

Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

12 June 2024

Medway SEND Local Area Partnership (LAP) Improvement Plan 2024-2025

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Deputy Chief Executive

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Summary

This report provides an overview of the Medway SEND Local Area Partnership (LAP) Improvement Plan 2024-25. The plan was developed in response to findings following the recent Joint Area inspection in February 2024 by Ofsted and CQC. The plan will be led by the SEND Partnership Board co-chaired by the Lead Member and the Chief Nurse of the NHS Integrated Care Board.

1. Recommendations

1.1. The Committee is asked to note the findings of the February 2024 Joint Area inspection and the Joint Area Improvement Plan coproduced by the Joint Area SEND partnership which includes health, social care, education and Medway parents and Carers.

2. Budget and policy framework

2.1. Improvements outlined in the plan (see Appendix 1) seek to address, in part, the following priorities of the One Medway Council Plan 2024/28:

- **Priority One: Delivering Quality Social Care and Community Services**
- **Priority Two: Benefitting from Good Education, Quality Jobs and a Growing Economy**
- **Priority Four: Improving Health and Wellbeing for All**

2.2. The Plan will also work in parallel with the Council's wider policy framework in particular the Local Area SEND Strategy 2022-25.

3. Background

- 3.1. Since the last inspection (2019) of the Area SEND arrangements in Medway, there have been changes in the leadership structure of both the Council and the ICB, as well as the political administration of the local authority.
- 3.2. The inspection was carried out jointly by the Department of Education (DfE) and Care Quality Commission at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004.
- 3.3. It found that:

“The local area partnership’s arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). The local area partnership must work jointly to make improvements.

The next full area SEND inspection will be within approximately three years.

Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) ask that the local area partnership updates and publishes its strategic plan based on the recommendations set out in this report.”

The plan set out in Appendix One is that noted in the inspection outcome. This has been approved by the DfE and CQC and we will report progress to them on a 6 monthly basis.

4. Advice and analysis

- 4.1. The inspection report found the following areas for improvement:
 - Leaders across the partnership should ensure that they swiftly identify key performance indicators that represent all stakeholders and enable evaluation of the impact of the partnership as a whole.
 - Leaders across the partnership should improve communication to:
 - Improve equity for all children, young people and families across the area;
 - Remove barriers to information and provide clear, consistent and accessible information and processes so that families can access the right support at the right time; and
 - Ensure that all professionals have appropriate access to information they need to support children and young people with SEND
 - Leaders across the partnership should continue to sustain the pace in completing the actions to:
 - Improve the oversight, quality and timeliness of EHC Plans and annual reviews and;
 - Reduce waiting times for health assessments and educational psychologists.
 - Leaders across the partnership should continue to improve co-production specifically to ensure that children’s and young people’s voices are heard and used to inform improvements and developments.

- Leaders across the partnership should continue to improve transitions from child to adult services in health, education and care for all children and young people with SEND.
- Leaders should ensure that they improve children’s and young people’s access to experiences outside of education by:
 - Improving and maintaining the quality and content of information on the local offer so that it is up to date and helps families find appropriate, accessible activities; and
 - Developing more partnership working so that barriers to services are lifted.

4.2. Set out in Appendix one, the LAP outlines 23 actions across these 6 areas. As part of the plan, it is intended for the Area’s SEND Strategy to be refreshed for 2025.

5. Risk management.

Risk	Description	Action to avoid or mitigate risk	Risk rating
SR39 – Failure to Deliver the High Needs Recovery Plan	The Council’s improvement journey could either run in parallel to its safety valve programme or be at odds.	Senior officers have worked to ensure both programmes are balanced and do not overlap negatively.	DI
Failure to deliver the required level of improvement necessary	The Council has three years to make the required improvements to the area’s services alongside its partners.	A robust improvement plan co-produced with partners. Regular oversight and an operational level of governance. Where activity isn’t achieved, officers have developed mitigation to ensure support for children does not cease.	CI
Lack of budget available to make necessary improvements	The grant from the Government is ever reducing meaning the need to create savings as well as driving improvements with reduced resources could hinder delivery.	Senior officers continue to ensure the most efficient use of resources, through the safety valve work.	DI

Likelihood	Impact:
A Very likely B Likely C Unlikely D Rare	I Catastrophic II Major III Moderate IV Minor

6. Consultation

- 6.1. Plan was co-produced with the SEND Area partners including NHS ICB, Partnership Commissioning, Children and Adults' Social Care and Parents & Carers.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1. Funding for children with SEND comes to the Local Authority through the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) from the Department for Education (DfE), which is announced annually. Whilst funding for the statutory functions that support SEND services such as educational psychologists are funded by the general fund and not the DSG.

- 7.2. In 2020-21, the DfE introduced the Safety Valve Intervention Programme (SVIP) to support local authorities with the very highest percentage DSG deficits. In May 2022, Medway Council was invited to take part in the SVIP and in March 2023, Medway formally entered into a Safety Valve Agreement with the DfE. Over the life of the agreement Medway will receive a total investment of £17.7m, to support the delivery of a substantial reform plan to its SEND systems and program. As at the 31 March 2024 Medway have received of £8.653m of this investment.

- 7.3. This investment along with the planned changes outlined in our Safety Valve program will bring the Council DSG reserve back into surplus before the statutory override ends in March 2026. The SVIP funding is dependent on evidence of improvements being delivered, with the SVIP remaining on track and whilst there are no direct financial implications arising as a direct result of this report, there may be requests submitted to the appropriate committee for extra resources at a later date to support the improvement journey.

8. Legal implications

- 8.1. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report.

Lead officer contact.

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Appendices

Appendix One – Medway LAP 2024-25

Background papers

Medway Area Inspection Report – February 2024 -
<https://files.ofsted.gov.uk/v1/file/50243176>