

Report to:	Cabinet	Date: 08 July 2026
Subject:	Bury's Local Area SEND Monitoring Inspection	
Report of	Cabinet Member for Children and Young People	

Summary

1. Between 9 and 11 March 2026, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) undertook a monitoring inspection of the Bury Local Area Partnership to assess progress against the six Areas for Priority Action (APAs) identified in the full Area SEND inspection that took place in February 2024.
2. The monitoring inspection concluded that effective action has been taken in all six priority action areas.
3. This represents a significant milestone in Bury's improvement journey, evidencing that:
 - a. Leadership across education, health and care is stronger with prompt action when needed, leading to improved professional confidence in supporting children and young people with SEND
 - b. Governance and oversight arrangements are working well, with effective use of data
 - c. Multi-agency working and co-production have improved, with wider stakeholder input
 - d. Systems and services have been strengthened to better support children and young people with SEND
4. As noted in the report, "Effective action does not mean that the area for priority action is no longer a concern or that the local action can stop taking action to address it". However the report marks a transition point from recovery to system-wide transformation, with the Council and partners expected to continue delivery through the SEND and wider children's services reform agenda.

Recommendation(s)

5. Cabinet should note the outcome of the monitoring inspection and the plans for continued transformation through the local SEND Reform Plan.

Reasons for recommendation(s)

6. Ofsted and CQC carry out joint inspections of local areas at the request of the Secretary of State for Education under section 20(1)(a) of the Children Act 2004. At their discretion, they may also carry out monitoring inspections of local areas using their power in section 20(2) of the Children Act 2004.
7. Inspectors assess the extent to which the local area partners are complying with relevant legal duties relating to arrangements for children and young people with SEND. This includes duties under the Children and Families Act 2014, the Equality Act 2010 and the Human Rights Act 1998.
8. The inspection framework was devised jointly by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) for use from 2023, and reviewed and updated in June 2025. The purpose of inspection is to:
 - provide an independent, external evaluation of the effectiveness of the local area partnership's arrangements for children and young people with SEND
 - where appropriate, recommend what the local area partnership should do to improve the arrangements
9. Area SEND inspections are delivered jointly by Ofsted and CQC and assess how effectively local area partnerships:
 - a. Identify and meet the needs of children and young people with SEND
 - b. Improve outcomes across education, health and care
 - c. Work in partnership with families through co-production
10. Inspections evaluate how well members of a local area partnership work together to improve the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND. The 'Local area partnership' refers to those in education, health and social care who are responsible for the strategic planning, commissioning, management, delivery and evaluation of arrangements for children and young people with SEND who live in a local area.
11. When evaluating the local area partnership, inspectors focus mainly on how effectively the local authority and integrated care board (ICB) jointly plan, evaluate and develop services for children and young people with SEND.
12. The scope of the inspection covers children and young people with SEND who live in the local authority area and attend education settings or receive health and/or care services outside of the local authority's geographical boundaries. However, it does not cover those who live in other local areas and attend an education setting within the local authority's boundaries.

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Background

13. The local area monitoring inspection took place over two weeks and 3 days, from the notification call on 23 February 2026 to the on-site field work between 9 and 11 March 2026. The report is due to be published on 29 June 2026.
14. As part of the inspection a range of documents were shared with inspectors (over 70 in the initial upload), and during on-site activity the 2 Ofsted inspectors and CQC inspector spoke to almost 100 professionals from across the local SEND system, including staff from across the Council, our health partners and schools. Inspectors also met with parent and carer representatives and young people from our Changemakers group.

Areas for Priority Action from the 2024 Inspection

15. The monitoring visit focused on the 6 areas for priority action that were identified in our Local Area SEND Inspection of February 2024. These were:
 - a. 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.
 - b. 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.
 - c. 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

- 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.

- d. 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.
- e. 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.
- f. 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.

Continued improvement and transformation: next steps

16. In February 2026 – on the same date that Bury received notification of the inspection - the government published its reforms to the SEND system in England as part of its White Paper, 'Every Child Achieving and Thriving'. This paper sets out expectations for major transformation across the school and SEND system.
17. As part of the wider transformation, all local areas were asked to co-produce a local area SEND Reforms Plan and submit to the DfE by 19 June 2026, which has been successfully completed.
18. The SEND Reform Plan will replace the Priority Impact Plan (PIP) as our main area of transformation, as a natural step on our improvement journey. The plan is focused on the four pillars of SEND reform:
 - a. Strengthening inclusion across settings - ensuring mainstream education can meet a wider range of needs

- b. Improving access to specialist support and local placements
 - c. System leadership, partnership and co-production
 - d. Inclusive culture and behaviours (enabled by system enablers)
19. Our robust partnership approach to governance will continue to oversee delivery of the SEND Reforms Plan. External scrutiny through the DfE will be in place as part of the Reforms, with regular meetings with our Senior SEND Delivery Case Lead and quarterly data returns. We will also continue to meet with Ofsted annually as part of the Area Engagement Meeting process which will include scrutiny of our Self-Evaluation. A full re-inspection would be expected 3 years after our original inspection in February 2024 or 18 months after the monitoring inspection.
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Links with the Corporate Priorities:

20. Improving the lives of children and families remains one of the council's key priorities.
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Equality Impact and Considerations:

21. Good quality children's services are instrumental in improving the outcomes for children for all children, but particularly those who face greater challenges than their peers.

Activities, actions, strategies and projects arising from this report will be individually impact assessed supporting the equitable provision of children's services and equitable outcomes for all children

Environmental Impact and Considerations:

22. Not applicable.
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Assessment and Mitigation of Risk:

23. The Local Area SEND inspection framework places significant emphasis on the extent to which partners are working together effectively to improve outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND), and on whether those improvements are experienced consistently by families. This report indicates that the partnership is moving in the right direction, however there remain risks in relation to risk of insufficient pace or sustainability of improvement and/or risks that improvements are not yet consistently experienced by children, young people and their families.

24. In mitigation, the core of our improvement activity is set out within the local area SEND Reforms Plan which sits under the existing governance in relation to improvement (as set out in paragraph 23). As part of these governance arrangements a risk register is maintained and owned by the partnership, and shared with the DfE under their own scrutiny arrangements.
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Procurement Implications:

25. Procurement will continue to support the SEND team in delivering against the priorities.
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Legal Implications:

26. As detailed above, following a monitoring inspection having been undertaken in March 2026, the conclusion finds that effective action has been taken across all six Areas for Priority Action identified in the previous inspection representing a significant milestone in Bury's improvement journey.
27. The outcome of the inspection confirms that effective action does not mean the area for priority action is no longer a concern. There is an ongoing legal duty for Bury Council to ensure the improvements are sustained.
28. The areas identified with effective action may be identified again as priorities if progress is not sustained or fails to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. It is noted that the Priority Impact Plan will be replaced by the SEND Reform Plan, being the main area of transformation which will be jointly owned with partners to review and ensure the delivery of the maintained improvements.
29. The recommendations made for continued transformation through the local SEND Reform Plan will support Bury in meeting its legal duties as defined in the Children and Families Act 2014, Equality Act 2010 and Human Rights Act 1998, mitigating against potential legal challenge, intervention by the Secretary of State or regulatory action by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission.
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Financial Implications:

30. SEND provision and the related services due to the increasing demand continues to increase the pressure within the Dedicated School Grant (DSG) High Needs block (High Needs block over-spent by £5.462m in 2025-26 before being offset by Programme Safety Valve (PSV) contribution and reserves released against the expenditure as agreed within the programme). Bury DSG deficit balance as at 31st March 2026 is £20.285m.

Bury council plans for the change from PSV to High Needs Stability Grant in 2026-28 for a two-year interim period whilst transitioning to the new model after the ending of the statutory override on 31st March 2028.

The finance service will continue to work closely with operations to align with, monitor and report on, the mandated reform plans along with any support required to seek approval, from school forum, of budget transfers across the DSG funding blocks.

This is not just a Bury council but a national challenge and estimates of unmitigated DSG deficit balances of between £14-£18 billion pounds across England at the point of the statutory over-ride ending.

Appendices:

Bury Local Area SEND Monitoring Inspection Report

Background papers:

SEND Inspection Framework - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/area-send-framework-and-handbook/area-send-inspections-framework-and-handbook>

Please include a glossary of terms, abbreviations and acronyms used in this report.

Term	Meaning
CQC	Care Quality Commission
EHCP	Education, Health & Care Plan
Ofsted	Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services & Skills
PIP	Priority Impact Plan
SEND	Special Education Needs & Disabilities