

Report to CABINET

Speech, Language and Communication Needs Business Case

Portfolio Holder: Cllr M Ali (Cabinet Member for Education and Skills)

Officer Contact: Paul Tinsley (Director of Education, Skills & Early Years)

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Reason for Decision

The purpose of this report is to set out proposals and seek a mandate for creating a speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN) service, integrated in the SEND & Inclusion Service.

This is part of the transformation plans for speech and language following the OFSTED Inspection in 2023; and is consistent with the Greater Manchester Balanced System work which has indicated a gap in Oldham in universal and targeted services around speech, language and communication.

This would allow greater join up of specialist teachers and specialist Speech & Language Therapy (S<) support for children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs (SLCN). The new provision would be school-facing and would deliver support directly in schools/settings.

Executive Summary

There are a higher-than-average number of children and young people in Oldham who have an education, health, and care plan (EHCP) compared to national (Oldham: 6.7% and national: 5.3%).

The most common type of need for children and young people with an EHCP is autism, although SLCN remains a significant area of need.

An OFSTED inspection in 2023 highlighted SaLT services as an area of concern in terms of waiting lists for the core team. A monitoring visit in 2025 recognised improvements and commended the contribution of ELSEC (Early Language for Every Child). This is a DfE and NHSE grant funded project focused on delivering intensive universal and targeted support into schools.

The Greater Manchester Balanced System work has identified gaps for Oldham in the Universal and Targeted S< provision.

This paper proposes the creation of a new school facing S&L team sat alongside the SEND & Inclusion services and working closely with the core S&L team which can provide universal and targeted services to children and young people in Oldham, providing a graduated response to need and ensuring that needs are understood and met at the right time.

The proposed team is built upon evidenced good practice / what we know works well in our existing Better Communication Team and the Early Language for Every Child (ELSEC) team.

Recommendations

Creation of a S< universal & targeted support team, through a joint funding agreement with the integrated care partnership (ICP). The service will sit within the existing SEND & Inclusion Service team, alongside other specialist services.

Cabinet

[Date]

1. Background

SLCN in Oldham

There are a higher-than-average number of children and young people in Oldham who have an education, health, and care plan (EHCP) compared to national (Oldham: 6.7% and national: 5.3%).

The most common type of need for children and young people with an EHCP is autism, although SLCN remains a significant area of need, which is shown through:

- The most common primary need for children and young people at the SEN support level is SLCN.
- Most transitions from early years (EY) to reception (YR) in mainstream schools are for those with a primary need of SLCN and autism.
- Most children at primary transition who move to special schools have primary needs in SLCN and autism.

Local area considerations

- Balanced System work identified gaps within primary aged universal and targeted provisions.
- SENCO feedback highlighted strengths accessing EY training and opportunities through Better Communication Team but gaps beyond Year Reception/KS1.
- SENCO feedback highlighted varied levels of confidence around delivery of SLC targeted interventions.
- EY Better Communication Team is well established with successful outcomes and structure.
- This has been replicated and extended into primary settings (10 settings to date) through the Early Language for all Children (ELSEC) project for which evaluation to date has been very positive.

What works

- Multitude of jointly led projects (P/C Forum and LA) to support children and families in Oldham: Family Hubs, Promoting Inclusion for Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS), Autism in Schools (AIS - now Neurodiversity in schools), ELSEC, Delivering Better Value (DBV).
- Projects based around teams integrating therapists e.g., Better Communication Team, PINS, AIS, ELSEC, DBV.
- Cross service working and increased coordination within the LA Specialist services – Educational Psychology Service (EP), Advisory Teaching Service (QUEST), Mental Health in Education Team, Sensory and Physical Support Services (SAPSS)
- Increased partnership working across LA, health, and POINT/PCF

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- Advisory Teaching Service model and the positive relationship this service has with schools.
 - Pupil Intervention Project model: a successful and highly sought after model of 'on the ground' coaching and modelling of approaches and interventions for staff supporting autistic children and young people and those with social communication needs. This model has recently been supported by positive evaluation of DBV and ELSEC work.

What needs to be improved?

Address identified gaps within universal and targeted provisions for Speech, Language, and Communication (SLC), with a particular focus on children aged 5–11.

- Universal and SEN Support/ targeted provision needs to be strengthened therefore reducing inappropriate referrals into Specialist Speech and Language Therapy services.
- Greater delivery of services in situ.
- Further join up between services, e.g., Health services and school-based services, needs to be developed.
- Greater access to a variety of quality assured training and support from varied skilled professionals.

2. What the model would look like

Drawing on learning from the ELSEC, Pupil Intervention Project and the Advisory Teaching service, the proposed model will incorporate elements such as:

- District-based primary or secondary mainstream school caseload management by speech and language therapists and an advisory teacher.
- School 'on-site' therapy assistants, supervised by speech and language therapists and advisory teachers, providing coaching and modelling of high-quality universal strategies and targeted interventions.
- Embedding of the Total Communication Policy across the local area via training, communication friendly audits, embedding HQT SLC approaches.
- Strategic, including SENCo support, and whole school speech, language, and communication support.
- Termly Communication Clinics to support ongoing needs (targeted /SEN Support level) with signposting if further progression within the SLC system is required.
- Universal training packages for workforce development including, as required, ongoing WELLCOMM training (Learning from the ELSEC model).
- Quality-assured toolkits for speech, language, and communication needs, all universally available via SENCO Space.
- Collaboration with Oldham's Parent/Carer Forum and specialist Speech and Language Therapy Team to deliver workshops on speech, language, and communication.
- Collaboration with Oldham's specialist speech and language therapy team to ensure a whole system approach.
- An SLCN Navigator to support access across the whole system.
- These speech and language therapists and advisory teachers will be available to provide advice and contribute to EHC needs assessments, addressing a key challenge identified within the local area.

To attract and recruit speech and language therapists and assistants into the Local Authority, these positions would be offered as term-time only contracts, which would cover term-time to support school needs.

By combining this along with the use of existing team resources, i.e., current advisory teachers the proposed resource could be efficiently deployed alongside existing services. Salaries would remain in-line with NHS/Agenda for Change banding and current advisory teacher and NJC grades.

3. Intended impact

- A reduction in inappropriate specialist speech and language therapy referrals by ensuring that only children and young people who require specialist intervention are referred to this service.
- A more skilled, school-based workforce, better equipped to address the needs of children with speech, language, and communication difficulties at the SEN support level. As a result, EHCPs with a primary need of SLCN will be issued only for those requiring specialist intervention.
- Enhanced collaboration with the Oldham Parent/Carer Forum (OPCF), leading to better-informed and more supported parents/carers regarding speech, language, and communication needs.
- Greater inclusion in schools via the implementation of targeted speech and language interventions within school settings that can be seamlessly integrated into the classroom and broader school environment, reducing the need to remove children from their classrooms.
- A sustainable system that prevents a return to the previous model of high, and sometimes inappropriate, Speech and Language Therapy referrals, which led to longer wait times.

4. Options/Alternatives

Option 1: Expand the Oldham SEND & Inclusion Service, Specialist Services Team, by increasing the capacity for support related to SLCN through a settings-based delivery model. This would be achieved through the employment of speech and language therapists, advisory teachers, and therapy assistants (possibly, and in part, through conversion of current ELSEC and Better Communication Team staff), with increased capacity to create a new model. The proposed model would consist of:

- 1x S< Lead
- 1 x 0.7 Advisory / Specialist Teacher for SLCN
- 3x S<s
- 4x S< Assistants
- 1x S< Navigator

Specialists in this area will enhance and work with existing advisory services and form a school-facing speech, language, and communication team, supporting both primary and secondary mainstream settings. The team will focus on providing universal and targeted interventions to address the needs of children and young people with speech, language, and communication needs and an emphasis would be on prevention. Option one would allow the potential to reduce capacity with the current provider.

Option 2: Continue to commission all S< services for children and young people under the current arrangements with the current provider. Current ELSEC and Better Communication funding is time limited so these teams would be vulnerable under this option.

Preferred Option: Option 1, This would allow for a school/setting facing delivery model for SLCN in Oldham, which would benefit children, young people, parents/carers, and schools/settings. This model would also avoid lengthy waiting lists developing. The model would allow for a planned transition from time limited projects, i.e., ELSEC and Better Communication Team, which would evolve into a robust offer so that learning through these projects isn't lost and system pilots that are most effective will be able to continue into sustainable practice

5. Consultation: Full consultation and partnership working with parent/carers, through POINT, and the core S< team would be required

6. Financial Implications

6.1 This report seeks to approve **Option 1** - Expand the Oldham SEND & Inclusion Service, Specialist Services Team, by increasing the capacity for support related to SLCN through a settings-based delivery model. The total annual costs associated with this will be in the region of **£506,034** including oncosts, creating an additional **9.70** FTE's, the table below details the posts and associated costs:

Post	Grade	FTE	Annual cost	Annual cost	Total
			TTO (0.88 FTE)	Full time	
S< Lead	G10 (NJC)	1.00		80,380	80,380
S<	Band 7 / Grade 9 (NJC)	3.00	61,660		184,980
S< Assistant	Grade 4 (NJC)	4.00	36,940		147,760
Specialist Teacher	UPS3 + TLR	0.70		39,380	55,132
S< Navigator	Grade 4 (NJC)	1.00	36,942		36,942
Total		9.70			506,034

6.2 This will be funded from a combination of funding from both the LA and ICP shown in the table below:

Funding source	Amount
ICP contribution	400,000
LA contribution	106,034
Total	506,034

6.3 The ICP recurrent contribution of £400k has been approved through both the Integrated Care Board Locality and STAR processes and the current recipient has been formally notified of the contract reduction. As agreed, the money will be utilised to fund the Local Authority model and staffing through a transfer of funds.

6.4 The Council contribution comes from an existing budget, this will be pooled from ceasing the existing annual contract with Northern Care Alliance (NCA) for additional S< Capacity for Primary and Secondary mainstream schools. This is budgeted at £106,536 for FY25/26.

Vicki Hayes – Senior Accountant

7. Legal Implications:

The report seeks to respond to the OFSTED Report of 2023 by addressing the gap identified in Oldham in relation to universal and targeted services around speech, language and communication. This proposal would benefit those residents who use the service and of course address the recommendation within the OFSTED report.

The report outlines that there are fixed term staff who are currently employed, engaging in similar activities within the Council and some of these staff may be dismissed as a result of this process. The service will need to be clear the length of time those staff have been employed with the Council, if long term (over 2 years) then the staff may have gained various protections from dismissal and any breach of these protections could lead to unfair dismissal claims against the Council. It is important that the service liaise with Legal Services and HR colleagues to make sure all relevant legislation and employment policies are complied with.

(Alex Bougatef – Director of Legal Services)

8. HR Implications

As the report has identified Fixed Term Staff currently employed, the service need to consider redeployment opportunities for these staff. Early engagement with the staff is essential.

The service will need to engage with a Senior HR Advisor to support with consultation and implementation.

For recruitment, the service will be required to follow the Councils Recruitment and Selection policy and procedure to recruit into new roles including reviewing the job description and ensuring the new roles have been evaluated.

(Jodie Rowson – Interim Senior HR Advisor)

9. **Equality Impact, including implications for Children and Young People:** to be attached

10. **Key Decision Reference:** (EDS-07-25)

11. **Background Papers:** none

12. **Appendices:** Recruitment strategy

Appendix A – Recruitment Strategy

Speech and Language Therapists (including Lead)	In scope for TUPE from NCA – follow TUPE process
SaLT Assistants	Direct recruitment to council as per current posts
Advisory Teacher	Direct recruitment to council as per current posts
SLCN Navigator	Direct recruitment to POINT