



HEALTH AND WELLBEING BOARD

Thursday, 13 March 2025

REPORT TITLE:	SEND IMPROVEMENT
REPORT OF:	DIRECTOR FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

REPORT SUMMARY

This report provides members of the Health and Wellbeing Board with an update on the improvement programme for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) for the Local Area in Wirral. The Local Authority, Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board, education settings, parent carer forum, and other relevant stakeholders are considered members of the Local Area.

The report includes the Written Statement of Action Impact Group Tracker which monitors progress against the areas identified for improvement in the Local Area SEND Inspection and Improvement Notice. Integral to the improvement plan are health pathways. Findings from the Local Area SEND Inspection of September 2021 was the very high levels of parental dissatisfaction with pathways and provision. The Local Area SEND Partnership Board is committed to improving the experiences and outcomes for children and young people on these pathways and this report provides an overview of the related business case and improvement plan which was endorsed by the SEND partnership.

RECOMMENDATION/S

The Health and Wellbeing Board is requested to:

1. Note and endorse the SEND improvement work delivered through the Local Area SEND Partnership Board.
2. Agree that the Health and Wellbeing Board continues to receive regular reports to enable the Board to monitor performance against the Written Statement of Action in relation to the areas identified for improvement in the Local Area SEND Inspection and Improvement Notice.
3. Endorse the neurodevelopmental business case and improvement plan.
4. Note the progress made by COSMOS and agree that COSMOS will report into the Local Area SEND Partnership Board, through its Participation and Engagement Subgroup.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S

- 1.1 It has been agreed with DfE and NHS England through the revised Terms of Reference for the Local Area SEND Partnership Board that the Health and Wellbeing Board is the appropriate forum to provide oversight of SEND improvement activity in Wirral, ensuring that the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) is fully delivered by October 2025.

2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 No other options have been considered. The Local Area SEND Partnership Board will provide updates for information to Wirral Place Based Partnership Board, the Children, Young People and Education Committee, the Adult Social Care and Public Health Committee, and Wirral Safeguarding Children Partnership.

3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 3.1 The Local Area SEND Partnership Board continues to meet monthly, holding its tenth meeting on 28th January 2025. The board continues to comply with the requirements of the Improvement Notice. The first formal review of progress against the Improvement Notice took place on 26th November 2024, with Department for Education and NHS England Advisors, noting “significant progress” being made by the partnership.
- 3.2 The SEND Improvement Plan, initiated in May 2024, set out a series of metrics for each WSoA area with quarterly targets. Detailed progress against the SEND Improvement Plan are contained within the WSoA Impact Tracker (Appendix 1).
- 3.3 It has been accepted that pre-April 2024, the lack of capacity to improve the Council’s statutory SEND services was limited. Since then, leaders have been working to create conditions that will enable effective practice that leads to improved outcomes and experiences for children and young people. This includes a significantly larger team, a fit-for-purpose case management system, increased investment in SENDIASS (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Independent Advice and Support Service), introduction of specialist tribunal workers, production of a quality assurance framework, performance framework, and training plan.
- 3.4 These arrangements are in place and being closely monitored through improved governance, however, it will take time for the new arrangements to fully embed and impact on performance, experience and outcomes. The local area partnership has recovery and improvement plans to enable this. Bringing those recovery plans together with a timeline to outline when parent carers and stakeholders can expect to see change will be beneficial to all stakeholders, help to manage expectations and reduce frustrations. This overview is in development and will be approved at the February 2025 meeting of the Local Area SEND Partnership Board, with publication on the SENDLO website following.
- 3.5 The importance of embedding robust and consistent application of the Graduated Approach across education settings is recognised by the Local Area SEND

Partnership Board. It is through earlier identification and meeting needs at lower levels of intervention that recent steep increases in EHC needs assessments and reliance on specialist or independent provision will be reduced. The accompanying WSoA Tracker report (Appendix 1) demonstrates the volume of activity supporting inclusion and embedding the Graduated Approach. Learning from similar approaches in Children's Services, particularly in embedding a robust early help and prevention offer which has significantly reduced the rate of children becoming looked after, shows that it can take approximately 3-4 years to evidence impact through data but improvements in experience for individuals can happen much more quickly.

- 3.6 The NHS, nationally and locally, has seen a significant increase over the last 4 years in demand for diagnostic assessments of children and young people who may be neurodiverse. This demand has outstripped available capacity, causing long waiting times and challenging experiences for families. Insight highlighted a lack of support and poor communication whilst waiting for assessments as well as on-going support post diagnosis.
- 3.7 Whilst referrals from education settings in Wirral are starting to plateau, there is still considerable work to do to manage the current waiting times. There are over 4,000 children and young people on the neurodevelopmental pathway awaiting diagnosis and a further 1,000 plus children and young people awaiting triage.
- 3.8 Data from October 2024 indicated a 74-week average waiting time from starting the pathway to diagnosis, with the longest waiting time being 165 weeks. The business case outlines the resource required to achieve the commissioned Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
- 3.9 There are currently almost 6,000 children and young people open to the Community Paediatric Service who are receiving follow ups including medication reviews. This impacts upon the ability of the service to increase 'new' or 'first' appointments. Work is underway to explore shared care arrangements alongside Primary Care, supporting Wirral's All Age Disability Strategy and Preparation for Adulthood.
- 3.10 The neurodevelopment business case (Appendix 2) defines the current challenges within the ND pathway. It also sets out proposed plans, including costs, to recover the position over a 3-year period. The plan includes introduction of a multi-disciplinary team responsible for triage and delivery of services. The immediate focus of year 1 will be to reduce the backlog and improve waiting times. Three options have been considered:
 - Option 1: Recruitment of additional resource and outsourcing (preferred option)
 - Option 2: Outsourcing of backlog to external providers
 - Option 3: Insourcing
- 3.11 The neurodevelopmental business case is supported by the Local Area SEND Partnership Board (LASPB)The final decision on implementation resides with NHS Cheshire and Merseyside, as the commissioner.

4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. The LASPB have considered those arising from improvement work on an individual basis and have agreed the necessary arrangements, as is documented in the board's minutes and action log.

5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council, working with the Integrated Care Board (ICB) and its other partner agencies must comply with the Improvement Notice and the actions it contains, as set out in Section 28 (2) of the Children and Families Act 2014. Failure to comply would lead to further intervention from the Minister for Children, Families and Wellbeing.
- 5.2 Provision of Education, Health and Care Needs assessments and plans are statutory responsibilities under the Children and Families Act 2014.

6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT, ASSETS

- 6.1 There are no direct resource implications arising from this report. The LASPB have considered those arising from improvement work on an individual basis and have agreed the necessary arrangements, as is documented in the board's minutes and action log.

7.0 RELEVANT RISKS

- 7.1 A risk and issues log is maintained and reviewed by the LASPB at each meeting. The Local Area SEND Partnership Board Executive Group meets twice monthly to add additional oversight to risk management.
- 7.2 Should the Local Area SEND Partnership Board not deliver the improvement required as set out in the notice and Written Statement of Action further intervention under Section 497A of the Education Act 1996 would be invoked, thereby directing the Council to take further action to improve SEND services.

8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Department for Education funds, via third sector organisation Contact, a parent carer forum for the local area. In Wirral, Parent Carer Participation Wirral (PCPW) are the designated group to represent the voice and experience of local families. PCPW are represented at the LASPB and its subgroups. The Participation & Engagement subgroup of the LASPB is Chaired by the Chair of PCPW.

9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside have a legal requirement to make sure their policies, and the way they carry out their work, do not discriminate against anyone. The Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside work in partnership with local and regional partners to develop arrangements necessary to deliver improved

outcomes in population health by tackling health inequality which are pertinent to special educational needs and disabilities.

<https://www.wirral.gov.uk/communities-and-neighbourhoods/equality-impact-assessments>

10.0 ENVIRONMENT, BIODIVERSITY AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 Wirral Council and NHS Cheshire and Merseyside and partners are committed to carrying out their work in an environmentally responsible manner. This update report does not have any direct environment, biodiversity or climate implications.

11.0 COMMUNITY WEALTH IMPLICATIONS

11.1 Community Wealth Building in Wirral focusses on partnerships and collaboration. These partnerships are led by Wirral Council with external partners and stakeholders, including residents. NHS Cheshire and Merseyside will support the Council in community wealth building by ensuring health and care organisations in the borough have a focus on reducing health inequalities and contribute to the development of a resilient and inclusive economy for Wirral.

REPORT AUTHOR: **Name** **Elizabeth Hartley**
Director for Children, Families and Education
Telephone: 0151 666 4330
Email: elizabethhartley@wirral.gov.uk

APPENDICES

Appendix 1- Written Statement of Action Tracker November & December 2024
Appendix 2- Business Case for Resourcing the Neurodevelopmental Pathway
Appendix 3 – COSMOS report

BACKGROUND PAPERS

The Local Area SEND and Alternative Provision Framework [Area SEND inspections: framework and handbook - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

December 2024 Local Area SEND Partnership Board papers are available at:
[LASPB December 2024](#)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

This report is being considered by the Health and Wellbeing Board in accordance with section a of its Terms of Reference:

(c) To provide a local governance structure for local planning and accountability of health and wellbeing related outcomes

SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Health and Wellbeing Board	18 th July 2024
Health and Wellbeing Board	19 th September 2024
Children, Young People and Education Committee	23 rd September 2024

Children, Young People and Education Committee
Children, Young People and Education Committee
Health and Wellbeing Board
Children, Young People and Education Committee

16th October 2024
27th November 2024
12th December 2024
22nd January 2025