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Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children's Services
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15 May 2025

Dear Sarah-Jane, Ed and Tracey,

Deep Dive into Area for Priority Action 1: Management of Transitions and Preparing for Adulthood

Thank you for the Local Area Partnership's ("the partnership") attendance and participation in the recent deep dive process. This includes the meeting on 14 March 2025 to review progress made against the first area for priority action (APA), focusing on the management of transitions and preparing for adulthood (PfA):

"The LAP should work more collaboratively and effectively to improve strategic planning. This needs to deliver systems with measurable impact that will create better experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

- the management of transitions and planning for adulthood for children and young people, starting in the earliest years, and across services in education, health and care, including putting steps in place to reduce NEET, so that they are better supported to lead fulfilling lives."

The purpose of the deep dive evidence gathering and subsequent meeting was:

- a. To assess the progress the partnership is making against the selected APA.
- b. Identify areas of possible slippage.
- c. Assess impact of the progress made and confidence levels in making a positive difference to the lived experience of children and young people with SEND.
- d. Agree priority recommendations to focus on to make rapid progress against the APA.

In preparation for the meeting, fieldwork was carried out by Helen Chester and Louise Warren with a range of practitioners and providers, through visits to schools and discussions with parents, carers, children, and young people. This was supplemented by a range of data provided by the partnership. Their findings were presented to those invited to the meeting.

The partnership expressed its deep gratitude to the important contributions that had been made throughout the evidence gathering. This includes the personal experiences of parents and carers as well as the efforts of those that captured a range of different voices and experiences.

There is recognition across the partnership that changes are beginning to happen, although these improvements are currently too subtle to be meaningfully felt by families. The partnership has demonstrated a shared commitment to improving these experiences so that moving between services becomes a seamless experience for those aged 0-25. They acknowledge this represents a long-term journey through deeply entrenched barriers that requires sustained focus alongside delivering immediate improvements.

The key issues and recommendations are listed below.

Key Issues:

- There is a strong consensus that the experiences of children, young people, and families during transitions are highly inconsistent across the area. While there are examples of excellent practice, these are not universal, creating a disparity in support that leaves many families feeling unsupported and isolated during critical transition periods.
- Parents and carers shared their distress of how poorly managed transitions have caused significant trauma for their children and young people. Families reported experiencing considerable emotional strain while attempting to secure appropriate support. The partnership acknowledges that the current system is not yet providing the consistent, compassionate approach needed during these vulnerable periods and is committed to addressing these serious concerns as a priority.
- Families and practitioners described a "cliff edge" that many young people face when transitioning between services, particularly at age 18 when moving from children to adult services in both health and social care. This creates unnecessary trauma and disruption to care.
- Young people and their families reported that post-16 education does not necessarily offer a suitable range of options. They reported experiencing a rigid focus on formal education rather than considering the broader needs of young people with SEND and more diverse ways to realise their potential.
- The local offer information is written with a professional focus. Families expressed a need for easy-read documents and videos they can share with their children, provided to them consistently and well in advance of transition meetings, including easily available hard copies.
- Health transitions work well within specific services, for example ZEST, with positive experiences for young people who meet the criteria for the service. However, this is limited to small numbers of children and is not consistently applied across all health services.
- There is a disconnect between what is available through social care and what appears in EHCPs. In the plans reviewed, social care support was not well-represented, with educational settings often expected to support social needs, community access and life skills.
- Limited coordination was identified between different parts of the system, with families often having to navigate complex transitions between multiple services without adequate support.

- Travel training was highlighted as an effective support but needs to be more consistently available and further adapted to meet individual needs. Public transport limitations in rural areas create additional barriers for young people seeking independence.

Recommendations:

- Continue the work underway to strengthen governance structures, which will improve oversight of transitions between services. The proposed board for preparing for adulthood from the earliest years will be essential to driving improvement across the partnership. The board must ensure young people's voices are central and their lived experiences are heard and used to develop services in Suffolk.
- Implement consistent transition protocols across health and social care services to address the "cliff edge" that families experience when moving between children's and adult's systems. This should include clear accountability for transitions within health services, particularly addressing issues in community paediatrics. For example, young people talked about having to re-refer through their GP at age 17.
- Ensure EHCPs include appropriate social care assessments, including for children who do not meet the high thresholds for direct social care support, rather than placing these responsibilities on educational settings. Develop timely assessment processes prior to transition points and improve family awareness of available support options including short breaks and grants.
- Develop a systematic approach to identify and expand effective practices across the area. This should include documenting successful approaches to enhanced school transition planning and visits, transition books with photographs of buildings and staff, and health services with strong transition protocols. The partnership will present an action plan to the SEND Improvement Board, setting out proposals for how improvements will be made across the partnership to improve transitions and PfA from early years.
- Ensure physical printed materials about transition processes are offered and made available well in advance of key transition points. Children, young people and families have specifically requested access to printed rather than digital resources as they are more accessible for family discussions and less likely to be overlooked.
- Introduce more flexibility to the post-16 options available to young people with SEND. Too often, young people are taking courses unrelated to their aspirations due to rigid application of admissions and attendance policies. The partnership should aim to be curious and ambitious in creating diverse pathways including supported internships and employment routes that level the playing field for young people with SEND.
- Sufficiency data should be updated regularly to reflect changing demographics and needs patterns, specifically addressing the flexibility of admission and attendance policies identified as barriers to appropriate provision. Through mapping all SEND activity, the partnership can establish clear benchmarks, and update sufficiency analysis to track transition patterns, measure outcomes, and guide strategic resource allocation over the 3–5-year improvement journey.


- Address the fragmentation of services that requires families to coordinate between multiple professionals. Improve communication and clearly define responsibilities between agencies to reduce the burden on families navigating the system and integrate support to these families, to recognise the impact on parents emotional and mental health.
- Expand the implementation of the existing travel training program, including the foundation course, community travel toolkit, and peer mentoring scheme. Focus on addressing challenges in rural areas where limited public transport restricts young people's access to education and employment opportunities.

Next steps

The next deep dive will be held on 11 June 2025, and I appreciate the partnership is currently working with Helen Chester and Louise Warren on evidence gathering for this meeting. The deep dive will cover the rest of the first APA from the Ofsted inspection report focusing on leadership and governance.

Thank you to all parties for their ongoing participation and input into the evidence gathering and the deep dive review meetings.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Fairclough

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