

Jeanette Richards, Executive Director of Children's Services, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

Eamonn O'Brien, Leader of the Council, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council

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10 July 2025

Dear Jeanette, Eamonn and Will,

BURY LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP: 6-MONTHLY SEND STOCKTAKE MEETING: REVIEW OF SEND PRIORITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Thank you for ensuring appropriate attendance to review the progress made against your Priority Impact Plan (PIP) at the Stocktake meeting on 1 July 2025. We are particularly grateful for the contributions from representatives of Bury2Gether, the local authority and ICB officers who attended the meeting. We also acknowledge the effort made to ensure children and young people had their views shared.

The purpose of this joint letter is to provide a summary of the discussions held at the stocktake meeting, documenting specific feedback from participants on the Areas for Priority Action and Areas for Improvement based on evidence from the six months leading up to and during the stocktake meeting.

The evidence and presentation shared before and during the meeting reflected encouraging progress in implementing the PIP, with various actions being carried out within the agreed timelines. The local area continues to show a shared commitment to making lasting improvements to SEND services and to the well-being of children and young people with SEND. Leaders communicated the next steps outlined by the partnership, which align with the existing plan and are expected to further sustain ongoing improvements.

The update you gave us suggests confidence that the governance framework is now well-established to oversee the PIP, and actions are aligning with the plan's expectations and timelines. As partners, you have worked hard to establish strong relationships, and these continue to improve since inspection. The collegiate approach is supporting the entire partnership to check and challenge itself. There is particular emphasis placed on the voices of children and young people which is a notable strength of the partnership's efforts. We welcomed and enjoyed hearing the presentation from the Changemakers reflecting their views of priority and progress.

The partnership has clearly recognised the need to move the focus from planning and action to gathering tangible impact and improving delivery. This is where we will concentrate our support and challenge in the coming months, with the support of the SIAB, to support you in providing more compelling evidence of this impact ahead of the next stocktake.

The progress you showed in the six priority areas and three areas for improvement demonstrates a more collaborative approach across the partnership, enriching the collective understanding of how different system elements interconnect and influence each other. This strategic alignment has been pivotal in building stronger partnerships, offering both support and challenge, and transforming a culture of siloed working into one of more genuine collaboration. The successful completion of the vast majority of the phase transfer reviews within statutory timelines and the enhanced engagement in annual reviews exemplify the partnership's collective commitment to improving EHCP quality and ensuring smoother transitions for children and young people.

Furthermore, you discussed the development of a comprehensive workforce strategy and the roll-out of targeted training programs that showcases the partnership's proactive efforts to strengthen capacity and build skills within the system.

However, there are aspects that require continued focus to sustain and build upon the actions delivered. It remains essential to enhance data reporting capabilities and establish clear, measurable outcomes to better monitor and demonstrate the impact of your actions. Overcoming challenges related to workforce capacity and consistency of skills is critical to delivering sustainable, transformational change. Once a data system of routine and robust partnership wide assurance is in place you will be able to more easily show the difference you are making whilst clearly identifying pressures, progress and risk.

Additionally, expanding communication and engagement with a broader range of children, young people, and families will help ensure that their voices influence co-production and service design.

Your PIP includes six areas for Priority Action and three Areas for Improvement related to the 'systemic failures' outcome identified in the SEND Ofsted-CQC inspection report.

Area for Priority Action 1: Leaders across the partnership should ensure that the SEND strategy continues to be implemented to improve the lived experiences of children and young people with SEND. This should be overseen by shared strategic governance to ensure that the pace of improvement is maintained.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The overarching strategic vision for Bury SEND improvement has been collaboratively developed and formally approved, underscoring a truly joint approach.

- Communication channels have seen notable enhancement, evidenced by more frequent updates to the Local Offer and the implementation of effective feedback mechanisms like 'You said, We are Doing'.
- Programme governance is progressing towards full maturity, which now allows for the proposal of significant changes aimed at driving long-term sustainability.
- Wider partners suggest that communication is improving.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps involve:

- Further developing and enhancing data and intelligence regarding the improvement plan's progress and impact, with the aim of having a regular and robust system of performance assurance in place across the PIP and SEND services.
- Consider addressing identified delays within some workstreams to ensure that the strategic changes and improvements yield their intended impact.
- Conducting a comprehensive survey to gather the perspectives of children and families, thereby providing crucial data on the actual impact of these strategic changes.

Area for Priority Action 2: Leaders across the partnership should work collaboratively and effectively to improve the early identification of children and young people's SEND as part of the graduated approach. In particular, they should urgently improve:

- ***children's access to support from education, health and social care to improve the early identification of needs***
- ***children, young people's and professionals' access to an effective, well-resourced educational psychology service.***

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The local offer has been reviewed, and efforts are underway to ensure it becomes statutory compliant. Additionally, the partnership's understanding of the graduated approach is being reviewed. A school's toolkit is being rolled out, with a significant push planned for the autumn.
- The development of Section 23 notifications and subsequent follow-up support has notably strengthened early identification pathways.
- Inclusion Services have undergone a redesign, now incorporating a community of practice model and expanded capacity.
- The establishment of a dedicated SEND Health Visiting Service, crucially supported by additional funding from Bury Council, has garnered very positive feedback from families.
- Positive engagement with GPs and Primary Care networks has taken place to further enhance the early identification of SEND.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps involve:

- When you expand upon the Communities of Practice (CoP) model across all SEND services, focus on ensuring its seamless integration and alignment with key local authority functions such as School Attendance, Admissions, and the Virtual School.
- Ensure that when you are implementing a new, integrated graduated model for early assessment, identification, and intervention, it is built on robust partnerships with schools, families, health and communities to ensure that it is a coordinated and effective response.
- When you are relaunching the SENCO networks in-house from September 2025 to strengthen borough-wide collaboration, ensure they are closely aligned with the partnership's strategic priorities.
- While there has been significant progress, it is important that this progress is more clearly captured and communicated. Consider making the positive strides more visible to demonstrate how your efforts are making a tangible difference. Consider using visual tools such as graphs or charts to clearly illustrate improvements and impacts. This will help stakeholders see the progress more vividly and reinforce the momentum you are building in SEND delivery.
- Consider how to capture examples of how Section 23 notifications and follow-up support have positively impacted children: This could include evidence of improved transitions to settings, timely initiation of Early Help Care Needs Assessments (EHCNA), and other measurable outcomes that demonstrate the effectiveness of early identification pathways.
- Consider how you will gather evidence of the impact of the SEND Health Visiting Service. This could include data on improved health outcomes for children, testimonials from families, and specific examples of how the service has facilitated better access to healthcare and support. Additionally, reference any relevant reports or studies (e.g., from HSJ) that highlight the perceived impact and effectiveness of the service.
- Partnership engagement with the proposed neighbourhood delivery model to integrate early identification pathways for children and young people.

Area for Priority Action 3: *Leaders across the partnership should improve the quality and availability of support for children, young people and their families while they wait for specialist assessments. This includes:*

- ***children and young people waiting for a speech and language therapy assessment and subsequent intervention***
 - ***children waiting for a community paediatric assessment and subsequent intervention***
- Inspection report: Bury Local Area Partnership 12 to 16 February 2024***
- ***children and young people on a neurodevelopmental pathway for an assessment of ADHD or autism. Leaders across the partnership should also ensure that young people aged up to 25 years old have access to a locally***

agreed neurodevelopmental diagnostic pathway.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The partnership has actively recognised the ongoing concerns voiced by young people, Ofsted/CQC and families regarding NHS waiting times, both locally in Bury and across the wider system.
- Leaders suggest the launch of the CANDU App has supported improving outcomes in Speech and Language Therapy services including a reduction in waiting times.
- Waiting times for Community Paediatric services continue to pose a challenge; however, improvement work is underway through local transformation and improvement programmes across the provider organisation the Northern Care Alliance (NCA) including a policy review of children not brought to appointments to improve uptake. Engagement sessions have also been held with providers.
- You understand the current pressures and lived experience by your acknowledgement that more work needs to be done to explain the lengthy waiting times for health services.
- Strategic leaders report the local area partnership are engaged with the GM proposed model for the Neurodevelopmental hub. Parent carers would welcome strengthened communication around this area.
- The public consultation for the NHS GM Adult ADHD has concluded, with the final report to be published Autumn 2025.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps involve:

- Ensure continued engagement with provider organisations to address the waiting times for Autism and ADHD assessments which includes access to support for families whilst waiting.
- Consider your efforts, whilst being pragmatic about what is possible, to reduce average waiting times in critical areas and ensure that families and stakeholders are well-informed about these improvements along the way.
- Consider how you can develop and deploy mechanisms to measure the impact of initiatives, including tracking waiting times and evaluating interim support services. Celebrate and share successes.
- Ensure that children, young people, and their families are aware of how to access to support options while awaiting specialist services, with clear communication about available resources.
- Review the ICB health SEND data dashboards to consider how this will inform the local area partnerships SEND dashboard.
- Ensure continued engagement with provider organisations to address the waiting times for Autism and ADHD assessments which includes access to support for families whilst waiting.
- Continue with the GM ND hub implementation programme in co production with parents, carers and young people.

Area for Priority Action 4: Leaders across the partnership should improve preparation for adulthood from the earliest ages for all children and young people with SEND in Bury. This should include a well-understood and co-produced strategy to embed preparation for adulthood effectively across the partnership.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The partnership has made significant strides in enhancing information and guidance for Preparing for Adulthood (PFA), notably through the creation of comprehensive factsheets and the development of the local offer site, which now aligns well with information from comparable authorities.
- A dedicated PFA transition team has been successfully established, which is facilitating smoother transitions into adult social care services.
- The local offer for Preparing for Adulthood has been thoughtfully redesigned and updated with detailed pathway information, and existing provisions have been meticulously mapped and audited to inform future commissioning discussions.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps will be to:

- Ensure effective communication and foster collaborative partnerships to address PFA meaningfully within reviews, bringing in schools' and other relevant colleagues where required in playing a crucial role in enhancing pathway planning.
- Continue to think of ways to enhance communication with SENCOs and all school staff and improve access to key information, support and expectations.
- Ensure that you make attempts to address and minimise the disruption caused by staff changes within Children's Services.
- To make best efforts to increase parent attendance at co-production meetings focused on designing adult social care transition policies.

Area for Priority Action 5: Leaders across the partnership should establish and implement a strategic approach to high-quality transitions for children and young people with SEND from birth to 25.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- All primary schools are now consistently inputting data into the 6into7 software, and secondary schools are actively accessing this, enabling a more standardised approach to transition and the exchange of quality information.
- The approach has significant potential to facilitate transitions from nurseries to primary education, and from secondary to further education, with additional support from education services, parent support group drop-in sessions, and targeted assistance from the Virtual School and Youth Service.

- All relevant health agencies have successfully implemented Standard Operating Procedures for transition, with ongoing quality assurance planned to ensure their continued effectiveness, including SEND Health Visiting and School Nursing, and multi-disciplinary team (MDT) lead meetings are fully operational.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps involve:

- Evolve and continue the partnerships transition best practice guide to comprehensively incorporate health and social care elements for use by education partners.
- Maintain a focus to improve the understanding of cohorts of children and young people in receipt of statutory plans and those at SEN support, as well as the interdependencies across the local area partnership.
- Ensure that you implement robust quality assurance measures to thoroughly evaluate the effectiveness of the Transition Standard Operating Procedures.
- Consider how you will mitigate any further decline in NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training) figures you raised with us.

Area for Priority Action 6: *Leaders across the partnership should further improve the quality of the statutory EHC plan process. This should include:*

- *improving the quality of advice received from professionals as part of the needs assessment process*
- *improving the timeliness and quality of updated EHC plans following annual reviews*
- *improving appropriate social care contributions to EHC plans so that children and young people's social care needs are reflected more accurately*
- *improving the focus on preparation for adulthood in children and young people's EHC plans so that their experiences and outcomes improve.*

You effectively demonstrated that:

- Phase transfer reviews were largely completed within statutory timelines, which is supporting smoother transitions. Over 66% of EHCPs were reviewed in 2024–25. Improved data systems will now enable a more comprehensive tracking of review activity, while newly developed procedures are strengthening consistency and accountability. Notifications for phase transfers have been issued well in advance for next year and a new template will focus Annual Reviews on addressing all aspects of the EHCP with the aim of increasing quality.
- The partnership has successfully maintained strong statutory compliance with EHC assessment timelines while simultaneously increasing the quality of those plans. A new EHCP template has been introduced to enhance clarity and completeness, complemented by Continuing Professional Development (CPD) delivered to all SEND Officers. Furthermore, an EHC Link Officer for Social Care has been appointed to strengthen contributions and compliance.

- Improved data quality will allow for more comprehensive tracking of review activity. Newly developed procedures, which are aligned with statutory requirements and supported by targeted training, will strengthening consistency and accountability. Successful recruitment into the EHC Team has further bolstered capacity.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps will be to:

- Maintain and strengthen data collection to fully understand statutory compliance with annual review timescales, placing a strong focus on the quality of outcomes and experiences. This will require ensuring timely communication and sufficient capacity for sustained improvement.
- Consider workforce capacity and capabilities to meet current demand, through ongoing refinement of processes, and targeted training. This will likely involve improving data quality specifically on annual review timeliness and proactively addressing historical legacy issues that impact on the trust and faith of families and schools.
- Continue to strengthen partnership working across all stakeholders to ensure shared ownership of outcomes. This includes improving messaging and engagement with partners, families, and other stakeholders.
- Further expand training and quality assurance efforts to build staff confidence and consistency. This could involve developing clearer milestone indicators and utilising data to drive continuous improvement, balancing timeliness with quality, and prioritising meaningful support and positive outcomes.
- Address the issue of timely communication and ensure sufficient capacity for sustained improvement, while also addressing historical legacy issues that impact upon trust.

Area for Improvement 1: Leaders across the partnership should improve communication to professionals, parents and carers and children and young people so that their strategies, actions and impact are better understood and that trust in the SEND system improves. The partnership should ensure that the local offer is updated regularly to provide parents, carers and other stakeholders with sufficiently accurate information.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The foundations for communication improvements are established, marked by the appointment of key communication roles and the creation of an interim communications strategy supported by a dedicated working group.
- Two newsletters have been successfully produced, with a third scheduled for publication, indicating improved content curation and production quality.

- Regular updates to the Local Offer are now being systematically implemented and actively promoted through social media channels this includes updates following a compliance review.
- A set of standards have been integrated into the interim communication strategy, and a standing item has been added to the SIAB agenda to promote a shared understanding of key messages.
- A stakeholder mapping exercise is proposed to support ongoing development of the board and stakeholder engagement.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps will be to:

- Support and continue in the developing Changemakers' social media presence, ensuring proactive updates while prioritising safeguarding.
- Ensure that you publish the SEND Communications Strategy once the coordinated feedback from parents and families is included.
- Evaluate and enhance your effectiveness in strengthening direct relationships and networks within the partnership to complement mass communication methods.
- Ensure that you are continuing to involve service users, parents, and carers in co-production.
- Implementing the stakeholder mapping exercise to further refine and improve communication strategies.

Area for Improvement 2: Leaders across the partnership should continue to develop the range of suitable AP available to children and young people in Bury. Leaders should further embed the improved oversight of AP and EOTAS packages in Bury. They should publish the refreshed policy for EOTAS, providing support so that this policy is clearly understood.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- The co-production and formal approval of the EOTAS policy by the partnership represents a major milestone in delivering inclusive and consistent educational support. The delivery of comprehensive training for case officers has improved understanding and application of the policy, while establishing a multi-agency panel ensures that all EOTAS requests are considered through a collaborative and holistic approach.
- The formation of the AP Strategy Group and the development of a strategic framework show a proactive stance towards improving outcomes for learners accessing alternative education pathways. Robust oversight systems for placements have been implemented, supported by targeted training, which help to uphold quality assurance and safeguarding standards consistently across all provisions.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps will be to:

- Continue to refine the planning of new EOTAS packages and systematically reviewing existing ones to ensure they lead to strong educational outcomes and provide clear progression pathways for learners.
- Progress with the finalising and publishing the draft AP Strategy. Although a new ILP format has been launched for AP placements, it now needs to be implemented consistently to maintain a focus on outcomes that will allow you to demonstrate efficacy.
- Ensure that the partnership is exploring opportunities to expand the range of alternative providers available locally and in surrounding areas, in order to better meet diverse learner needs and improve access to quality provision.

Area for Improvement 3: Leaders across the partnership should work collaboratively to create a partnership wide workforce development strategy. This should focus on coordinating training, support and guidance to improve health, social care and education professionals' ability to identify, assess and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND, from birth to 25.

You effectively demonstrated that:

- A comprehensive workforce strategy, guided by best practices, has been developed to outline the required training levels for specific staff groups. An implementation plan is currently in development. While the framework provides clear direction, it's still early days to evaluate its impact. Efforts are underway to complete a stocktake of existing training provision, assess demand by competency level, and compare training uptake against cohort sizes to identify any gaps.
- Training remains central to your commitment to supporting inclusive practices and fostering continuous learning. As part of this initiative, Changemakers will be designing and delivering targeted training sessions for school staff on how to effectively engage with and support young people with additional needs and disabilities, starting in the summer term.
- There has been reasonable engagement with the programme of induction and Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions conducted with SENCOs over the spring and summer terms but that you were ambitious to improve buy in.

Looking ahead, in line with your plans the next steps will be to:

- Address any delays in the implementation of the new strategy and action plan to ensure the timely delivery of its intended impact.
- Increase participation in the staff training programme delivered by Oak Learning Partnership.

- Ensure that the partnership is continuing to develop and refine the workforce strategy and learning and development plan to ensure they meet the needs of all staff cohorts.
- Enhance data collection efforts to measure and demonstrate the impact of the strategy once fully implemented.

Intervention Next Steps:

Your DfE Case Lead, Gareth Llewellyn will be in contact to arrange the next review to assess further progress against your priority impact plan. Gareth, along with your DfE commissioned SEND advisor, Kevin Burns and NHS England Advisor, Janet Wray, will continue to offer support and challenge. Please contact either party if you require further assistance.

We are copying this letter to: Lynne Ridsdale (Chief Executive, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council), Stephen Holden (Interim Director of Education and Skills, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council), Wendy Young (SEND Head of Service, Bury Metropolitan Borough Council), Jane Case (Program Manager, GM NHS Bury), Deborah Glassbrook (SIAB independent chair), Bury2gether (Parent Carer Forum), Lorraine Mulrooney (Head of SEND, NHSE), NHS England), Janet Wray (Regional SEND Advisor, NHSE), Kevin Burns (DfE commissioned SEND advisor), Sharon Thornton (Regional Lead for SEND Improvement, DfE), and Gareth Llewellyn (SEND Case Lead, DfE).

Yours sincerely,



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