



Department
for Education



Adam Johnston Director of Children's Services, Worcestershire County Council,
Councillor Simon Geraghty, Leader of the Council,
Simon Trickett, Chief Executive of NHS Herefordshire and Worcestershire Integrated Care Board

31 March 2025

Dear Adam, Simon and Simon,

**Worcestershire Local Area Partnership: 6-MONTHLY SEND STOCKTAKE MEETING:
REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLAN AND PRIORITY ACTION PLAN**

Thank you for attending the stocktake meeting on 6 March 2025 to review the progress made against your Priority Action Plan (PAP) and your Strategic Plan over the past six months.

We are particularly grateful for the contributions from representatives of the Parent Carer Forum (PCF), local authority officers and ICB members who attended the meeting.

The purpose of this joint letter is to provide a summary of the discussions held at the stocktake meeting, documenting specific feedback from participants on the Areas for Priority Action and Areas for Improvement, based on evidence from the six months leading up to and during the stocktake meeting.

The evidence and presentation provided before and during the stocktake meeting demonstrated progress in implementing the strategic plan, which outlines the partnership's response to the two Areas for Priority Action and three Areas for Improvement related to 'systemic failings' identified in the SEND inspection report;

Priority Action 1:

The local area partnership should urgently address the long waiting times for:

- community paediatrics;
- the neurodevelopmental assessment pathway;
- occupational therapy; and
- physiotherapy.

Leaders should also improve the support available while children and young people wait.

You told us that:

- You have now contacted all families who are waiting over 52 weeks. The PCF advised that families have found this reassuring, although noted that other efforts are not yet being felt by families.

Next Steps

- We look forward to hearing about the rollout and impact of the 'health neighbourhood approach'

Priority Action 2:

The local area partnership should urgently develop genuine co-production with children and young people with SEND at a strategic level. Children and young people should feel they have fully participated in the process of developing services, improvement strategies and plans that meet their needs.

You told us that:

- You have successfully recruited two coproduction officers: one on a substantive basis and the second on a 12-month fixed term contract.
- The youth cabinet is in place and has SEND as a priority in their manifesto.

Next Steps:

- We look forward hearing about the roll out of the Four Cornerstone work.
- We will be expecting to see evidence of coproduction at all levels during the next stock take e.g. Co-design. Co-assessment, co-evaluation to support wider coproduction.
- We will want to see evidence that children and young people with SEND are active and directly involved in co-production.
- A map of contacts with groups of young people with SEND that demonstrates this direct involvement will be an important piece of evidence.

Area for Improvement 1:

Leaders across the partnership should work at pace to implement the action plans that underpin the SEND strategy and seek to address the areas identified as priorities. This includes ensuring that:

- all services gather accurate data and use this to effectively identify where there are gaps in provision and commission appropriate services to address those gaps;
- existing processes in place for tracking attendance are more rigorous in ensuring that no child or young person is missing education for prolonged periods of time;
- the time children and young people wait for a specialist place is reduced so that Alternative Provision (AP) is available to those children and young people who need it; and
- the planned increases in specialist places does not compromise the quality of existing places and enables valuable outreach to mainstream settings to continue.

You told us that:

- Governance and reporting mechanisms have been strengthened with strong oversight and governance of the strategic plan. Accountability for the identified improvements is built into the plan.
- That your independent chair, Jane Friswell, has started and your first meeting was held on 14 February, which we find reassuring.
- There is a focus on and support for tighter monitoring of children's attendance in independent special schools.

Next Steps:

- We will want to see evidence of co-production in strategic planning and in reporting mechanisms.
- We look forward to hearing the progress of T1 work with AP and outreach developments from special schools.
- To continue the monitoring of and support for children and young people awaiting a specialist place to ensure their educational entitlement.

Area for Improvement 2:

Leaders across the partnership should work at pace to continue to improve the timeliness and quality of new Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) and the quality of existing plans. This includes:

- ensuring that the number of new EHC plans issued within the statutory timeframe increases;
- ensuring that new EHC plans accurately reflect the child or young persons' needs through appropriate contributions from all relevant professionals across education, health and care; and
- ensuring that the annual review process takes place within the appropriate timescales and amendments to plans include updated views from children and young people and their families.

You told us that:

- You are dealing with high demand, impacting on timeliness of plans but that this was 54% in February.
- You have increased capacity, although caseworkers are still dealing with large caseloads.
- Increasing the capacity of Educational Psychologists which you hope will improve receipt of quality advice.
- There needs to be an increase in the scope of the Quality Assurance (QA) process.

Next Steps:

- Ensuring the SEND Team has the capacity and capability to deliver timeliness and quality through both the Education Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) and Annual Review processes with circa 7,139 children and young people with an EHCP and a restructure underway.

- We would like to see evidence from families' feedback that communication between themselves and the team is improving.
- Progress on plans to develop and implement a robust QA framework. This should include QA of advice by services, QA of drafted plans, multi-agency QA of finalised plans and multi-agency audits of joint casework.

Area for Improvement 3:

Leaders across the partnership should continue to address the long waiting times for children and young people requesting support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS).

You told us that:

- A new service is being commissioned that is not in a clinical setting and involves peer support and mentoring.
- There has been progress made on wait times.

Next Steps:

- Evaluate the evidence of the early impact of the roll out of the newly commissioned service.
- Evaluate and report on the deep dive on access for Autism Spectrum Condition/Learning Difficulties for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services CAMHS.

Deep Dive

Area for Improvement 2 will be the focus of the next deep dive.

Your next review to assess further progress against your Strategic Plan will take place on 4th September 2025. We would expect the Local Area Partnership to demonstrate by this date impact through the evidence they share against the areas for improvement including the next steps detailed above.

Your SEND Advisor, Pat Tate and NHS England Advisor, Debbie Ward, will continue to offer support and challenge. Please contact them if you require further assistance.

We are copying this letter to, Daniela Carson (Director for All Age Disability 0-25), Councillor David Chambers (Lead member responsible for Education), Helen Johns (DfE Lead Professional Adviser), Pat Tate (DfE Adviser), Lorraine Mulroney (Head of SEND, NHS England), Nick Harrison (Senior Programme Manager CYP, NHS England), Debbie Ward (NHS England Adviser) and Kirsten Pearce (Case Lead, DfE).

Yours sincerely,



Katie Pritchard,
SEND Regional Lead, West Midlands
Vulnerable Children's Unit, Department for
Education



Robert Ferris,
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Disabilities, Autism and SEND, West
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