

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

– 26 June 2026

Local Area Partnership SEND Improvement Notice lifted

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 to secure the lifting of the Department for Education SEND Improvement Notice. Thank all partners, particularly Oxfordshire Parent Carers Forum and the SEND Youth Forum for their contributions, insight and hard work.
 - b) Note that SEND improvement work will continue, including through our revised SEND Priority Action Plan and in response to national SEND reform.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides an update on the local area partnership SEND improvement notice issued to Oxfordshire in 2023. Following the monitoring visit in October 2025 and other oversight and assurance activities, the Secretary of State for Education has made the decision to lift the improvement notice.

Progress

3. We have been working closely with partners to strengthen special educational needs and disabilities (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 Secretary of State for Education issued an improvement notice to Oxfordshire County Council and the Thames Valley Integrated Care Board (formerly Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board). 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. A key part of this approach has been strengthening how the voices of children, young people and parent carers inform improvement work and strategic planning. Oxfordshire Parent Carers 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. 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, as well as to further expand the reach of our engagement and participation.
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. In April 2026, we received a letter from the Secretary of State for Education confirming that our improvement notice has been lifted. The letter acknowledges the progress we have made, including to strengthen how the views of children and young people with SEND and parents and carers are used in strategic planning, to improve the timeliness of education, health and care (EHC) plans, and to reduce waiting times for critical support.
9. 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 journey. This was presented to Scrutiny in January 2026. Work is also ongoing to co-design our new SEND strategy, working closely with children, young people and their families to agree our priorities and vision.
10. These further improvements will dovetail with the work beginning in Oxfordshire to respond to SEND reform. In February 2026, the Government announced significant plans for national SEND reform, requiring all local areas to prepare a local SEND reform plan. This builds on the SEND improvement journey to date and our local partnership to support more children to access the right support, as close to home as possible where appropriate, and to improve their experiences and outcomes.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

11. Progress on our SEND improvement journey is a core part of how we deliver our fairer and healthier Oxfordshire vision. The ongoing improvement work led

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

12. There are no immediate financial implications arising directly from this report, which is for noting and does not seek approval for additional expenditure or changes to existing budgets. Ongoing SEND improvement activity, including the revised SEND Priority Action Plan, will need to be managed within approved budgets and existing governance arrangements. Any future financial implications arising from the national SEND reform programme and local SEND reform plan will be considered through the Council's normal budget monitoring, business planning and decision-making processes, with Cabinet decisions and supporting business cases brought forward as required.

Comments checked by:

Jane Billington, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
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Legal Implications

13. The report provides an update on the progress made by the local area partnership to secure the lifting of the Department for Education SEND Improvement Notice and reports that the SEND improvement work will continue.
14. Whilst there are no specific legal implications arising from the report, the letter from the Secretary of State for Education, dated 15 April 2026, makes it clear that further work and continuing progress is expected and sets out the potential consequences of a failure to meet those requirements.

Comments checked by:

Janice White – Principal Solicitor, ASC, Education and SEND

Staff Implications

15. There are no direct staffing implications arising from this report.

Comments checked by: Michelle Higgs, Strategic People Partner,
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Date:9/6/2026

Equality & Inclusion Implications

16. The improvement work progressed by the local area partnership is intended to improve experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and early evidence demonstrates positive progress in a number of areas.

Sustainability Implications

17. There are no sustainability implications.

Risk Management

18. A robust approach to risk management is in place across the SEND improvement programme. Monthly theme group meetings review risks and mitigations for each area, escalating as needed to the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board. The overall programme risk is recorded and reviewed monthly on the Council's risk register.

Lisa Lyons
Director of Children's Services

Annex: Annex 1: Letter from the Secretary of State for Education

Background papers: Local Area Partnership SEND update January 2026 (link: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s80393/EYP%20LAP%20Monitoring%20report.pdf>)

Contact Officer: Annette Perrington, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion

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