

Local Government Association

Developing and sustaining effective local SEND systems

**Regional workshops focused on fostering effective partnership
working across education, health and care: A summary**

February 2020



Structure of the following document



Introduction: Background and aims, and our approach to this project



Part I: Where are local areas on their education, health and care partnership working journey?



Part II: What aspects of education, health and care partnership working are working well and where are local areas less confident?



Part III: What do local leaders think is needed at national level to create conditions for effective education, health and care partnership working?

In the annex at the end of this document, we have included vignettes of the partnership working journeys of four local areas. This is not because we – or they – are claiming that they have got everything working perfectly across their partnership, but because the work they have been doing and are continuing to do helps to exemplify some of the practical messages, themes and questions that have arisen in the course of our discussions with local areas.

Introduction and background to the project

- **Background and context:** Education, health and care (EHC) partnership working has been a central pillar of the reforms of the special educational needs and disability (SEND) framework introduced through the Children and Families Act 2014. Looking at ways to strengthen partnership working across these agencies, to foster effective support for children and young people with SEND, has been a central theme in our national research and work with individual local areas. The recently formed SEND System Leadership Board, of which the Local Government Association (LGA) is a member, and the Department for Education's recently announced review of the SEND reforms indicate that the focus on strengthening EHC partnership working.
- **This project:** It is in this context that the LGA commissioned Isos Partnership to lead a project to facilitate a series of regional discussions for partners from education, health and care to reflect on where they were in their journey to embed effective EHC partnership working in the context of their local SEND systems and on what is needed to create the conditions for EHC partnership working to become embedded across the SEND system nationally. This work builds on a previous series of regional seminars, facilitated by Isos, that were designed to capture what local areas can do and are doing to develop and sustain effective local SEND systems. (This work was published in autumn 2018, and a summary can be found [here](#).) EHC partnership working was one of the six central themes in that work.
- **The aims of the present project have been for local areas to:**
 - reflect on the strengths and areas for development in EHC partnership working within their local area;
 - to hear of examples of effective practice and new ideas from other local areas;
 - to shape practical messages for developing and sustaining partnership working and joint commissioning; and
 - to contribute to shaping key findings about what is needed at local, regional and national level to strengthen partnership working and joint commissioning.

Approach to the project

- **Our approach:** We facilitated a series of eight regional workshops. For each one, local areas were invited to attend the workshops in “teams”, made up of colleagues from local education, health and care services. The aim was to enable colleagues from the same local area to reflect together, and then with counterparts from other local areas, on their work to establish effective EHC partnership working arrangements. Colleagues from the SEND System Leadership Board and the National Network of Parent Carer Forums (NNPCF) also attended some of these discussions. These workshops took place between October 2019 and January 2020. In total, colleagues representing 99 local areas attended engaged in and contributed to this project.
- **A word about terminology:** Much of the language in the SEND framework focuses on “joint commissioning”. In the workshops, there was a strong message from local areas about the need to focus more emphasis on “joint” and less emphasis on “commissioning”. They argued that what mattered most was the ways in which partners work together to identify needs, plan support, make decisions, deliver services and seek to achieve outcomes as part of an effective system of support for young people with SEND. “Joint commissioning” has a role to play, but as one of the range of ways in which EHC partners may work together in an aligned manner within an overarching, shared approach.
- **The purpose of this summary document:** We hope this document provides a useful summary for leaders in local areas, enabling them to consider where they are on their journey to establish and sustain the EHC partnership working arrangements needed to maintain an effective local system of support for young people with SEND – both those at SEN Support and those with education, health & care plans (EHCPs). Likewise, we hope this document is useful to national policy makers, considering how to create the conditions for effective EHC partnership working in the next phase of the development of the SEND system.

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Part III: What do local leaders think is needed at national level to create conditions for effective education, health and care partnership working?

Part I: Where are the local areas on their EHC partnership working journey?

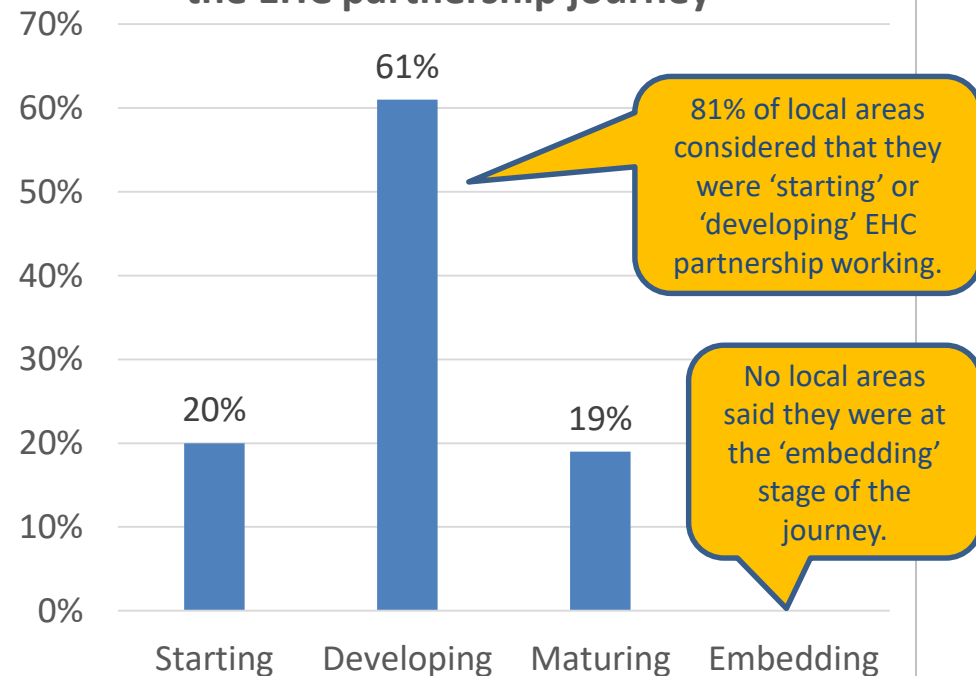
We developed a four-stage framework to enable local areas to reflect on where they were in their journey to develop EHC partnership working. “Starting” signifies the initial stage of the putting partnership processes in place. “Developing” is the stage where structures and an overarching strategy may be in place, but are not embedded across all partners and services. “Maturing” signifies the stage where there is a strong commitment, shared strategy, common understanding of local needs, and crucially families can see the benefits of joined-up working. “Embedding” is the stage where these ways of working have become business-as-usual and evidence of impact is clear.

Over the five years since the reforms, despite progress in some areas, it is telling that no local areas felt confident that they were at the stage of developing EHC partnership working that we have called “embedding”.

In the graph, we show the spread of where local areas thought they were on the journey. While many felt they had progressed since the reforms, the sheer breadth of activities where EHC partnership working needs to be developed meant the majority considered themselves to be at the stage we have called “developing”.

We developed the framework iteratively with local areas through the workshops. An updated version of the framework – which colleagues can use to continue their self-evaluation discussions within their local areas, is on the next page. Copies of the templates, which local areas can use for their own self-assessment exercises, are available alongside this summary document.

Where local areas saw themselves on the EHC partnership journey



Part I: The framework

Below is the framework we co-developed and used during the regional workshops. It shows four broad stages on the journey of establishing EHC partnership working locally. We asked local areas to consider which of these four stages best reflected where they were currently. (We deliberately kept the descriptors brief, as we wanted the framework to prompt reflection. We have subsequently taken on board what local areas told us about what they were focusing on at each stage of the journey in order to refine the framework and create the descriptors below.)

“Starting”

The local area is just beginning to put in place some of the operational arrangements and processes that are necessary for partners from education, health and care to work together to provide support for young people with SEND.

“Developing”

The local area has put in place the governance structures around strategic partnership working across education, health and care. There is a shared strategy, but this may not yet be fully embedded across all partners and services. There are some strong aspects of joint working at operational level, but it is too early to see impact.

“Maturing”

There is a strong commitment from leaders of education, health and care services to joint working and a shared strategy. This is informed by a shared understanding of the needs of the local system, and informs a shared set of priorities and frontline practice. Families are beginning to see the benefit of services working in a more joined-up manner.

“Embedding”

Strategic partnership working is “business-as-usual” for the local area. Services are planned and delivered in an aligned, integrated manner where appropriate. Partners have an agreed set of shared outcomes. There is clear evidence of the impact of partnership working.

Part I: Three overarching reflections from local areas on the EHC partnership working journey.

In the discussions about the journey to establish and sustain EHC partnership working arrangements, colleagues from local areas shared three overarching reflections. These are set out below. On the next four pages, we set out the specific reflections colleagues shared about each of the four stages of the journey.

The EHC partnership working journey is not linear

The scale of the task of fostering effective partnership working means there will always be aspects to strengthen. Local areas also reflected, however, on the fragility of local arrangements – changes in leadership in key positions across the partnership, or changes in local context and needs, had required some areas to go back to the start and re-develop a vision, strategy, structure, sets of strategic routines and operational practices. Most local areas argued that successful partnerships take several years to form and reach maturity, and will always rely to some extent on the relationships between key leaders, managers and professionals. There is the need, therefore, for constant work to check the strength and health of partnerships, and formalise key routines and practices. Local areas also reflected that there was no right path to strengthening EHC partnership. The sheer breadth of EHC partnership working needed in a local SEND system means that local areas at similar stages on the journey may have got there by prioritising different activities.

The local area SEND inspection framework appears to have had a significant impact in driving action

Many local areas have used the local area SEND inspection framework as a prompt to bring together partners and put in place EHC partnership working arrangements. Some local areas described how they have been prompted to focus on EHC partnership working as a result of a critical comment in their inspection, whereas for others a strategic focus on EHC partnership working has been an intrinsic aspect of their work since the introduction of the SEND reforms.

There is a key shift that local areas are exploring as part of their journey

This is the shift from “implementation” of the individual aspects of the SEND reforms to “improvement” of local SEND systems. Put simply, some local areas were moving beyond “ticking off” delivery of the local offer, the EHCP process, joint commissioning, and thinking more holistically about how to create a joined-up system that achieved the principles of excellent support for all at the heart of the SEND reforms.

Part I: Key features of partnership working for local areas who considered themselves to be at the “starting” phase of the journey

“Starting” the journey: A focus on some of the core operational processes

At this stage of the journey, some local areas had started by focusing on putting in place some of the operational arrangements and processes that are necessary for partners from education, health and care to work together. Other areas had started their journey by developing a unifying vision for what EHC partnership working.

Some local areas were at this stage following a critical local area SEND inspection, which had exposed gaps in EHC partnership working. Often, this had had the effect of bringing together senior leaders across partner agencies to create the conditions for stronger partnership working. Local areas were, however, keen to stress that it was important not to become overly focused on responding only to the inspection and “ticking off” the outward signs and structures of partnership working. Instead, they advised that it was important to focus on putting in place the long-term foundations for strong EHC partnership – vision, strategy, commitment, culture and practice.

Characteristics of local areas at this stage of the journey

At this stage of the journey, most local areas had in place:

- a complex needs funding panel or similar – a mechanism for deciding on the split of agencies’ contributions for children with the most complex needs who require support from education, health and/or care; and
- a range of services from across education, health and care included in the local area’s local offer.

Some local areas also were developing:

- a joint vision and governance structure, but at an early stage and not embedded across all services; or
- a structure for aligning and commissioning services jointly, but not yet fully connected to the SEND system.

The lack of reliable, joined-up or aligned datasets and evidence bases was a major barrier for local areas at this stage of their journey. As such, the “starting” stage of the journey may be summed by saying that, at this stage, local areas were often able to demonstrate some of the outward features of EHC partnership working, but these tended not to be connected yet to a whole-system ethos and strategy.

Part I: Key features of partnership working for local areas who considered themselves to be at the “developing” phase

The “developing” phase of the journey: Key characteristics

Based on the feedback from local areas, there appeared to be two key characteristics of this phase of the journey:

1. a shared understanding of the needs of children and young people with SEND in the local area, at an overall system level, informed by shared evidence and intelligence drawn from across the partner agencies; and
2. a set of shared priorities for improving support for children and young people with SEND in the local area, shared by partners, and informed by a shared understanding of evidence and intelligence (for example in the form of a good Joint Strategic Needs Assessment), which can inform decisions about how support and services are to be arranged.

Local areas may have reached this stage of the journey via different routes

1. Top-down: local areas may have developed a shared vision and an effective partnership governance structure at a senior leadership level, but the vision is not yet fully shared and embedded across services and professionals.
2. Bottom-up: local areas may have retained a strong culture of partnership working from previous initiatives or structures at a service-to-service / professional-to-professional level, but this is not yet replicated at senior level and formed into an overarching strategy and partnership governance structure.

There are the beginnings of an EHC partnership culture, but this is not yet mature and embedded

At this stage of the journey, there will be the beginnings of the culture and commitment that enable formal leadership and governance structures to drive forward shared priorities. There are likely to be two reasons why local areas do not yet think of themselves as being at the “maturing” stage of the journey.

1. Impact: strategic partnership working is likely to be at an early stage, with strategic leaders starting to ask themselves questions about the impact of their activities *as a partnership*.
2. Fragility: the system may also feel “fragile”, dependent on key individuals and their commitment to the partnership.

Part I: Key features of partnership working for local areas who considered themselves to be at the “maturing” phase of the journey

The “maturing” stage of the journey: Three key shifts

Local areas at this stage of the journey saw themselves as having in place the ethos, decision-making structures, shared understanding of need and priorities for improvement, and a shared set of outcomes through which they could demonstrate the impact of their work. There were three key shifts that local areas describing in reaching this stage.

1. A strong culture of EHC partnership working at every level of the system

- A strong commitment from strategic leaders, with strong partnership governance, which creates a shared culture, the conditions and a “mandate” for professionals to work together across service boundaries.
- This is made concrete through the use of strong processes and practices that support and reinforce joint working at service and practice level – e.g. processes for making decisions about support for individual young people or about how whole services are delivered.
- If this is working well, local areas considered that families should see the benefits of this more joined-up approach.

2. Thinking about the system in terms of pathways of support which are holistic and provided jointly

The key shift here is from an approach where individual agencies see themselves as responsible for what they directly provide or commission to one where they see themselves as part of a partnership with responsibility for the whole system. Local areas talked about being able to identify an issue and agree collectively how best to address it – whether through delivering or commissioning services in a parallel but aligned way, through to providing or commissioning services jointly. The key point here is that, at this stage of their journey, local areas had developed sophisticated mechanisms for partners to work together to determine the best approach to offering a form of support, making best use of the collective resources of the local area.

3. A strong focus on commissioning services for children with SEND

The third shift local areas described at this stage of the journey was from parallel to more integrated ways of working, where SEND was not seen as a “bolt-on” to wider strategic initiatives for children and young people, but was at the heart of the local area’s strategic priorities for children and young people.

Part I: Key features of partnership working for local areas who considered themselves to be at the “embedding” phase

The “embedding” stage of the journey: No local areas considered that they had reached this stage

As shown in the chart on p.6, no local areas were confident that they had reached the “embedding” stage of the journey. Five years after the introduction of the SEND reforms, this is telling in itself. It reflects both the scale of the task of implementing such significant changes to services across multiple agencies, the time it takes for partnerships to form and mature, and the ongoing work needed to reinforce partnership working in a context where structures, services and personnel are subject to rapid change.

Reaching the “embedding” stage of the journey: What would it take to get there?

The discussion we had with local areas focused on what it would take to get to the point where local areas considered that EHC partnership working was becoming embedded. The local areas we engaged in the review highlighted two points.

1. **Impact** – even where local leaders considered that EHC partnership working was strong, they reflected on the challenges of demonstrating the overall impact of their partnership working. There were two parts to this. First, there was the challenge of being able to identify the right shared outcomes, which would track the overall impact of the work of the partnership. Second, there was the challenge of being able to create the time and space, away from delivering day-to-day priorities within the local SEND system, to reflect on impact of the partnership’s work.
2. **A focus on all children and young people with SEND** – local areas acknowledged much of the focus of EHC partnership working was on children with more complex needs, including those with statutory EHCPs. Colleagues considered that, to reach the “embedding” stage of the journey, a local area would need to develop a broader joined-up offer of support for all children and young people with SEND, including those at SEN Support level. They reflected that, often, young people came to the attention of statutory and specialist services due to a lack of joined-up, wraparound support for children at the level of SEN Support. As such, they considered that to be confident that partnership working was embedded there would need to be a joined-up offer for all children and young people with SEND, including both those with SEN Support and those with EHCPs.

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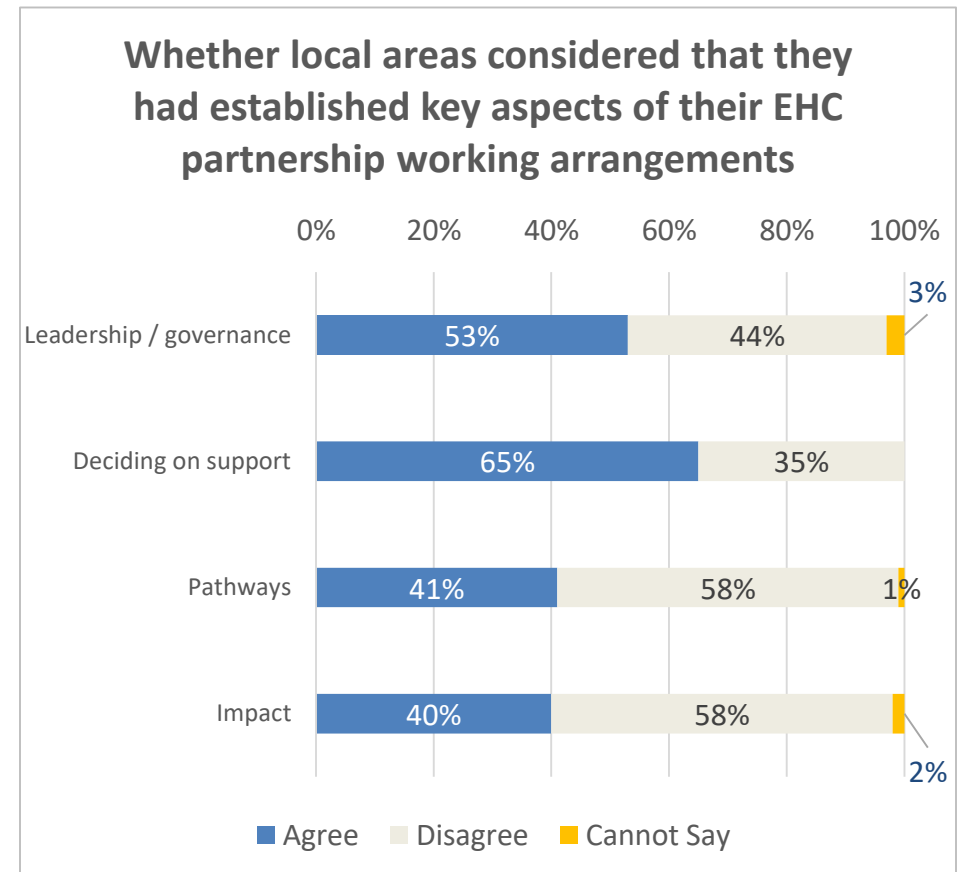
Part II: What aspects of EHC partnership working are working well and where are local areas less confident?

We then asked local areas to consider specific aspects of their partnership working arrangements – (1) leadership and governance, (2) processes for deciding on support for individual young people, (3) strategic planning of pathways of support, and (4) impact. Local areas were most likely to agree that they had strong arrangements in place around processes for deciding on support, and for leadership and governance. They were more likely to disagree that they had joined-up pathways of support in place and could evidence the impact of their work as a partnership.

For each of the four themes, we posed between two and three suggested “good practice” statements, and asked local areas whether this characterised their local arrangements. The chart on the right shows the breakdown of responses from the local areas.

The self-evaluation framework we developed through the workshops is on the next page. Colleagues are welcome to use this (and the full version that accompanies this document) as a self-evaluation tool in their local areas.

In this section, we summarise local areas’ responses for each of these four themes. It was noteworthy that local areas at different stages of their EHC partnership working journey gave similar responses to this exercise. This indicates the importance of taking a holistic, system-wide approach to EHC partnership working, and the fact that there are some system-wide challenges that all local areas are facing.



Part II: EHC partnership working self-evaluation framework

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Cannot say
1. Strategic leadership and governance There is a <u>strong vision and strategy</u> for supporting all young people with SEND, co-produced with families and professionals, and shared by strategic leaders and services across the local area. Robust arrangements enable leaders to <u>use data and intelligence</u> from across all agencies to form a shared understanding of the needs of the local area (JSNA). Effective <u>strategic governance arrangements</u> enable leaders to draw on assessments of need, agree shared priorities and take decisions to improve support for young people with SEND in the local area.	○	○	○	○	◐
2. Deciding on support Established multi-agency processes enable professionals jointly to identify, decide upon and fund support for <u>individual young people</u> . Established processes enable leaders and commissioners from key agencies to work together strategically to <u>plan, commission and deliver services in a joined-up way</u> .	○	○	○	○	◐
3. Pathways of support The local area has developed clear, <u>person-centred pathways of support</u> for young people with SEND that draws together support from across different agencies in a seamless and integrated manner. The <u>local offer</u> has been used strategically to plan support and services so that it sets out how agencies and services work together to provide a joined-up offer of support for young people with SEN and their families.	○	○	○	○	◐
4. Having an impact Feedback from <u>young people with SEND and their families</u> shows that they feel services are working together in a joined-up way such that they feel well supported by the local system. The local area has an agreed set of shared outcomes, which it can use to <u>demonstrate the impact</u> of EHC partnership working activities on improving outcomes for young people with SEND.	○	○	○	○	◐

Part II: Self-evaluation framework – Leadership and governance

Leadership

Local areas that were more confident in their ability to push for joint partnership working felt they had benefitted from a mandate from key leaders for joined-up working. Having a governance structure that brought together key partners was important, but what ensured that this was an effective means of driving progress across all services and achieving impact for families was it being underpinned by strong leadership, and an ethos that endorsed, encouraged and enabled partnership working.

Governance

As we have noted, while no guarantee of effective partnership working on its own, having a strong strategic governance structure – an effective set of arrangements enabling senior leaders from key partner agencies to come together to share intelligence, developed a shared understanding of local need, shape priorities and track progress – was vital to having effective an EHC partnership. This was what helped to translate a strategic vision and a set of aspirations into a practical programme of work.

A shared understanding of need

Some local areas have developed strong datasets to enable joined-up decision-making – for some, they had found a strong Joint Strategic Needs Assessment had been a useful tool for this. This can be crucial in ensuring that strategic priorities are grounded in the evidence of what is needed in the local area, which can then drive improvements and deliver outcomes for children and young people in the local area.

Part II: Self-evaluation framework – Deciding on support

Deciding on support for individual young people

Most local areas considered that they had good arrangements for making partnership decisions where a young person required support from more than one agency, most often through a multi-agency panel for young people with complex needs. Most local areas felt these panels provided a clear framework for taking decisions and allocating resources where multi-agency packages of support were needed. Where local areas had developed sophisticated, streamlined panel arrangements, they argued that this was vital in taking away a potential source of inter-agency tension that enabled a more person-centred approach. As one senior leader put it, *'If you get good processes in place for joint funding, you avoid a source of potential tensions. Our conversations now focus more on outcomes.'* Fewer, however, considered that intelligence and trends drawn from the cases that a panel considers were being used strategically to inform how services were planned and support delivered across the local area. The role of the Designated Medical / Clinical Officer (DMO / DCO) – being pro-active in engaging professionals – was seen as crucial in changing culture and embedding practice.

Deciding on support at a strategic level

While most local areas considered that they had well-developed arrangements in place for deciding on support at the level of *individual* young people, fewer felt that they had similarly established and effective arrangements for jointly planning services and pathways of support at a *strategic* level. Where local areas had developed effective mechanisms for jointly planning support and services at a strategic level, they had often sought to adopt a “whole-system” approach:

- treating all requests for support as indicators of need that required a response (rather than adopting a strictly threshold-based approach to accessing each service);
- ensuring that all services see themselves as part of the local area’s SEND system, rather than seeing SEND as something led by the SEND service; and
- having well-established mechanisms for using data and intelligence from requests for support, EHC assessments, annual reviews and other sources to inform regular strategic discussions about how best to arrange support and services.

Part II: Self-evaluation framework – Pathways

Using the local offer as a tool for planning and setting out joined-up pathways of support

In the spirit of moving from “implementation” of the SEND reforms to system “improvement”, several local areas reflected on the strategic value of the local offer as a means of strengthening EHC partnership working. Local areas who were more confident in response to the statement that we posed described how they had used the local offer both as a means of capturing the current offer from across the EHC partnership, but also as a prompt to test whether the local offer articulated a coherent offer of support, to identify gaps in that offer, and to use this to shape shared priorities for improving the offer of support. (Those who were less confident acknowledged that the local offer was more of a static directory of individual services, rather than a description of how the local system supported young people with SEND.)

Planning joined-up pathways of support

Some local areas had taken the approach of identifying cohorts of young people with specific needs, and developing pathways of support for those cohorts. These local areas set themselves the test of whether the local offer described a coherent pathway of support for specific needs, rather than what each individual service offered, and focusing on families’ experience of that support. Most local areas that had taken this approach had focused on developing:

- a neuro-developmental pathway for children with communication and interaction needs (subtly but crucially different from commissioning a service to deliver autism assessments and diagnoses);
- an integrated offer of speech and language therapy (rather than having disputes about the criteria for accessing a speech and language therapy service);
- an integrated social, emotional and mental health pathway, with joined-up working between schools, settings and mental health professionals (as opposed focusing on the capacity of child & adolescent mental health services); and
- an offer of support for young people with SEND, but not an EHCP, and requiring input from several services.

Colleagues also reflected that this was a less complex task in areas where the LA and CCG were coterminous – as we noted in our previous research, structures can be put in place to draw together decision-making across multiple CCGs working with one LA and vice versa, but the key is that there are processes that enable streamlined decision-making.

Part II: Self-evaluation framework – Impact

Challenges in capturing the impact of the local system of support for young people with SEND

Capturing long-term impact of the local area's work as a partnership was an area that many local areas identified as a challenge. This was often because:

- a. they were not yet seeing the impact of their work at a system level; or
- b. they were seeing some evidence of immediate impact, but there was not clarity about how to measure the longer term, overall impact of EHC partnership working for children and young people with SEND.

Getting the right information and data

Colleagues reflected that most local areas had lots of data, but the data did not necessarily capture whether activities designed to support children and young people in preparing for a successful and fulfilling adult life actually achieved this or not. They considered that often data told them what they had been doing, but not its impact. For example:

- there are lots of data in education services, but these focus qualifications that did not necessarily tell the whole story for young people whose aspirations and achievements may not translate into these qualifications;
- health data tend to focus on activity and process, and is often not specific to young people with SEND; and
- SEND data tends to focus on activity (EHCPs, numbers in specific types of provision) rather than impact.

Asking the right question

Local areas felt the key question that they should be asking themselves was not about whether they had “joint commissioning” and “pooled budget” arrangements in place as end in themselves. Instead, the key question should be:

‘Are we doing things in a joined-up way that makes the best use of all locally available resources, and are these things making a difference to children, young people and families so that they feel the system is supporting them?’

Part II: A summary of key practical messages from our discussions with local areas about how to strengthen EHC partnership working

1. Strategic leadership and governance	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Vision</u>: convene leaders, confront the evidence and identify challenges faced, remove blame, focus on what kind of system you want to create for <u>all</u> young people with SEND and their families.• <u>Governance</u>: put in place structure that enables leaders to “prioritise the priorities”, keep coming back to and communicating shared challenges and to drive progress to address them.• <u>Priorities</u>: use data and intelligence (including complaints) to agree a set of shared priorities.
2. Deciding on support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Support for individual young people</u>: have a strong panel process that enables professionals and services to agree packages of support for young people with the most complex needs. Use key “champions” (a strong DCO) to embed a practices of joint working and a focus on outcomes.• <u>Strategic planning of services</u>: develop partnership mechanisms for assessing whether the current offer of support is meeting local needs, and for taking strategic decisions about how best to organise support (services provided in parallel, aligning services, jointly commissioning services).
3. Pathways of support	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>Think “pathways”</u>: plan support not service-by-service, but as pathways that makes sense from the perspective of families (including young people on SEN Support) and is focused on meeting needs.• <u>Use the local offer as a strategic planning tool</u>: test whether the local area is able to set out clearly its pathways of support in a way that makes sense to families and professionals.• <u>Create ownership</u>: develop practice and relationships at operational level within services.
4. Having an impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• <u>System-level outcomes</u>: establish mechanisms for tracking long-term outcomes for young people and the impact of EHC partnership working at a system level. Enable leaders and professionals to describe what the impact they would expect to see if the partnership was working effectively.• <u>Capturing feedback</u>: build mechanisms for capturing feedback from young people and families – their perspective is a key indicator of the success of EHC partnership working. Co-produce evaluations with families and professionals to ensure a shared understanding.

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Part III: Overall points – what is needed at national and regional level?

- At the end of each workshop, we asked colleagues what is needed to create the conditions at regional and national system-level to support local areas in effectively bringing about joint partnership working across education, health and care. There was a strong feeling that at national level, the system was not as joined-up as it needed to be, with different legislative frameworks, funding systems, performance measures, which local areas were required to attempt to align at local level.
- There was a strong call for leadership and governance of the SEND system at a national level to reflect the alignment and partnership working expected at local level. Colleagues, therefore, welcomed the establishment of the SEND System Leadership Board and the potential areas on which the SEND review may focus.
- In this final section, we have captured the key points that came out of our discussions with local areas about what is needed at national and regional level to create the conditions for effective local EHC partnership working.
- The majority of the discussions focused on what is needed at national level. While there are some strong regional SEND networks, there is not yet a formal role for a regional tier in the SEND system: either in reinforcing national messages, supporting implementation of aspects of the reforms or practice improvements, or collating intelligence to inform national policy-making. If the regional tier is to be an important part of the SEND system, then further thought will need to go into how it can play this role effectively. Colleagues highlighted three practical things needed at regional level:
 - ongoing sharing of good practice through regional events;
 - facilitating joint commissioning of highly specialist services (and highlighting the capacity needed for this); and
 - supporting cross-border arrangements to ensuring consistency of approaches.

Part III: Four things that are needed at national level

1. Strategic leadership

Local areas suggested that there would be value in re-stating who has overall responsibility for and oversight of the SEND system at a national level, and refreshing the governance arrangements that bring together education, health and care for young people with SEND. Colleagues argued that this would be valuable in its own right, but would also send a powerful signal about the importance of joined-up partnership working, leadership and governance at local level. Colleagues were cautiously welcoming of the work of the SEND System Leadership Board, which could provide some of this joined-up leadership. Nevertheless, colleagues also emphasised that they did not think there is currently a clear answer to the question, *'Who has overall responsibility for the SEND system at a national level?'.*

2. Aligning priorities, clarifying responsibilities

Local areas argued that current national arrangements perpetuate competing priorities, responsibilities, and budgets. (Colleagues also highlighted the disproportionate role played by the Tribunal and its influence on the decision-making within local EHC partnerships.) The job for local areas then becomes one of seeking to re-align these priorities with some degree of coherence at local level (and in the context of the threat of Tribunal decisions going against them). Local areas were keen for any help in aligning these competing agendas across education, health and care. Five years on from the SEND reforms, local areas would welcome a re-clarification of who should be considered key partners across education, health and care, and their roles in supporting children and young people with SEND.

- a. First, local areas would welcome a definitive restatement of the roles of education, health and care professionals and their contribution to local EHC partnership arrangements, particularly clarifying contributions that health and social care services should make to support and services for children and young people with SEND.
- b. Second, local areas noted that the education landscape has changed significantly since the SEND reforms were first conceived, with new partners, notably the Regional Schools Commissioners, playing an increasingly influential role in the education system and having important influence over mainstream schools and the SEND system, but often not part of local SEND partnership governance arrangements or activities.

Part III: Four things that are needed at national level

3. Clarifying what good looks like

Colleagues noted that there continued to be a lack of clarity around EHC partnership working, specifically the responsibilities of health and social care partners. Some colleagues noted that the local area SEND inspection framework had been useful in sharpening the focus of health and social care leaders on their contributions to support for children and young people with SEND. Whilst not disagreeing with this point, other colleagues noted that the inspection framework may place too much emphasis on some of the outward signs of partnership “activity”, rather than on whether the system has the requisite foundations in place and is working in a joined-up way. Local areas would welcome anything that would ensure a focus on the foundations of EHC partnership working.

Local areas considered that a truly effective local area SEND inspection regime would focus on how well the local partnership as a whole worked together to:

- identify a joint assessment of needs;
- shape evidence-informed joint priorities;
- translate these into how day-to-day services are arranged and how support is delivered; and
- ensure that this is reflected in the experience of children / young people and their families.

While noting that a critical inspection had kick-started their EHC partnership journey, many local areas said that they would welcome an approach that set out clear expectations of what good EHC partnership working looked like and used this as a spur for developing strong local arrangements, alongside the inspection framework.

4. Sharing benchmarking data

There was a strong call for the development of some meaningful national benchmarking data. Notwithstanding some of the limitations that colleagues acknowledged with existing datasets, local areas would welcome any data, dashboards, one-page profiles, or similar products, that enabled meaningful comparisons across local areas and focused on long-term outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Summary

- EHC partnership working has been a central theme in the work to reform and strengthen the SEND system, and looks like it will continue to be a focus of the work of the SEND System Leadership Board and the Government's recently announced review of the SEND reforms. Throughout our national research and our work with individual local areas around SEND, EHC partnership working has been high on the agenda. Therefore, we are very grateful to the LGA for the opportunity to continue our research into what local areas are doing in their local SEND systems. Similarly, we are grateful to all of the local areas who participated in this work for their engagement and contributions. We hope that the workshop discussions, as well as this summary document and the accompanying self-evaluation tools that we co-developed through the workshops, will be of value to colleagues in local areas and to the LGA and other national decision-making and policy-shaping bodies.
- A key overarching message from the workshops was that all local areas have strengthened EHC partnership working following the introduction of the SEND reforms, but the breadth of the activities where EHC partnership working is needed means that, while all local areas have tackled some aspects, no single local area is confident of having fully embedded EHC partnership working across all aspects of their local SEND system. This series of regional workshops has hopefully highlighted where local areas and the SEND system as a whole are on the journey to embed EHC partnership working, some of the practical things local areas are doing within their own systems, and what is needed to create the conditions for effective EHC partnership working to become more fully embedded.

We would like to thank everyone that contributed to these workshops and shared examples of their work to establish effective local partnerships to support young people with SEND.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

- **In this annex, we have included four vignettes that capture the partnership arrangements in place in four local areas** – St Helens, Warrington, Portsmouth and Northumberland.
- **These are based on presentations given by these local areas at the start of some of the regional workshops that we facilitated.** We asked local areas to give these presentations, not because we wanted to put them forward as exemplars where all aspects of EHC partnerships were working perfectly. Instead, we found that it was a helpful opening to the workshops to have a sense of arrangements, strengths and current priorities, and key practical reflections from one or two local areas.
- **With the help of those four local areas, we have written up some short vignettes that describe their EHC partnership arrangements and journey,** and we include these here in the same spirit: as examples that illustrate many of the aspects of partnership working that local areas across the country raised through our workshops, and consequently reflect the themes that we have summarised in this document.
- **A caveat:** we are conscious that the four local areas that feature in this section have coterminous LA and CCG boundaries. We have not included these four local areas to make a point about the advantages to partnership working of having a coterminous LA and CCG. Indeed, in both this and our previous research, we came across examples and have described some of the ways local areas where one LA works with multiple CCGs, or vice-versa, have found for developing some of the key ingredients of successful partnership working that we describe in this report. The inclusion of these four local areas simply reflects the fact that they participated in the workshops and were generous in agreeing to provide an overview of their EHC partnership working arrangements and journeys.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

St Helens (1/2)

St Helens is a large town in Merseyside. The local area is made up of one unitary local authority and a coterminous CCG, 3 NHS Trusts, along with 69 state-funded schools. The local area was inspected by Ofsted and CQC in early 2018. The inspection report comments that,

'joint commissioning is a strength of the local area', and that 'arrangements for working together are strong, from senior managers through to frontline staff.'

In particular,

'the development of the neurodevelopmental pathway demonstrates the commitment of senior leaders and managers to work collaboratively.'

The development of integrated working to support young people with SEND in St Helens has been a strong focus since the introduction of the SEND reforms. Partners have established "St Helens Cares" as an integrated care system across all partners, which includes integrated leadership roles across the town. Leaders have worked to understand barriers to professionals and services working together in a more collaborative way, and particularly in overcoming operational silos. Leaders have focused specifically on creating a more collaborative culture, and on the concept of "tribes", recognising the way in which professionals feel a sense of belonging and affinity to particular groupings, services or practices within a local system.

The work to redevelop the neurodevelopmental pathway is a good example of both person-centred design of an area of support, and of the need to focus on developing the underpinning culture to ensure such an approach is successful.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

St Helens (2/2)

Like many local areas, St Helens found that demand for autism assessments and diagnoses was outstripping available capacity, leading to lengthening waiting-lists and frustrations for families and professionals. A steering group with representation from all key partners and interested parties was created, and a process was begun to redesign the whole system of support to respond to need, rather than focusing on autism assessments and diagnosis. Through this process, partners including parents, co-designed the new pathway, aiming to join-up the local offer for young people with neurodevelopmental needs. At the same time, the co-productive nature of this work meant that there was a sense of pride and ownership of the pathway of support itself – a sense of affinity and belonging to a shared endeavour, as opposed to professionals feeling that they belonged only to one small part of that process and were disconnected from the rest.

The new neurodevelopmental pathway was launched in 2018. Since then, it has:

- provided a better means for offering support and choice, rather than support contingent upon diagnosis (an important nuance); and
- been positively received by families and professionals – for providing a single point-of-access with investment in the co-ordination, a clinical lead overseeing the pathway process, a common language and set of practices across agencies, transparency about the process for accessing support, and putting the voice of the young person at the centre of this process.

A key reflection from leaders in St Helens has been about the importance of recognising the cultural barriers to working in more collaborative way, and the need to create a culture and a sense of ownership, belonging and pride in more collaborative ventures.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Warrington (1/2)

Warrington is a town in the north-west of England, located between Manchester and Liverpool. The local partnership is made up of the local authority, NHS Warrington CCG, Bridgewater Community Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, North West Boroughs Healthcare NHS Foundation Trust, Warrington Parents and Carers Forum, Warrington Speak Up and 87 state-funded schools. Warrington's support for young people with SEND was inspected in December 2018. Ofsted and CQC commented on the fact that, having previously '*focused on compliance and building the infrastructure*' to implement the SEND reforms, a new strategy '*seeks to transform the quality and effectiveness of services further*' with an emphasis on ensuring that '*the right services get to the right children at the right time*'.

Specifically, the inspection report notes that,

'Senior leaders from education, health and care work closely. They are increasingly commissioning services jointly for the benefit of individuals and groups of children and young people.'

Like many local areas, Warrington has seen a significant rise in demand since the introduction of the SEND reforms – for example, a two thirds increase in the number of young people with EHCPs. Leaders have recognised that the town needed a whole-system strategic response, rather than a purely compliance-based approach. There have been four elements to this approach.

1. **Creating a shared vision** – this has been focused on ensuring that the right support is provided at the right time, enabling young people to do their best in all settings, feel valued and in control of the support they receive, and enable them to pursue their long-term ambitions and lead happy, fulfilled lives.
2. **Creating a robust governance structure** – the focus here has been on creating a structure that enables leaders to 'prioritise the priorities', spending time identifying common challenges and putting in place shared actions to address them. There is an overarching SEND Strategic Improvement Board, with three sub-groups (including one looking at joint commissioning), and six identified work-strands (including early identification, assessment and support planning, SEN education, quality assurance of provision, the local offer, and preparation for adulthood).

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Warrington (2/2)

3. **Creating integrated structures and processes** – Warrington have created a jointly-funded Service Development Manager post. There is also a Warrington-wide joint commissioning strategy, with a specific focus on children with SEND, as well as an established multi-agency process for commissioning individualised packages of support for young people requiring input from across the partnership.

4. **Focusing on “pathways” of joined-up support for families** – there has been a strong focus on developing a joined-up pathway of emotional well-being and behaviour support, including work through the Future in Mind initiative and implementing the THRIVE model. This is commented on in the local area inspection report: ‘Children and young people have benefited from a consistent approach to the promotion of their emotional health and well-being. Jointly commissioned initiatives, such as the ‘Future in Mind’ project, have contributed to the strength of the local area’s work in this area.’ The local area has also started to develop a new neurodevelopmental pathway, drawing on the learning from St Helens’ work in this area.

Leaders in Warrington shared three key reflections on the work to develop a whole-system, partnership-based approach to support children and young people with SEND:

- focusing on establishing a collaborative culture is just as important as having the right strategy – there needs to be buy-in from senior leaders and this approach needs to be demonstrated through strategic and operational decision-making processes;
- ensuring that the system is geared to listening to and acting upon families’ experiences; and
- having regular opportunities to share information, identify gaps, agree common approaches, and reflect on progress and adapt as necessary.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Portsmouth (1/2)

Portsmouth is a city on the south coast. The local area in Portsmouth is made up one a unitary LA, a coterminous CCG, 103 nurseries and pre-schools, 48 primary schools, 10 secondary schools, one university technical college, four special schools and two colleges. The local area was inspected by Ofsted and CQC in July 2019. The inspection report commented positively on the leadership and shared vision for improving support for young people with SEND across the city:

'Leaders and professionals across education, health and care share the same ambitious vision for children and young people with SEND. ... One leader summed this up by saying: "In Portsmouth, we work together to make things happen." As a result, the outcomes for children and young people with SEND are improving.'

Partnership working in the city is well-established, and there is a strong history of services working together collaboratively. For example, the Portsmouth Education Partnership enables collaborative working across maintained schools, academies and the LA. As part of their work in implementing the SEND reforms, leaders in Portsmouth have created a set of core structures and processes that build on this history of partnership working and translate a vision of collaborative practice into reality. There are five key elements to this approach.

1. **A clear structure of governance and shared responsibility.** The city's approach to supporting young people with SEND is overseen by a SEND Board. Its membership includes senior leaders from all key agencies and partners in the local SEND system, including the Lead Member for Education, the Director of Adults' Services, and the Director of Children's Services. The latter is a joint role with responsibility for commissioning children's services on behalf of the CCG and the LA. The Board is co-chaired by the manager of the parent carer forum. The Board works effectively due to strong relationships whereby services hold each other to account and apply a solution-focused approach across the partnership. The Board's oversight of the system is complemented by the work of eight co-productive working groups, reporting to the Board, which focus on specific system-level priorities. These priorities include strengthening integration of services, aligned / joint commissioning, and inclusion through the co-production of guidance on Ordinarily Available Provision and a Portsmouth Inclusive Education Quality Mark.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Portsmouth (2/2)

2. **Joint strategic leadership** – in Portsmouth, the Director of Children's Services has direct responsibility for all services that relate to children and young people, including education, social care and health services. The LA and CCG fund a joint Assistant Director post and a joint project manager, to ensure that there is capacity at all levels to drive forward a joined-up, holistic approach to supporting all young people, including those with SEND.

3. **Joint decision-making processes** – Portsmouth have developed strong panel arrangements for deciding on individual commissioning for packages of support for young people. Budgets have been aligned that ensure that decisions can be taken collectively by services based on what is best for a young person. All jointly funded placements are agreed at this multi-agency panel. Decisions regarding EHCPs are moderated by an Inclusion Support Panel. The Inclusion Support Panel includes trained parent / carer representatives alongside SENCOs, headteachers and professionals from education, health and social care. This has been in place since the Lamb Enquiry in 2009, and is now well embedded and facilitates trust in the process. Parents / carers can also observe their own case being discussed.

4. **Developing integrated services** – Portsmouth have developed an integrated service approach in a number of areas including enhanced health visiting, adult learning difficulty services, and therapy services. City leaders are currently developing a needs-led neurodevelopmental pathway, and an integrated approach to social, emotional and mental health support via an SEMH partnership that is made up of CAMHS, Educational Psychologists, school outreach and safeguarding professionals.

5. **Underpinned by participation and co-production** – all of this work is underpinned by strong co-productive working with partners, parents/carers and young people, ensuring that they are engaged in and able to shape support and services across Portsmouth.

The key reflection from Portsmouth's partnership working journey has been about the importance of creating a shared vision, an expectation and a belief in doing things collaboratively as the best way of improving support, and of creating effective structures and processes that ensure this is delivered in day-to-day practice.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Northumberland (1/2)

Northumberland is a large rural area in the north-east. Partners in the local area include the local authority, a coterminous CCG, and over 160 schools. The local area was inspected by Ofsted and CQC in October 2018. The inspection report commented that,

'Local area leaders are not jointly planning, commissioning and providing education, health and care services in a way which is improving children and young people's outcomes.'

Following this, local leaders recognised the need to rethink how they used data to answer the question,

'Are our strategies, plans and commissioning arrangements delivering outcomes for children and young people with SEND that enable positive and successful transition into adulthood?'

Leaders reflected that data collected did not necessarily correspond to the things that young people and their families said mattered most to them. Leaders identified that much of the data collected was related to activity and compliance information from social care and educational attainment at both a local and national level. Similarly, they found data held by health services was activity-driven and often not specific to the cohort of young people with SEND and that most of the data collected did not relate to outcomes.

They started a process whereby, working with independent facilitators, they brought together a wide range of professionals from education, health and social care including teachers, therapists, social workers, early years, commissioners, parents/carers and young people. The aim was to design a simple framework or dashboard that reflected the outcomes that young people and their families said mattered most to them. Partners started by generating potential critical indicators for each of the four preparation for adulthood areas. Over 100 were identified, and these were then refined down to thirteen accessible, understandable and easy-to-communicate indicators. Colleagues then used this to identify their data development agenda by reviewing what data they already had, what was needed, and what actions should be taken to capture the data that would enable the local area to come to evidence-informed judgements about the effectiveness of their work across the local partnership to improve support for young people with SEND and their families.

Annex:

Four vignettes illustrating local areas' EHC partnership journeys

Northumberland (2/2)

Colleagues from Northumberland identified three main reflections from this process.

1. **The importance of being clear about what matters, what measures of impact will tell you if you are being effective in delivering this, and building a plan to capture data that will help you to measure this.** Colleagues in Northumberland found the process of developing a local area outcomes framework valuable in that it provided a clear framework for capturing the right data that would help them answer the question about the impact of the activities of their partnership.
2. **The importance of co-production** – it was vital to engage all partners in the process at the outset to enable ownership of the outcomes framework that the local area as a whole was committed to achieving.
3. **Make use of under-utilised processes for capturing information.** For example, Northumberland colleagues identified that the EHCP annual review as an under-utilised process where valuable feedback could be gathered. The annual review process and paperwork is now undergoing review to enable the collection of data for the thirteen critical indicators.