

LLR JOINT HEALTH SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 30th April 2026

Speech and Language Therapy Service in LLR

Purpose of report

This report provides the Committee with information about Speech and Language Therapy Services in Leicester, Leicestershire, including:

- An update on Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC) discussed in February Joint LRR HOSC
- LPT's Speech and Language Therapy Provision
- Our system plans for the future

This report also sets out the central role that this collaborative arrangement across LLR will play in responding to the SEND Reforms that will be set out in Schools White Paper published on 23 February 2026.

1.0 Early Language Support for Every Child (ELSEC)

ELSEC, launched in September 2023, with Department for Education and NHSE funding as part of the national SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme 2023-2026. The ELSEC MOU set out 5 objectives to build an improved system-wide, balanced offer for children aged 0-11 years with speech, language and communication needs.

LLR is one of nine regional partnerships working across 32 local areas that was selected to test proposed changes.

ELSEC is delivered in Early Years settings, schools, families' own homes and Family Hubs. Together with many partners across LLR, we have made significant progress in strengthening a more balanced, responsive and effective system to meet children's speech, language and communication needs for the 0-11 age range.

To date, almost 1000 children across LLR with universal or targeted SLCN, have received much timelier and evidence-based support, and have been diverted away from NHS waiting lists for specialist Speech and Language Therapy. Parents and schools report strong satisfaction with the service.

The national DFE interim evaluation report of ELSEC said about LLR *"LLR developed their ELSEC model to offer assessment and time limited episodes of care for children aged two to eleven with mild to moderate SLCN who are referred into the specialist service. LLR have used prescriptive and evidence-based intervention packages consisting of three sessions, integrated with the universal approaches in place in children's settings and schools. LLR used a 'I do, we do, you do' approach to coach setting staff and parents and carers to gradually assume the role of delivering a targeted intervention. The initial session involved demonstration from a support worker, the second session was delivered together, and the final session involved observing setting staff or parents delivering the intervention. The final session offered the opportunity for the support worker."*ⁱ

Some of our family feedback is included in Appendix 1 to this report.

2.0 LPT's CYP Speech and Language Provision

Speech and Language Therapy – Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust (LPT) provides the Speech and Language Therapy Service for children and young people aged 0–18 years across Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland.

The service provides assessment, diagnosis and time-limited episodes of intervention for children with speech, language and communication needs (SLCN), including speech sound disorder, language delay or disorder, fluency and voice disorders, and eating, drinking and swallowing difficulties.

Delivery is underpinned by a graduated response, with a strong emphasis on early identification, building capacity and accessible communication environments within early years and school settings, and equipping parents, carers, education and social care partners with evidence-based strategies to support children's outcomes beyond direct therapy input.

The service works in close partnership with local authority services, including early years providers, schools, specialist SEND services and wider health and care professionals, to support educational access, inclusion and developmental progress, and to contribute to multi-agency planning for children and young people with additional needs.

Speech and Language current performance is described in Figure 1 and 2. Figure 1 indicates that current referral to assessment, which includes commencement of treatment, has been consistently performing. The dip in performance in 2024 followed a decision to move some resource from assessment to follow-up support. In Early 2025 the evidence from ELSEC became clear that this was providing preventative support and we returned that resource back to assessments. Figure 2 describes Children and Young People (CYP) who remain on the caseload with further treatment, our goal is to have 4,000 or less people on the caseload each month. Figure 3 indicates that programmes such as ELSEC are already reducing specialist demand. In Section 3 of this paper, we describe how these waits for specialist services, which mirror the national picture, are being further addressed within a system plan. Our system work includes the NHS, local authorities, schools, families and voluntary groups.

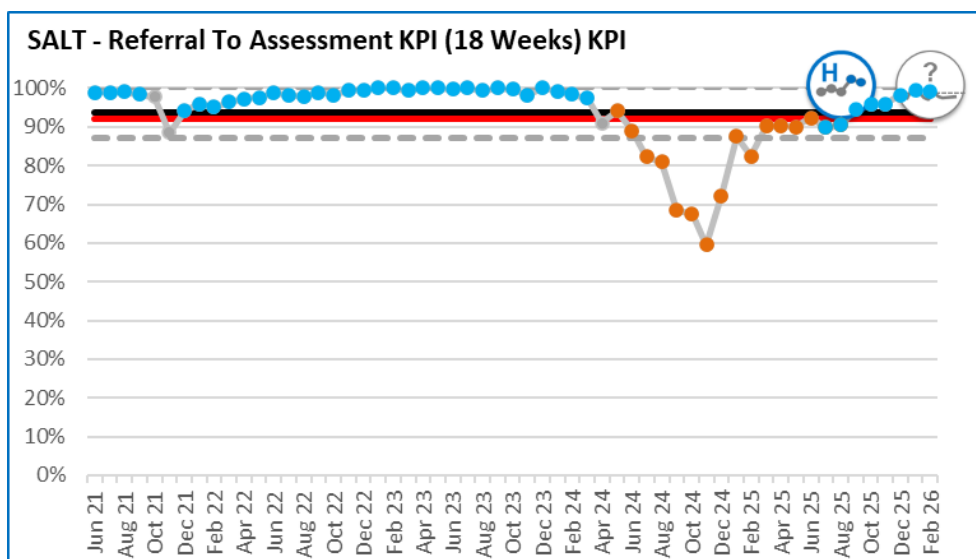


Figure 1: LPT's performance of the referral to assessment indicator within 18 weeks. Figure shows % of people assessed within 18 weeks. Blue circles indicate performance at or within thresholds

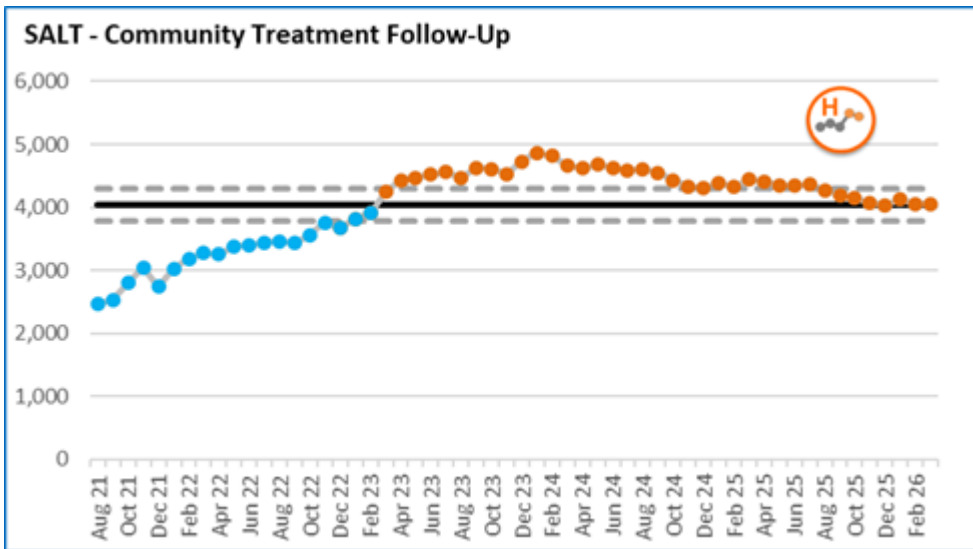


Figure 2: Number of CYP supported every month with further treatment. The chart shows we are supporting more people per month than we expected to. Red dots show a higher than threshold number being supported.

Referral summary:

Referral Year	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Jan	Feb	Mar	Total
2025/26	236	244	249	267	212	233	270	262	255	278	341		2847
2024/25	312	372	246	298	242	295	319	337	248	409	253	303	3634
2023/24	288	370	364	308	291	333	331	369	311	384	378	377	4104
2022/23	331	395	362	281	261	261	338	404	271	393	352	407	4061
2021/22	327	378	383	297	231	323	337	450	314	371	352	408	4171

Figure 3: Number of referrals to LPT SALT services by year. Decreasing numbers of referrals evidence the success of preventative programmes e.g. ELSEC, despite increasing demand.

3.0 Our System plan

As set out in the Schools White Paper, the government aims to reform the current SEND system, building on ongoing work to create a system that’s rooted in inclusion, where every child and young person receives high-quality support early on and can thrive in their local early years setting, school or college. This will be based on an inclusive mainstream education system, with more accessible, professional support for children and young people who need it, and improved, efficient and effective local delivery.

The Experts at Hand Offer is a core pillar of the SEND reform programme, designed to strengthen the capability of mainstream education settings to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND more effectively and inclusively.

Based on significant feedback in the national SEND consultation from parents, Early Years settings and school leaders, Speech and Language Therapy is named as a priority for

inclusion and investment in local SEND reform and Experts at Hand models as a critical feature of delivery.

Local area SEND plans should provide a defined route for mainstream education settings to access specialist support from speech and language therapists and speech and language support workers, strengthening prevention and early intervention and reducing the need for escalation to specialist services and for Education, Health and Care Plans.

By adding support to shift to increased group-based models and whole setting advice and support, health and education professionals can deliver evidence-based support and intervention with greater impact and value, ensuring, where possible, that universal and targeted level needs do not escalate.

Effective practice in this area already exists in Leicester in the ELSEC pathway. Based on the impact to date, the local area partnership is keen to embed the LLR ELSEC model in the Experts at Hand offer and scale this up, particularly to address health inequity associated with early speech, language and communication needs e.g. adverse impact on educational attainment, mental health, family health, social mobility.

Alongside system partners and local families, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust is currently involved in responding to DfE's request for a 3 year SEND Reform Plan, with a strong emphasis on improved speech, language and communication outcomes for all young children in Leicester, building on the impact to date of the local Early Language Support for Every Child pathfinder.

Resource Implications

1. Developing new ways to support families that empowers families is preventative. This reduces the demand in the NHS and in schools and local authorities. Over time this has a significant benefit for our communities.
2. Children and Young People is one of the 3 key strategic transformation priorities for the ICB. The success of programmes like ELSEC can support demand management, however, additional system investment is still needed.
3. Maintaining a focus on children and families in LLR ensures we support the local authority strategies, ensuring the best start in life for our children and young people.

Background Papers

4. SEND and Alternative Provision Joint HOSC February 2026

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

5. None

Equality Implications

6. Children and young people with speech and language needs are more likely to experience poor physical and mental health, barriers to accessing services, and worse long-term outcomes. Support programmes play a critical role in reducing health

inequalities; largely through joint working with in education, health, local authority and the voluntary sector.

Human Rights Implications

7. SEND law requires reasonable adjustments and appropriate provision to ensure pupils with disabilities can participate fully, supporting their right to non-discrimination and accessible schooling.

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

NA.

Officer(s) to Contact

Colin Cross, Deputy Director, Families, Young People, Children, learning Disability & Autism Directorate, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Name and Job Title: David Williams, Group Director of Strategy & Partnerships, Leicestershire Partnership NHS Trust

Appendix 1 – Summary of Family Feedback



Figure 4: Summary of ELSEC feedback from families

ⁱ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/early-language-support-for-every-child-interim-evaluation-report>