

Fieldwork Report:

Understanding the Special Education, Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Workforce in London

Findings from Special Education, Needs & Disabilities (SEND) Workforce interviews and case studies undertaken with local LA SEND teams by the London Innovation & Improvement Alliance (LIIA).

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Section 1: Introduction to Purpose & Research

Pressing Workforce Challenges

The ALDCS Special Education, Needs & Disabilities (SEND) and Workforce Priority programmes identified a pressing need to explore the challenges faced by London's SEND workforce. This research aimed to examine issues related to recruitment and retention while providing a clearer understanding of the current landscape for London's local authorities. In response the London Innovation & Improvement Alliance (LIIA) launched a comprehensive research programme of work to address these challenges. A key component of this effort involved conducting fieldwork to better understand the scale of the difficulties faced by local authorities.

This report summarises the findings from our fieldwork and included individual Local Authority (LA) case studies to represent the context associated with key themes.

Preceding Research Leading to Field Work

In January 2024 LIIA conducted a regional workforce scoping survey capturing salary information, caseload volumes, and gathering insights from local authorities on key challenges such as recruitment, retention, and the use of agency staff. The survey was distributed to SEND Leads and Directors of Children's Services across London, with 23 local authorities responding.

This research highlighted the need for us to understand the SEND workforce challenges in more depth and emphasised the shared difficulties Local Authorities expressed in their ability to recruit and retain SEND caseworkers and Educational Psychologists in particular.

LA Sample Group for Field Work

Analysis of the survey data allowed us to identify a diagonal slice of local authorities to participate in interviews and case study development to ensure varied representation of different characteristics such as salary, caseloads, agency usage, inner and outer London locality, sub-regions and inspection outcomes. Fieldwork has provided space for an in-depth look at the specific challenges and practices.

Additional Data & Discussions

To complement our fieldwork, the research programme also engaged with Managed Service Providers (MSPs) to provide insights on market trends and agency usage and behaviours, both in London and nationally. This has included learning of pay rates, on- and off-contract practices, in and outside of IR35 arrangements, working patterns and behaviours. This information has been integrated into the findings presented in this report.

We have also engaged with other regions to share learnings on parallel activities as well as key networks such as the National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP), engaging with London representatives. These supplementary discussions have further contributed to understanding the systemic challenges in which our findings sit, as well as establishing collaborative relationships that are considered essential as part of next steps.

Recommendations

Included within this report is a proposed recommendations that form part of key priorities we have identified to both respond to London's SEND workforce challenges and prepare for the changes ahead. The SEND Workforce workstream sits across both the ALDCS SEND and Workforce Programmes, forming part of broader agendas.

Together these programmes aim to enable local authorities to build a more stable, sufficient and sustainable SEND workforce and will jointly deliver agreed recommendations with clear lines of responsibility.

Section 2: Summary of Findings through Six Common Themes

This short summary presents the commonalities identified across fieldwork comprising of a survey and case studies that helped us to build a more comprehensive picture of SEND workforces in London local authorities.

1) Stable Leadership

The importance of stable leadership in driving workforce improvements was referenced in the majority of case studies. In several cases, strong, permanent leadership has been key to reducing reliance on agency staff and fostering long-term workforce development practices. Stable leadership enables strategic oversight and consistency, creating an environment where changes can be effectively implemented, and staff feel supported.

Leadership continuity has also been referenced as a key enabler of structured plans to address recruitment and retention challenges, such as ‘top down’ permanent recruitment. Stability at leadership and management levels enables effective recruitment campaigns, consistent panels, expectations, speed of decision making and an improved overall candidate experience with relational recruitment at the heart. This approach clearly contributed to greater long-term workforce stability.

➤ *Referenced within Case Studies 1, 3, and 6.*

2) Recruitment Campaign Strategies

Recruitment remains a significant challenge for many authorities, especially where competition exists for specialist roles. Several local authorities have adopted innovative recruitment strategies to address workforce shortages. A popular strategy is the “grow your own” approach, where authorities focus on developing talent internally, often clarifying target audiences from the outset, including professionals from related fields such as teaching and ensuring agency staff are captured within engagement efforts. This approach has been successful in several cases, helping to create a pipeline of SEND caseworkers and Educational Psychologists.

However, in targeting specific groups, several also referenced the learnings captured through earlier processes that demonstrated the differing expectations and needs of candidates that over time has served to influence their job profiles and advertising as well as internal interviewing styles to ensure expectations are managed and any assumptions are clarified at the earliest opportunity. Some authorities have also explored international recruitment as a way to bridge staffing gaps within Educational Psychology specifically, while others focus on place-based recruitment campaigns to attract local talent and ensure diversity within the workforce.

➤ *Referenced within Case Studies 2, 3, 4, and 5.*

3) The Role of Training and Development in Retention

The training and development opportunities provided by the LA have been shown to play a central role in improving staff retention across London Local Authorities. Authorities investing in comprehensive training programmes, including training on legal frameworks and policy legislation, ensure that caseworkers are well-equipped to manage complex cases and stay up-to-date with legislative changes. In turn this contributes positively to retention efforts.

Clear career pathways and opportunities for personal and professional growth are also key factors in retention. Many authorities also focus on specialisation, offering staff the opportunity to develop expertise in specific areas, such as

autism support or critical incident response, which helps increase job satisfaction, variability and and a tool strategically used to reduce turnover.

4) Agency Usage

➤ *Referenced within Case Studies 1, 4, and 6*

The use of agency staff continues to be a challenge across local authorities, driven by rising demand and the push and pull factors of the market. Whilst we heard that some agency workers seek to achieve a more diverse portfolio through agency work, in practice agency workers both SEND Caseworkers and Educational Psychologists (EP)s are often recruited to support backlog issues. We also learned of challenged with working behaviours and expectations, such as remote working, task based delivery, and the impact of inside or outside IR35 determination. In some cases, agency workers make up a significant proportion of the SEND workforce, leading to issues with stability of services, and contributing to significant and unsustainable financial pressures.

Engagement with Managed Services Providers (MSPs) has enabled us to gather some information of agency pay rates and market trends from across 20 London LAs. Based on the data we collected from MSPs day rates on average vary from ~£300 to ~£550 per day for SEND Caseworkers with the highs of ~£750 to ~£800 per day for EPs. Of those roles captured in our 'snap-shot' collection, 94% of workers were deemed inside IR35, however we expect that there is a large, possibly greater, proportion of off-contract agency assignments that are more likely to be outside of IR35. In relation to EPs specifically, trends identified that agency workers were submitting timesheets of no more than 1 to 2 working days per week and suggested that one EP was typically working across multiple LAs in parallel. Due to these various routes to market and several dominant agencies operating outside of local level contracts the lack of transparency contributes to LAs lacking confidence in negotiating when hiring agency staff.

Nonetheless, a number of authorities have successfully reduced their reliance on agency staff as recently as the last 12 months, by refocusing recruitment efforts, including developing more specific job profiles and titles to better reflect the duties and skills required, introducing more flexibility to support staff in work-life balance, updating pay scales in accordance with sub-regional and regional benchmarking where possible, and including training and development information within adverts. Despite these efforts, the ongoing competition for skilled professionals, coupled with financial constraints, means that reliance on agency staff persists across multiple LAs.

➤ *Referenced within Case Studies 1, 4, and 5.*

5) Backlog of Annual Plans and Caseloads

The backlog of annual plans remains a significant issue across many authorities, with rising demand for SEND services limiting workforce capacity. In some examples, caseworkers are managing extremely high caseload levels, placing pressure on both staff and service delivery. Part of our exploration of caseloads was to better understand the disparity we had seen in case load levels between LAs in the original survey. Throughout our fieldwork it was clear that the recording methodology was not comparable and in all cases SEND colleague suggested that greater exploration of these differences would be a 'red herring'.

External factors also play a part, such as delays in partner health services. There continues to be a strain on the system, making it difficult for LAs to address backlogs fully without dedicated investment. In several of our case studies we heard from LAs who had implemented solutions to address high caseloads through restructure and the introduction of dedicated 'backlog' teams removing this work from the daily workload of core teams and better enabling compliance with statutory deadlines. In these cases there was a clear additional investment to enable this model and typically agency staff were used to supplement resource on a time limited basis. This highlights the need for continued investment in workforce capacity in order for LAs to meet statutory requirements.

- *Referenced within Case Studies 2, 5, and 6.*

6) Diverse and Representative Teams

Achieving a more diverse SEND workforce was referenced as a key goal for the majority of authorities in London, who reflected on the demographics of their SEND children underpinning the ambition for a representative workforce. However, for many it remains a challenge to prioritise diversity in recruitment within the context of high levels of demand and ongoing recruitment and retention challenges. In turn LAs referenced some of their most successful target candidate markets in recruitment often lack diversity, with examples of predominantly white female demographics.

Nonetheless, some authorities have achieved positive progress in building teams that better reflect the diverse populations they serve. Representation at leadership levels remains a longer-term ambition with links to training and develop strategies.

- *Referenced within Case Studies 1, 2, 4, and 6.*

Section 3: Local Authority Case Studies

As part of our research, we interviewed multiple Local Authority SEND teams who shared insights and reflections about their own SEND workforce, recruitment and retention challenges in the context of growing system pressures, as well the interventions that have had a positive impact. Below are the case studies that we captured through interviews that best express the common themes we identified through the research.

Case Study: Local Authority 1

Context:

This LA demonstrates a long established and stable SEND workforce, sharing well regarded training and development support for staff and an overall attractive offer. Nonetheless there are areas of challenge that persist for them in the context, but in line with common themes identified above, such as leadership stability, their foundations for responding to these challenges support action at a local level. In relation to EHCP writers they have introduced a model that removed the need for this role to have existing expertise to undertake plan writing and instead offers training and support for staff with transferable skills to develop this skill over time, recruiting for values. In turn the focus for their EP team is retention; currently supported by locums and trainees who manage statutory work, they are enabling permanent EPs to focus on community-based projects to diversify portfolios, and introducing flexible working patterns. The LA manages a comprehensive training offer to ensure consistency across both permanent and agency staff which has helped them to minimise turnover, and competition from higher-paying neighbouring areas, leading to high retention across the service.

The biggest issue for us is not statutory assessments, it's annual reviews. It is a challenge for even our highest performing staff to consistently complete the volume

It's really important to value Educational Psychologists (EPs) and for that message to be loud and clear. The secret to retention of EPs for us is to avoid them having too many assessments, but rather getting involved in early intervention.

SEND Caseworkers:

- Training systems are comprehensive, with accessible resources and hands-on support ensuring new recruits and agency staff all have access to all the resources to align with service standards.
- The service has shifted plan writing away from core case officer roles, prioritising specialised plan writers to address the complexity of EHCP demands. Recruitment strategies include a "grow your own" approach, developing talent from diverse professional backgrounds through structured career pathways.
- Demographically, the workforce reflects a mix of permanent and agency staff, though increasing diversity remains a goal. Challenges include reliance on agency staff (15%) to manage peaks in demand and a competitive market where neighbouring areas offer higher pay rates.
- Despite these challenges, the service maintains continuity through in-depth training and the use of temporary staffing solutions to manage spikes in demand and staff shortages, whilst they recruitment permanently in parallel.

Educational Psychologists:

- The EP team benefits from stability, supported by trainees and agency staff, which allows permanent staff access more diverse portfolios with opportunities to contribute to specific research and intervention projects.
- Efforts to create a diverse workforce have included developing targeted recruitment and retention strategies that enable a more diverse SEND workforce, involving engagement and greater partnership working with Universities to generate a steady stream of EP trainees particularly.
- The team boasts many long-standing staff members, but increasing greater diversity is an ongoing focus.
- Flexible working patterns, varied roles, and opportunities to lead on special projects—such as autism support or critical incident response—help retain staff and maintain engagement. Despite national EP shortages, the service's reputation and proactive recruitment strategies ensure a competitive edge.

Green Shoots:

- ✓ Comprehensive training programmes and the removal of plan writing from case officer roles allow for more effective recruitment campaigns and focused and specialised work.
- ✓ Agency support and flexible working arrangements enables them to maintain effective workload management and greater retention.
- ✓ Partnerships with universities and varied project opportunities enrich EP roles and create an attractive employer profile.
- ✓ Efforts toward increasing workforce diversity and the "grow your own" strategy nurtures talent and allows for better representation.

Case Study: Local Authority 2

Context:

This LA has focused on reducing agency dependency and building a more stable SEND workforce over the last 12 months, despite having the highest vacancy gap of any other London LA who responded to the regional survey. The LA however, recently achieved zero vacancies in its SEND coordination team.

Challenges remain however, and have included high and unsustainable agency costs, staffing shortages, levels of backlog related to annual reviews, and the impact of a competitive market for specialist roles. Efforts to address these have included reviving recruitment strategies, focusing on the development of internal staff, and creating a more permanent workforce. Despite these steps, recruitment and retention remains a significant concern, particularly in

relation to EPs and SEND caseworkers, compounded by rising service demand and external factors like regional pay disparities.

We have focused on internal promotion and professional development opportunities for staff which has helped us to cultivate a stable and dedicated team, reducing turnover and long-term sickness.

We've successfully limited our agency reliance to 10%. Of course retention challenges persist, but primarily stem from competition with neighbouring boroughs and the national agency market.

SEND Caseworkers:

- The LA has eliminated agency reliance within the SEND team over the last 12 months, focusing on the recruitment, retention and development of permanent staff to improve service continuity. Despite their success, regional salary discrepancies and competition from neighbouring LAs continue to challenge recruitment.
- Staff caseloads have decreased but remain above their target, with each caseworker handling approximately 150 cases. Their ideal target is 100. This remains a strain on service quality and timeliness.
- Ongoing investment in training, including legal workshops and policy updates, ensures caseworkers are equipped to manage complex cases and remain up to date with legislative changes.
- Efforts to reduce workloads and streamline case allocation has helped improve service delivery and reduce burnout. However, external factors such as delays in partner health services and their locality adds pressure.

Educational Psychologists:

- EPs are predominantly permanent, with only 10% agency staff used flexibly. The team benefits from a long-standing Principal Educational Psychologist and experienced EPs who lead key areas such as statutory duties and early intervention. Despite the strong retention focus, the LA struggles to recruit due to national EP shortages and the persistent attraction to higher-paying agency roles that they are unable to compete with financially. This has resulted in difficulties meeting demand, particularly in early intervention and EHCP assessments.
- In-person engagement with schools is a priority with positive reflections that highlighted their commitment to EPs building long-term relationships and understanding the local context in order to better identify effective interventions.
- The LAs recruitment strategy includes a "grow-your-own" model that enables internal staff to progress into both EP and SEND roles, fostering a pipeline of talent from within, who are invested in the LA and the community. However there remain challenges in attracting senior roles such as experienced and Principal EPs to remain.

Green Shoots:

- ✓ Efforts to strengthen permanent recruitment and retention, with a focus on internal development of staff helped to reduce agency dependency and improve service consistency.
- ✓ Streamlining caseloads and improving workload allocation has reduced pressure on SEND caseworkers, supporting better service delivery.
- ✓ The LAs reputation as a supportive and community-focused employer, combined with clear career development pathways, has enabled them to attract and retain staff

Case Study: Local Authority 3

Context:

Over the past 18 months, the LA has moved from a heavy reliance on agency workers to a more stable and permanent SEND workforce. Previously, challenges included high agency costs, significant case backlogs, and leadership instability. Strategic recruitment campaigns, leadership and management changes and restructures, and a "grow your own" model that has enabled the development of a pipeline has all driven improvements, though recruitment and retention challenges persist for certain roles.

We've had significant agency reliance within SEND over recent years and permanent recruitment strategies have been mixed in success. It wasn't until we prioritised a 'top down' permanent recruitment strategy that things really started to stick. If you have stability at the top then the rest follows. In the last 18 months we've significantly reduced our agency reliance and been able to implement our 'grow your own' model in a targeted way.

SEND Caseworkers:

- A successful transition from a workforce comprising 75% agency staff to a fully permanent team has been achieved within 18 months.
- Leadership stability, with a permanent Head of Service and Service Manager in place for approaching two years, has brought strategic oversight and consistency. The 'top down' approach to permanent recruitment has contributed to this position and enabled stability when wider recruitment across the team was launched.
- A "grow your own" model has been implemented, targeting professionals with SEND experience, such as teachers, and converting Assistant Case Officers into full-time caseworkers, involving recruiting and developing from within.
- Career pathways have been enhanced to incorporate senior and specialist roles offering progression opportunities, attracting candidates with higher levels of expertise.
- Despite challenges in competing with agency pay rates, salaries for permanent roles and structured development plans support retention and recruitment efforts.

Educational Psychologists:

- The LA employs 10 locum EPs, with day rates ranging from £500 to £661 inside of IR35, some of which are on direct associate contracts with the council, though creating ongoing financial pressure on the service.
- Recruitment campaigns have attracted early-career professionals, but senior and leadership roles remain difficult to fill due to market shortages and pay disparities with the agency market.
- Reliance on agency supply chains provided via the Managed Service Provider ensures a consistent stream of candidates and consistency of pay though market pressure persist with agencies who are not on the councils MSP contracts pursuing candidate placements directly with service managers.
- Efforts to manage high agency costs include managing pay caps, identified internally. and exploring regional collaboration to standardise rates and reduce reliance on locums.
- Flexible roles and structured development opportunities are being explored to enhance the appeal of permanent positions.

Green Shoots:

- ✓ Leadership stability achieved through a 'top down' recruitment strategy has driven strategic workforce improvements and reduced reliance on agency staff.
- ✓ A "grow your own" model has strengthened recruitment pipelines by leveraging professionals with SEND experience and developing internal talent.
- ✓ The introduction of senior caseworker roles has improved retention and created clear progression pathways.
- ✓ Proactive pay caps and thresholds and are showing promise for controlling costs and building a sustainable workforce.
- ✓ Recruitment campaigns and training initiatives demonstrate the LAs commitment to long-term workforce development and resilience to prospective candidates

Case Study: Local Authority 4

Context:

The LA is facing significant challenges in recruiting and retention, particularly in relation to Educational Psychologists (EPs) and SEND caseworkers, creating workforce instability and significant financial pressures. Shortages have impacted on service delivery putting additional pressure on permanent members of staff, particularly in meeting statutory deadlines for Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) assessments. High reliance on locums and agency staff has significantly increased costs, with locum EPs costing more than double the amount of permanent EP per annum. Efforts to stabilize the workforce include retention strategies, flexible working options, and the development of an associate contract model for EPs to reduce reliance on agencies.

Training and induction is really challenging and despite investment it's really disappointing when workers leave after the time and money we've spent training them.

Educational Psychologists (EPs) are a highly respected, valued and an important part of our workforce, but we need regulation on locum arrangements due to unprecedented costs that are only continuing to rise. It has become a battle of attrition and it's creating huge pressure that no one benefits from.

SEND Caseworkers:

- 50-60% of SEND caseworkers are currently agency staff, ensuring manageable caseloads but limiting workforce stability and sustainability.
- High turnover and long-term sickness has contributed to instability, with 15% of staff on long-term sick leave in the past year.
- Senior coordinators oversee assessments and reviews without holding caseloads, offering better workforce support despite challenges.
- Experienced staff often leave for agency roles offering higher pay, indicated as £350 - £400 per day) and greater flexibility, persistently contributing to recruitment and retention difficulties.
- The LA has invested in training and development, but challenges arise when trained staff leave for better opportunities soon after completion.
- Efforts to improve retention include exploring retention bonuses and additional annual leave to encourage longer-term commitment from staff.

Educational Psychologists:

- The EP team includes 9 permanent EPs (7.5/8 FTE) but requires 14-15 FTE to meet service demands.
- Flexible working options are offered, but mandatory in-person requirements or 2 days per week pose challenges compared to other LAs offering more flexible or fully remote options, which does not align with their commitment to in person working with children.
- Locum EPs are currently costing up to £770 per day. This creates significant financial strain but remains necessary to meet statutory obligations.
- The associate contract model for EPs, often attracting self-employed former employees, has been introduced to reduce reliance on agencies, although associates typically work part-time and across multiple LAs at one time which impacts availability of this flexible resource.
- Agencies actively solicit permanent EPs for locum roles, exacerbating workforce shortages and inflating costs.

Green Shoots:

- ✓ The LA has invested in training and development, which has supported staff in their personal and professional progress and direct impact on work with children's and families
- ✓ The associate contract model for EPs provides an alternative to agency reliance, reducing costs and leveraging relationships with former employees who are experienced and understand the local context.
- ✓ The senior coordinator model provides better support for caseworkers, contributing to manageable caseloads and improved service delivery.

Case Study: Local Authority 5

Context:

The LA has undertaken significant steps to stabilise and improve its SEND workforce, including a restructure in September 2022 to expand the SEND 0-25 team. Over the past year, staffing levels have reached capacity, with a clear focus on maintaining team stability and reducing reliance on agency staff. However, caseloads remain high, reflecting a broader national challenge of rising demand that outpaces staffing and resources. Positive recruitment trends and ongoing investment in workforce development highlight a efforts to sustain improvement momentum, in parallel to addressing systemic challenges.

We've had a positive experience of permanent recruitment over recent years, and there is now good stability on the team. We of course get churn, but recruit well to recover. We're not doing any specific targeted recruitment outside of our normal channels and get a lot of responses but are strict with shortlisting.

Recruitment of main grade EPs remains a challenge, but 'grow our own' strategies are bearing fruit, albeit slowly. We ensure that our EPs are given a balance of work, not just statutory assessments, to improve retention. We are proud that the diversity of our team is representative of the Local Authorities demographic. Our reputation really matters to us. We want people to feel seen and supported.

SEND Caseworkers:

- Current caseloads average around 300 cases per officer, despite investment that halved previous levels. Officers dedicated to annual reviews face significant challenges, with a large backlog to address.

- Workforce demographics are mostly female, those otherwise diverse in ethnicity and representative of the borough's population, with a range of ages. Flexible working arrangements include condensed hours and three mandatory office days weekly.
- Agency use is minimal, with just two staff focused on specific tasks under the Delivering Better Value programme. Recruitment for permanent roles is effective, with recent drives yielding 30 applicants for case officer roles and 11 shortlisted candidates.
- Training opportunities are a priority, with cross-team initiatives ensuring skills development. However, there is no formal career pathway, though lateral moves, for example into Early Help teams. This provides a sense of variety and professional growth, which serves to benefit services and the LA beyond SEND.

Educational Psychologists:

- Recruitment for permanent EPs remains challenging, with a lack of appropriate applicants for main-grade and senior roles. Efforts include starting new recruits higher on the pay scale and exploring creative approaches to hiring.
- The team has achieved a greater balance of permanent versus agency staff, with all permanent EPs working full-time. Agency EPs are still required, however, reliance on agencies is scrutinised at a corporate level to ensure value for money especially given rising daily rates of £600 per day or more, compared to £500 per day previously.
- Strategies to retain EPs include variation of tasks, balancing new projects with statutory-heavy work, which has been identified as a key push factor resulting in turnover.
- The LA has explored international recruitment, particularly from New Zealand and the US, with some success

Green Shoots:

- ✓ Exploring AI tools to assist with plan writing aims to further alleviate pressures and allow case officers to dedicate more time to core responsibilities.
- ✓ The recruitment of international Educational Psychologists highlights innovative strategies to address workforce shortages.
- ✓ The LAs reputation as a supportive and inclusive workplace, with a focus on staff well-being, has helped attract and retain talent, particularly at case officer levels.

Case Study: Local Authority 6

Context:

Over the past 18 months, the LA has transitioned from a reliance on agency staff to building a more stable and permanent SEND workforce. Historical challenges included high agency costs, significant backlogs, and leadership instability. Improvements have been driven by strategic recruitment campaigns, leadership restructuring, and a "grow your own" model to develop a stronger pipeline for new talent. However, recruitment and retention remain persistent issues, particularly for Educational Psychologists (EPs) and SEND caseworkers, compounded by systemic pressures, growing complexity of need alongside rising demand and pay disparities. The LA do not use their MSP as a route to market for SEND and EP agency recruitment. This means that they are often contending with direct negotiations on a case by case basis which makes pay rates and agency fees more inconsistent and prone to increase.

The increased complexity we are seeing in our children is making things more stressful. Working with children and families where complexities are greater is really challenging with high emotions. We hear from families and schools and where there concerns that this will impact turnover and difficulty to find placements for these children.

SEND Caseworkers:

- The SEND caseworker team is structured into four phases: Post-16, Secondary, Early Years and Primary, and Assessment.
- Caseloads have improved from over 250 to approximately 150 per worker, but this remains above the ideal target of 100. Rising demand continues to strain the workforce, affecting timeliness and service quality.
- Caseworkers come from diverse professional backgrounds, leading to inconsistencies in service delivery, though training initiatives like the nasen Caseworker Award is slowly contributing to improvements in consistency of service.
- Pay disparities, with the LA offering salaries around £5,000 less than neighbouring areas, hinders recruitment and retention efforts. Around 5–6 agency staff are still required to cover vacancies.
- Broader system challenges, such as shortages in partner health services, exacerbate workload pressures, as well as delays in accessing therapies add complexity of cases.

Educational Psychologists:

- Recruitment for senior roles, such as the Principal EP, has been particularly challenging, with multiple re-advertisements yielding limited candidates.
- Hybrid work arrangements allow EPs to work remotely up to two days per week, but the LA struggles to compete with areas offering fully remote roles.
- Salaries are lower than neighbouring authorities, and financial incentives, such as retention bonuses, are not currently in place.
- An associate contract model for EPs has been introduced, utilising part-time professionals to bridge gaps in service delivery, though this does not fully address shortages.

Green Shoots:

- ✓ The associate contract model for EPs has reduced reliance on agencies, offering a cost-effective alternative for service delivery.
- ✓ Mandatory training, such as the nasen Caseworker Award, has improved consistency across the SEND casework team.
- ✓ Regional discussions on salary standardisation and retention incentives, such as additional annual leave, are promising steps toward addressing pay disparities.
- ✓ Engagement in national and regional forums positions the LA as an advocate for systemic workforce improvements.
- ✓ A collaborative work culture and a progressive council ethos are promoted to attract prospective staff, helping to enhance the LAs reputation as an employer.

Section 4: Four Priorities Recommended as Part of Next Steps

Priority 1: Strengthen networks, engagement and shared learning across the region

- a. Facilitate a London SEND Heads of Service Meeting and explore with them options for future engagement.
- b. Facilitate a recruitment and retention workshop to explore fieldwork learnings and share best practices in more depth.
- c. Collaborate with National Association of Principal Educational Psychologists (NAPEP) to enable robust developments that and enhance both regional and cross-regional working.

Priority 2: Listen to the SEND workforce

- a. Undertake qualitative research with the SEND workforce through a 'Big Listen' initiative to capture the voice of staff to enhance clarity of focus in next steps and ensure change *with* not *to*.
- b. Utilise existing data that contributes to qualitative intelligence, and explore opportunities to develop more insights to the scope and scale of workforce challenges.

Priority 3: Collaborate to improve agency engagement and root cause push and pull factors

- a. Engage with Managed Service Providers (MSPs) and specialist agencies to improve partnership working and strengthen market awareness.
- b. Explore opportunities to develop bespoke SEND Caseworker and Educational Psychologist 'London Pledge' agreements that enable consistency of agency costs and improve the understanding of quality expectations.
- c. Work with other regions systematically to ensure collaboration and cooperative market engagement that enables shared learning and prevents unintended consequences for all.

Priority 4: Develop a regional training academy

- a. Explore interest in developing a regional academy synthesizing existing London offers.
- b. Co-produce a programme balancing central funding with local authority contributions, leveraging networks to run thematic workshops and dedicated sessions.
- c. Develop a series of induction workshops targeting key roles and thematic areas of focus identified by the workforce.
- d. Develop multi-agency training sessions to enhance recruitment and retention, building on the SEND Leadership Programme model to create a bespoke "London Training Offer".