



Judith Hay, Director of Children's Services, Newcastle City Council
Mark Adams, Chief Officer, Newcastle Gateshead CCG
Deanne Taylor, Head of Service SEND, Newcastle City Council

25 February 2022

Dear Judith, Mark, and Deanne,

NEWCASTLE LOCAL AREA - SIX MONTH PROGRESS REVIEW AGAINST YOUR ACCELERATED PROGRESS PLAN (APP)

Thank you to you and your colleagues for meeting with officials and advisers from the Department for Education (DfE) and NHS England (NHSE) on 18 February 2022, to review the progress you have made against your SEND APP over the past six months.

We are particularly grateful for the contributions from your Parent Carer Forum (PCF) and school representatives. The local area's collective and passionate determination to making sustainable improvements to SEND services and to the lives of children and young people was clear and brought out within your presentation.

The key area of focus, highlighted within your Ofsted and Care Quality Commission revisit report is:

- Area leaders should establish effective arrangements to identify the impact of the area's work on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Both in your documentation and during your progress review, you demonstrated:

- Appropriate governance and good working relationships, as shown by the PCF which values its role 'as a good critical friend' and the downward trajectory in complaints.
- Additional resource has been secured for LA and CCG roles which is expected to drive improvements, including on joint-working and quality assurance. It is too early to discern impact.
- A strong two-way relationship with active leadership from schools, with a credible, promising strategy to improve the graduated response across the local area, including school-led peer moderation and challenge of EHCPs and SEN support plans.

However, we also found that:

- Whilst a number of promising workstreams, frameworks, and processes are under development, it is not yet possible to judge whether they are leading to sustained improvements in pupil experiences and outcomes.
- Investment in staffing and an electronic SEND portal has been made, but it has not yet driven improvements in the timeliness and quality of EHCPs which both remain weak. The target regarding quality advice for EHCP assessments is also not ambitious enough.
- EHCP timeliness has been hindered by the lateness of some health contributions.
- Whilst the pandemic has been a constraining factor waiting lists for Occupational Therapy remain high and the strategy for improving this – including through a better universal offer

and understanding of systematic issues in provision – is at a very early stage.

Over the next six months, we ask that you:

- Demonstrate how various new processes and systems for EHCPs are leading to sustained improvements in timeliness and quality.
- Demonstrate the effectiveness of your revised graduated response in reducing absence and exclusions. We would also be interested to see evidence for the effectiveness of your wider work on the graduated response within schools.
- Demonstrate how pupils and parents' experience of therapies, especially Occupational Therapy, has improved, including as a universal offer and new pathways are developed.

As with all local areas that were required to produce a Written Statement of Action, you will continue to receive support and challenge from your DfE and NHSE Advisers, and DfE officials who will wish to assure themselves on an ongoing basis that you are managing to sustain the reassuring progress you have made. Your next six-month review meeting should take place in September 2022. Andrea will be in touch to arrange a date for this meeting and please contact her in the first instance should you have any questions.

I am copying this letter to Leader of the Council Nick Forbes, Chief Executive Pam Smith and local MPs Nick Brown, Catherine McKinnell and Chi Onwurah. In addition, a copy is also being sent to your DfE and NHS England advisers. You may also wish to share this letter with the chair of the Parent Carer Forum, and any other key stakeholders.

Yours sincerely,



Richard Bracey

Regional Lead (Yorkshire and The Humber; North East),
SEND Improvement and Operations Division
Department for Education