

Report subject	Speech and Language Therapy Update
Meeting date	11 March 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The service has embedded the largest changes to the delivery model which are now embedded in Standard Operating Procedures. Over the next few years, we require partners in the wider system to support the implementation of the framework with an end date for adoption by all by 2027.</p> <p>The service will continue to evolve however the main elements of the transformation for the Speech and Language Therapy Provider service is now in place.</p>
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Classification	For Update

1 Background

- 1.1 From 1 April 2023 Dorset HealthCare's Children and Young People Speech and Language Therapy Service's Pan-Dorset offer became jointly commissioned by NHS Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council and Dorset Council.
- 1.2 The service has been working solely to the new joint Service Level Agreement and an associated transformation plan since April 2023. NHS Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council and Dorset Council have commissioned a whole system approach and wider transformation agenda across health, education and social care in accordance with The Balanced System® framework to support children's speech, language and communication development. <https://www.thebalancedsystem.org/>.
- 1.3 *"Significant system wide change is needed to deliver our shared vision for speech and language across the whole Dorset area, it will take all partners, including Dorset Council, Bournemouth Christchurch and Poole Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board (ICB) and the Provider working together", "...all parties are jointly responsible for achieving our vision." (CYP SALT Service Specification 2022-2025).*

- 1.4 Funding streams have continued separately whilst the three commissioners work towards a lead commissioner arrangement.

2 Update on Speech and Language Therapy Service changes as part of the whole system Speech, Language and Communication Pathway

- 2.1 The information below relates solely to the changes that have been implemented by Dorset HealthCare's Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy Service. Changes undertaken by partner agencies, including changes within Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council services, as part of the Speech, Language and Communication Pathway are not within the scope of this report. For oversight of whole system changes in support for children and young people's speech, language and communication development, this report should be read in conjunction with information from education and other partners.

2.2 Access to the service

2.2.1 Early Years – Ready STEADI Chat

The service moved to offering Ready STEADI Chat in April 2023.

- These are individual, reserved appointments with a Speech and Language Therapist.
- The parent/carer books an in-person or virtual timeslot with a therapist by calling a dedicated number 01202 443200.
- An appointment time and date are agreed with the parent during the call, this will take place within 14 days of the call.
- At the appointment an assessment is undertaken, and next steps agreed for the child. This may be:
 - group or individual intervention with the CYPsalt service,
 - a parent workshop,
 - signposting to interventions in place within the wider system
 - advice and signposting and ending care.
- A communication plan is provided after the session for parents and a copy for the Early Years setting.
- Parents can book to attend any of our sessions in BCP or Dorset

In 2024 the service offered just under 2000 Ready STEADI Chat appointments across the whole of Dorset. The data for BCP is below.

Location	Available appointments	Appointments booked
Kinson & West Howe Children's Centre	196	186
Townsend Children's Centre	121	112
Boscombe Family Hub	171	162

Christchurch Family Hub	141	134
Old Town Children's Centre	120	115
Rossmore Children's Centre	149	142
Turlin Moor Children's Centre	36	31

An additional 98 Pan-Dorset virtual appointments were offered, of these 80 appointments were booked.

Feedback from parents has been positive:

- 'The ladies made both me and my son feel so at ease. It was a comfortable and calm atmosphere and really helped put my mind at ease. They were lovely to talk to and I really appreciate the help that they provided.'
- 'Excellent service and communication for staff. Lots of playing to learn about my child and their specific needs'.
- 'Reassured that child was making good progress and although behind it is understandable for his background. Offered lots of advice but biggest and most helpful thing was the reassurance and being shown the pyramid of communication and how talking is right near the top and he does everything below it.'

There is no Referral to Treatment (RTT) measurement for this pathway as ALL children are offered an appointment within 14 days (2 weeks).

The move to this model has reduced the numbers of children who did not attend. Prior to Ready STEADI Chat an average of 20% of preschool children were not brought to their initial assessment with the service. This has now reduced to less than 9%. The service is offering comparable numbers of initial assessments.

2.2.2 School Aged Children and Young People

In September 2024 the service moved to the Link Speech and Language Therapist model.

- All local authority mainstream schools that fall within the service contractual arrangements have an assigned Link Speech and Language Therapist
- Resource bases, Specialist Education settings, Learning Centres, Pupil Referral Units, Alternative Provisions and settings who receive devolved monies are not part of this model as therapeutic input into these settings is commissioned separately by BCP.
- Independent schools are able to request a specialist assessment for their pupil and specialist level interventions.
- The Link SLT meets with the school each term. In this meeting they identify shared priorities for the term including targeted and specialist interventions for named children, discuss training needs and any training to take place that term for school staff and discuss named children,

including those who may require assessment from the Link SLT. If this is the identified next step the child will be registered with the service (with parental consent) and the assessment will take place within a term.

The average RTT for pupils on this pathway is 9.46 weeks.

2.2.3 Neurodevelopmental and Behaviour Pathway

There are no changes to access to the service with the implementation of The Balanced System. Direct referrals from a Consultant Paediatrician or Psychiatrist are accepted. This is a Pan Dorset pathway.

The average RTT for children on this pathway is 14.03 weeks.

2.2.4 Oro-pharyngeal dysphagia

There are no changes to the referral pathways for this pathway. All referrals must have Paediatrician or GP consent for the referral.

2.3 Service delivery models

Early Years

The service has embedded the new model in Early Years, and the elements below are now 'business as usual'.

2.3.1 Family Support- Summary of SLT Service Offer

- Balanced System® Pathway online resource for Dorset links to our own DHC website pages.
- The service signposts families and professionals to the site and delivers training at parent events and wider workforce teams.
- A range of themed advice including videos for parents and carers are accessed via the DHC website and linked via the Balanced System® Pathway online resource. Universally available to all and could be used by other services i.e. Health Visitor's, maternity services etc. as part of their advice offer.
- The SLT Service uses social media channels Facebook and Twitter to promote ideas and activities and links to helpful information.
- The SLT Service supports parents through general information and ideas to support speech, language and communication through universal/targeted offers as part of the Link SLT role e.g. coffee mornings, drop-ins.
- Information and recommendations provided to parents to support targeted interventions. These are delivered in various ways including written information, rolling programme of training/modelling of common and recurrent themes delivered virtually and in-person group sessions.
- Provision of specific training/modelling regarding targeted strategies for common and recurrent themes to wider system colleagues who support families.

- Advice and expertise shared with wider system colleagues who are developing their own targeted support.
- Service leaders attend wider system project meetings to facilitate information sharing and identification of joint opportunities to support families.
- Highly Specialist SLT Team in place to provide oversight, advice and training for support families of CYP with complex needs: Neurodiversity; Dysphagia; Deafness; Voice; AAC; DLD; Speech; Cleft and VPD; Selective Mutism; Social, Emotional & Mental Health (SEMH)
- SLTs work in collaboration with multi-agency teams to support families i.e. Portage, Paediatricians, Pan-Dorset Specialist Teachers, Outreach services.
- SLTs provide professional advice for EHCP Assessments including the family/home context.
- SLTs Attendance at EHCP Annual Review meetings
- Provision of opportunities to families to develop strategies and skills relevant to the specific areas of need for their child including specific training for specialist interventions and strategies e.g. Signalong.
- Personalised coaching during intervention sessions.

2.3.2 Environment

- Link SLTs support settings with Communication Friendly Environment audits and advice.
- SLTs support settings with use of visual timetables
- SLTs provide advice to settings and schools regarding the incorporation of language and communication into the daily learning.
- Link SLTs work with settings to embed individualised visual timetables, Now and Next Boards into the setting

2.3.3 Workforce

- SLTs deliver training and provide on the job experiential learning opportunities at universal, targeted and specialist levels.
- Communication Champion Programme workshops for Early Years and each school key stage
- SLTs advise on appropriate training packages for the school and EYS workforce including signposting to externally available training.
- The service offers free training to EY and schools on a range of topics including An Introduction to Speech, Language and Communication Needs, Supporting children with complex communication needs, Phonological Awareness, Developmental Language Disorder in the Classroom.
- SLTs deliver training to other professional groups i.e. Specialist Teachers, Educational Psychologists, Public Health Nursing.

- In addition to the free training, there is a Traded Training offer open to all settings, including special schools: PEIC-D; SignAlong; Selective Mutism; Stammering; Speech.
- Appraising and signposting to other local and national training for SLCN

2.3.4 Identification

- Ready STEADI Chat sessions for pre-schoolers available across 21 locations in Dorset. Easy access pre-bookable appointments within 2 weeks.
- Link SLT termly meeting with School SENCO supports identification of school age CYP with SLCN
- Timely place-based specialist assessment according to need (home, school, early years setting, clinic, hospital)
- Signposting to universally available identification tools.
- Provision of targeted screening /identification tools and associated training.
- Highly Specialist SLTs support colleagues with second opinions and advice
- Highly Specialist SLTs undertake direct assessment in complex cases in their area of specialism.
- SLTs support settings and schools in identifying children for school based targeted interventions.
- SLTs provide guidance in the appropriate use of and identification tools.
- SLTs are part of multi-agency assessment pathways i.e. Neurodiversity.
- Speech and language therapists liaise with other specialist staff and parents and carers as part of the identification of SLCN including an assessment of the functional communication needs of the individual in context.
- Following assessment SLTs provide timely and appropriate feedback to the family as well as others involved in providing support.

2.3.5 Intervention

- SLTs signpost to appropriate resources and programmes to support children's speech and language development.
- SLTs monitor the selection and progress of children accessing targeted interventions.
- Provision of SLT led group interventions are delivered in a wide range of appropriate venues including Family Hubs/Children's Centres and libraries.
- Provision of specialist SLT intervention for CYP is delivered in range of environments including home settings, early years settings and schools.
- SLTs co-run interventions with school-based staff to ensure confidence and competence levels are reached and maintained.
- SLTs establish the appropriate targeted interventions providing both programmes of work and resources.

- SLTs lead targeted interventions as appropriate e.g. for children also receiving specialist interventions in parallel within schools where the workforce is at an early developmental stage with regards to capacity and competence.
- SLTs provide specialist support to children as indicated by their need. This will typically be in conjunction with parents and colleagues from the educational setting and may include highly specialist colleagues.
- SLTs ensure that interventions are evidence based and that appropriate outcome measures are agreed at the outset so that the child their family and other colleagues can both support the intervention and the evaluation of progress.
- The service has a mechanism for highly specialist SLTs being able to support children in conjunction with less specialist colleagues.
- Where need is so specialist that the appropriate competences are not available locally the service ensures onward referral.
- SLTs provide coaching and support to enable parents/carers to participate in interventions as appropriate including reinforcing specific activities in the home and encourage attending elements of school-based interventions as appropriate.
- SLTs collaborate with other specialists in the planning and delivery of specialist interventions as appropriate. For example, multi-disciplinary interventions for children with complex needs involving SLT OT and Physiotherapy colleagues.

3 Key Questions posed by the Oversight and Scrutiny Board

3.1 Continuing Challenges and successes

3.1.1 Continuing Challenges

- Wider challenges within the commissioning arrangements can cause confusion for families and professionals as to where to seek support for children with speech, language, and communication needs.
- Within some areas of the wider system there are settings and services who see speech, language and communication the responsibility of the provider service (Children and Young People's Speech and Language Therapy) only. This is not the framework that BCP has commissioned, and all agencies have a responsibility to support children's speech, language and communication development within The Balanced System framework.
- Working within Secondary Schools. Although good relationships and actions are being agreed by the Link SLT and the SENCO/TAs these are frequently not put in place due to decision making within schools. This is significantly impacting on the service's ability to promote and develop the new way of working and is detrimental to SLT Service staff, school staff and the pupils.

3.1.2 Successes

- There are increasing numbers of settings signing up to the Communication Champion Programme <https://www.dorsethealthcare.nhs.uk/patients-and-visitors/our-services-hospitals/physical-health/paediatric-speech-and-language-therapy/health-and-education-professionals/communication-champions>
- As of January 2025

- 54 BCP Early Years settings had a Communication Champion and of these 10 settings had more than one Champion.
- 72% of BCP Primary Schools have at least one Communication Champion
- 59% of BCP Secondary Schools have at least one Communication Champion
- Feedback on the programme has been positive across all key stages.
 - The staff member has introduced this (iceberg technique) in the school, all children with an EHCP now have a visual iceberg to support teachers in quickly recognising when they've got the young person in class. For one young person, staff had to do further investigations and found out about many more influencing factors, and this has led to a lot more support in place for them in the classroom.
 - X was an excellent tutor and answered and questions we had. The picture handouts were very useful.
 - It was brilliantly delivered. Very approachable tutors who appear very knowledgeable
- The service has recently run a successful training session for BCP Childminders 'Interaction Strategies to Support Language Development'. Over 30 childminders attended this free training course.
- All schools in BCP have been offered a Link SLT Meeting in the Autumn and Spring Terms.
- Feedback on the new model from schools has been overwhelmingly positive. Below are a selection of comments relating to the new school model, which includes a range of training options that settings can select, either to support them running interventions or to upskill their workforce.
 - I feel confident to be able to run my own group now and am busy planning for next week. Having seen what is possible, we as a school are very excited to be able to roll this out for our children.
 - The CFE (communication friendly environment tool) was really useful to let me know I am still doing things well after years of teaching. I then also got specific feedback - more specific than if I have a classroom observation by another teacher. I've got some specific things to work on.
 - X provided strategies that will be really useful and simple to implement. Good explanations and background to how and why they work.
 - Thank you, I like the fact we will have support before, middle and at the end. So great having you in school for advice and hands on support.

3.1.3 Cross service working

The Balanced System is a whole system framework and has been commissioned by NHS Dorset, Bournemouth, Poole and Christchurch Council and Dorset Council to be adopted across all services. Recent examples of cross service working in BCP include:

- Early Year Communication Champion workshops are supported by BCP Early Year advisors, with both services offering a joint drop-in prior to the workshop for professionals to ask questions about specific children, new resources and innovations.
- Neurodiversity training for settings has been jointly written by the PINS Team (***Promoting Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools***) and schools are able to access this training free of charge.
- The service supported the recent Belonging Conference running a workshop '***Moving towards neuroaffirming practice and language***'. All attendees identified that this met their expectations of the session.



3.1.3 Recruitment

The service has had a period of successful recruitment, with staffing levels increasing by 10.28wte during the period 31 January 2024 to 31 January 2025. This has been due to

- Introduction of Speech and Language Therapy Degree Apprenticeships. The service currently has 2 apprentices undertaking the 4-year undergraduate degree to become a qualified Speech and Language Therapist.
- The ability to employ local newly qualified Speech and Language Therapists who have graduated from Health Sciences University in Bournemouth.

4 Summary

The service has embedded the largest changes to the delivery model, and these are now in the process of being embedded. Over the next few years, we expect that partners in the wider system will support the framework with the aim of adopting it fully

by 2027. The changes in the model require commitment from the whole system, and in particular Education, to ensure success. The Speech & Language Therapy Service have laid the foundations for this framework to succeed, and the next phase is to ensure all parties are engaged and committed to the implementation.

The service will continue to evolve, however the main elements of the transformation for the Speech and Language Therapy Provider service are now in place.