



3 February 2026

SEND Local Area Partnership Post Inspection Oversight and Intervention

Area of Priority Action Deep Dive

Worcestershire Local Area Partnership

Background

The process for conducting an Area of Priority Action (APA) Deep Dive is set out within the *SEND Improvement and Intervention Internal Process Manual v1.6 November 2025*.

'The purpose of the APA Deep Dive report-writing process is to gather and interrogate detailed evidence on specific APAs with local area SEND officials at the operational, working level, for those APAs which are deemed at a Stocktake meeting to warrant this detailed treatment'

Area of Priority Action

The following APA was jointly agreed between the Local Area Partnership (LAP) and DfE/NHSE at the Worcestershire SEND Stocktake meeting 25 September 2025:

'The local area partnership should urgently develop genuine co production with children and young people with SEND at a strategic level. Children and young people should feel they have fully participated in the process of developing services, improvement strategies and plans that meet their needs'

Methodology

The APA Deep Dive was led by Pat Tate (DfE Commissioned SEND Adviser) and Debbie Ward (NHSE SEND Senior Manager/NHSE Adviser) and was undertaken as follows:

1. A review of the evidence submitted by Worcestershire LAP on 16 December 2025.

This included:

- Strategic co-production frameworks.
- Examples of recent co-produced work.
- Feedback from children and young people (CYP).
- Operational practice.
- Future plans.

2. Following key lines of enquiry, Advisers facilitated onsite system and stakeholder focus groups in Worcestershire on 7 January 2026.

This included discussions with and feedback from:

- Six young people from Voices United, the newly established CYP group.
- The system's two Co-production Officers.
- Members of the SEND and AP Partnership Committee plus other key stakeholders.

APA Deep Dive Findings

Strengths

Overall, the Worcestershire LAP has moved from episodic engagement to a visibly more systematic approach to strategic co-production.

The partnership now has:

- Formal representation of young people at the SEND Executive Board.
- A recognised forum for CYP, titled Voices United, has been established with a coproduced identity and group agreement. The group has formulated a development plan for 2026, which includes widening representation/engagement, introducing training programmes, seeking increased involvement in the planning, and commissioning new services.
- Voices United appreciated the opportunity to listen, discuss and be heard by project leaders from the local authority and health, e.g. being involved in discussions to make an Accident and Emergency Department more neurodivergent friendly.
- Individual membership of Voices United has brought tangible benefits for the CYP involved. Young people cited that they had made new friends/connections and had an increased sense of purpose. There was clear evidence of mutual respect within the group and that members were motivated to drive success both within the group and in their work with external stakeholders.
- There are also examples of developing co-production with the Parent/Carer Forum and a desire to co-design and jointly deliver training.
- Governance and assurance scaffolding is in place within the SEND Self Evaluation Framework, quality descriptors and soon to be piloted Impact Tool.
- There is now a partnership vision, co-production commitment and shared outcomes have been developed.
- Co-production is well established within Adult Social Care Services, and the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) is working with Children's Services to ensure this is replicated across the different children's teams.
- Educational Psychology and Specialist Teaching Services have established co-production as a key strand of their continuing professional and service development.
- Operational programmes translate voice into service change, which includes the development of the Ordinary Available Inclusive guidance, Partnerships for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools programme, Inclusion Services co-production service development group, co-production of adult assessments, Easy Read/Widgets templates and MET Public Health grant case.
- A pipeline of evidence of impact is being developed through the National Development Team for Inclusion (NDTi) work, Young Evaluators and University of Worcester research.

Discussion

- CYP reported that progress is visible but uneven, highlighting inconsistent feedback loops, variable accessibility to support and to information. Meaningful on the ground change is only just beginning to emerge.

- CYP valued engagement from senior leaders and especially appreciated being able to contribute “*before decisions are made.*”
- The positive impact of the Co-production Officers is clear, with progress accelerating as a result, however, co-production is not yet embedded across the whole strategic partnership.
- Senior leadership commitment is evident, but implementation has not yet extended to integrating co-production expectations into service performance processes and frameworks.
- CYP expressed concerns about praise that sometimes feels tokenistic and emphasised the importance of follow-through and visible action.
- The membership of Voices United is limited to neurodivergent CYP.
- CYP reiterated the need for lawful, timely processes (e.g. Education, Health and Care Plans EHCPs) and for practical improvements that can be felt immediately.
- Co-production with older young people, who feel they have been let down by the system, is lacking. This is a missed opportunity for their experiences to be captured and potentially shape and improve pathways that support preparing for adulthood and future outcomes for this group.
- Co-production is not systematically embedded into commissioning and service delivery, with clear KPIs and regular impact reporting. Service practice is variable; some demonstrate strong practice, but others require structured support to move beyond basic consultation
- Voices United and the Parent Carer Forum will be involved in the review and co-design of the Short Breaks offer with four sessions already scheduled.
- Families and CYP do not feel they have really clear evidence of system changes including regular “you said, we did” updates, case studies and improvements to the Local Offer dashboards. These would demonstrate tangible progress.
- At council level young people recognised financial pressures but emphasised the need to be seen more than a number or a statistic, reminding leaders: “*My future is priceless.*”
- Currently there is no confirmed and projected budgets for remuneration, mentoring and recognition for members of CYP forums, which would support long term sustainability.

Areas for Consideration

The following areas have been identified for consideration as part of future development and improvement within this APA.

1. Strengthening Representation and Inclusivity

- Broaden, increase and balance membership of CYP forums (such as Voices United) to include those with complex needs, physical disabilities and sensory impairments, and those from under-represented groups, as current representation is uneven across services.
- Develop a school engagement strategy to ensure all schools are involved in co-production and that best practice is shared well across the entire educational landscape.
- Develop school engagement networks (including alternative provision and specialist settings) to widen reach and enable two-way communication.

2. Embed Authentic Co-Production in Governance

- Maintain CYP involvement at strategic boards (e.g., SEND and Alternative Provision Executive Board) with mentoring and accessible documentation, available to support this.
- Strategic leaders within each partner organisation to take responsibility for embedding co-production within their services and drive measurable change.
- The partnership now needs to take collective ownership and responsibility for driving the cultural change required to embed co-production across all managers and frontline practitioners by:
 - setting clear expectations
 - monitoring delivery
 - holding leaders to account for progress
 - ensuring co-production is not seen as an isolated function but a core part of service improvement and performance management.

This could include:

- Making co-production business as usual by embedding it in staff induction and performance management frameworks.
- Integrating co-production objectives into performance management for Directors and Heads of Service.
- Mandating commissioning compliance, where programme or service changes require children/young people involvement and impact analysis.
- Formalising co-production within commissioning cycles by routinely including CYP in co-design, bid assessments and ongoing monitoring.

3. Improve Feedback Loops and Visibility

- Introduce a systematic “You said, we did” reporting cycle with quarterly updates.
- Use impact dashboards, videos, and case studies on the Local Offer to demonstrate how CYP’s input influences decisions.
- Ensure accessible communication standards (Easy Read, glossaries, multi-format materials) are consistently applied across all services.
- Long-term sustainability requires confirmed and protected budgets for CYP remuneration, mentoring, and recognition, ensuring engagement remains meaningful and trust continues to be strengthened.

4. Build Capacity and Confidence

- Roll out the tiered co-production training programme (introductory to advanced) across education, health and care, co-delivered with CYP
- Include neuro-affirming language and practical tools to help professionals overcome confidence barriers.
- Consider expanding the Young Evaluators programmes and structured roles for children/young people to assess impact.
- Develop an education strategy to promote co-production within settings and establish networks of support.

5. Resource and Sustain Engagement

- Implement the remuneration and recognition policy for CYP’s contributions to ensure long-term sustainability.
- Secure budget for mentoring and accessibility supports (e.g., transport, assistive technology).
- Implement plans for funded roles for CYP that support active involvement in strategic and operational programmes of work. In addition, this could be a

considered for Parent Carer Forum involvement and considered a partnership responsibility.

- Develop digital systems for participation tracking and evaluation.

6. Monitor and Assure Progress

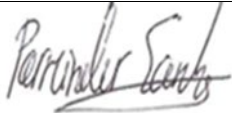
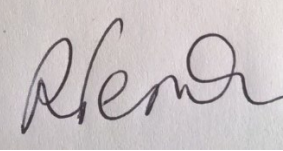
- Following the initial pilot and evaluation apply the Impact Tool and 0-3 quality descriptors consistently across services to track assurance and improvement.
- Include participation metrics in Board reporting and Self-Evaluation Framework assurance.
- Set clear KPIs for co-production in commissioning and service delivery.

7. Share Impact and Celebrate Contributions

- Publicly recognise CYP's contributions through events, Local Offer stories and social media campaigns.
- Define success indicators for June 2026 (e.g., co-production embedded in governance, visible impact stories, strong partnership culture).

Next Steps

- The APA Deep Dive will be presented at the Worcestershire SEND Executive Board Meeting, on 11 February 2026, by DfE and NHSE SEND Advisers.
- Following presentation of the APA Deep Dive and the follow-on discussion with the LAP, DfE and NHSE will consider if any additional support or intervention is required to support improvement in this APA.
- The LAP should review the APA Deep Dive - its findings, discussion and the areas for consideration and assess where these can be used within the APA.
- DfE/NHSE request that the LAP provides a written update based around the APA Deep Dive within three months of the report being presented. This should include any improvements or developments which have been directly influenced by the report.

	
<p>Parminder Singh Garcha Deputy Director, West Midlands Regional Group</p>	<p>Robert Ferris Regional Programme Director Learning Disabilities, Autism and SEND, NHS England, Midlands</p>