

Independent Chair's update on SEND Improvement Board meeting.

2nd April 2025

Representatives from the SEND Improvement Board attended the latest meeting on 2nd April 2025. All papers from the board can be found on the [Local Offer website](#).

What is the purpose of the Board?

The purpose of the board is to bring strategic oversight and to hold those with responsibility to account for the improvement of special educational needs and disabilities services across Suffolk. Senior leaders recognise that children and families have an entitlement to a better experience, and they are committed to making the improvements needed. The SEND Local Area Partnership comprises Suffolk County Council, NHS Suffolk and North-East Essex Integrated Care Board and NHS Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board, Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, schools and settings, colleges, health providers and the voluntary sector.

Key discussions at the Board included:

- Strengthening work to help young people prepare for adulthood, including hearing the experiences and views of young people
- An update on the Priority Action Plan, including progress and areas of concern
- A detailed look at what the data is telling us and how we can plan sufficiently within the Joint Needs Assessment

Preparing for Adulthood:

It was agreed at the last board that it would be a welcome addition to hear the views and experiences of children and young people with SEND at the start of the meeting, rather than at the end, so their voices anchor and lead all of our discussions.

Today we heard from Anna Mears, headteacher at Castle East School, and the experiences of her students as they prepare to leave Year 11 to attend new future education settings. We also heard the experiences of young people from Woodbridge Road Academy, Ipswich who had shared their views at a previous operational meeting.

At Castle East, they take a particular focus on preparing Year 10 and Year 11 pupils for their future and it's positive that there are currently no students that left last year that are not in education or training. The school works closely with a careers advisor and educational provisions to ensure that students are well-briefed and prepared for their next steps, and this includes multiple visits to the new education settings.

Anna shared some of the worries that students have spoken about. These included making relationships with new staff and how they will be supported, not being given enough time to process new information or worries about the size of the new college and the increase in work.

Preparing for adulthood is an area that the SEND Local Area Partnership is prioritising. The board heard how it was a topic of discussion at the latest deep dive meeting with the Department for Education on March 14. It was identified that there are examples of good practice and innovative working, and pockets of robust transition support in schools and setting. However, this is inconsistent and not replicated widely across the local area. There is also not enough range and suitable options for students with SEND post-16 and some long waiting times exist for suitable placements. Detailed analysis and planning is continuing at pace to fully understand the situation and strengthen the approach that is take so that young people's outcomes are improved.

Another deep dive will take place on June 11 and which will examine strategic leadership and governance.

Update from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum:

Next on the agenda was a standing item from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum, our strategic coproduction partners.

Chair of the forum, Claire Smith, shared that engagement and membership of the Forum continues to grow and they have had a number of well-attended information groups and events, such as the RISE coproduction event. While confidence is beginning to grow in the senior leadership of the SEND Local Area Partnership, this remains limited. Claire reported on areas that are still not working well, such as: difficulty in finding information; a lack of inclusion in schools and exclusions; poor

communications from case workers; poor annual reviews; long waits for support; parent carer needs assessments and reports of poor complaints handling. This open and honest feedback is vital for board members to hear as it informs how SEND services are improved and delivered moving forwards.

Upcoming events that the forum are running include Meet Mike McKeaveney, the new assistant director for inclusion services at SCC, Phase Transfers and Annual Reviews. For details visit the forum's [Facebook page](#).

An update on the Priority Action Plan:

There are two areas for priority action and three areas for improvement within the priority action plan. The priority action plan was developed following the Ofsted and CQC inspection of November 2023.

Some key pieces of work include:

Priority Action 1. Strategic Governance, Transitions, Preparing for Adulthood, Governance and Programme Management.

- New Governance structures have been signed off at the SEND Improvement Board
- As discussed above, there is a particular focus on 'Preparing for Adulthood from the Earliest Years'
- Mapping across the SEND local area partnership is in process so that the different strategies and initiatives are better aligned

Priority Action 2. Quality and Timeliness of EHCPs

- A full-scale review of policy and processes is being undertaken to inform a new Education Health and Care Plan Quality Assurance Framework. It is important that all stakeholders are involved in co-producing a robust and transparent process for quality assuring Education Health and Care Plans with consistent feedback loops for learning and improvement
- There is a newly appointed interim strategic SEND QA development lead who will focus on a co-produced EHCP Quality Assurance Framework and QA

Development Plan working alongside the existing SEND QA team, Interim Head of SEND Services and Principal Educational Psychologist

- A checklist has been designed for all members of Family Services to use to eradicate errors. All team members have undergone training regarding 'Writing Holistic Outcomes'
- The expectation is that there is a steady increase in 20 week timeliness of EHCPs – aiming for 40% by September 2025
- We know that the draft EHCP needs to be properly co-produced to avoid the need for the to-ing and fro-ing of the draft plan between case officer and parent.
- The deployment of additional staff and a change in the team structure will help staying on track for the September target
- Alongside focusing on new EHCPs, an important focus is also on those EHC Plans that have been waiting the longest. By June 2025, all EHC Plans that have been waiting over 52 weeks will be finalised.

Area for improvement 1. Data and Performance.

- The completion of the Joint Strategic SEND Needs Assessment has enabled improvements to strategic performance monitoring. However further review is underway to ensure all performance measures are directly relating to the Priority Action Plan, SEND Strategy and new preparing for adulthood strategy
- A lot of work has been undertaken on the SEND Children's Outcome Framework and a core project group has been established and is meeting regularly to oversee this programme of work.

Area for Improvement 2. Communication and co-production

- The Local Area Partnership has agreed that there needs to be a focus on restorative relationships and developing the foundations for strong co-production and collaboration
- Coproduction Leads and practitioners across the county are working together to establish a consistent and joined up approach – this includes the voice of children and young people

- The coproduction workshop held in February, facilitated by RISE and SCC teams had very good attendance and representation from across the partnership. A set of behaviours for coproduction were identified and core foundations for safe and productive relationships were agreed with key actions suggested. The content of the workshop will form the basis of a coproduction charter, and action plan for the partnership
- A Peer review of the Local Offer website will help to identify the gaps and produce a Local Offer action plan so that it can be improved.
- Complaints: As part of the workstreams which sit under the new Quality and Performance Board; data, themes and learning from complaints and LGSOs will form a key area of development

As you can see, there is a lot of information about the work being done against the Priority Action Plan and I hope the detail is helpful. It's important that board members understand where there are any gaps in provision or where further action is needed so that they can hold each other to account for making improvements.

SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment

Finally, the Board were taken through the detail found in the Joint Strategic SEND Needs Assessment. Many board members were directly involved in the production of this forensic 177-page document. The report delves into current arrangements, future anticipated need and looks at gaps and challenges in SEND provision. This assessment highlights the nature of needs experienced by children and young people, the challenges faced by families and professionals, and the importance of improving service provision to ensure equitable outcomes for all.

As a result of this analysis, a series of recommendations have been made which also inform the work to improve children's outcomes.

The report also captures the voices of children and young people, parents, and practitioners to ensure lived experiences inform future strategies.

The importance of this document cannot be underestimated and will support SEND sufficiency planning which is about ensuring there is enough of the right provision for children and young people over the next three to five years.

I hope this brief update is helpful. The next board meeting is 21st May 2025 when we will discuss what further progress has been made to take forward the improvements that are needed.

Thank you,

Kathryn Boulton

Independent chair of the SEND Improvement Board