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Rosa Waddingham, Executive Director of Quality (Nursing) NHS ICB cluster (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire)

13 February 2026

Dear Alison and Rosa,

### **DERBYSHIRE LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP: 6-MONTHLY SEND STOCKTAKE MEETING: REVIEW OF STRATEGIC PLAN AND PRIORITY ACTION PLAN**

Thank you for your attendance and input at the stocktake meeting on Wednesday 21 January to review the progress made against your Priority Impact Plan (PIP) over the past 6 months. The purpose of this joint letter is to provide a summary of the discussions, documenting specific feedback from participants on the Areas for Priority Action (APAs), based on the evidence submitted.

We heard from all partners at the stocktake and got a good sense of a strengthening partnership, delivering more cohesive work. There is a willingness and commitment to continued improvement from all leaders, including the council's politicians, with a more transparent strategic approach emerging.

The evidence provided before and during the stocktake meeting demonstrated progress from the previous stocktake in July 2025 with different elements within your Priority Impact Plan (PIP) being driven forward in response to the 6 APAs identified in the SEND inspection report (14 November 2024).

#### **Leadership and Governance**

- **Leadership across the partnership is being strengthened**, with key appointments including a new Chief Executive for Derbyshire County Council and a permanent Executive Director of Quality (Nursing) across the new NHS ICB cluster. In addition, there is ongoing recruitment for two Assistant Director positions and a plan in place to recruit a permanent Director of Children's Services, enhancing stability and strategic oversight.
- **The Local Area Partnership (LAP)** has a clearer SEND & system governance structure in place, to enable accountability and effective oversight including examples of effective escalation of risks with effective decision-making.
- **Collaborative and child-centred leadership:** Leaders are working collaboratively across the partnership, with a shared ambition to understand the lived experiences of children and families and a clear commitment to improving outcomes across

SEND services. The Parent Carer Forum also feel heard and are building up trust with leaders across the partnership.

## Next steps

- **Governance and reporting arrangements:** Leaders must urgently address outstanding actions within the PIP to ensure accurate timescales are met and progress is clearly tracked. Continue to embed effective governance and reporting mechanisms to provide clear oversight, accountability, and assurance of progress across SEND services.
- **Urgently improve data intelligence and performance monitoring:** finalise and implement a comprehensive data dashboard to strengthen data intelligence, support timely decision-making, and effectively track progress, impact and outcomes. Transparent KPIs and data projections are needed to demonstrate success and provide assurance. The data dashboard to be implemented in February 2026 as planned.
- **Strategic vision and co-production:** Leaders to finalise a robust SEND strategy to reflect a shared ambition for improvement, shaped by the lived experiences of children, young people, and families. Development of the Self Evaluation of the effectiveness of strategic arrangements.
- **Leadership and workforce stability:** Leaders to implement a structured transition and succession plan to manage ongoing leadership and workforce changes. Ensure clear communication of roles, responsibilities, and decision-making authority to maintain statutory duties and service continuity during periods of restructure.

## APA 1

*Area leaders need to urgently, jointly and accurately identify the needs of children and young people with SEND in the local area, ensure that there is a clear and cohesive strategic direction for the local partnership and ensure that there is an agreed co-produced strategy in place that includes effective joint plans which clearly demonstrate how improvements will be made in a timely manner to address the key areas that need improvement.*

## Key findings

- **The Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA)** was developed collaboratively and published to inform and strengthen strategic planning across the partnership.
- **Sector datasets enhancements**, some positive developments in identifying and tracking children and young people across a range of key metrics, including attendance, exclusions, Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans, and other statutory indicators. This has strengthened our understanding of the needs of children and young people and improved our ability to respond effectively.

## Next steps

- **SEND Strategy:** Leaders to finalise a clear, cohesive strategy reflecting shared ambitions for improvement, informed by the lived experiences of children, young people, and families.
- **Participation and Engagement Charter:** Develop and implement a Participation and Engagement Charter, informed by insights from the values workshops and co-produced with the Parent and Carer Participation (PCP). This will ensure lived experience is captured, systematically gathered and meaningfully used to inform

ongoing SEND system Improvement and supports clarity around system roles and functions.

- **Vulnerable cohort dataset:** Implement a shared vulnerable children and young people dataset across the partnership to improve information sharing, strengthen oversight, and support targeted intervention.

## **APA 2**

*Area leaders need to ensure that there is a strategic partnership commissioning agreement in place based on a thorough joint strategic needs assessment.*

### **Key findings**

- **Collaborative commissioning:** A joint commissioning agreement has been drafted, and a SEND hub established, to enable effective collaborative planning across partners.
- **Data-informed decisions:** Joint commissioning decisions are now guided by the SEND JSNA and the draft outcomes framework, ensuring that planning and resource allocation are evidence-based and focused on improving outcomes for children and young people.

### **Next steps**

- **Joint Commissioning Strategy:** Partners to finalise a joint commissioning strategy and delivery plan that integrates lived experiences and is underpinned by collaborative partnership working, ensuring services are effectively designed and delivered to meet local needs.

## **APA 3**

*Area leaders need to assess and provide for the needs of children and young people with SEND jointly and accurately. This includes multi-agency assessment of needs, multi-agency quality assurance processes, timely issuing of high-quality EHC plans, and a holistic oversight of these plans through annual reviews to ensure that they are kept up to date.*

### **Key findings**

- **The Derbyshire SEND QA, Performance, and Participation Framework** ensures coordinated, high-quality EHCPs and inclusive services, with termly audits and feedback loops embedding continuous improvement.
- **Recovery plan positively progressing** to reduce backlogs, supported by ongoing staff recruitment, agency capacity and workforce training. There is additional Educational Psychologist (EP) agency capacity and 95% of advice is on track for timely completion by the end of the Spring term.
- **Targeted investment to improve SEND delivery:** The local authority has invested £1.3 million to strengthen SEND statutory assessment and EHC recovery through additional resources, increased capacity, and focused workforce training, supporting more timely and effective outcomes for children and young people.
- **An inclusion framework** has been implemented across all schools, with designated practitioners and co-produced revisions to align education and inclusion, ensuring meaningful engagement with stakeholders.
- **SEND team has strengthened communication** with families and partners through clear expectations, well-attended SENCO networks, and regular Parent Carer Voice meetings enabling a more responsive, outward-facing culture.

- **A new multi-agency approach** is enabling timely decisions and support for children's needs, with "Moving on Together" meetings established to guide next steps with parents, carers, and schools following a decision not to assess.

### Next steps

- **Accelerate recovery plan delivery** to continue to resolve backlogs, improve assessment timelines, and ensure progress is effectively monitored. In addition, workforce succession planning to support sustainable improvement.
- **Continue to embed and monitor quality assurance framework** to drive consistent QA practices across services and at the system level.
- Leaders should consider developing a **Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO)** role to enhance capacity, strengthen collaboration, and connect operational delivery with strategic oversight across the partnership.

### APA 4

*Area leaders need to urgently address the number of children and young people with SEND missing education. Leaders need to ensure that joint strategies address the underlying reasons for this issue, such as the lack of special school and AP places, long waits for needs assessments, and the lack of effective mental health support, which prevent children's and young people's needs escalating to a point where they stop attending school.*

### Key findings

- **A strengthened attendance policy with a graduated response** has been implemented, supported by embedded termly school visits from September 2025 to enable consistent challenge and support.
- **Targeted multiagency early interventions** are successfully preventing permanent exclusions and enabling children to remain in mainstream education. Data shows 32% reduction in permanent exclusions and 21% reduction in suspensions year-on-year.
- **Data dashboard** is now operational, tracking attendance, suspensions, exclusions, and Children Missing from Education (CME) across the priority area to monitor performance, identify trends, and assess impact.
- **Engagement with Inclusion Support Service** reached 100% of Derbyshire schools. Early Years Inclusion Funding performance has significantly improved, with successful applications increasing from 58% to 71%. Early Years workshops and SENCo briefing have received positive feedback, demonstrating high impact and practitioner confidence.

### Next steps

- **Sufficiency strategy**: finalise and implement a robust sufficiency strategy informed by reliable and integrated data mechanisms. To enable accurate assessment of need and effective future planning to ensure the local area has the right provision in place at the right time.
- **Complete and implement the Alternative Provision strategy and framework by September 2026**, ensuring alignment with commissioning and sufficiency planning.
- **Monitor and evaluate pathways to prevent permanent exclusions and reintegrate**, particularly for vulnerable children. To enable a clear focus on early intervention, quality assurance and inclusive practice. Maximising opportunities for

children and young people to **return to mainstream education** wherever appropriate.

### **APA 5**

*Area leaders need to accelerate plans to improve communication with parents and other key stakeholders in order to explain changes they have made to their area's services. Leaders need to ensure that the voices of families are heard and used where appropriate to shape the services and support these families receive.*

#### **Key findings**

- **The establishment of the Derbyshire Youth Inclusion Forum** demonstrates a strategic commitment to co-production, enabling young people to meaningfully influence decision-making locally and regionally.
- **Parent Carer Forum-led values workshops** with families and system colleagues to strengthen shared understanding and collaboration.
- **Communication and engagement developing** through a joint communications strategy, supported by youth participation updates, monthly news updates, MP drop-in sessions, and a Parent Carer Forum-led survey.
- **Partnership with parents and carers need to mature** further before co-production is fully embedded.

#### **Next steps**

- **Evaluate the effectiveness of the communication and engagement strategy** and revise the delivery plan accordingly. Integrating insights from values workshops, stakeholder feedback, local offer review and survey findings to drive ongoing improvements.
- **Establish a structured approach to capture and integrate lived experiences, learning, and feedback**, creating a continuous loop that shapes and influences evidence-based service improvements. This could be achieved by bringing the PCF into decision-making earlier, before work has begun.
- **Be authentic** when communicating with families by providing clear, transparent and honest updates of progress generally and for specific issues such as health time wait updates.

### **APA 6**

*Health leaders must address the current waiting times for community paediatric assessments, neurodevelopmental and mental health support and assessments Children and young people's needs should be identified at the earliest opportunity for plans to be developed to support them. Area leaders must ensure that there is sufficient support for families across all services while they wait for an assessment or support.*

#### **Key findings**

- **Neurodiversity (ND) business case** has been co-produced to transform system support and assessment pathways for children and young people.
- **Investment & CAMHS Improvement.** £1.5m has been secured across Derby City and Derbyshire to reduce CAMHS waiting lists. Recovery planning is being revised to improve timeliness, enhance early intervention, and reduce delays in accessing care.
- **Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)** project is supporting early identification within educational settings. It equips schools with

guidance and tools to support neurodivergent learners to improve timely interventions and outcomes.

### Next steps

- **Health performance data** must be systematically and consistently shared across all partners to maintain clear oversight of progress since the last inspection, with leaders assured of overall progress and improvements are being delivered at pace and sustained over time.
- **Robust risk-managed improvement and recovery plans** need to be in place for key health services to manage risk and drive ongoing improvement, supported by clear trajectories for progress and ensuring services remain safe and effective.
- **Leaders must urgently ensure an effective support whilst waiting offer** for children and young people awaiting assessment. This includes ensuring families receive clear, consistent, and proactive communication, and have access to appropriate early help and intervention across the partnership.

### Key dates and documents

Several key documents, which are important for providing greater assurance, are due to be completed and signed off this year. These documents and their associated completion dates are listed below for reference:

- **Data dashboard** – to be implemented and go to SIAB in February 2026
- **AD positions** –SIAB to be informed of successful appointments in February 2026
- **Assurance report** following a detailed review of the **risk log** by the ODG – to go to SIAB February 2026 (postponed from January SIAB)
- **New education clusters** – first meeting to take place in February 2026 – report to SIAB in February 2026 (if meeting held prior to SIAB date)
- **Updated PIP/PIP tracker** – to be updated/created and to go to SIAB in March 2026
- **Sufficiency strategy** – to be completed by March 2026 (originally Sept 25)
- **SEND and Inclusion strategy** – to be completed by March 2026, go to SIAB in April 2026
- Revised **Communications strategy** – to be completed by April 2026
- Partners to finalise a **joint commissioning strategy and delivery plan** – date to be confirmed but we should expect this by April 2026
- Develop and implement a **Participation and Engagement Charter** – reset meeting due date Jan 2026) date to be confirmed and charter to be aligned with the strategy
- **Alternative Provision Strategy and Framework** to be completed and implemented by September 2026

The partnership is stronger than 6 months ago and there has been a lot of focus on addressing some key issues such as workforce capacity, stability of leadership and co-production involving children's and young people's voices which has led to some demonstratable improvements. It is now essential that the focus of improvement includes acknowledging what differences have been made and are being felt by children, young people and their families by making all activity meaningful, clear and valuable.

The stocktake provided assurance that the LAP is making progress against its PIP, leaders are focused on and committed to ensuring that improvements are sustainable and that preparation work undertaken within the past 6 months is informing the direction of travel for these improvements.

We will continue to review progress against each Area of Priority Action and Area for Improvement as outlined in the Improvement Notice issued to Derbyshire County Council on 14 January 2025.

Your next review to assess progress against your PIP will take place in July 2026. As well as a progress review, the focus will also be on data, communication, culture and impact.

Your Case Lead, Karena Gregory, SEND Advisor, Rebecca Hogan, and NHS England Advisor, Claire Scott, will continue to offer support and challenge. Please contact them if you require further assistance.

We would both like to take this opportunity to thank you for your commitment to improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND, and their families, across Derbyshire.

Yours sincerely,



**Paul R Roberts**

Head of Vulnerable Children's Unit, East Midlands  
Regions Group  
Department for Education



**Pardip Hundal**

Assistant Director for Quality Improvement and Health Inequalities / Deputy Programme  
Director  
Learning Disabilities, Autism/SEND Programme  
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We are copying this letter to:

Cllr Alan Graves (Leader of the Council, Derbyshire County Council)  
Cllr Sam Redfern (Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Derbyshire County Council)  
Cllr Simon Mabbott (Cabinet Member for SEND and Education, Derbyshire County Council)  
Neil Crittenden, Chief Executive, Derbyshire County Council  
Joe Wilson (Director of Education and Inclusion, Derbyshire County Council)  
Deborah Glassbrook (Independent Chair, Derbyshire SEND Board)  
Claire Walsh (PCF Chair & Vice Chair, Derbyshire SEND Board)  
Kelly Hughes (Deputy Director East Midlands Regions Group, Department for Education)  
Ian Dixon (Regional Improvement and Support Lead for SEND, Department for Education)  
Karena Gregory (Regional Case Lead for SEND, Department for Education)  
Rebecca Hogan (Independent DfE appointed SEND Advisor)  
Claire Scott (NHSE Adviser, Senior Programme Manager Learning Disabilities, Autism and SEND)  
Amanda Sullivan, Chief Executive, NHS ICB cluster (Derby, Derbyshire, Nottingham, Nottinghamshire and Lincolnshire)  
Lorraine Mulroney (Head of SEND NHS England)