

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 March 2026**

#### **Local Area Partnership Monitoring and Priority Action Plan Report of Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee convened an additional meeting on 30 January 2026. This was principally to consider a report on the Local Area Partnership's SEND monitoring and Priority Action Plan and the opportunity to consider the Area SEND monitoring visit inspection report which had been published at the end of November 2025.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, Matthew Tait, the Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer, for

attending to present the report, as well as Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director for Education and Deborah Smit, Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion.

5. The Committee was also grateful to Steve Crocker, the Independent Chair of the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB), Jules Francis-Sinclair, the Chair of the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum (OxPCF), and Sophia Johnson, Feedback and Reporting Coordinator at the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum for attending.
6. The Committee welcomed the progress since the 2023 Area SEND Inspection and noted that the Local Area Partnership had taken 'effective action' across all five areas for priority action. However, the Committee also heard and noted evidence that improvement must be sustained against ongoing demand and financial pressures; that clarity is needed about the purpose and resourcing of resource bases (i.e., those specialist units within some mainstream schools which provide tailored support to those with specific SEND); the system must strengthen transition arrangements, particularly for pupils moving from primary resource bases into secondary education.

## **SUMMARY**

7. The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People reported that the SEND Local Area Partnership had made significant progress in recent years, evolving into a more coherent and outcome-focused system. This increased confidence was attributed to stronger joint working arrangements and the steady leadership of the Independent Chair, alongside committed effort from officers and partner agencies. Together, these improvements had helped to establish a clearer shared purpose around delivering better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.
8. The Assistant Director for SEND and Inclusion outlined the structured progress made since the 2023 SEND inspection, organised around five priority action areas: strengthening the voice of children and young people, improving communication, enhancing the quality and timeliness of EHCPs, reinforcing commissioning, and bolstering accountability and governance. She reported steady, evidenced improvements across each of these areas but also highlighted ongoing challenges, including inconsistent communication, the need to deepen workforce understanding of SEND, and increasing participation in the youth forum so that a wider range of voices could be heard. Contributions from OxPCF were acknowledged as central to this work, with many of their proposals incorporated into the Priority Action Plan and others redirected to wider improvement streams where they could be meaningfully progressed.
9. The Committee discussed the implications of local government reorganisation (LGR), noting the need for early planning and careful management of any future structural changes. The Independent Chair confirmed that the Partnership had already considered different scenarios and would maintain

continuity through any transition. He emphasised the importance of stability, even as future governance arrangements remain uncertain.

10. Members examined waiting times and early help pathways, distinguishing between statutory EHCP-related timescales – which were generally being met – and the more variable waits within wider health services. Officers highlighted improvements achieved through redesigned pathways, triage processes, and tools like WellComm, which enable early intervention before assessments are complete. Training for school and early years staff was also expanded to ensure practical help could begin while families awaited specialist support.
11. The Committee also explored progress monitoring, performance assurance, and system learning, including safeguards designed to maintain EHCP quality alongside faster processing. Updated governance arrangements now rely on themed highlight reports and escalation processes to identify risks earlier and maintain momentum. Members further considered the role of children and young people’s voices, the realism of future targets, and the importance of sustained collaboration to ensure continuous improvement.
12. The Committee makes three recommendations: each is about ensuring that the Council, as part of the wider system, sets out its plans for building on and sustaining the improvements that have been noted. The Committee recommends that plans are set out for targeted SEND support; for resource bases within Oxfordshire schools; for strengthened transition pathways.
13. In making these recommendations, the Committee is cognisant of the uncertainty that the prospect of LGR brings to any medium- to long-term planning on the Council’s part. The Committee was encouraged to hear that the Partnership had already started considering the impact of the possible iterations in the current County Council region (i.e., that the County Council becomes a unitary authority for the same footprint; that, with the inclusion of West Berkshire Council’s area, the current footprint is divided into either two or three unitary authorities). Despite the potential for significant change to the delivery of children’s services, the Committee is of the view that planning remains essential.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

14. The Committee welcomed the “effective action” judgement from Ofsted/CQC and recognised that Oxfordshire has taken reasonable steps to address all five areas for priority action since the 2023 inspection. Inspectors pointed to strengthened governance, improved oversight and an increasingly integrated approach to planning and decision-making, with a clearer partnership structure from board level through to delivery groups.
15. However, the Committee also noted that the monitoring letter is explicit that “effective action does not mean the area for priority action is no longer a concern” and that improvement must be sustained to avoid slippage and renewed concern in future inspections.

16. Against that background, the Committee considered sustainability and resourcing to be a pivotal 'next stage' issue because the improvement achieved to date is being delivered in a context of continuing demand growth, workforce pressure and constrained public finances. The report submitted to the Committee is clear that the updated Priority Action Plan continues to carry financial implications across both the Dedicated Schools Grant and the General Fund and, also, that the impacts of improvement activity have not yet been fully quantified. It also highlights specific indicative budget pressures for statutory SEND services (including SEND casework and Educational Psychology), arising from increased statutory demand associated with EHCP assessment and review activity and quality/timeliness improvements.
17. The Committee is very aware that the national SEND system remains under significant pressure and that Oxfordshire's local progress will require constant attention and maintenance to be sustained.
18. The Committee concluded, therefore, that a clear plan for the long-term sustainability and resourcing of targeted SEND support is necessary because it directly addresses an identified risk in the inspection findings and would strengthen the Council's ability to sustain improvement at pace. Inspectors explicitly recorded stakeholder concerns about "the longevity and sustainability of some projects," even whilst noting the positive impact from partnership-funded initiatives and joint commissioning.
19. A published sustainability plan would help the Council and partners move from 'time-limited improvement activity' to 'business-as-usual' delivery by: (i) setting out how targeted interventions will be funded and workforce-supported over the medium term; (ii) aligning improvement commitments to the Council's budget cycle and the DSG management plan; and (iii) clarifying how impact will be maintained and monitored through the existing governance and Key Performance Indicator arrangements described in the Priority Action Plan (particularly with theme groups reporting to the Partnership Delivery Group and the SIAB with agreed indicators and feedback loops).
20. In practical terms, this would strengthen system stability (by reducing stop-start delivery), improve transparency for partners and families, and reduce the risk that short-term gains in inclusion and early support might be lost due to funding cliffs or workforce churn.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council should set out a clear plan for the long-term sustainability and resourcing of targeted SEND support across Oxfordshire, ensuring that improvements made through the Local Area SEND Partnership can be maintained despite ongoing financial and demand pressures.***

21. The Committee identified resource bases as an increasingly important part of Oxfordshire's inclusion and provision landscape. However, it heard evidence that the current system lacks the strategic clarity needed to ensure they operate consistently and sustainably. Discussion at the meeting highlighted the need for deeper workforce understanding of SEND, stronger

communication across the system, and more coherent delivery across agencies. These are all issues that directly affect how resource bases function and how consistently they support children across the county.

22. The report to the Committee emphasises that improvement activity has prompted better joint work across education and health and care but also recognises that inconsistencies remain and further work is required to embed system-wide coherence. These factors strengthen the case for a refreshed strategic statement on resource bases that sets out purpose, expectations, and alignment with the wider SEND Improvement Programme.
23. The Committee further noted that while Ofsted/CQC found “effective action” across all priority areas, inspectors also recorded stakeholder concerns about the sustainability and sufficiency of provision. The Committee notes that the monitoring letter explicitly highlights the importance of coordinated, consistent practice, and identifies persistent variation in communication and in how children’s needs are understood and met across the system.
24. At the meeting, officers and partners stressed that resource bases must be positioned coherently within redesigned pathways, strengthened early-help approaches, and improved transitions, especially given the national context of structural pressures and uneven performance. A clear, updated statement would therefore help to align expectations for schools, professionals, families and commissioners.
25. The Committee concluded that not producing a refreshed strategic statement could carry significant drawbacks. Without clear guidance, resource bases may continue to develop unevenly, risking variation in access, quality, staffing and integration with mainstream settings—issues already highlighted in inspection findings and discussion. The absence of a defined strategic framework could undermine inclusion by weakening pathways between resource bases, mainstream provision and specialist services at a time when the system is already under pressure. Conversely, a formal statement would give the Council and its partners a common reference point for commissioning, workforce planning, sufficiency decisions, and future investment. This would strengthen the system’s resilience and support more equitable provision for children and young people across Oxfordshire.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council should provide an updated strategic statement on the purpose, role, and operational expectations of resource bases within Oxfordshire schools, including how these bases will be funded and supported in the medium- to long-term as part of the wider SEND Improvement Programme.***

26. The Committee noted that transition points are moments of heightened vulnerability for children and young people with SEND, and the discussion reinforced that inconsistent communication and variable practice across agencies can significantly affect families at these stages. The Independent Chair highlighted that experiences still differ depending on the practitioner

involved and that the system, though more cohesive, continues to operate in a national context marked by structural pressures and instability.

27. The Ofsted/CQC monitoring letter also sets out that, although “effective action” has been taken, inconsistencies remain—particularly in how children’s needs are understood, recorded and supported across services—making transition a key pressure point that requires deliberate strengthening. The Committee is of the view that having a formally published, strengthened transition pathway would provide a clear, consistent roadmap for all parties, reducing the risk that children fall through gaps during critical educational moves.
28. The Committee also heard explicit evidence about the importance of incorporating the voices and lived experiences of older young people who reflected on earlier transitions and what would have helped them. The Independent Chair confirmed that these retrospective perspectives had already shaped improvement discussions and that they exposed system weaknesses at key points, especially the move from primary to secondary school. This had highlighted areas where earlier support or clearer processes could have changed experiences.
29. The Committee notes that the Priority Action Plan commits to strengthened governance, deeper engagement with children and young people, and improved co-production of processes, all of which align with the need for a clearly defined transition pathway with measurable outcomes. The Committee is therefore of the view that formalising the transition pathway would support both regulatory requirements and the system’s aim – which is both stated and laudable – of embedding the child’s voice at the centre of planning.
30. The Committee concluded that failing to strengthen and publish a transition pathway would create foreseeable risks to the Council and the wider system. Without a clear and consistent process, variations in communication – which had already been identified both by inspectors and by the Committee – could potentially persist or widen. Were that to be the case, it could well lead to increasing anxiety for families and potentially contribute to breakdowns in placement or unnecessary escalation to specialist settings.
31. The absence of a strengthened assurance framework with benchmarking against statistical neighbours would also hinder the Council’s ability to assess performance transparently, respond early to pressures, and demonstrate sustained improvement. This is something that Ofsted/CQC explicitly require.
32. In contrast, the Committee considers that adopting the recommendation would reinforce system stability, support inclusion, strengthen accountability, and help maintain regulatory confidence by ensuring that transition processes are robust, well-evidenced, and consistently applied across the county.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council should develop and publish a strengthened transition pathway for children and young people moving from primary resource bases into secondary education, ensuring continuity of provision, clarity for families, and an enhanced assurance framework aligned***

***to the improvement actions identified since the 2023 SEND inspection which should also include benchmarking against statistical neighbours and comparable authorities.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

33. The Committee does not anticipate considering the Local Area SEND Partnership again during the remainder of this municipal year.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

34. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
35. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Richard Doney  
Scrutiny Officer  
[richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

March 2026