



Department
for Education

Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street

Sarah-Jane Smedmor, Executive Director of Children's Services
Dr Ed Garrett, Chief Executive, Suffolk and North East Essex Integrated Care Board
Tracey Bleakley, Chief Executive, Norfolk and Waveney Integrated Care Board

15 November 2024

Dear Sarah-Jane, Ed and Tracey,

SUFFOLK COUNTY COUNCIL: 6-MONTHLY PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN

Thank you for meeting with the Department for Education (DfE) SEND and NHS England officials on 4 November 2024 to review the progress made against your Priority Action Plan (PAP) and your strategic plan over the past six months.

We are grateful for the substantial documentary evidence provided by the partnership to demonstrate the work undertaken since the inspection. Alongside the discussions at the meeting, the documentary evidence was helpful in understanding the progress being made and we discussed key achievements and areas for improvement. We welcome the improvements and the evidence of impact demonstrated since the Improvement Notice was issued earlier this year, recognise the considerable challenges that remain to reach the required targets and we agreed solid foundations were in place for moving forward.

Key achievements

Capacity

- Increase in capacity through investment from the Council with 89 new staff and three jointly funded roles that are shared across the partnership.
- Additional EP capacity secured through 100 locums completing advice and information as part of the EHC needs assessments.
- Work with schools through the Graduated Response delivered by Special Education Services as well as Psychology and Therapeutic Service.

Compliance

- Improved 20-week data and feedback from parents show improvements to the quality of plans, as more are being audited through the quality assurance process.
- Reduced waiting times for assessments of ASD and ADHD and improvements to timeliness of advice.
- More annual reviews are being completed on time and in a way that are making a difference to children and families, as evidenced by their feedback.
- Reduction in mediation requests.

Co-production

- Working together as a system and using available resources to better gather data.
- Launched new website for parents/young people to give feedback.
- Focus groups with senior leaders and parents including executive leads.
- Created a new survey with schools to issue to the school population using the parent carers annual survey.
- Joint co-production lead – create a better co-production strategy as a system.

We also noted the following positive work in the evidence provided:

- Outstanding academic progress for children participating in the Raising Achievement - Delivering Better Value academic interventions. This demonstrates better partnership working with schools and is evidence that the partnership is working to meet needs effectively at an earlier stage.
- Targeted work on permanent exclusions is having a positive impact, evidenced by significant reduction of permanent exclusions in primary ages and for children with EHCPs.
- The local authority have worked to identify unknown children and young people; the data is showing a reduction in SEN NEET and an increase in children and young people remaining in education, employment or training.

Key areas for development

The partnership was very open about the areas it felt still needed considerable further improvement to meet the needs of all children and families more effectively and has clear plans in place for driving this. These include:

- Co-production, communication (both formal and informal, as well as continue to evolve the service delivery culture around kindness and compassion) and consistency. Communications should evolve to share successes more often.

- Governance and the use of data - this is not always succinct enough for the board to be effective. Work also needs to be done to bring together evidence of impact in an accessible way that enables the board to drive strategic change.
- Ensuring that improvement work continues at pace, specifically with regard to:
 - Continue to improve timeliness and quality to meet or exceed the target set in the PAP, which is the national average, by September 2025,
 - Complete and embed the frameworks for delivering these improvements such that consistency is achieved for all families,
 - Reducing further the backlog of plans and reviews while spreading kindness and compassion in the service culture,
 - The voice of children and families continuing to be heard at the heart of decision making,
 - Ensuring resources are targeting to where they are most needed, and
 - Ensuring requirements of the Improvement Notice continue to be met with a growing sense of integration across service providers.

Next Steps

Your next six monthly stocktake review will take place in May 2025. We will write to you further to arrange a date and request evidence for the areas we would like to focus on at the new stocktake.

Your SEND Adviser, Helen Chester, and NHS England Adviser, Louise Warren, will continue to offer support and challenge. Please contact them if you require further assistance.

I am copying this letter to: Nicola Beach, Chief Executive of the Council; Helen, Chester, SEND Advisor; Louise Warren, NHSE Adviser; and Lorraine Mulrooney, Head of SEND at NHSE.

Yours sincerely,



Jonathan Fairclough
Head of Delivery, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire
East of England Regions Group
Department for Education