

SEND improvement plan – quarterly progress update July 2024

Welcome to our second update on how we are making progress against actions being taken to improve services for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and their families, as outlined in our [Priority Action and Improvement Plan](#). This update includes progress over the last quarter against each priority action and improvement area set out in the SEND area inspection report, alongside a cumulative review of progress.

Key highlights over last quarter:

- 95 new recruits have been trained through our SEND Academy and are now working in services that manage EHCPs.
- An [EHCP Good Standards document](#) has been developed with input from parent/carers and schools, to provide staff in education, health and care with clear guidelines on what a good quality EHCP should look like.
- The '[This is Me](#)' tool has been co-produced with children and young people to enable their voice to be central to their EHC Needs Assessment and subsequent review of their EHCP.
- We have set-up new quadrant based [SEND Provision Panels](#), increasing from one to eight per month, to improve timeliness and decision making. Following feedback from parent/carers and professionals, the opening hours of the [Neurodiversity Hub](#) have been expanded.
- We have appointed [four experts](#), all under 25 with lived experience, who will be leading on co-production and engagement with young people to support the improvement of SEND services.
- The partnership is running a [series of webinars](#) for parent/carers on a range of topics, which will be informed by the Local Offer parent/carer online feedback group.

There are already several areas we can start to identify early signs of improvement:

- There has been a significant reduction in the backlog of EHC needs assessments and, compared to previous years, there has been improved timeliness of EHC needs assessments.
- Feedback from parent/carers and professionals who completed the survey on Collaborative Involvement Meetings has been majority positive.
- Waiting lists for speech and language assessments have decreased and the number of children waiting more than 6 weeks has decreased.
- Feedback from parents and professionals on the newly expanded Neurodiversity hub has been positive.
- The quality of EHCPs audited has started to improve (from 5% to 28% rated good or outstanding).
- There has been a reduction in the number of children waiting for specialist provision.

Whilst we are moving in the right direction, we recognise that improved experiences for children, young people and families across Hertfordshire are not yet consistent and we continue to work hard to improve experiences for all families. We are continuously exploring ways to seek feedback on their lived experience to assess the impact of actions.

Priority action 1: Leaders should act with urgency to accelerate their data dashboard work so that they have a shared, accurate understanding of the exact provision for SEND in Hertfordshire, and of its quality, so that they can target coherent activity where it is needed most.

Data dashboard developed and in use

- The SEND Data Dashboard is now developed and refreshed in a monthly cycle. The dashboard helps leaders to analyse performance in relation to EHCPs, health services and social care and includes feedback from families to support the partnership to understand lived experience. This important information informs and drives our improvement work and we continue to add more measures to show the impact of progress being made across the partnership.

Collecting and using attendance data more effectively

- The partnership is on track to adopt Groupcall software by September 2024, which gathers school attendance data, and monitors this at an individual and strategic level. This will support early intervention to ensure children and young people can engage in education.

Priority action 2: Leaders should work more collaboratively and in partnership across all of SEND provision, with secure governance and quality assurance arrangements in place, and with a particular urgent focus on addressing the areas leaders have identified in their strategy for SEND.

New model for engagement ensures voices of children and young people influence decision making at leadership level

- To support leaders across the partnership to keep children and young people at the heart of their decision making, we have launched Voices of Hertfordshire - a new model for engaging with children and young people at the individual, operational and strategic level across education, health and social care. This will increase opportunities for children and young people with SEND to help shape services and highlight issues that are important to them.
- The new model includes numerous 'youth councils' involving children through certain organisations including Services for Young People and the Integrated Care Board, and some special schools. We have also recruited 4 [experts by experience](#) who are consulted in service design and improvement work.
- Keep up with the work of Voices of Hertfordshire on their [YouTube](#) and [Instagram](#).

New Quality Assurance framework launched in partnership (April 24)

- The Partnership and Assurance Board endorsed a new SEND multi-agency Quality Assurance and Improvement Framework, jointly produced by partners across education, health and social care.
- The framework includes the views of young people and parent/carers who were asked 'what does good look like' for them, leading to the creation of our 10 principles of quality.
- A key feature of the framework is the creation of a new 'SEND Quality Assurance Board'. They inspect the quality of services across education, health and social care and make sure that where improvements are identified action is taken. The Board (which features parent carer representation) held its first meeting in May 2024 to review the latest EHCP quarterly audit cycle. This quarter they found a 23% improvement from the baseline of EHCPs audited as being 'good' or 'outstanding'. There is still a way to go to improve the quality of EHCPs, but this improving trajectory is positive.

We are reporting on improvement areas 1 and 4 together because a lot of the work happening in our improvement services contributes to both these aims.

Improvement Area 1: Leaders across the partnership should address the variability in children and young people's access to health services that exists in different areas within the local area so that all children and young people with SEND in Hertfordshire have an equal opportunity to access appropriate provision and support that meets their needs.

Improvement Area 4: Leaders should further address the gaps and delays in service provision to meet the full range of needs of children and young people with SEND. This includes services for ASD, ADHD, mental health, audiology and speech and language.

Increasing the opening hours of the neurodiversity hub support line

- In our last update we shared with you that the [Neurodiversity Hub](#) has been expanded across Hertfordshire. The neurodiversity support hub offers support and guidance about a whole range of things relating to ADHD and Autism (no diagnosis necessary)
- Following feedback from parent/carers and professionals, the opening hours of the Neurodiversity Hub have been expanded by recruiting more call handlers:
 - Monday, Wednesday, Friday 9am – 1pm
 - Tuesday and Thursday 9am – 3pm
 - Wednesday evening (by appointment only) 7pm – 9pm

Reducing the number of children waiting for speech and language assessments

- We continue to make progress on the number of children and young people waiting for speech and language assessments. As of April 2024, the number of children and young people waiting for their Speech and Language Therapy (SaLT) EHC needs assessment report was 257, down from over 600 in 2023. There is also a substantial reduction in the number of children waiting for the longest time periods with 2.3% now waiting over 19 weeks compared to 54% in Sep 2023.

Hertfordshire Community Trust Therapy Service webpages updated

- The [Hertfordshire Community Trust Therapy Service webpages](#) provide extensive resources for parent/carers and professionals for children who might require SaLT, OT or PT assessment. These have been refreshed following feedback from families.

Training on ADHD for schools, informed by young people

- HPCI have supported the SEND Participation Lead in reaching out to families whose children have a diagnosis of ADHD to ask these young people what is important to know when working with them. 124 children and young people ranging from seven (completed with a trusted adult) to 24 years old answered an online survey, which has informed ADHD training for schools currently being developed by the SEND Specialist Advice and Support (SAS) service.

Reopening of children's audiology services

- Children's Hearing Services at East and North Hertfordshire NHS Trust are re-opening, in a staged way. The first services to have re-opened are those for 3 – 5 year olds and children over 5 years.
- These services had been under review since mid 2023, with parts of the service paused, following an audit of paediatric audiology in England. This was happening nationally to ensure that quality of care was assured and national guidelines were followed. Auditory brainstem responses for babies and adult audiology services have been available throughout the review.
- We'll continue to keep you updated, but in the meantime, please email audiology.enh-tr@nhs.net if you have any questions.

Improvement Area 2: Leaders across the partnership should act to improve the quality of new and existing EHC plans and ensure that plans meaningfully capture the voice and experience of children and young people with SEND and their families.

New staff appointed to services managing Education, Health and Care Plans

- We have appointed **122** new staff through our [workforce transformation programme](#), to improve experiences of the EHCP process. We currently have **95** new recruits trained through our [SEND Academy](#) and now working in services that manage EHCPs.
- We have launched a new survey for families and education settings to feedback on their experience of the EHC needs assessment and EHCP processes.
- One way we are monitoring the impact of increased staff numbers is the timeliness of EHC needs assessments.
- At the end of June 2024, **55.9%** of EHCPs were issued within 20 weeks. This compares to **36%** for the whole of 2023. The target we have identified with Ofsted, as a key milestone on our improvement journey, is to achieve 60% by March 2025. This is not a ceiling for our performance; our ambition is to support all children in a timely way and be among the best performers in the country.

New standards for what a 'good' EHCP looks like

- We have developed an EHCP Good Standards document, with input from parent/carers and schools, to provide clear guidelines to staff in education, health and care on what a good quality EHCP should look like. This has been shared with staff. 70% of parents surveyed January - March 2024 were happy with the support outlined in their EHCP (up from 59% in Q3 October - December 2023).
- Our next step is to publish this document on the Local Offer. We are also developing a summary version with [Herts Parent Carer Involvement](#) (HPCI) and our Experts by Experience which will be published on the Local Offer.
- Our EHCP quality audits show an increase in the number of plans rated as 'good' or 'outstanding' from 5% to 28% (from Q2 Jul – Sep 2023 to Q1 Apr – Jul 2024). There is still a long way to go. Findings from our auditing work helps us design training for staff. Read more about [our journey to more effective, higher quality Education, Health and Care Plans](#).
- We developed a standard Education, Health and Care (EHC) needs assessment template with parent/carers, for health providers submitting health advice towards the EHC needs assessment to improve consistency and quality of advice.
- We developed an EHCP Good Standards document, with input from parent/carers and schools, to provide clear guidelines to staff in education, health and care on what a good quality EHCP should look like.

'This is Me' form for capturing voice of the child in EHCPs

- Our SEND Participation Lead, in partnership with the SEND Quality Assurance Team, Participation Team and children and young people, has developed the '[This is Me](#)' tool.
- The tool is a children and young person-friendly way of recording their views within EHCPs and includes accessible formats for screen-readers and children with communication difficulties. It has been launched, along with training and guidance, for staff and SENCOs. Workshops for parent/carers were held across May.

Improvement Area 3: Leaders should take action to ensure that pupils with EHC plans are attending the provision as stated on their plans, that the provision is effective in meeting needs, and that the use of part-time timetables is appropriate and is carefully managed and monitored.

Increasing specialist provision - the numbers

- We are beginning to see an impact on the number of children and young people who are waiting for specialist provision. This is thanks to an increase in capacity of specialist provision brought about with investment of more than £131m, paired with a dedicated focus on finding suitable provision.

- There has been a 64% reduction in the number of children and young people waiting over one year for specialist provision (67 children waiting in June 2024, down from 187 in September 2023).

Improvement to Provision Panel now in place

- Four new SEND Panel Managers joined us in March 2024. They are responsible for four new locality-based SEND provision panels in Hertfordshire. This is a change away from the previous county-wide approach, enabling more timely and consistent decision-making.
- There are now 2 SEND provision panels per month per area, increasing the capacity to make timely decisions on children and young peoples' provision and improve communication with families around this. Read more about the new [SEND Provision Panels](#).

Improvement Area 5: The local area partnership should act to address parents' and carers' concerns at an early stage to reduce dissatisfaction and eliminate the need for parents and carers to have to follow formal routes.

Improving communication

- The SEND Partnership and Assurance Board have endorsed a new communications strategy for the partnership. Developed with parent carer forum, HPCI, it details our ambition for all communications from services to children, young people and their families to be 'Accurate, Compassionate, and Timely' (ACT).
- In line with the ACT principles, SEND Academy recruits continue to receive training in empathetic communication. HPCI recorded a video with a parent about their lived experience to support this work. We have seen an increase in positive feedback relating to communication.

Development of a new EHCP online portal

- Soon it will be easier for parent/carers and young people to access information about their child or young person's/their EHC needs assessment and EHCP, through a new online portal.
- The portal is in development stage and HPCI have provided feedback to inform this.
- From September, families who are new to the EHC needs assessment process will be offered the choice to use the portal. This will not replace direct communication with staff but will provide access to information whenever the user wishes to access the portal.
- Rollout of the portal to families of children and young people with an existing EHCP will happen at a later stage and we will keep you updated on this.

More staff in the Resolution and Reconciliation team

- We have three new permanent members of our Resolution and Reconciliation Team. The team now have more capacity to support with resolving families' concerns at an earlier stage, with recruitment underway for a fourth officer.

SEND Improvement Plan webinar series

- Across health and the council we are running a series of webinars to update you on SEND improvement work and what these changes mean for you. Our first webinar was about the 'Making SEND Everyone's Business' workforce programme and how it will lead to improvements in experiences of the EHCP process. If you were unable to attend you can [watch a recording of the MSEB webinar on our YouTube](#).