

SEND improvement plan – quarterly progress update

April 2024

The Hertfordshire SEND Local Area Partnership published the [Priority Action and Improvement Plan](#) in Jan 2024. The plan explains the actions being taken to improve services for children and young people with SEND and their families. This newsletter is our first update on the progress of the plan. We will publish an update like this every three months, but you can find updates on specific items on the Local Offer.

One of our priority actions is to ensure that Leaders from all organisations in education, health and care (EHC) services work together better and have an urgent focus on delivering the improvements in services that are needed.

In December 2023, we set up a new governance structure to ensure that we regularly review the progress we are making and have clear accountability for delivering improvements. This governance includes a Partnership Board, attended by Education, Health and Care service leads, Headteachers and parent/carer reps, who meet every month, and a Priority Executive, independently chaired by Dame Christine Lenehan. They have met five times so far to review progress of actions.

Below is a summary of the progress made to date against our five key areas for improvement. In our communications we want to be clear about when we expect improvements to be felt and fully recognise that whilst progress is being made, the impact of our actions will not be felt by the children, young people and families of Hertfordshire immediately.

We have created a new page on the **Local Offer** to publish specific updates on our SEND improvement progress, and we will continue to communicate regularly through our SEND Newsletter, which you can sign up to [through this link](#). Our next full quarterly update will be published at the end of July 2024.

Improvement Area 1: Make sure all children and young people can get the same support from health services, no matter where they live in the county

Improvement Area 4: Address the gaps and delays in service provision for children and young people with SEND. This includes services for ASD, ADHD, mental health, audiology and speech and language

- The [Neurodiversity Support Hub](#) has been expanded across Hertfordshire, staffed by Experts by Experience. The hub offers advice, support, signposting, and guidance about a whole range of things relating to ADHD and Autism.
- Anyone who has a question about a child's neurodiversity (age 0 - 25) can get in touch with the hub. The child or young person does not need to have a diagnosis. Parents, carers, family members, professionals and friends can also call.

- We received feedback from users of the hub that having wider opening hours would help improve parents' and carers' ability to access this resource. Recruitment is currently taking place and once completed we'll be increasing the opening hours.
- The NHS' speech and language service introduced focused clinics in December 2023, January and February 2024 to reduce the backlog of children and young people waiting for an assessment of their special education needs. These changes have meant that SaLT (speech and language therapy) assessments were completed for 526 children. As a result, the number of children and young people waiting for a SaLT assessment for their EHCP has now been reduced by 78% to February 2024. The service is now reviewing what they have learned from these clinics to improve the service.
- In the last 6 months we have seen a reduction in the number of children and young people waiting for PALMS treatment by 52% (since Sep 2023).

Improvement Area 2: Improve the quality of Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) documents

- The county council's [workforce transformation programme](#), which has included a successful recruitment campaign for additional staff who will manage EHCPs, has led to 111 appointments. We currently have 34 new recruits being trained through our newly developed [SEND Academy](#), with 48 having completed their training and now working in the service.
- Once new staff join their teams, between April and June (when they have completed their SEND Academy induction), caseloads for staff who manage EHCPs will begin to reduce.
- The council has recruited a SEND Participation Lead, to expand our participation and co-production with children and young people. She has been working with our quality assurance team to develop a tool, 'This is Me' which will be used with children and young people to capture their views in their EHC assessments and annual reviews more consistently. We will start rolling out the use of this tool from May onwards.
- Our [Participation Lead has also been consulting with young people](#) in school about what good quality services look like to them. Their views have been included in our newly developed quality assurance framework which describes how we will regularly review the quality of services across education, health and social care in a joined-up way.
- In 2024 to date, 42.5% of new EHC plans have been finalised within the statutory timeframe (compared with our previous figure of 35.7% for 2023). Our target for 2024 is 60%.

Improvement Area 3: Make sure that children who have EHCPs are attending the right type of school for them

- We recognise that we need to increase the number of specialist provision places available in Hertfordshire to ensure all CYP can attend education provision that meets their needs. We are investing £91m across the county to create more than 1,000 special school places for our children in Hertfordshire as part of our Special School Place Planning Strategy.
- As of March 2024, the number of special school places in Hertfordshire has increased by 737 places (31%), from 2350 in 2018/19 to 3054 from September 2024.
- We are on track to extend our Special School Place Planning Strategy to Spring 2025 so we can deliver additional places for CYP with Severe Learning Difficulties and to meet immediate demand. This is backed up by an additional £40.5m of investment agreed by the county council in Feb 2024.
- Since September 2023, over 100 children who had been waiting for longer than one year have now secured a place.

- There are now less than 70 children who have been waiting longer than year and we are aiming to clear this waiting list, so that there are no children waiting for longer than three terms, by January 2025.
- We recognise that communication in relation to panel decisions can be unclear and inconsistent, and this can increase frustration experienced by children, young people, families and settings. To address this, we have recruited four SEND Panel Managers, who started on 18 March 2024. They will be focused on delivering a new locality-based provision panel model to allow for quicker decision making and improved communication with families. We are on track to move to this new model at the end of June 2024.

Improvement Area 5: We 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 of complaint

- We are committed to improving how services communicate with families, ensuring this is accurate, compassionate and timely. Through our SEND Academy, staff have been receiving training on the importance of empathetic communication. Herts Parent Carer Involvement (HPCI) also worked with us to develop a training video on communication, based on Parent Carers experiences.
- One of our new SEND Academy Graduates recently shared their experience of the induction with us, which you can read here on the local offer. [Hertfordshire County Council | Guest blog: Being part of the change in statutory SEND \(a new colleague shares her experiences\)](#)
- We are developing a parent portal to provide parents with information about their child's EHCP, including during the needs assessment process. We have been working with our IT supplier to develop this portal and are about to enter a user testing period with parent carer reps.
- We are seeing a sustained increase in visits to the [Hertfordshire SEND Local Offer website](#) and over the last quarter have held two 'Introduction to the Local Offer' webinars for professionals with an additional one for parent / carers and professionals on Thursday 25 April.

Herts Parent Carer Involvement recently published the results of their 2023 annual survey which you can find [here](#). Partnership leaders recently published their response to the survey results, recognising the role that parent feedback has played in our SEND improvement journey so far. [Hertfordshire County Council | HPCI's annual survey results - how we are responding and improving as a result](#)

We have a forthcoming webinar for parents and carers on how we're [Improving the way we manage EHCP duties: Making SEND everyone's business](#) taking place on Tuesday 23 May, 7-8pm