



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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Ms Sue Cook, Executive Director for People Services
Dr Ed Garrett, Chief Officer, Integrated Care Board

1 March 2023

SIX MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP)

Dear Sue and Ed,

Thank you for meeting with DfE SEND and NHS England officials on 19 July 2022 to review the progress you have made against your Accelerated Progress Plan to address the outstanding significant weaknesses following the revisit by inspectors from Ofsted and CQC. Please accept our apologies for the delay in issuing this follow up letter.

We are grateful for the contributions from your parent carer forum (PCF) and school representatives to the meeting.

The evidence provided by the local area demonstrated the leadership's commitment to improvement in a wide range of areas illustrated by a number of measures including significant investment in staffing in the LA's SEND services in 2023/24, the neurodevelopment pathway, mental health services and speech and language therapy. The roll out of Speechlink to all but six primary schools is a good achievement that should improve the identification and support for children with developmental speech sound difficulties.

It is also evident from the papers provided that there is a strong overview of performance in a number of key areas.

We are pleased that a new PCF was established quickly which has helped ensure continuity of a strong parent voice on the SEND improvement board. We are pleased to see that the PCF has resumed the annual survey of parents' views and experiences and that the issues raised will be given careful consideration by the area's leadership to inform priorities and the direction of improvement plans.

We are also grateful to your schools' representatives for their insight and it is reassuring to learn that they feel confident in knowing what improvements are being made to improve the experiences for the families and to enable schools to respond more effectively.

It was encouraging to see a significant improvement in EHCP timescales during 2021 with Suffolk's performance being significantly above the national average. It is therefore disappointing to see that performance fell during 2022 which we understand is largely due to significant difficulties in the recruitment and retention of educational psychologists compounded by a significant increase in requests for EHC Needs Assessment. We welcome the fact that you have added three additional educational

psychologist posts to the service but note the difficulties experienced in recruitment and the need to use locums in an attempt to cover vacancies.

The information provided to us demonstrates improved quality assurance arrangements for EHCPs across local authority and health services including external validation of the result from audits of the quality of EHCPs. The appointment of a designated social care officer should help ensure the social care content of EHCPs is of the required quality.

The introduction of a new compliments, comments and complaints dashboard to help track, analyse and report on the issues raised along with follow up workshops including parents to explore what improvement could be made is a promising addition to your overall quality assurance process.

The development of systems to ensure that all Phase Transfers reviews and other annual reviews of EHCPs are identified and actively tracked provides a good basis for ensuring all reviews are completed on time. However, we note that you recognise that further action is needed to improve performance in this area.

We are encouraged by the substantial additional investment in the local authority's Family Service during 2022/23. This should impact positively on the ability to comply with statutory timescales as well as giving staff more time to communicate and engage with families.

We see that to improve the experience of families you have recently developed a "conversation prompt tool" to help officers and families have productive conversations around the child's needs and EHCP which is based on feedback from families and staff. You have also provided training on strength based conversations. We would be interested in hearing how these promising initiatives have improved the experience of both families and staff and the content of EHCPs.

We welcome the investment to improve the NDD pathways such as the neuro diversity diagnostic service waiting list initiative with the new services due to be operational in Autumn 2022 and look forward to hearing about its initial impact.

The establishment of the Crisis Help and Risk Intervention Service in East and West Suffolk is a much-welcomed development and from the documentation submitted, it was encouraging to see information on outcomes using the children's global assessment scale as well as feedback directly from the young people using the service.

The improvement in access and waiting times for urgent referrals via the eating disorder pathway is welcomed but we note your concerns that routine wait times are still below national standards.

The roll out of Mental Health Support Teams is in line with national targets with the intention of achieving 50% coverage during 2023.

We were pleased to hear that the Emotional Wellbeing Hub recovery improvement plan has resulted in a significant reduction in waiting times for non-urgent support; waiting times and caseload have reduced by over 55% since July 2021. Following service line reviews, there have been improved access times for ADHD assessments.

The local area has taken a number of measures to improve communication including co-produced improvements to the local offer, use of social media and newsletters which keep readers aware of strategic developments such as progress in implementing the action plan following the Peer review of SEND arrangements in Suffolk. We note the intent to further improve communications with additional funding for a Communication & Engagement Officer during 2022/23.

We are looking forward to hearing about your progress with supporting evidence at the next review meeting in April/May, including:

- The impact of your plans to improve performance on EHCP timescales and what support children are receiving while they are waiting for their overdue EHCP.
- The improvements that have resulted from the appointment of additional staff during 2022/23 following the Family Services capacity review. In particular, the improvements in reviewing EHCPs.
- The impact of the additional investment and improvements to mental health services and the NDD pathway, including waiting times and the experiences of families.
- The outcomes of your demand and capacity review of core MH service provision in Suffolk.
- The impact of your recovery plan for CAMHS ADHD service.
- Progress in implementing your new mental health early intervention and wellbeing model and any improvements that have resulted.
- Outcome and impact of the additional funding of services in relation to speech and language and occupational therapy services.
- How the local area has responded to the results from the annual parent carer survey.
- An update on the work for commissioning of health provision for the new multi-disciplinary assessment centres as this was not yet in a place for an update at the previous meeting.

The overall actions being taken and progress made to date is reassuring. Your next six-month review meeting should take place week commencing 3 April 2023. Corrina Bielby will be in touch to arrange a convenient date.

In the meantime, SEND and NHS England Advisers, Brian Gale and Louise Warren and Corrina Bielby as your DfE Case Lead, will continue to provide you with support and challenge. If you have any questions or need any further support, please contact either party in the first instance.

We are copying this letter to Matthew Hicks, Leader of the Council, to your SEND / NHSE Advisers, and to your DfE Case Lead.

Yours sincerely,



Sharon Thornton East of England Regional Lead
SEND Improvement and Intervention
Department for Education (DfE)

Cc: Ros Somerville, Assistant Director of Inclusion