



Cheshire East Overview of progress against our SEND WSoA

August 2020

1. Introduction

The SEND Inspection of Cheshire East in March 2018 identified a number of strengths in our arrangements but these were undermined by **two key areas of significant weakness** (the timeliness, process and quality of EHC plans; and the lack of an effective ASD pathway and unreasonable waiting times). Cheshire East was therefore required to submit a Written Statement of Action (WSOA) in relation to these two areas. Cheshire East's **WSOA was deemed to be fit for purpose by Ofsted on 23rd October 2018**.

This document provides an overview of the progress we have made and is supported by themed reports on the areas of significant weakness.

2. Senior Leaders' Statement

In Cheshire East we are proud of the **significant improvements we have made since 2018** for children and young people who have special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND). Our Written Statement of Action (WSOA) has been an effective **driver in improving the experiences of children, young people and their parent/carers** in the two areas of significant weaknesses set out in the inspection report.

As a partnership, we have worked tirelessly over the past two years against a **backdrop of significant increased demand and budget pressures**, and now the challenges of a global pandemic. However, we are confident that the energy and enthusiasm of leaders at a strategic level to improve provision, observed in our inspection, is now resulting in positive change for children, young people and their families. **Children and young people with SEN now have their needs met earlier**; we have significantly decreased the number of ongoing EHC needs assessments over 20 weeks, and **no children and young people in the Eastern Cheshire area now wait more than 12 weeks for an autism assessment**.

These improvements would not have been possible without the **continued commitment of our parent carers**. Co-production has been essential to understand the experiences of parent carers and their children and how these can be improved. We are not complacent, and we know that there is much more we need to do in Cheshire East. However, we are confident that **we have the right culture, staff and resources to develop and sustain quality services** that children and young people with SEND in the borough need and deserve.

3. Impact

A highlight of actions from the WSOA within key milestone periods is set out at Appendix 1.

The impact we have achieved across the two areas within the WSOA since May 2018 (September 2018 for autism) is set out in detail in our themed reports, but includes:

- ✓ A significant and sustained improvement (decrease) in the number of ongoing EHC needs assessments over 20 weeks, with a reduction from **180 assessments on 17/12/2018** to **2 assessments on 29/07/2019**.
- ✓ The number of assessments over 20 weeks **was sustained in single figures for 4 months** until 25/11/2019 (when it reached 12 assessments). This number peaked at 91 during the initial Covid-19 restrictions in April 2020 but, despite the impact of the pandemic, this was

managed to ensure that it did not reach levels that were seen in 2018 prior to our improvements. It has since been reduced by a third (with 63 assessments on 21/08/2020) and continues to decrease.

- ✓ An **increase in percentage of health advice for EHC needs assessment submitted within 6 weeks** (performance for individual months for advice due in that month) from **37%** to **91%** in July 2020. This has remained **above 83% throughout 2020**, despite the ongoing impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on our health services.
- ✓ **ASD diagnostic pathways** across Cheshire East were **consistent and compliant with NICE guidance** before lockdown as of 6th March 2020.
- ✓ A **reduction in the number of children and young people in the Eastern Cheshire area awaiting the start of autism assessment** for more than 12 weeks from **210** to **0** children and young people **which we have sustained since December 2019**. Numbers in the South Cheshire area remain very low (and have not risen above 1 or 2 children each month during 2020).
- ✓ A **reduction in the average length** of wait in weeks between referral and first appointment from **56 weeks** to **8 weeks** as of 6th June 2020.
- ✓ A **consistent MTD assessment 0-4 pathway** is now available across Cheshire East.
- ✓ **There has been an increase in parental satisfaction** – whilst we are still working to improve in this area, our latest survey of plans completed shows improved parental satisfaction, particularly for those parents where plans have been completed in the past 6 months. A telephone survey (10% of those completed) shows that 65% of parents were satisfied with the EHC needs assessment process overall.

4. Leadership Commitment

Strong leadership across all agencies has ensured a focus on making sure that **the WSoA actions have been completed** and **performance has significantly improved in the target measures**.

Strategic Leadership and management in Cheshire East is visible and well established. The Leader of the Council, Chief Executives in the Council and Health, and Portfolio Holder, recognise and prioritise the needs of children and this is reflected through increased budget allocation, decision-making and membership at meetings and boards. Whilst the Director with lead responsibility for SEND has experienced some change over the past couple of years, the existing experienced Director has worked closely with the Deputy Director for Strategy and Partnerships within in the CCG to **significantly increase the pace of change** over the past 18 months. We have strengthened the senior management with two Heads of Service for SEND and additional DCO support which will provide sustainability to our improvements, giving equal priority to timeliness and quality of EHC plans.

Management oversight at all levels has been strengthened through the development of better performance information, trackers, weekly and monthly meetings. Regular audits by senior managers has improved the quality of plans, reports and information through effective challenge. A **new health governance structure** for management oversight of SEND improvements and performance has increased the scrutiny in this area. The 0-25 SEND Partnership **Executive Management Group**, established in May 2019, has provided a formalised agreement of how leaders in education, health and care work together. The group provides strategic oversight of the

progress, outcomes and impact of the work carried out by the 0-25 SEND Partnership and progress against the WSoA.

The Council's **Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee** has received updates on the progress of the WSoA and provide scrutiny and challenge around key SEND performance measures, which are included in a quarterly scorecard to the Committee.

A number of **services have been restructured to better meet the needs of children and young people and their families**, including the SEND and Specialist Teams within the Council, to strengthen management oversight. The previous Head of Service, Service Manager and Team Manager have left Cheshire East which enabled **strengthening of leadership and management** by increasing capacity at a senior level (Head of Service). This has further strengthened management oversight of the timeliness and quality of SEND services from the Locality Manager and Quality Manager. **A secondment from Health** to a Head of Service position has supported integrated working across education, health and care partners. The Educational Psychology Service has moved to sit with our Head of Service for Pupil Support and Participation and has undergone significant restructuring and review of working practices.

Both the local authority and health have **commissioned additional capacity to address the backlog** in EHC needs assessments and waiting lists for autism assessments. This has resulted in significant improvements in timeliness and compliance with NICE guidance. The Local Authority and CCG have ensured that additional funding into the services will remain to ensure longer term sustainability. Whilst temporary and agency staff have enabled us to meet some of our short-term issues around timeliness, developing our workforce is key; our **priority is to ensure that we have the right permanent workforce, with the right support and development in place** to enable them to carry out their roles effectively. Ongoing recruitment exercises are in place across Cheshire and Wirral Partnership (CWP) to ensure the right workforce is in place.

5. Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has had an impact on our planned improvement journey creating some delays on our pace of improvement. However, we can demonstrate that we have remained focused on the aim to ensure a **quality service** with **good timeliness**.

The main challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic have been:

- Delays in receiving advice – as services had to adapt to gathering their information remotely – this has impacted on our timeliness and the quality of advice.
- The challenge of additional work, as we ensured risk assessments and temporary provision plans were in place to support children during this period.
- Some parents not wanting to complete plans within the timeframe as they have not been able to visit schools and have felt uncertain.
- Our ability to continue the induction and training of new staff and therefore the time it has taken for them to be fully effective has taken longer.
- Some families have been reluctant to attend hospital/outpatient clinics for a face-to-face appointment. Children on the Autism Assessment pathway by nature of their difficulties find it challenging to cope with the different experience that a trip to out-patients brings with the PPE and distancing requirements. PPE makes assessment of communication and social

interaction skills very challenging. However, all patients have been tracked and future appointments provided where required.

- Assessments by the Specialist Speech and Language Therapist (SALT) on the Autism Assessment pathway have been difficult to complete during this time for similar reasons.
- Children have been out of school for a significant length of time so getting up to date feedback and information from staff has been difficult.

During Covid-19, the CCG with partners have supported families and young people to **access ASD assessments and pre and post diagnostic support online**. Space 4 Autism and ChAPS increased access to support the waiting list. Many parents have been able to have their assessment completed online, however there are times when appropriate diagnosis can only take place on a face-to-face basis which has caused some delays. As a partnership we are ensuring that the impact of any delays is limited. Where required, face-to-face assessments have been booked dependant on Covid-19 guidance. We are continuing to use a mix of video, telephone clinics and face-to-face support as deemed appropriate by the clinician. Services are using alternate ways to virtually assess children, including Video Consultations, to see if that helps the overall pathway, as it is a multi-disciplinary assessment, so therefore relies heavily on receiving information from all various sources.

Additional hours are being worked over the summer to undertake more CCICP SALT assessments (part of the ASD Diagnostic pathway) to catch up on the delay in assessments as a result of the pandemic. Additional administrative support is also being secured to assist with appointment booking.

We have provided lots of support remotely and **services have been creative and adapted their offer** to ensure that families have continued to be supported during this time. During school shutdown we provided learning resources tailored to different types of needs to support children, along with a helpline for parents with children with Autism and support via video conferencing for children with sensory impairments. Support and equipment were provided for families where needed to enable them to support remote education. We have maintained regular contact with the Parent Carer Forum and have worked with them to develop our approach to reopening schools. As part of an early intervention mental health offer, Cheshire CCG has increased funding into online services through Visyon and Healthbox.

In general, the feedback received from parents during the lockdown period has been positive. Teams have continued to keep in contact with families who have understood that face-to-face visits/assessment could not be completed during this time and that virtual appointments would not necessarily be appropriate to complete a more formal assessment.

Despite the challenges brought on by the Covid-19 pandemic, we have made some excellent improvements over the last 6 months, as detailed in the appendix.

6. Strong Partnerships

Since its establishment, Cheshire East's **0-25 SEND Partnership has been committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND**. The partnership has **parent carers at the heart** of decision making and at all levels of governance. It has very good representation and engagement from all key stakeholders and continues to focus on making a difference for children and young people with SEND.

We **revised and streamlined all workstreams and governance** of the SEND Partnership Board in order to ensure delivery and focus in relation to the Written Statement of Action (WSOA). Our practice and procedures are becoming increasingly integrated across agencies and we now **jointly commission** a number of services, including a Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy provision. A Children's Joint Commissioning Strategy and Commissioners meeting ensures that partners work together across the range of children's services, and clear action plans are in place to ensure we commission seamless services.

Ensuring that children, young people and young adults with additional needs have better chances in life is **Outcome 6 of our new Children and Young People's Plan, 2019-21**, co-produced with children and young people.

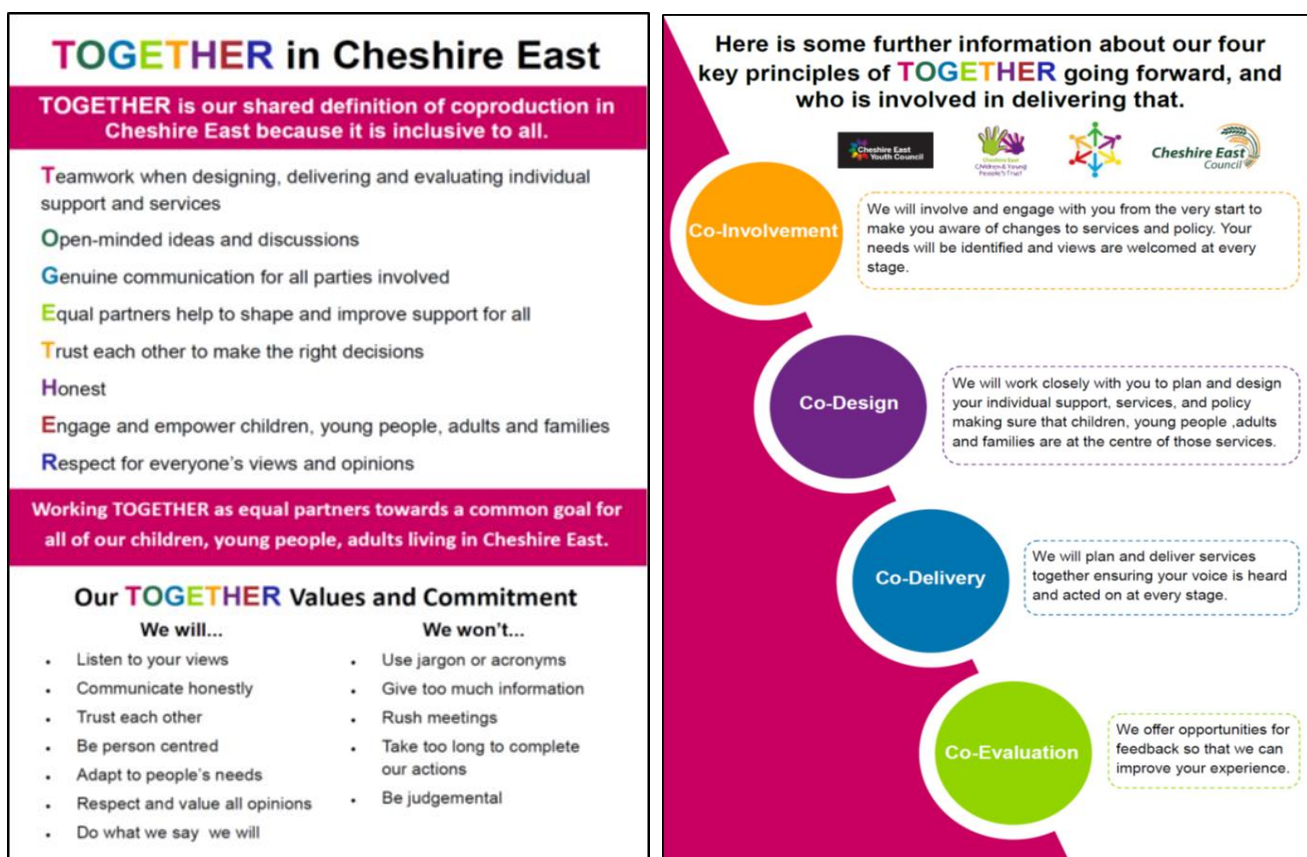
We have **strengthened our partnership with schools**. This includes regular Headteacher and Governor Briefings, along with termly SENCO conferences, which provide both local and national updates and development opportunities. SENCO conference attendee numbers rose from 35 to 235 at our last conference before Covid-19.

Improving **communication and engagement** has been an area of focus. The introduction of *SENDing you the News*, aims to provide regular updates to all stakeholders, supported by increased and improved information on our Local Offer. A Communication and Engagement Strategy has been co-produced with our Parent Carer Forum which sets the framework for all future communication and engagement.

7. Developing our services TOGETHER

Building our relationships with parent carers and young people has been a priority. Co-production has been at the heart of our improvement journey and our Parent Carer Forum and SEND Youth Forum are central to this. As a partnership we developed and signed up to TOGETHER in Cheshire East (see overleaf) as our shared definition of co-production as it is inclusive to all. This work has been endorsed and adopted by key partnerships and agencies across children and adult services in Cheshire East in addition to the SEND Partnership.

Examples of some of the areas we have produced TOGETHER include information about how to request an EHC needs assessment, Standards for EHC Plans, a single delivery model across Cheshire to align the diagnostic process for ASD, an All Age Autism Strategy and our Quality Assurance Framework for SEND.



8. Using our Learning to Sustain Improvements

As a learning partnership, we intend to use the experiences of our services and those who have used them over the past two years to ensure we sustain these improvements in the future. This includes the **importance of putting parent carers and children and young people at the heart of decision making**; they know how services can best meet their needs.

We are also much **clearer about peaks and troughs in demand** and, through challenge and support, we have a much better understanding and systems in place to manage these. Our **management oversight and monitoring** now provide us with the tools we need to manage demand. **Getting the right staff with the right culture and commitment** is also key to building confidence and trust with our parents and carers. We will continue to learn from good practice in other areas, to embrace peer challenge.

We are currently revising our 0-25 SEND Partnership Strategy. This will be informed by our self-evaluation, but priorities are likely to include:

- The **quality of EHC Plans**
- **Satisfaction of parent carers** through refreshed communication and engagement strategy
- The quality and effectiveness of **annual reviews** of EHC Plans and transitions
- Preparing for **adulthood and transitions earlier**
- **Better access to health services**
- Improvements in the **time between completion of an autism assessment and feedback** of a diagnosis to ensure hidden waits do not develop

9. Any finally....

From those who have had a positive experience of our services....

"Improvements related to SEND are palpable. x High had noticed a transformation in the effectiveness of the service provided by the SEND Team over the last 6+ months. There appears to be better join up between officers, greater resource becoming available to support the frontline and some very motivated team members who appear to be making things happen. For example, [staff member] had been excellent and [staff member] has quickly impressed. Similarly Education Psychologist reports have been more useful, helping to lead to improved provision."

[Cheshire East School]

"The commitment, effort and energy by everyone involved is very much appreciated - if I could rate this on a scale of 1 - 5 it would be 100."

[Parent/carer in telephone survey, Feb 2020]

"The Education Psychologist's report was superb and a 'game change' in our house. We had not had one of these before and everything was documented so well."

[Parent/carer in telephone survey, Feb 2020]

"My reading has improved significantly due to the plan."

[Young person]

"I would also just like to say how supportive and valuable your seconded SENCOs are. Other than at the networking meetings, I have only had contact with [IQ Officer] but she has been extremely helpful to not only me as a covering SENCO but to our school, staff and parents. The support from someone who works in a SENCO role, is always available to give advice, visit and even attend meetings is very much appreciated".

[Cheshire East School]

"I said what works well for me and my worker listened."

"It is a plan that has all my needs and helps others understand my needs."

[Young people]

WSOA Progress

6 months post-WSOA approval (by April 2019)

- ✓ **Weekly support** and training workshop sessions established to focus on improving the quality of EHC Plans.
- ✓ **Weekly reports** created (using data from comprehensive live trackers) to provide detailed information on the number and timeliness of EP advice requests and ongoing EHC needs assessment requests.
- ✓ Established **weekly operational meetings** for SEND Team managers focused on timeliness of EHC needs assessments, which provide management oversight and challenge around timeliness of EP advice and EHC Plans using the detailed trackers.
- ✓ **Access in place** for settings to share information from annual review meetings directly within the **local authority's case management system**. Health professionals in all provider trusts were also provided access to the case management system.
- ✓ **Additional capacity** secured through an external provider (Enhance EHC Ltd.) who completed work to assist with short term review processes for current EHC plans.
- ✓ Published revised, co-produced details about **how to request an EHC needs assessment**.
- ✓ **New clear pathway and paperwork** for bringing children and young people with SEN to the attention of the local authority published.
- ✓ Content of all **standard letters** within the EHC needs assessment process **reviewed and revised**.
- ✓ **Multi-agency Quality Assurance Task and Finish Group** in place monthly to drive forward improvements relating to the quality of EHC needs assessments and EHC Plans.
- ✓ **Quality Assurance Framework**, calendar of quality assurance activities and our co-produced standards for EHC Plans in place.
- ✓ **New 'Ignition' process** to improve person-centred transition planning within the EHC needs assessment process introduced.
- ✓ A set of **'non-negotiables'**, and more detailed quality standards in place for EHC Plans.
- ✓ **Waiting List Initiative** (WLI) to increase the assessment capacity for Autism and 'Dual' Autism and ADHD assessments in place.
- ✓ **0-4 years Autism Assessment Pathway established**.
- ✓ Multi-disciplinary team of healthcare and education **experts set up to assess the needs of 0 to 4 year olds** in the Eastern Cheshire part of Cheshire East.
- ✓ **Clinical care co-ordinators** to ensure that children and young people get all the help they need during the ASD assessment process in place as a result of additional health funding secured.
- ✓ **New post diagnostic support pack** developed, along with a bespoke post diagnostic 3-hour training course.
- ✓ Launched **'TOGETHER'**, co-produced shared definition of co-production.

- ✓ **SEND Youth Forum** in place.
- ✓ **Termly conferences** to provide local, regional and national updates, continuing professional development and networking opportunities for Cheshire East **SENCOs** established.

One year post-WSOA approval (by October 2019)

- ✓ **Recurrent £500,000 investment to increase capacity** across the SEND service agreed by the Council.
- ✓ Newly established multi-agency 0-25 SEND Partnership **Executive Management Group** in place.
- ✓ **Finalised, and consulted on, a new structure** for the SEND team and the Educational Psychology (EP) Service.
- ✓ Multi-agency **workshop focusing on 'Defining Excellence across SEND'** with a wide range of representatives from across education, health and care services, along with parent carers, to input into our refreshed Quality Assurance (QA) Framework for SEND by considering what 'good' looks like in Cheshire East.
- ✓ Additional **£300k investment into health services** to ensure consistency of offer across Cheshire East in regard to diagnosis and pre and post diagnostic support.
- ✓ **The waiting list initiative** for children and young people (CYP) age 4-19 years **extended** in Eastern Cheshire until February 2020 (**£80k new investment**).
- ✓ **Updated Autism JSNA** published.
- ✓ **Two seconded part-time Health Visitors** in place (one for Eastern Cheshire and one for South Cheshire) to act as specialist HVs for SEND.
- ✓ **Health scorecard developed** so that there is now consistent information gathered by both CCGs from all provider trusts in order to track performance.
- ✓ Increased **engagement with the Parent Carer Forum**, including through their Annual General Meeting and Preparing for Adulthood event.
- ✓ **Additional SALT therapists recruited.**

18 months post-WSOA approval (by April 2020)

- ✓ Developed **new advice templates** co-produced with parents.
- ✓ Interim **dedicated team to focus on timeliness and quality of annual reviews** in place.
- ✓ New **SEND Service structure in place**, including three Locality Manager roles and two Interim Head of Service posts to ensure that we can move the improvement of the service forward with greater pace.
- ✓ **Service offer and processes** within the **Cheshire East Autism Team, Sensory Inclusion** service and **Educational Psychology** service **reviewed**.
- ✓ **Experienced Head of Service** leads on driving forward changes in the **Educational Psychology** service
- ✓ **Autism Strategy** published.

- ✓ Director for Education and Skills/Chair of SEND Partnership attends **termly meetings with Parent Carer Forum.**
- ✓ Key Health officers attend Parent Carer Forum meetings to update on health and social care integrated process as well as work with the Forum to develop integrated co-produced approaches.
- ✓ **Additional recurrent £500,000 investment to increase capacity** across the SEND service agreed by the Council.
- ✓ **Recurrent investment by Cheshire CCG** to support the maintenance of the NICE Autism timescales.
- ✓ **Adapted services to offer support online** in response to Covid-19 and lockdown.

Two years post-WSOA approval (by October 2020)

- ✓ Co-produced **new temporary provision plans** with services and parents.
- ✓ Established a **Quality Managers group** across the partnership which has led to significant improvement of plans.
- ✓ Introduced a **Practice Champions Forum** which brings all key services together and ensures they take accountability for improvement in their part of the service.
- ✓ Put in place **guidance on undertaking remote annual reviews.**
- ✓ Introduced a **full review of the annual review process and paperwork**, co-developed with the Parent Carer Forum, and published up-to-date information on our Local Offer.
- ✓ Developed a **demand management process** for EHC needs assessments.
- ✓ **Further reviewed and developed EHC Panel arrangements**, particularly with a review of post-16 panel to ensure more effective decision making.
- ✓ **Recruitment to plan writers post** to bring in additional capacity to ensure we can meet potential increase demand in September 2020 when schools return.
- ✓ **Undertaken a full review of Educational Psychology service and recruited Assistant Educational Psychologists.**
- ✓ Developed a **quality management system** to ensure sustainability and moved away from quality assuring 100% of EHC Plans with confidence.
- ✓ Developed a **comprehensive training plan.**
- ✓ **Single agreed Autism diagnosis pathway in place.**
- ✓ Implementation of the **THRIVE model.**
- ✓ **Pre and post diagnostic support for Autism** in place across Cheshire East.
- ✓ **Online consultations** now available where applicable.
- ✓ Dynamic **risk register** in place for children and young people with ASC and/or learning difficulties who are at risk of being admitted to a tier 4 bed in order to monitor and prevent admission. Risks to individual children are reviewed on a multi-agency basis to ensure there is an accurate understanding of their needs.
- ✓ **Updated Care Education and Treatment Review (CETR) processes** – the DCO now attends all CETR to facilitate good working relationships between partners.

- ✓ **Reduced inpatient admissions** demonstrating we are successfully avoiding escalation and are meeting children and young people's needs in the community.
- ✓ **Autism intensive care support** in place through Cheshire and Wirral Partnership.