

## **Independent Chair's update on SEND Improvement Board meeting.**

**10<sup>th</sup> September 2025**

Representatives from the SEND Improvement Board attended the latest meeting on 10<sup>th</sup> September.

### **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 takeaways:**

- We are making improvements, especially with timeliness for Education and Health Care Plans, and expect to see real progress by January
- Recognise we need to do more across the system to support wider inclusion and children and young people who are waiting for a specialist place
- New sufficiency strategy will focus on outstanding capital investment of £3million to support children and young people awaiting a school place
- Coproduction charter agreed in principle subject to additional partner involvement

### **Chair's reflections:**

I have been Chair of the SEND Improvement Board since June 2024, and during that time I've seen a significant amount of change. After each board meeting, I often say that there is a lot happening—and that continues to be true. One of the key things I always take away from the board is the unwavering commitment from everyone involved. There is no doubt about the shared determination across the local partnership to make a real and positive difference to the lives of children and young people with special

educational needs and disabilities (SEND), as well as their families. However, I recognise that the difference is yet to be felt directly by children and families and there is still a lot that needs to be done. We're seeing developments both locally and in the wider national policy landscape, and while change is happening, it's important that we remain focused and aligned on the overall improvement journey.

We are beginning to see some positive impact, which is encouraging, and I want to acknowledge the hard work that has gone into getting us to this point. However, there are still areas that require greater pace and clarity to ensure we keep moving forward effectively. Discussions at the board meetings have been both assuring and constructive, helping to provide a clearer picture of the priorities ahead.

I will summarise what was discussed at September's board now.

### **An update from the Suffolk Parent Carer Forum**

The forum has seen a sizeable growth in membership, despite being closed over the summer and have launched a new Instagram page.

A review of the website is being undertaken to support user experience, but in the meantime a page listing the common acronyms has been added.

The forum reported that they have heard of swift communication, and an EP report within 10 days of agreeing to assess and seen some improved plans. They also reported a rise in post 3pm emails on a Friday, which families find distressing. They also told the board that families have faced a lot of anxiety over transitions this summer. Many have raised the uncertainty over transport, and bills for £260 with only ten days to pay them. There has also been reports of complaints still being a difficult experience and families not receiving calls to discuss it.

### **An update on SEND improvement**

There are several areas within the Priority Action Plan which the team has been focusing on to ensure accelerated progress. These include:

- Assessments and Annual Reviews

- Ensuring that children who are not placed in specialist provision are understood and that plans are in place at an operational and strategic level to support these children
- Improving the systems in place to ensure that good quality EHC plans are produced and that they reflect
- Creating solid pathways for children in the Local Authority's SEND statutory processes that provide the right support at the right time for the voices of children and young people
- The overall Governance of the system

We are now seeing evidence of some improvements. The projections indicate that Suffolk will have improved the timeliness of EHCPs by the new year so that they are above national average.

Our Priority Action Plan requires us to exceed the DfE national average of 46.4% for timeliness. Currently, there are 1,480 EHC needs assessments in the system, with 52.2% completed within the 20-week timeframe and 47.8% exceeding it. The plan is to finalise assessments that are overdue by the end of the year and to resolve all outstanding Annual Reviews, while also improving the efficiency of processing new Annual Review amendments. However, due to the significant number of assessments already beyond the 20-week limit, the best achievable timeliness for this year is approximately 30%, as recognised by the Department for Education. It is crucial that this work remains on track so that 2026 starts without any family experiencing a long delay with their child's assessment.

Whilst we acknowledge there is still a lot of work to be done, a number of other impacts are also being felt:

- ✓ Improved number of Assessments, June to August
- ✓ Improved number of Annual Reviews, June to August
- ✓ Full identification of children in phased transfer or other years awaiting a specialist school place

## ✓ Development on Alternative Provision and Sufficiency Strategies

Other updates to note include the fact that the SEND statutory service has 138 full time members of staff with 9.96 vacancies. Managers are carrying out end-to-end process reviews to streamline and improve productivity with staff. This links to new productivity measures and this month, a new quality assurance system was introduced to focus on the quality of EHC plans. Complaints are now all being reviewed to address the learning and to change the system. The team is also working on a new sufficiency strategy to focus on outstanding capital investment of £3million to support those children and young people awaiting a school place. We recognise there is a need to do more across the system to support wider inclusion and those awaiting a specialist place.

The team is also looking to reshape the locality teams and split into age-based PODs. This would enable a focus on specialist areas, building relationships with schools and give children more time with a caseworker.

The number of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) continues to increase and has grown from 9,044 to 11,135 in the past year. An important area of work to support this growth is to have a renewed focus on working with schools to support greater inclusion in both mainstream and specialist environments. This collaborative approach aims to improve outcomes and ensure that children have the arrangements that are needed to meet their needs.

### **A Coproduction Charter and Action Plan for SEND in Suffolk**

The Board was asked to agree a coproduction charter and action plan.

In February, around 70 people attended a workshop to discuss coproduction in Suffolk SEND, focusing on restorative and trauma-informed approaches. A follow-up workshop reviewed the draft Coproduction Charter and Action Plan, including ways to measure impact. The Coproduction Charter, rooted in SEND strategy principles, clarifies what coproduction looks like, how it feels, and its intended impact. It includes “we” statements that outline positive behaviours for all partners, promoting accountability and effective collaboration. The Charter has been widely shared for feedback from parents, carers, young people, and partners.

An accompanying Action Plan, agreed at the SEND Operational Group, is being implemented to support the Charter's priorities. To measure progress, a Coproduction Self-Assessment Framework has been developed, with regular "check-ins" planned to reflect, assess, and plan ongoing coproduction efforts, reporting progress to the Improvement Board. This work is crucially important and subject to some further engagement with some system partners, the Board was supportive of the Charter and action plan.

I hope that this update is helpful.

The next board meeting is Thursday 6th November.

Thanks,

**Kathryn Boulton**

**Independent chair of the SEND Improvement Board**