From Backlogs to Brilliance:

How AI is Redefining EHCP Creation

A Detailed Report

Improving SEND Provision and EHCP Plans in England

EHCP

This report explores how the UK government's AI initiatives can accelerate the development of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), bringing much-needed support to children nationwide. By analysing AI's potential to overcome current hurdles in the EHCP process, the report highlights the incredible opportunity for adoption of AI and the transformative benefits for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and local authorities

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Overview

Earlier this week, the UK government announced ambitious plans to accelerate AI development and position the nation as a global leader in the field[1]. Highlighting the urgency of AI adoption across the public sector, Prime Minister Keir Starmer emphasised that "We cannot afford to lag behind other countries in our adoption of AI. We need to be bold and ambitious in our approach, ensuring that AI is used to improve public services and deliver better outcomes for everyone." This has significant implications for local governments, particularly in areas like education, where AI can help local authorities deliver services more efficiently and effectively, improving response times and reducing administrative burdens.

The news was released on the same week that the Public Accounts Committee released a report on the SEND emergency, investigating the damning state of support for children and young people with special educational needs. The crisis in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system is urgent and deeply concerning. Despite increased investment, the system is struggling under surging demand, with a **77%** increase in Education, Health, and Care (EHC) plans issued between 2016 and 2021, far outpacing funding and resourcing improvements. This has led to a significant failure in meeting statutory obligations,

with only 50% of plans completed within the required 20-week timeframe in many areas, leaving thousands of children without the critical support they need. Families face a "postcode lottery" in accessing SEND services, creating inequity and amplifying frustration.

A core area of focus is EHCPs, legally binding documents that ensure children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) receive the provisions necessary to reach their full potential.

> In 2024, there were approximately **576,000** children and young people with EHC plans in England, and around **84,400** new plans were drafted [3].

The costs associated with EHCPs are substantial, and with a statutory deadline of 20 weeks to create an EHCP, councils are up against rising costs and tight timeframes. Liberal Democrat Spokesperson for Education Munira Wilson MP highlighted, **"There is a crisis in support for children with special educational needs and disabilities. The system is bureaucratic, adversarial and stressful for families, and it's failing to deliver for too many children." [5]**

Legal Framework and Guidance for EHC Plan Creation in the UK

In the UK, the creation of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) is governed by the Children and Families Act 2014. This legislation outlines the legal framework for identifying and supporting children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). The process begins with a request for an EHC needs assessment, which can be made by parents, young people, or professionals. If the local authority decides to proceed with an assessment, they must gather information from various sources, including parents, educational settings, and health and social care professionals. This information is then used to determine whether the child or young person has SEND and requires an EHCP.

The EHCP is a legally binding document that outlines the child's needs educational, health, and social care needs, as well as their aspirations and the desired outcomes. The EHCP also specifies the provision that will be made to support the child, including the type and amount of support, the professionals involved, and the location where the support will be provided.

The Department for Education provides statutory guidance on the EHCP process, which outlines the legal requirements and best practices for local authorities. This guidance covers all aspects of the EHCP process, from the initial request for assessment to the review and maintenance of the plan. It emphasises the importance of person-centered planning, co-production with parents and young people, and collaboration between different agencies.

Current Challenges in EHCP Drafting

The current EHCP drafting process faces several challenges that impact both the efficiency of the process and the quality of support provided to children with SEND:

Time-consuming procedures:

The process involves extensive paperwork, manual data handling, and coordination between professionals, leading to delays. With statutory deadlines of 20 weeks and increasing caseloads (1,626 EHCPs completed weekly in 2023), SEND Caseworkers spend 0.5–1.5 days drafting each plan, leaving little time for proactive support.

High workloads:

Caseworkers often manage dozens of cases simultaneously, leading to administrative burdens and reducing their ability to focus on creating detailed, high-quality, and personalized plans for each child.

Coordination challenges:

Gathering information from parents, educators, and healthcare professionals is a time-intensive task requiring effective communication and collaboration. This complexity often delays progress and creates additional stress for caseworkers.

Lack of personalisation:

Many EHCPs lack sufficient individualization, often appearing generic and failing to effectively support the unique learning and development goals of children with SEND. Balancing standardized processes with personalization remains a significant challenge.

Inconsistent quality:

The quality of EHCPs varies widely across local authorities, resulting in unequal access to resources and services for children with SEND, creating disparities in outcomes.

Financial strain:

The costs associated with the EHCP process place significant pressure on local authority budgets, limiting their ability to allocate adequate resources and potentially delaying necessary support.

Adapting to changes:

Keeping up with evolving legislation, guidance, and best practices is challenging for caseworkers, who must stay informed while managing already demanding workloads and time constraints..

These challenges highlight the need for improved support and resources for SEND caseworkers, including access to technology and training that can help them to overcome these obstacles and improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the EHCP drafting process.

How AI Can Drive Change in EHCP

"As an EHCP Caseworker, I spent long hours drafting EHCPs and it would have been beneficial to have time to spend on other case work duties such as talking to families, school placements and general provision for each child. By harnessing the power of GenAI, I can focus more on advocating for children and young people, guiding them through their EHCP journey, and making a real difference in their lives."

Sarah Warren, Former
SEND Caseworker

01 **Decreasing time spent on drafting plans and focusing on quality time spent with citizens.**

More specifically, SEND case workers can spend more time on building relationships and communicating with children and families, providing impactful support and reducing cases that lead to a tribunal.

02 **Improving quality and consistency:**

AI can assist in generating initial drafts of EHCPs based on standardised templates and data, ensuring greater consistency and adherence to best practices [16]. This can help to improve the overall quality of EHCPs and reduce variability across different local authorities.

03 **Facilitating communication and collaboration:**

AI can facilitate communication and collaboration between different professionals involved in the EHCP process, ensuring smoother coordination and information sharing [11]. This can help to break down silos between different agencies and ensure that everyone involved in the child's care is working together effectively.

By leveraging AI, local governments can improve the efficiency, quality, and personalization of EHCPs, ultimately leading to better outcomes for children with SEND. AI tools and platforms, such as Agilisys Transform's EHCP tool are already available to support this transformation [17]

AI can lead to significant cost and time savings in EHCP drafting. Studies suggest that using digital technologies and AI can result in an estimated **25%** cost and time savings, equating to **£60M** nationally and **£420k** per local authority that adopts the technology [14]. These savings can be reinvested in other areas of SEND provision, further enhancing support for children and families.

AI-Powered Initiatives Underway

1. The Department for Education Digital EHCP Project

The Department for Education is undertaking a digital EHCP project with the aim of improving outcomes for children and young people with EHC plans [8]. This cross-government project, initiated in 2023 [9], seeks to reform the SEND system and make it more user-centered, simpler, faster, and more cost-effective [10]. The project aims to standardise and digitise the EHCP process, ensuring that plans are comprehensive, accurate, and personalised to meet the unique needs of each child. It also seeks to reduce conflicts within the EHCP system through better co-production by promoting collaboration and communication between parents, educators, and healthcare professionals.

The project is currently in its beta phase, following discovery and alpha research phases [7]. The Department for Education is actively engaging with stakeholders, including local authorities, integrated care boards, and software suppliers, to gather feedback and shape the development of the digital EHCP system. The project is exploring various aspects of digitization, including data standardization, user experience design, and the use of analytics and AI to support the EHCP process.

2. Agilisys Transform's EHCP Drafting Solution

Agilisys Transform

Agilisys, a leading provider of digital transformation solutions for the public sector, offers QuickAction, an AI-powered EHCP drafting solution designed to streamline the EHCP process and improve outcomes for children with SEND. This solution leverages AI to produce a first draft of an EHCP for the case worker to review, saving on average 5 hours per plan. Transform's EHCP tool is currently the only live tool in the market that provides drafting services, and is in use by North Somerset Council.

Transform's EHCP tool provides a transformative solution for councils and caseworkers, addressing key challenges in the Education, Health, and Care Plan process:
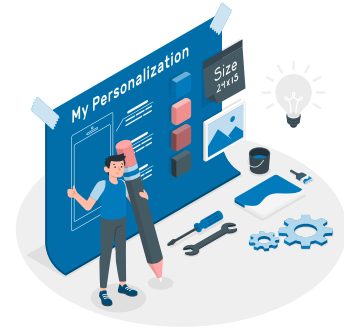
Streamlining processes:

Transform's EHCP tool automates the summarisation of large amounts of information into the EHCP draft, significantly reducing the time needed to complete plans. This allows caseworkers to dedicate time to engagement with families and children.

Improving personalisation:

By harnessing advanced generative AI, Transform's EHCP tool supports the creation of tailored plans that meet the unique needs and aspirations of each child, ensuring appropriate support and resources are provided.
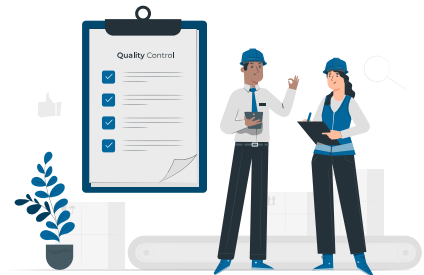
Enhancing collaboration

The platform simplifies the coordination of information from parents, educators, and healthcare professionals, making it easier to integrate diverse inputs into cohesive, high-quality plans.

Increasing consistency and quality

Transform's EHCP tool helps standardise processes while maintaining flexibility for personalisation, ensuring consistently high-quality plans across cases and reducing disparities in support provided by different councils.

You can learn more about this solution at

https://transform.agilisys.co.uk/ehcp-plus/

Recommendations for Local Governments

Based on the findings presented in this report, the following recommendations are offered to local governments seeking to effectively leverage AI in EHCP drafting:

Develop a clear AI strategy for EHCP drafting:

This strategy should outline the local authority's goals for AI adoption, identify specific use cases, and address ethical considerations.

Invest in AI infrastructure and training:

Local authorities should invest in the necessary infrastructure, such as data centers and AI platforms, and provide training to SEND caseworkers on how to effectively use AI tools.

Pilot AI-powered EHCP solutions:

Start with small-scale pilot programs to test and evaluate different AI solutions before implementing them across the local authority.

Partner with technology providers:

Collaborate with technology providers specialising in AI solutions for education to access expertise and support in implementing AI-powered EHCP systems.

Prioritise data privacy and security:

Implement robust data protection measures and ethical guidelines to ensure the responsible use of sensitive data related to children with SEND.

Monitor and evaluate the impact of AI:

Continuously monitor and evaluate the impact of AI on the EHCP process, including its effects on efficiency, quality, and outcomes for children with SEND.

Engage with stakeholders:

Communicate with parents, educators, and other stakeholders about the use of AI in EHCP drafting to build trust and address any concerns.

Have robust discussions on ethical use of AI:

It is important to address privacy and security concerns of any tools you procure. Ensure all tools are ISO 27001 compliant and that the data you input does not train any underlying model.

By following these recommendations, local governments can effectively harness the transformative potential of AI to improve the EHCP drafting process and enhance outcomes for children with SEND.

Conclusion: Why It Is Important to Act Now

The UK government's AI acceleration plan presents a significant opportunity for local governments to transform the EHCP drafting process. By embracing AI, local authorities can address current challenges, improve efficiency and quality, and ultimately enhance outcomes for children with SEND. This aligns with the UK's ambition to be a global leader in AI, and the potential benefits for children with SEND are a key part of this vision.

Acting now on AI acceleration in EHCP drafting is crucial for several reasons:

▷ **Early adoption advantage:** Early adopters of AI technology in the education sector will be better positioned to leverage its benefits and gain a competitive advantage. They will have the opportunity to shape the development and implementation of AI solutions, ensuring that they meet the specific needs of their local communities.

▷ **Addressing the growing demand for SEND support:** The demand for EHCPs is increasing significantly, putting a strain on resources and leading to delays. In 2023, there were 84,428 new EHCPs issued in England, a 26.6% increase from the previous year. This upward trend is expected to continue, with the number of children and young people with EHCPs more than doubling since the SEND reforms were launched in 2014. AI can help local authorities manage this growing demand more effectively, ensuring that children with SEND receive timely and appropriate support.

▷ **Aligning with the national AI agenda:** Embracing AI in EHCP drafting aligns with the UK government's broader AI acceleration plan and its vision for the future of education. The government has committed to expanding the UK's AI capabilities and promoting its use across various sectors, including the public sector. By adopting AI in this area, local governments can contribute to the national goal of becoming a global leader in AI and demonstrate their commitment to innovation in education.

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The increasing demand for EHCPs is a significant challenge for local authorities. AI can play a crucial role in managing this demand effectively and ensuring timely support for children with SEND. By automating tasks, streamlining workflows, and improving efficiency, AI can help local authorities cope with the growing number of EHCP requests and ensure that children receive the support they need without undue delays.

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