



Department
for Education



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15 July 2025

Dear Emma, Chris, Alison and Dean,

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 2 July 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 submitted evidence.

We heard from all partners at the stocktake and got a good sense of a developing partnership, with an awareness of the challenges ahead and a firm commitment from leaders to improve services at pace.

The evidence provided before and during the stocktake meeting demonstrated progress in implementing your Priority Impact Plan (PIP), which outlines the partnership's response to the 6 APA's related to 'systemic failings' identified in the SEND inspection report.

Leadership and Governance

- **Strengthened Partnership Working:** ongoing collaboration across the local area reflects a shared commitment to delivering sustained improvements in SEND services.
- **Enhanced Governance and Oversight:** new governance structures, including the introduction of an independent chair, have been established to provide stronger strategic oversight and monitor progress against the PIP.
- **Leadership Stability and Capacity:** the appointment of a permanent Director of Education is contributing to greater leadership capacity within the Local Authority to support SEND improvements.

Next steps

- **Embedding System-wide Governance:** review the new governance structures to ensure they are effective and embed systems, including developing a comprehensive risk register, robust reporting mechanisms aligned to the PIP, and a clear change request process to address delays in actions to ensure accountability across the partnership.
- **Integrated Strategic Oversight:** strengthen links with wider corporate system governance, such as the Health and Wellbeing Board, to support collaborative planning, quality assurance, and effective risk management.
- **Leadership Capacity and Stability:** while interim leadership supports current SEND improvements, there is a recognised need to build permanent leadership capacity to ensure long-term stability, strategic continuity, and sustained progress across the SEND system.
- **System Alignment:** there are increasing numbers of workstream and partnership groups. Leaders must ensure all workstreams have the right membership, clear delivery plans, and escalation routes, which align to relevant wider system improvements to help build on effective practices and partnership capacity, whilst avoiding duplication. This should be co-ordinated and supported through a dedicated programme management office.

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

- **Data-Informed Strategic Planning:** development of a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) by partners is strengthening the understanding of local population needs, supporting informed strategic vision, decision-making, and future strategy development.
- **Effective joint working:** whilst plans are being developed, there is a limited strategic and shared understanding of how to collectively address the needs of children and young people with SEND in the local area that will drive effective joint working.

Next steps

- **JSNA:** the development and publication of the JSNA is a positive step that needs to be built on through ensuring that needs are communicated across the Local Area Partnership (LAP) and the information used to prioritise action and monitor progress.
- **Strategic Vision and Co-Production:** leaders to develop a clear and cohesive SEND strategy to reflect a shared ambition for improvement, shaped by the lived experiences of children, young people, and families.
- **Strengthening Participation and Engagement:** in conjunction with the PIP, a Participation and Engagement Charter should be developed to ensure stakeholder feedback is actively gathered and used to inform the Improvement Board's work and clarify system functions.

- **Shared Data Dashboard:** the local area partnership should co-develop a joint SEND system data dashboard to strengthen data intelligence and support informed, strategic decision-making.

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

- **Strengthening Joint Commissioning:** a joint commissioning SEND hub has been established to enhance collaborative planning and support the effective delivery of PIP.

Next steps

- **Strategic Commissioning Development:** partners to develop an updated joint commissioning strategy and delivery plan utilising the JSNA, best practices, and identify future opportunities to enhance outcomes for children and young people (0-25 years).

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

- **Education Health Care Plans (EHCP) Quality and Timeliness:** leaders recognise significant issues in relation to EHCPs and are taking steps to address them. This includes investing in additional staffing, improving communication, strengthening data monitoring and performance management, and reviewing systems and processes to drive improvement.

Next steps

- **EHCP Recovery and Risk Management:** leaders need to develop a robust EHCP recovery plan, which outlines actions taken, risk mitigation strategies, clear improvement trajectories, training and development for the workforce and ongoing plans to accelerate progress.
- **Strengthening Quality Assurance:** a multi-agency quality assurance (QA) working group to be established to drive consistent QA practices across services and at the system level.

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

- **Improved Data to Support Inclusion:** progress is being made in developing datasets to identify children not accessing full-time education, including those awaiting placements outside of mainstream settings, enabling more targeted support.
- **Increased School Engagement in Inclusion:** all Derbyshire schools are now engaged with the Inclusion Support Service (up from less than 50% in the previous year), contributing to a reduction in exclusions and suspensions and supporting improved educational outcomes.

Next steps

- **Enhanced Sufficiency Planning and Decision-Making:** leaders to strengthen sufficiency planning by incorporating the JSNA, data intelligence, and partnership collaboration across education clusters to target need. This needs to be supported by robust mechanisms for decision-making, commissioning, and quality assurance in relation to SEND capital funding.
- **Ongoing Enhancement of Data Intelligence:** continue developments of data intelligence to align with the Attendance Strategy and delivery plan to support improved monitoring and outcomes.

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

- **Strengthening Co-Production and Youth Voice:** stronger collaboration with the Derbyshire Parent Carer Forum is supporting the development of effective co-production practices. Alongside emerging efforts to engage with young people and better understand their lived experiences within the SEND system.
- **Strengthened Political Engagement:** the introduction of an MP and lead members surgery is enhancing communication and engagement with the Local Authority and SEND team.
- **Increased Transparency and Openness:** publicly publishing minutes from the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board on the Local Offer website to promote greater transparency to families and stakeholder of progress against the PIP.

Next steps

- **Urgent Focus on Communication and Co-Production:** there is a significant need for leaders to develop and implement a robust communication and engagement plan to ensure consistent co-production practices and improve consistent communication with families and schools at both service and system levels.

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

- **Co-Produced Service Development:** leaders are working collaboratively to co-produce business cases aimed at improving mental health and neurodevelopmental services, whilst also ensuring the service design is informed by the needs and experiences of children, young people, and families.

Next steps

- **Urgent Improvement of Performance Data:** leaders must urgently address issues with performance data to enable informed strategic decision-making, strengthen assurance processes, and support effective risk management and recovery planning, especially regarding waiting times, assessments and what prioritisation criteria are being used.

It has been an important step to focus on internal diagnostics over the last 6 months, with partnership processes, system improvements and workforce all being considered, alongside establishing the Improvement Board. This preparation now needs to turn into delivery and improved outcomes - including importantly children and their families feeling the difference – over the next 6 months.

The stocktake provided assurance that the LAP is making progress against its PIP, there is an awareness of the challenges ahead and leaders are focused on and committed to ensuring the systems and processes are in place to begin the much-needed improvement journey.

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 January 2026.

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

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We are copying this letter to:

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Cllr Sam Redfern (Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Derbyshire County Council)
Cllr Jack Bradley (Cabinet Member for SEND and Education, Derbyshire County Council)
Joe Wilson (Director of Education and Inclusion, Derbyshire County Council)
Deborah Glassbrook (Independent Chair, Derbyshire SEND Board)
Carol Gray (Regional Director East Midlands, 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)
Lorraine Mulroney (Head of SEND NHS England)