UK Government

To: Helen Charlesworth-May, Executive Director of Adults, Health and Integration, Cheshire East Council
Dawn Godfrey, Executive Director of Children's Services at Cheshire East Council
Dr Liz Bishop, Interim Chief Executive, NHS Cheshire and Merseyside Integrated Care Board

cc. Ashley Hughes, Executive Director of Resources and S151 Officer at Cheshire East Council

2 October 2026

Dear Helen, Dawn and Liz,

Re: Local SEND Reform Plan Assessment Outcome

Every child and young person deserves the opportunity to fulfil their potential, whatever their needs or circumstances. Delivering that ambition depends on strong local leadership and effective partnership working across education, health and care. As local leaders, your role in setting that direction, strengthening those partnerships and securing better outcomes for children and young people with SEND is critical. Thank you to you and your teams for all the work you are doing in this important area.

This government's programme of SEND reform presents an important opportunity to improve support for children, young people and families, and to build a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable system. It was against this backdrop that, in March 2026, this government commissioned your local area partnership to develop and submit a Local SEND Reform Plan, underpinned by a Local Partnership Maturity Assessment.

Thank you for the commitment and effort that you and your partners have demonstrated in developing your Local SEND Reform Plan. We are pleased to confirm that your plan has been approved.

This approval reflects the government's view that your plan has met the required threshold and provides a sound foundation from which your local area can move into delivery. It also recognises the commitment that your partnership has shown to reform, the progress made in strengthening local leadership and relationships, and developing a shared plan for improvement.

While your local area partnership has demonstrated commitment and some momentum in working collectively across education, health and care, the government's wider assessment is that your partnership is still developing and has not yet demonstrated consistently the maturity, grip and assurance that will be needed to deliver reform successfully. Further action is needed to strengthen capability, governance, partnership working and delivery disciplines so that the plan translates into sustained improvements for children, young people and families.

Further feedback on your plan is attached at Annex A. You should consider this feedback carefully and address the areas identified through your delivery arrangements. We expect this to be reflected in your local governance, implementation planning and reporting to the government. If our officials can help you to do this in any way, please do get in touch. We stand ready to work together to support you.

As you move into delivery, it will be important to build on the progress made and strengthen the maturity of your partnership. Successful delivery will require clear collective ownership, effective oversight and a sustained focus on measurable outcomes. We expect the partnership to move purposefully from planning into implementation, with clear senior accountability, robust and proportionate performance monitoring, and early evidence that delivery is leading to improved experiences and outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

Government officials, health regional SEND leads, and your assigned SEND and Financial Advisers will continue to engage with your partnership as you implement your plan and maintain a close focus on your progress. Quarterly review meetings will provide an opportunity to consider progress against the commitments in your plan, assess emerging risks and challenges, and identify or agree any further support, challenge or improvement activity that may be required. Where appropriate, these review meetings will be consolidated with existing improvement engagement. Further details on available support and monitoring arrangements are set out in Annex B.

Your local area partnership is expected to submit quarterly data returns as set out in the guidance you received in August 2026, to enable the government to understand the emerging impact of implementation. The Department for Education will, in turn, use your submitted data to provide quarterly data reports with visualised analysis and benchmarking to support your local delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

As your local area's Local SEND Reform Plan has been approved, you are now eligible to receive a High Needs Stability Grant covering 90% of your DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025-26. The indicative High Needs Stability Grant allocation for Cheshire East Council is £140,348,732. Your allocation will be confirmed in writing in due course, with payments expected on 30 November 2026. Your allocation remains subject to change as a result of final audited outturn. If any overpayment is made under this grant or any amount is paid in error, the Secretary of State may reduce, suspend or withhold grant payments or require the repayment of the whole or any part of the grant monies paid, as may be determined by the Secretary of State and notified in writing to the recipient authority.

For deficits that arise in 2026–27 and 2027–28, local authorities can expect that we will continue to take an appropriate and proportionate approach, though it will not be unlimited. Future support will take into account LAs' successful delivery of their approved Local SEND reform plan, including appropriate use of investment funding to establish an Experts at Hand offer.

Once again, we would like to thank you and your partners for the commitment that has gone into developing your Local SEND Reform Plan. Approval is an important step and reflects the progress your partnership has made, but it is only the beginning of the next phase. It is important we see continued progress as you translate the commitments in your plan into delivery, supported by appropriate support, challenge and oversight where needed. The task now is to strengthen the maturity of your partnership arrangements and demonstrate that commitment is translating into sustained improvements for children and young people with SEND and their families.

We recognise that this will require continued collective effort across local government, health services, education providers and central government. We are committed to working with you to realise this ambition, providing the support, investment, challenge and national leadership needed alongside your local efforts. We are asking your local area to maintain a clear commitment, focus and leadership as delivery progresses. Together, we can build a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable SEND system that earns the confidence of

children and young people with SEND and their families, and enables every child to achieve and thrive.

Information on your outcome will be shared with MPs whose constituencies fall within your local area.

Yours sincerely,



Georgia Gould

Minister of State for School Standards
Department for Education



Alison McGovern

Minister of State for Social Care and Mental Health
Department for Health and Social Care

Annex A - Local SEND Reform Plan feedback for Cheshire East

1. Local SEND Reform plan

Q1 - Vision - What is the local area trying to achieve?
The vision sets out an ambitious commitment to a more inclusive, needs-led SEND system, centred on early intervention, partnership working and better outcomes for children and young people. Delivery would be strengthened by articulating clearer outcome measures and how success will be evidenced for children, families and mainstream settings.
Q2 – Where does the local area partnership expect to be in the next 3 years?
The plan describes a more inclusive and sustainable system with stronger mainstream provision, improved pathways and greater consistency of support. Further clarity on expected improvements in timeliness, parental confidence, inclusion and health access would strengthen the future-state narrative.
Q3 – What is your local strategy to deliver your 3-year vision?
The theory of change is coherent, well-structured and aligned to the wider reform programme. It provides a credible explanation of how Cheshire East intends to improve outcomes and create a more sustainable SEND system. However, some of the assumptions underpinning delivery remain dependent on future implementation and there is limited evidence that all enabling conditions are currently in place.
Q4 – Maturity Assessment Tool
The maturity assessment reflects a realistic understanding of local strengths and improvement priorities, including governance, inclusion and partnership working. Ongoing focus is required on system capacity, consistency of practice and the maturity of joint commissioning arrangements.
Q5 – What is your roadmap for the next 3 years?
The roadmap provides a coherent sequence of activity and demonstrates clear ambition for phased reform implementation. The roadmap could be strengthened further through clearer milestone tracking and outcome measures linked directly to delivery priorities.
Q6 – What will you deliver in the first year?

The activities proposed in Year 1 focus appropriately on building the foundations required for longer-term reform and the sequencing appears logical. The delivery plan also demonstrates awareness of current system weaknesses and addresses these through the Maturity Assessment Tool. However, whilst the breadth of activity is strong, the level of detail is not always consistent across all workstreams. Some areas contain clearer milestones and measures than others, and in places the plan is stronger on describing activity than demonstrating how impact will be measured.
Q7 – How will local area partnerships deliver the first-year plan?
Delivery arrangements demonstrate identifiable leadership, programme management and partnership engagement across the local area. Continued assurance is needed that sufficient workforce, analytical and transformation capacity is available to maintain pace of delivery.
Q8 – Other Funding (Capital)
The strategy aligns with the direction of SEND reform, to increasing local capacity, strengthening mainstream inclusion and reducing reliance on external placements. To further strengthen the response, more information on how future capacity requirements, place creation and demand assumptions are quantified across the full three-year period would evidence the scale of the impact from the capital programme.
Q9 - System partner and stakeholder engagement, and co-production
The plan demonstrates extensive engagement activity with parents, carers, education providers, health partners and wider stakeholders through the Shared Journeys programme.
Q10 – Risks and Mitigation
The plan identifies key risks relating to workforce pressures, inspection activity, reform capacity and delivery dependencies. Appropriate mitigations are identified, although ongoing monitoring and review will be important to ensure risks remain effectively managed.
Q11 - Dependencies

The partnership demonstrates a good understanding of dependencies across education, health, Families First reforms and wider government programmes.
Q12 - Monitoring and Evaluation - How will you know if you are succeeding?
The plan identifies monitoring tools, review arrangements and feedback processes and aligns with SEND reform principles. Whilst the monitoring arrangements are sufficiently developed, the maturity assessment tool identifies a need for ongoing development around data quality, performance reporting and creating a single version of the trust across the partnership. As a result, some aspects of the monitoring infrastructure are still being strengthened and the partnership recognises that further work is required to improve data consistency and reporting capabilities over time.
Q13 – Monitoring and Evaluation – Reporting to DfE
The required data template has been fully completed.
Q.14 - Governance
The governance framework demonstrates senior leadership engagement and clear accountability for reform delivery across the partnership.

2. Policy-specific feedback

Families First Partnership (FFP)
Alongside, the SEND reforms, you'll be very aware that delivery of the Families First Partnership (FFP) programme is a priority for the government. Similarly, FFP will also improve support for children, young people and families, and overtime build a more inclusive, responsive and sustainable system. The FFP programme guide sets out the expectations for this year with a focus on fully operational delivery across the three strands by 31 March 2027. The programme guide also highlights the link between FFP and SEND, where often the same children may be receiving services. It makes clear that the local Family Help offer should reflect the needs of disabled children and provides examples of how this can be achieved. You have a ring-fenced grant for spend on FFP and a delivery plan, agreed across your safeguarding partnership, that articulates your local approach. These plans were shared with the department in December 2025 and quarterly reporting on progress is a grant condition. It is vital that progress on FFP delivery is prioritised, alongside your SEND reform plan. The department will consider local authority

progress across both reform programmes and failure to spend the FFP funding appropriately or meet the March 27 deadline may impact future decisions on support.
Post-16
Post-16 settings/institutions are referenced generically as delivery partners, including with the Inclusion Framework and SENCO networks, but the plan could be enhanced with more evidence of direct engagement with colleges based and/or active in the area or how FE input has informed post-16 SEND priorities. Post-16 delivery is not developed to the same level of detail as school-age provision.
EY
As implementation progresses, local area partnerships should ensure that delivery of SEND reforms for children aged 0-5 remains aligned with local Best Start in Life plans, bringing together early years setting, Best Start Family Hubs, health and family services to support earlier identification of need and provision of appropriate support. This includes clear routes to access the Experts at Hand service. Early years providers and Best Start Family Hubs should be meaningfully engaged in local governance and delivery arrangements, with appropriate representation of the early years sector in strategic decision-making. Partnerships should maintain strategic oversight of early years SEND provision, including the sufficiency and quality of support available to children aged 0-5.

Annex B - Support, monitoring and next steps

Local area partnership: Cheshire East

This annex sets out how we will work with you to review progress, identify risks and provide support and challenge. You should read it alongside your outcome letter and the feedback in Annex A. Our shared priority is to ensure that your work leads to sustained improvements in the experiences and outcomes of children and young people with SEND and their families.

1. How your progress will be assessed

You will be regularly assessed through the Local Area SEND Performance and Delivery Framework. The framework brings together evidence about outcomes for children and young people with SEND, your partnership's readiness and capacity, and your capability to deliver your Local SEND Reform Plan.

Your assessment will draw on quantitative and qualitative evidence as well as professional judgement. It will consider the quality of local SEND provision and the progress you are making against your approved or revised plan. It will also consider the strength of your leadership, relationships, systems and corporate capacity.

Your overall performance and delivery assessment will inform the level of monitoring, engagement, support and, where necessary, intervention that applies to your partnership. The approach will remain proportionate to the evidence available and may change if your performance, risks or delivery confidence changes.

The Local Area SEND Performance and Delivery Framework will be published in due course, alongside each local area's overall performance and delivery RAG.

2. What you will need to do

- Maintain clear collective ownership and senior accountability across education, health and care local SEND partnership to deliver the commitments and milestones in your Local SEND Reform Plan, addressing the feedback in Annex A;
- Identify and escalate emerging risks promptly, with clear action to mitigate them;
- Submit quarterly data returns in line with the guidance issued in August 2026; and
- Use the quarterly data reports, visualised analysis and benchmarking provided by the Department for Education to support your local delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

3. Your monitoring, engagement and support arrangements

Your approved plan provides a sound foundation for delivery and recognises the progress your partnership has made. You will now need to build on this progress by strengthening the capability, governance, partnership working and delivery disciplines needed to secure sustained improvement.

You should address the feedback in Annex A through your delivery arrangements, with clear senior accountability and proportionate performance monitoring. Your quarterly reviews will consider progress against your commitments, the steps you are taking to strengthen partnership maturity and early evidence of improved experiences and outcomes for children, young people and families.

You will receive support from your DfE regional team and assigned SEND and Financial Advisers and will be expected to take part in quarterly review meetings to discuss progress against your plan, emerging risks and challenges, and any further support or improvement activity needed. Where appropriate, these meetings will be consolidated with existing improvement engagement.

You will be able to draw on the universal support available to local areas, including Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances, Council for Disabled Children webinars and e-learning, What Works in SEND research and Local Government Association universal leadership training. Your regional team will help you identify the support most relevant to your priorities.

Your regional team will schedule a meeting with you in October to discuss this letter, feedback on your plan and expectations for implementation monitoring. Your lead DfE contact, Gareth Llewellyn (Gareth.Llewellyn@education.gov.uk) will confirm the arrangements with you, including adviser and relevant health participation.

4. What happens next

When	Who	What you can expect
October 2026	Your Department for Education regional team	You will receive confirmation of your first feedback and planning meeting and the officials and advisers who will support your partnership.
Quarterly - from October 2026	Your partnership	You will submit the required data return in line with the August 2026 guidance.
Quarterly – from January 2027	Your partnership and government officials	You will review delivery against your plan, evidence progress, consider risks and agree any further support, challenge or action.
Quarterly - from January 2027	Department for Education	You will receive a data report with visualised analysis and benchmarking to support local delivery, monitoring and evaluation.

Local contact: Gareth Llewellyn, SEND Improvement and Intervention Case Lead, Department for Education (Gareth.Llewellyn@education.gov.uk)