlier as a result. Children in these settings waiting for SLT support will benefit from access to the programme. The programme improves the skills of all teaching staff, benefitting all children in these settings.

Children's Integrated Therapies (Physio and Occupational Therapies) facilitated focus groups with parents on the Acquired Brain Injury Pathway in October November and December 2024 to collect their views to update the pathway and ensure it is reflective of the journey children are now living once discharged from hospital. Funding for Children's Integrated Therapies for Bloxham Grove Specialist setting agreed by OCC and BOB ICB. Support from SLT and OT commenced in January 25. £590k requested as part of NHS planning for 2025/26, this would increase capacity in SLT and fund 50% of the Sensory OT service in partnership with OCC

- e. *Neurodevelopmental Conditions Pathways*: Within the Neurodevelopmental pathway, although demand (referrals in) continues to outstrip capacity (number of assessments available), the median time that people are waiting has reduced since April 2023. The number of people attending workshops / webinars for Living Well with Neurodivergence Offer is included in the quarterly reporting to PDG/SIAB, in quarter 2 2024/25, 352 CYP / families attended workshop/webinars, to date, over 2,000 individual IP addresses have accessed online resources. Content is Co-produced with OxPCF and delivered by Autism Oxford in collaboration with CAMHS. CAMHS continue to develop AI tool to support triage of the NDC assessments which in the long term could be used to support diagnosis, but this depends on NICE guidance being updated.
- f. *Transitions*: Regular meetings at senior management level between Adults Social Care and Children's Social Care to discuss general themes in relation to young people coming through the system and how we can improve our transition processes for those young people that have SEND and Care Act needs. Preparations for transitions are completed in a timely

manner and by statutory deadlines. A Twilight webinar in Jan 2025 designed specifically for Secondary SENDCOs to inform how the Oxfordshire Careers Hub can support the education and transition of SEND learners in secondary school. Transitional arrangements for young people turning 18 transferring from CAMHS is currently in development. Ongoing commitment to further improve transition arrangements from CAMHS into Adult Mental Health services. The Head of Commissioning has a working group to address the commissioning of placements for young adults who are Care Act eligible.

17. **Key risks and challenges:**

- a. *Availability of resource to increase capacity in line with demand:* Against a backdrop of BOB Integrated Care System's deficit and national planning guidance, expectations going into 2025/26 relate to maintaining current levels of provision, rather than growth. Priority investment requests relate to:
 - Children's Integrated Therapies
 - Special School Nursing
- b. *Embedding needs led approach to neurodivergence amidst current policies and societal expectations:* Despite recognition and acceptance of needs led support, there remains continued focus on diagnosis from CYP, parents and carers.
- c. As stated above, a new theme 'Preparation for Adulthood' is being introduced from February 2025 to ensure a greater focus on post 16, employment, training and education. This will be co-chaired by Deputy Director Education and Inclusion and a lead from Adult Social Care and will include representation from Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

18. **Data and Dashboards:**

Data and feedback is being used to inform the SEND Transformation Programme and business as usual continuous improvement. Work to date includes:

- a. Strategic and operational KPIs have been established and integrated PowerBi data dashboard.
- b. Power BI Data Dashboard is currently being rolled out to strategic and operational leads within Education.
- c. Audit findings will be reported into PDG and SIAB as well as other boards/forums to ensure continuous improvement.
- d. BOB ICB SEND data dashboard is underway & will align to guidance from NHSE regarding data sets.

- e. Bi-monthly performance and quality assurance meetings is attended by social care and education professionals to share performance and local area priorities across the service areas.
 - f. OxPCF tracker will allow quantifiable data to be shared regarding the number of escalated issues, areas of impact, actions in progress, and their current status.
19. Key performance indicator information is presented to SIAB on a monthly basis where it is challenged and monitored. KPIs are further embedded in the work of each theme where they are also challenged regularly.
20. **Evaluation of progress:**
The framework of the DfE improvement cycle requires the Local Area Partnership to demonstrate progress against the priority action plan. This takes the form of 4 stocktake meetings and 4 Deep Dives prior to a monitoring visit. The stocktakes and deep dives are overseen jointly between DfE and NHSE advisors. A monitoring visit is usually undertaken 18 months after the full inspection. For Oxfordshire this would mean a timescale from July 2023. It is the Local Area Partnership understanding from Ofsted and CQC, that monitoring visits may be delayed beyond the 18-month cycle. A full inspection should take place approximately 3 years after the previous full inspection. To date the deep dives and stocktakes have demonstrated incremental progress.
21. **Overall progress:**
At a system level there has been significant progress in a number of key areas:
- a. The rate of permanent exclusions is low compared to other authorities.
 - b. The quality of our EHCPs is increasing with 44% rated 'good or outstanding' in November 2024 compared with 21% in July 2023.
 - c. The average time to respond to correspondence has declined to 9 working days (compared to over 30 in the previous year).
 - d. Our backlog on the completion of annual reviews has reduced from over 200 in September 2024 to less than 50 in January 2025.
 - e. Our Youth Offending Service have been awarded the SEND quality award.
 - f. The proportion of children and young people in mainstream schools has increased by 5% compared with 2023.
 - g. For pupils moving into statutory school age or Year 6/7 transfer, 100% of students had final Education, Health and Care plans issued by the deadline of 15 February 2024.

- h. For students moving into a post 16 setting 94% of all students had final Education, Health and Care plans finalised by the deadline of 31 March 2024.
- i. For our Evaluate My School initiative, 177 (62%) of schools have registered of which 109 (62%) have partly or fully completed the evaluation. A further 204 of our 423 early years settings have also registered.
- j. Educational Psychologist Capacity: The increase in needs assessments have led to EPs leaving LAs to undertake private employment. There is now a national shortage of educational psychologists. We have had some success in permanent recruitment and a system of developing a pipeline of qualified EP's through our Associate programme which has led to an additional 5 EPS. The service is working with Bath Spa University to develop a pipeline of qualified EPs. We have also reviewed commissioning activity to ensure access to a greater pool of EPs to meet volume. This has meant that our backlog in EHCNA requests waiting for an Educational Psychology assessment has reduced by 82% (from 250 in September 2024 to 44 in December 2024).
- k. At early years foundation stage, 5% of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire achieved a good level of development, 1%pt above the national average, and the same as both the region and statistical neighbours.
- l. In Year 1 Phonics, 24% of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire are working at the expected level, 4%pts above the national average.
- m. At key stage 5 in 2024, the average APS per A Level entry for pupils with an EHCP has seen a notable increase from 25.18 in 2023 to 34.57 in 2024. This is above the national average and places Oxfordshire in the second quartile nationally (previously in bottom quartile).

Key Challenges

- 22. Despite the success of much of our work, it is still the case that a small number of parent/carers are not 'seeing' these changes 'on the ground'. To address this, we intend to continue to:
 - a. Develop our communication approach so that parent/carers are kept informed.
 - b. Develop the understanding and approach to co-production so that parents/carers are involved in services in an appropriate way.
 - c. Support our schools to continue to work in an inclusive way, reflecting the changed emphasis from national Government, the DfE and Ofsted.
- 23. **Next steps:**
 The priority action plan (PAP) which was produced in response to the July 2023 inspection is to be updated so that we can continue to focus effectively on our areas of further improvement and embed those areas of strength. The priority action plan is required to focus on those areas highlighted as in need of improvement within the Ofsted/ CQC judgement. There are of course wider systems improvements which need to be incorporated. A revised PAP will be

produced and will incorporate the work of the new theme: Preparation for Adulthood. In addition, we will continue to focus on improving our communication, measuring our impact and rolling out our work to support schools becoming more inclusive as indicated by the new Ofsted framework which will be introduced from September 2025.

Financial Implications

24. The majority of funding for SEND comes from the High Needs Block element of the Dedicated Schools Grant. The 'block' is projected as at period 8 to overspend by £28.4m for the financial year 24/25. This will add to the High Needs deficit opening balance of £55.8m at the start of the year. This means the High Needs deficit is forecast to be £84.2m at year end. Currently the deficit is 'held' by the Council as 'unusable reserves' in line with the existing government arrangements via statutory override which is in place until 31st March 2026. We are awaiting further information from central government on future funding regimes, as full removal will significantly affect the financial position of the Council and many others nationally.

Comments checked by:

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Legal Implications

25. 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).
26. As stated above, the outcome of the most recent Area SEND inspection (2023) required the production of a plan to address the areas for priority action to urgently address concerns identified. The next scheduled monitoring inspection was set for 18 months after the original inspection (although this report outlines that this may be delayed), and the Inspectorate will expect to see improvements against the areas for priority action.

Comments checked by:

Janice White, Head of Law and Legal Business Partner (ASC and Litigation),
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Staff Implications

27. Any staffing implications are part of the regular governance processes of stakeholders within the local area partnership.

Comments checked by:

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Equality & Inclusion Implications

28. The improvement work that the local area partnership is engaged with, will make a difference to the life chances and outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities.

Sustainability Implications

29. There are no sustainability implications.

Risk Management

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

LISA LYONS
Director of Children's Services

Annex: Nil.

Background papers: Nil.

[Other Documents:] Nil.

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February 2025