

SCRUTINY REPORT

MEETING:	Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Committee
DATE:	14 January 2025
SUBJECT:	The Local Area Response to the Published SEND inspection and monthly update
REPORT FROM:	Wendy Young, Head of Service – Inclusion & SEND
CONTACT OFFICER:	Jeanette Richards, Executive Director, Children's Services

1.0 BACKGROUND

1.1 Following Bury's local area SEND services Inspection by the Care Quality Commission and Ofsted. The inspection team identified widespread, systemic failings in services and highlighted the challenge that we need to do more to improve the outcomes of children and young people with special educational needs.

1.2 The inspection identified 6 priority actions which Bury Council and NHS Greater Manchester ICB are jointly responsible for, along with 3 areas for improvement. As a result of the inspection outcome, the local authority has been issued with an Improvement Notice and will be subject to monitoring visits followed by a re-inspection in approximately 18 months.

2.0 ISSUES

2.1 As a result of the inspection outcome, the Bury local area has produced a Priority Action Plan, which we are locally referring to as our Priority Impact Plan (PIP).

2.2 The PIP has been co-produced with stakeholders, including parents and carers and is the strategic plan for SEND, setting out what needs to be delivered in the next 18-24 months with key milestones and key performance indicators. The plan is published on our local offer.

2.3 Support for the delivery of the Priority Impact Plan has been through additional investment by the council and the ICB – this will support the programme management and governance (see below), but also address some of the critical deficits identified in the report, such as the number of EHCPs reviewed and amended each year. The level of investment secured is approximately £450,000 a year.

2.4 Although financial investment has been secured, recruitment has only been successful in part to date, with some challenges regarding candidate quality leading to the use of agency workers to cover gaps. We have also experienced some staff retention issues due to progression opportunities and retirement. It is therefore necessary to conduct further recruitment activity to fill vacant posts on a more permanent basis.

Governance arrangements

2.5 The SEND Improvement & Assurance Board (SIAB) is accountable to the Cabinet within the Council, and to the GM Integrated Care Board via the Locality Board, which operates as a sub-committee of the ICB Board and replaces the previous SEND local area partnership Boards.

2.6 The SIAB meet monthly (first meeting took place on 17th June 2024), and benefits from an independent chair, Deborah Glassbrook who has experience of working with other local areas who are subject to intervention in relation to SEND. The Board include strategic leaders from across the partnership and a Delivery Group has been mobilised with Terms of Reference agreed, with active participation in both groups from across the partnership.

Project Management support has now been onboarded and is embedded to support the programme.

Minutes and papers from each SIAB are provided through the Local Offer Website to ensure visibility.

2.7 Each Priority Action has a nominated lead officer, who will be a senior officer within their organisation. The Workstream Leads provide monthly highlight reports to the SIAB and ensure monthly reviews of the risk register. Reports will be expected to provide updates on activity, performance data and quality assurance findings.

The Local Area Priority Impact Plan (PIP) outlines the high-level strategic plan for SEND improvement, with the performance monitoring, future activity and risk/risk register. In accordance with the reporting requirements of this board and as part of this standing agenda item, Children and Young Peoples Scrutiny Committee will be reported to in the same format.

2.8 Monitoring arrangements

Following an Ofsted and Care Quality Commission (CQC) SEND inspection, local areas are required to implement monitoring, support, and challenge arrangements to improve their SEND service delivery. This process involves several key steps:

Monitoring: Continuous oversight of the local area's SEND arrangements to ensure they meet the required standards.

Support: Providing guidance and resources to help local areas address any identified weaknesses.

Challenge: Holding local areas accountable for making necessary improvements.

Bury Local Area Partnership remains subject to external scrutiny. These arrangements, to date, have taken place in the form of 'deep dive' activities and 'stocktake' visits facilitated by the Department for Education (DfE).

During October 2024 the Local Area Partnership engaged in a 'deep dive' activity in respect of, priority area 4: Preparation for Adulthood. The deep dive was a thorough and detailed examination to understand the root cause of issues and to identify opportunities for improvement. For this the local area partnership gathered comprehensive data and

evidence to understand the current position, and identify focused areas for sustainable improvement.

This also enabled the local area to discuss the targeted action plan against this area, based on the findings. The deep dive proved valuable to the local area partnership to solve complex matters and ensuring that improvements are based on a thorough understanding of the situation.

A stocktake visit followed this in December 2024. This takes the form of a comprehensive review conducted by the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England. The purpose of this visit is to assess the progress made by the local area in addressing the issues identified in the improvement notice.

This visit focused on evaluating the actions taken, to date, by the local area to address the specific concerns highlighted in the improvement notice and an evaluation of the evidence collected around progress to date. These visits are crucial to ensuring that local areas are on track to meet the required standards and provide effective support for children and young people with SEND.

Formal feedback and a written letter outlining the DfE conclusions from the visit (and any additional recommendations or actions) will be provided shortly. As at date of writing, the formal report has yet to be received, but the visit was positive, with the DfE indicating that Bury is where they would expect us to be, at this time in our improvement journey and in accordance with the agreed actions. The DfE recognised that the first 6 months of our improvement journey has been mainly focused on the implementation of actions, in accordance with the improvement plan and that the next phase is to ensure that these are embedded into systematic change and are sustained. We also acknowledge that the impact of some of the changes is not yet felt by our schools and other educational providers, but most of all by our parents, carers, and their families. This will be a major focus for us during this next phase and prior to our next stocktake visit, anticipated in July 2025. Informally, the DfE commented positively on the progress being made in Bury compared to other areas with improvement plans.

2.9 Annual Reviews of Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plans update

Bury Council currently maintain 2,856 EHC Plans. The Local Authority is responsible for ensuring that each plan is reviewed at least annually and every 6 months for children under the age of 5 years old.

It was previously reported that the local authority does not have an accurate monitoring and reporting mechanism for holding annual review data, to ensure robust reporting of annual review involvements and to enable notifications to our education, health and social care colleagues of when an annual review should be held by, in accordance with statutory requirements. This continues to be a significant area for improvement and focus, in accordance with our Local Area SEND Priority Impact Plan and Project Safety Valve Agreement.

The use of excel spreadsheets to keep this overview, at present, must be maintained while we establish an accurate and efficient use of the system. As previously reported, a data cleanse has been undertaken to update the Liquid Logic System and whilst December 2024 was the anticipated completion date, this has not yet been achieved due to updates to the system that have affected some of the data already held within. This has required further resource to resolve through manually updating the system, which has been identified and secured. Recruitment to these temporary posts is underway and a revised completion date will be established on appointment.

We have adopted a phased approach to the annual review recovery plan, initially addressing the Key Stage transfer reviews, which are due to be completed by 15 February 2025, (nursery to reception and school year 6 to 7 (primary to secondary school age) transfers). There are currently 225 transfers to be completed by this date and we are on to deliver against this deadline. Phase 2 will address the year 11 (end of secondary school) and year 13 (end of college/sixth form) transfers by the 31 March 2025 – this covers a further 253 young people. Weekly tracking meetings are in place to ensure that we are on track to deliver against these timescales.

Taken together, these first two phases of recovery will cover 17% of all currently existing EHCPs. Further phases of annual reviews with different foci will then take place, as the capacity within the team develops. An annual review triage panel currently operates to ensure that any annual reviews held outside of the groups identified in the initial phases of recovery (as outlined above) are reviewed and responded to in as timely manner as possible.

This area remains a significant area of challenge, in terms of the ability to capture accurate data and ensure that we work towards fulfilling this statutory requirement. To ensure this area of recovery progresses appropriately a deeper understanding of the functionality of management information systems is required, as well as the need to build the capacity in the team through ongoing recruitment processes.

3.0 CONCLUSION

The Local Area SEND Partnership is committed to improving services for children and young people with SEND and their families.

The SIAB has received assurance that Bury's services are progressing, in accordance with the commitments set out in the Local Area SEND Priority Impact Plan. There is still a considerable amount of work to be done, and it is essential that we maintain a consistent pace and ensure that we capture the positive impact improvements are having for our children, young people and their families. This will be a particular area of focus for us as we move into phase 2 of our improvement journey.

List of Background Papers:-

Bury Local Area Partnership Priority Impact Plan

Contact Details:-

[Report Author] Wendy Young, Head of Service, SEND & Inclusion

Executive Director sign off Date: _____

JET Meeting Date: _____