

Targeted Support Programme

Year 1 Targeted Support Programme Evaluation Report & Proposal for Year 2

1. Year 1 Narrative: Learning and Impact (2025–26)

Context

The first year of the Targeted Support Programme was delivered in a context of a new national government, local government reorganisation, financial pressures on LAs and ICBs, ICB and NHS England reforms, major education and SEND reforms, a significant reform to children's social care, sustained national pressure across SEND and children's social care systems. Rising demand, workforce capacity challenges, financial constraints, and increasing scrutiny shaped both the need for and the delivery of targeted, sector-led support.

The programme was established from September 2025, with some preparatory work being carried out in advance of confirmation of DfE grant. This included developing a [prospectus](#), engaging with LA leaders to understand what they would value and the appetite for both receiving targeted support and enabling staff to take part in other LAs support.

The programme responded to locally identified priorities across SEND and children's social care. Work in the first year has covered system flows, partnership working, multi-agency arrangements, assurance, decision-making, and lived experience, with an emphasis on sustainable system improvement rather than reactive measures.

The programme focused on how SESLIP could enable and support LAs in their work to improve outcomes for children, to be clear about the impact for children and their families and how to communicate this.

The programme was designed to:

- Work collaboratively with LAs to identify their improvement priority, the activity required and the products from support
- Work with LAs that wanted the support and engaged with it, working at their pace including determining when the support should take place
- Use expertise from within the region to deliver the support, including representatives from other LAs, as well as SESLIP associates with proven track record in the improvement area
- Fit in with local area priorities, existing plans and support, including DfE Adviser activity
- Enable LAs to take work forward themselves once the support had concluded

What Year 1 Achieved

The programme in effect began in September 2025, with work developing with individual LAs from October, so six months from the time of this report.

During 2025–26, the programme established a strong and credible presence across a number of local areas, including Brighton & Hove, Buckinghamshire, East Sussex, Hampshire, Kent, Medway, Milton Keynes, Oxford, Portsmouth, Reading, Southampton, Surrey, West Sussex and Wokingham.

The Targeted Support Programme has delivered, and will continue to deliver, support across a broad range of priority areas into 2026/7, including: -

Safe Uncertainty Peer Case Review Workshop (January 2026) - Sub-region (**Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Portsmouth, Southampton and West Sussex**) workshop exploring management of cases close to the Child Protection threshold using safe uncertainty.

Brighton & Hove – two live Targeted Support projects are in development - Project 1: Leadership Coaching & Mentoring Programme. Project 2: Alternative Provision (AP), EOTAS & Section 19 Diagnostic. Brighton & Hove LA is also interested in support on joint commissioning – as Hampshire has done (see below)

Buckinghamshire – SEND Assessment Throughput Review. Independent review of SEND assessment throughput and decision-making panels, supported by regional subject matter experts.

Hampshire – Joint Commissioning for SEND, reviewing current joint commissioning activity including contracts, partnership development of language and understanding, principles, governance and key next steps

Kent – Co-delivery of SEND engagement workshops with schools and parent carers focusing on understanding of SEND Support.

Medway – building on area's understanding of co-production, communication and the understanding of Ordinarily Available Provision

Milton Keynes – Diagnostic evaluation of Ordinarily Available Provision and SEND Support.

Oxfordshire – Annual Review quality and lived experience mapping.

Reading – Annual Review process mapping for internal SEND team, data and business support. Second workshop to map process including multi-agency partners.

Reading – Regional collaboration with Kent County Council to improve engagement with the Black and Global Majority (BGM) workforce. West Sussex is also supporting Reading to improve their workforce engagement via sharing learning on 'social graces'.

Surrey – Hearing the Voice of Families - regional intelligence shared to support improved engagement with the Parent Carer Forum.

Diagnostic review of SEND complaints and recommendations on clearer communication and best practice. Lean Process Mapping of Stage 1 and 2 Complaints Procedure, and council and partner's response.

Wokingham – Mapping Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) to strengthen early intervention.

Support was deliberately **responsive, diagnostic and enabling**, recognising that improvement cannot be delivered through a single, directive model. Rather than applying a one-size-fits-all approach, the programme worked alongside local authorities to understand their specific context, priorities and pressures, tailoring support accordingly.

This approach enabled local partnerships to:

- Gain clearer insight into how their processes operate in practice, and how these processes impact children and families
- Strengthen confidence and consistency in decision-making and the application of thresholds
- Improve clarity around roles, responsibilities, processes and the evidence used to inform decisions
- Create the conditions for earlier, more proportionate intervention

The deployment of regional Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) proved particularly effective in supporting **locally owned improvement**, helping systems to build capability and develop solutions that reflected their own context, rather than relying on externally imposed models. Brighton and Hove, East Sussex, Medway and Milton Keynes all enabled staff to be SMEs and provide peers offering mutual support. This is a key element of the SESLIP sector-led improvement programme. It also enabled SMEs to reflect on their own LAs, systems, leadership and practice and take back learning into their own context.

Key Learning from Year 1

Local authorities and partners who have engaged with the targeted support offer have consistently reported that they value the work highly, often describing it as a catalyst for renewed focus and momentum within their local systems. The support has helped areas to step back, reflect collectively on current challenges, and refocus effort on shared priorities.

The work has been particularly effective in enabling local partnerships to develop a shared understanding of issues and an agreed set of actions, with independent facilitation and external perspective playing an important and valued role in supporting constructive dialogue and consensus.

Experience across the programme has also shown that time invested in detailed preparation with local authorities significantly strengthens the quality and impact of the work, ensuring that activity is well targeted and grounded in local context.

Across the programme, several consistent learning themes emerged:

- **Diagnostic work creates momentum:** Local areas value independent, evidence-informed insight to support prioritisation and sequencing of improvement
- **Process clarity matters:** Using Lean Process Mapping methodology allows a collective and clear understanding of how workflows, thereby bringing colleagues together to move process forward coherently.
- **Assurance must link to practice principles:** QA activity is most effective when clearly connected to agreed practice standards and values.
- **Some SEND and social care pressures are interconnected:** Improvement is most sustainable where SEND and social care interfaces are addressed together.

Limitations and Reflections

Take up has depended upon when LAs determine it is right for them. The programme has been designed to continue to offer the opportunity to LAs throughout the year. This has meant that though detailed planning has taken place and scopes developed, a number of identified support packages are due to be delivered in the first two quarters of 2026/27.

An LA's own capacity to engage (amongst everything else they are working on), has been highlighted as a key limitation on take-up.

This has meant that some LAs have not taken up the offer and others may not have been able to organise the support with the SESLIP team at the pace that they would ideally wish.

Year 1 was deliberately focused on understanding local priorities and working with partners to shape proposals that would deliver the greatest benefit for the area. While early impact is evident, many improvements require time to embed and translate into measurable outcomes for children and families.

This reinforces the importance of targeted support being embedded within a local area's wider improvement programme over the medium term, with opportunities for further packages of support to provide additional capacity and specialist expertise as improvement work progresses.

It may also help to lift the cap on potential funding of individual packages and to develop packages that are multi-year, with funding accordingly.

Participant Quotes (incl. subject matter experts)

"I enjoyed completing the audits, time is precious however I feel I learned from this experience and hope that Bucks can take the same level of learning from this to improve services and outcomes for children and young people. I will be reflecting on our own forum process over the rest of the academic year. I would also be happy to be included in further work as required".

"It has been a pleasure working with you and your colleagues. I found the experience extremely valuable, even if at times it was challenging due to the demands of day-to-day responsibilities. I would be very happy to support any future initiatives with similar objectives, so please do keep me in mind for upcoming opportunities".

"It was so valuable to have a range of professionals who could talk about their input into the Annual Review process".

"There was a high level of expertise that facilitated difficult conversations. A good use of precious time"

"Bespoke and adapted to our needs as the topic [commissioning] could be quite wide ranging. Well structured, worked in partnership, excellent level of expertise and input. Reflected what had been discussed in meetings. Felt it was an excellent use of time."

"This is something that had been difficult to get buy-in from, and SESLIP support made it happen"

"It was very clear where the gaps are and what we need to do next".

"It has helped me to see the process from start to finish"

"The key take aways from our work together is clarity on the work we need to do in mapping out Annual Review processes across the partnership".

We have benefited from Subject Matter Experts joining the work from **Brighton & Hove, East Sussex, Medway, and Milton Keynes.**

2. Year 2 Planning: 2026–27

The letter from the Minister for Children and Families 11 March 2026 makes clear that funding for RIAs to deliver small packages of system-led support for children's social care will stop. There may be opportunities to align any SESLIP targeted support offer with LA requirements focusing on Children's Social Care, once more detail is known on DfE intentions.

The main national driver considered are the SEND Reforms.

Strategic Intent

In 2026–27, the Targeted Support Programme will continue to work collaboratively with local authorities to develop proposals for sustainable improvement aligned with local priorities and plans, building on Year 1 learning to accelerate and embed lasting change.:

SESLIP are currently looking at three main areas for potential SESLIP support in light of the SEND Reforms which focus on ensuring children achieve and thrive throughout their lives and are included and have their needs met:

- Supporting the individual leaders (mentoring, coaching, possibly supplying consultant capacity to take on particular tasks)
- Strengthening assurance, using peer challenge/peer review of self-assessments and plans, to give supportive developmental feedback
- Continuing our work on the *SEND data challenge* - agreeing counting rules, making systems work to supply useable data comparisons

Priorities for 2026–27 (current proposals across Children's Social Care and SEND)

1. Supporting LAs with SEND Reforms

- Developing specific work aligned to LA SEND Reform Plans and the principles of reform
- Understanding and developing inclusive education, including building on understanding of effectiveness of local offer
- Supporting the developing the Experts at Hand offer
- Making the most of commissioning for SEND, including sufficiency
- Process development and review
- Quality Assurance of SEND work.

2. Workforce and Leadership Capability

- Providing funded capacity in host authorities to engage with targeted support including funding direct to LAs and/or consultant time– creating space for leaders to think about how to prioritise plans to be supported by SESLIP
- Launch coaching and mentoring programme to support delivery.
- Using peer learning and SME support to build confidence
- Provide tools to empower system leadership
- delivery Support leaders and supervisors to model safe, proportionate practice

- Support leaders and supervisors to disseminate and embed learning within the workforce and promote learning within the partnership

3. Strengthening Assurance

- Align QA frameworks with practice principles
- Improve use of data as a learning tool
- Strengthen confidence in defensible decision-making

4. Impact for Children and Families

- Strengthen co-production and trust
- Improve clarity, timeliness, and communication in service delivery
- Ensure improvements are visible to families, not just services

What Success Will Look Like by the End of 2026–27

- ✓ Clear evidence of improvement activity embedded in practice
- ✓ LAs report tangible benefit to delivering SEND Reforms
- ✓ Reduced escalation driven by process inefficiency
- ✓ Stronger assurance that systems are working as intended
- ✓ Increased evidence of child and family voice informing services and practice, leading to tangible improvements in family experience and trust

It is envisaged that the 2026-27 offer will be different from 2025/26, which was in reality up and running for a 6-month period. It will build on the region's value of peer support and challenge, enabling fellow practitioners to offer advice and reflection including on the response to SEND Reforms and prioritisation. It is proposed that it continues to offer local flexibility to enable LAs in consultation to determine what support is right for them.

The learning from this year is that there needs to be a greater degree of flexibility, including considering different elements of funding, removing the current upper ceiling of funding per package, potentially offering multi-year packages for improvement over several years, with funding committed accordingly.

These proposals and this paper are still in draft. Comments are welcome on what has taken place in 2025/2026 and to help us develop the offer for 2026/27, which will be dependent on the DfE expectations for Regional Improvement and Innovation Alliances.

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