

JULY 2025

A young girl with Down syndrome is shown from the chest up, looking down at a table. She has light brown hair with two small yellow flower clips. She is wearing a white long-sleeved shirt with small purple and blue polka dots. The background is a blurred indoor setting with a white table and a green object on the table.

Rising Demand for EHCPs and the Case for Intelligent Tools like EHCP Plus

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Introduction

We are Outcomes Matter Consulting, founders of EHCP Plus. Over the last two years, we've partnered with local authorities across England to explore, test, and embed AI and emerging technologies in public services, particularly within SEND. **In Autumn 2023, we launched** our pioneering generative AI project, **EHCP Plus**, specifically designed to support SEND caseworkers facing unprecedented demand.

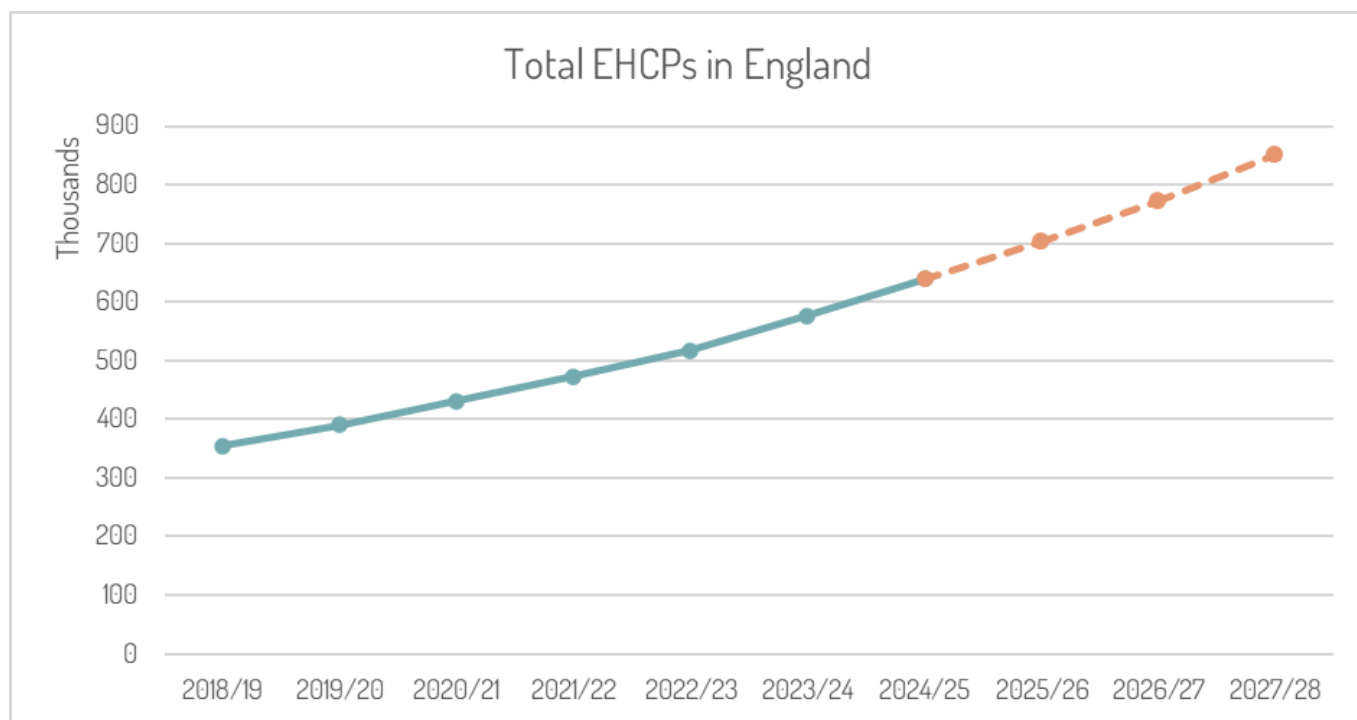
The newly released **2024 EHCP data highlights an ongoing, critical rise in EHCP requests, plans, and pressures across local authorities**, further underlining the necessity of solutions like EHCP Plus. **This report** examines these latest figures, identifies key trends, explores the implications for local authorities, and **makes a clear, evidence-based case for intelligent, supportive tools to address growing demands** sustainably and effectively.

Key Findings from the 2024 EHCP Data Release



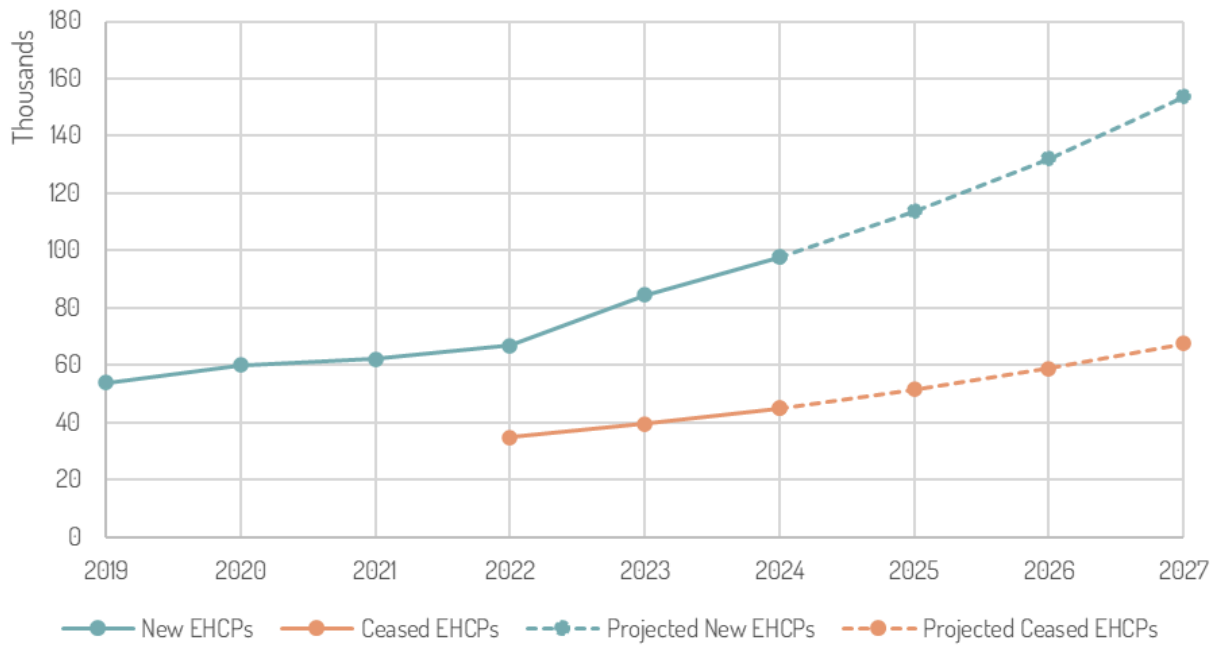
The total number of EHCPs are at an all-time high. The **total number of children and young people with EHCPs** in England **rose to 640,000** as of January 2025. This is 10.8% higher than January 2024 and nearly double the number from five years ago (350,000 in 2019).

Every year since 2014 has seen an increase in EHCP caseload. If demand continues to rise at current rates, there could be **850,000 children with EHCPs by 2027**. This has implications not just for assessment teams, but for all parts of the education and care system.



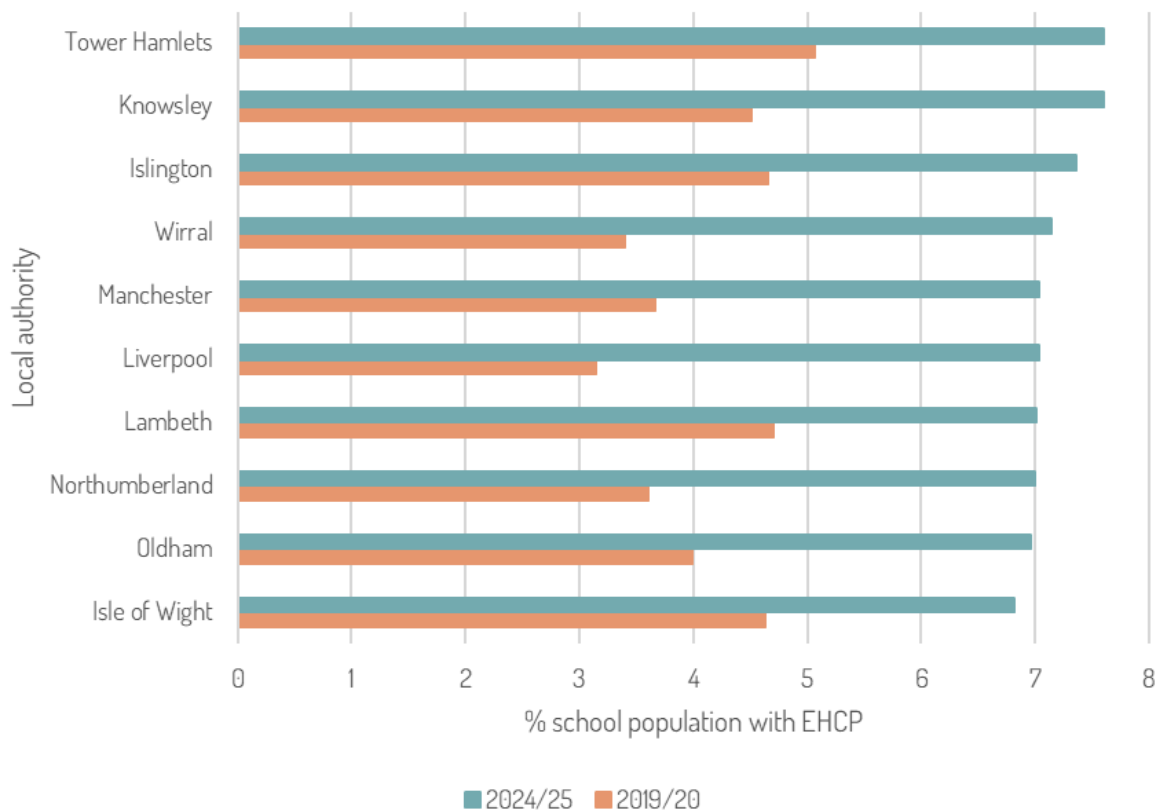
The number of new EHC plans has surged. **98,000 new** Education, Health and Care Plans were issued during 2024 – a **15.8% increase from 2023**. This continues an upward trend, with an **80% increase since 2019**. In 10 local authorities, rates have more than doubled since 2019. At current rates, **new EHCPs will reach 150,000 nationally by 2027**.

New and Ceased EHCPs in England 2019-2027



Rates of EHCP are rising. The national **rate of EHCPs in the school population was 5.3% in 2024/25** compared to 3.3% in 2019/20. Rates were highest in the North West at 6.4%. In some areas, such as Liverpool, the rate has more than doubled since 2019.

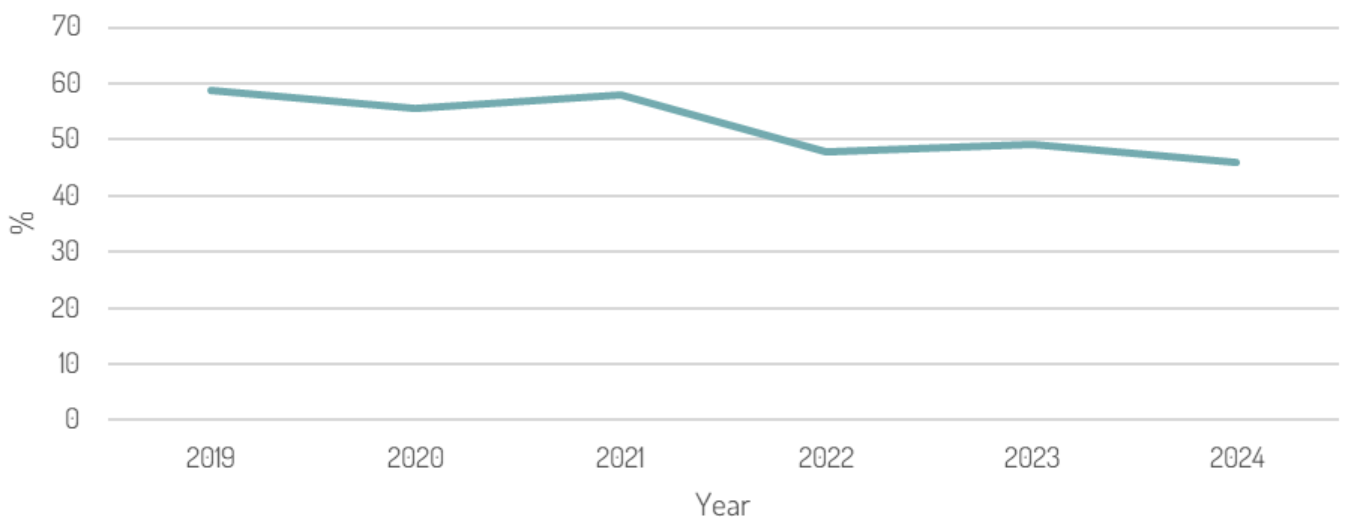
Local authorities with the highest EHCP rate



Timeliness has continued to fall. Only **46.4% of new EHCPs in 2024 were issued within the 20-week statutory timeframe**, down from 50.3% in 2023. 30% of local authorities achieved less than $\frac{1}{3}$ in timeframe – with 12 below 10% and the lowest performance 3%.

The combination of volume and complexity, combined with workforce shortages, is making statutory compliance harder each year. Delays in issuing plans can mean delays in receipt of support, with a significant effect on lifelong outcomes.

Percentage of EHCPs issued within 20 weeks



These numbers aren't just statistics though – they represent real children, families, and communities navigating an increasingly strained SEND system. The sustained growth in EHCP demand highlights the real and urgent need for immediate, innovative, and scalable solutions.

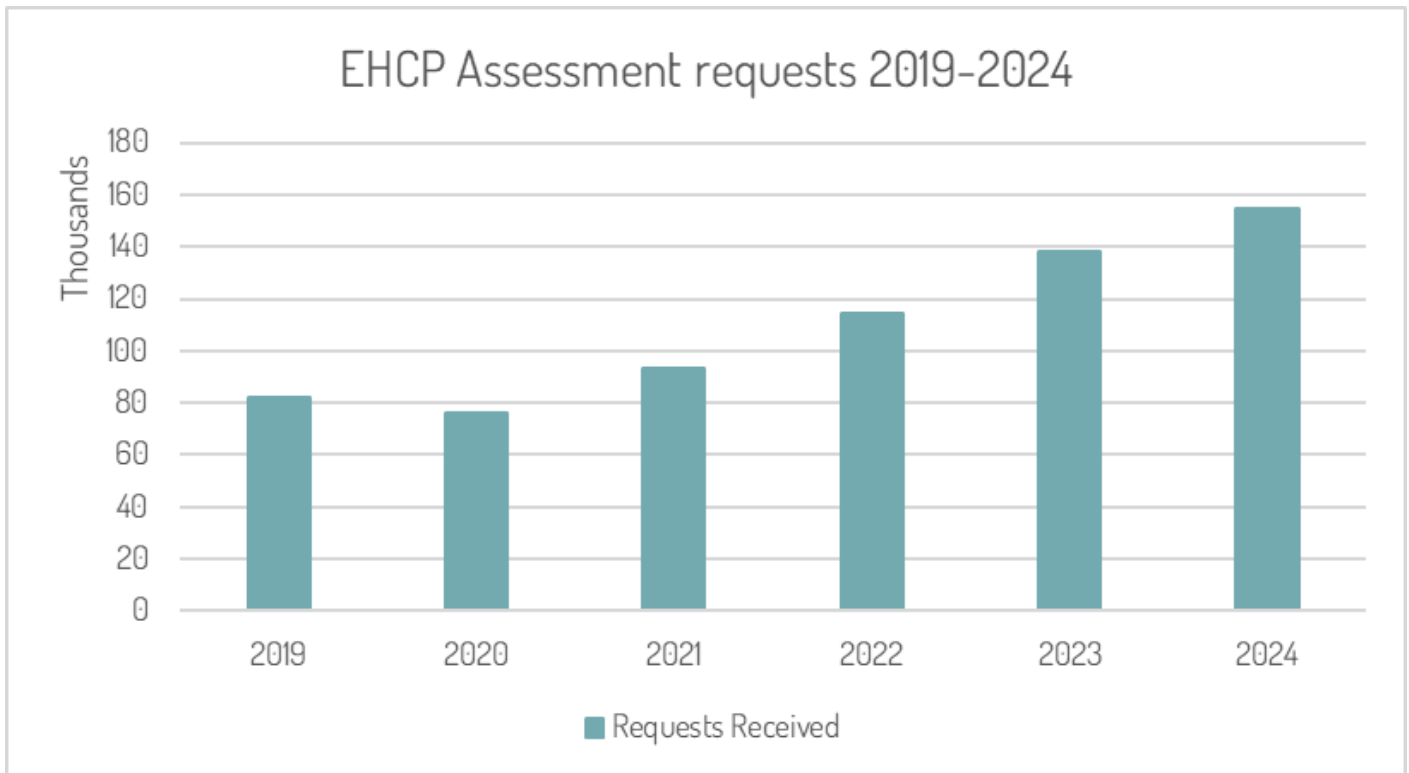
Trends and Pressures in the EHCP System

Beyond this headline rise in demand, we can see other trends that increase workload across the system, as well as missed opportunities to improve outcomes.

Once a child has an EHCP, they tend to continue to have one until adulthood. Although the number of ceased plans has increased, this has not kept pace with new plans meaning the total EHCP caseload has continued to rise. **Two-thirds of ceased plans were for children 18+** suggesting most children will continue to receive support until they reach adulthood. 80% of ceased plans below age 18 were due to a transfer to another local authority, representing a transferred, as opposed to ceased, cost.

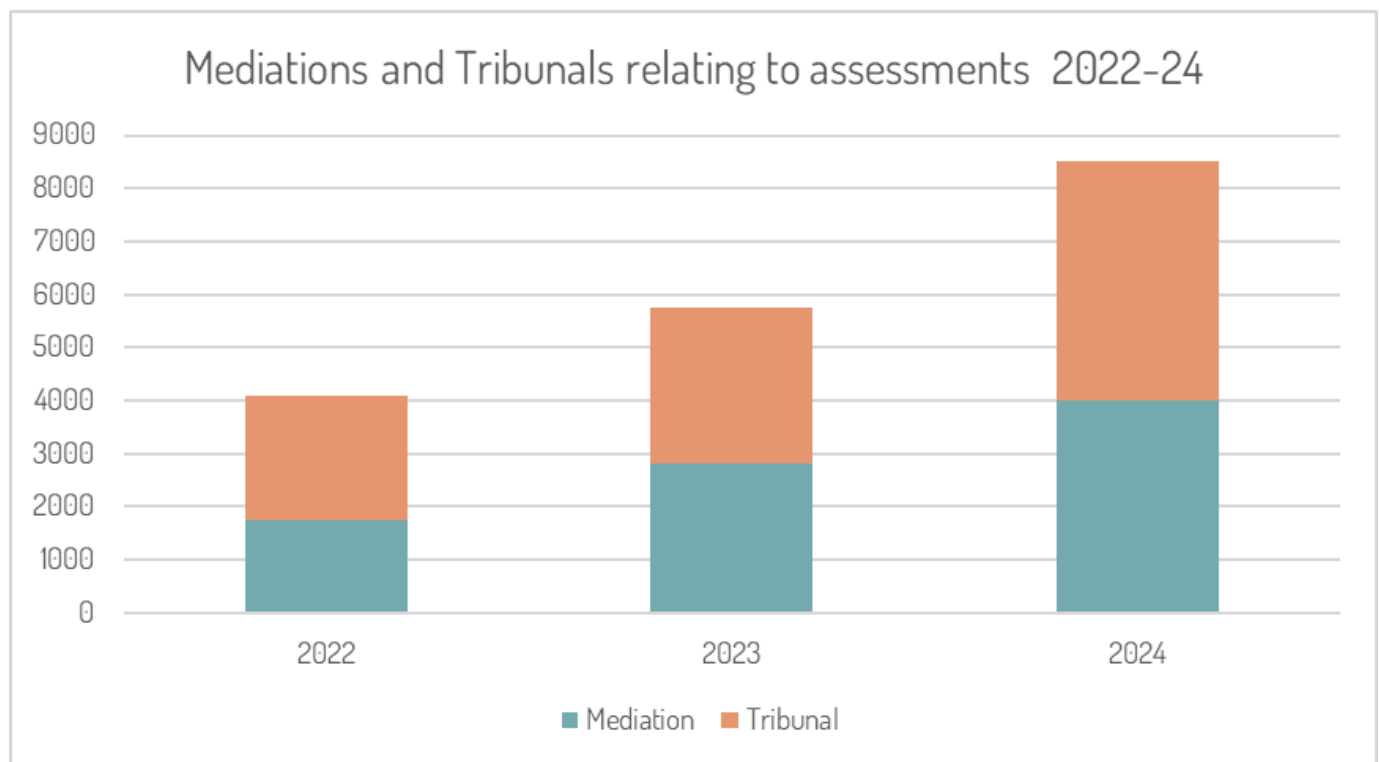
▲ 11%

Assessment requests have risen. Local authorities received **150,000 EHCP needs assessment requests in 2024**, up 11.8% from 2023. In almost half of local authorities, assessments requests have more than doubled since 2020, with requests tripling in Derbyshire. Although rates of successful assessment have not increased substantially, every assessment request represents workload for the council.



Annual reviews continue to rise as caseload rises and are less timely. Local authorities are unable to keep up demand for annual reviews. **520,000 annual reviews were expected last year but only 330,000 review meetings were held.** 89,000 review decisions were outstanding at time of reporting. This means some children are not getting the right support which changes as their needs change. Annual reviews were also not timely, with **55% of decisions issued outside the four-week target period.**

Disputed outcomes have rapidly increased: The number of both **mediations and tribunals has doubled in 2 years**, to a combined total of 8500. Every case that goes to appeal consumes hours of officer time, often in already stretched teams. Some councils are trying to settle cases earlier – but this still takes significant effort and often highlights systemic problems in initial decision-making or plan quality.



Taken together, these trends demonstrate systemic pressures that are unlikely to ease without proactive intervention.



Implications for Local Authority Capacity and Practice

The rising **demand for EHCPs has profound implications** for local authority practice, workforce management, service quality, and financial sustainability. This section explores these impacts, demonstrating how increasing pressures affect every layer of SEND service provision and support.



Workforce pressure:

The number of case officers has not kept pace with the number of EHCPs. Many local authorities report vacancies or difficulties recruiting. Staff turnover is rising – and with it, the cost of onboarding and training. Newer caseworkers often need more supervision and support, making consistent delivery harder to sustain. The risk is a spiral: as caseloads grow, more experienced staff burn out, and capacity falls further.



Systems stretched beyond design:

Most SEND teams were not set up to manage the current volume of EHCPs.

Processes are largely manual. Record-keeping is often siloed. Handoffs between professionals are dependent on personal relationships or informal workarounds. Even with dedicated staff, the system design itself is limiting responsiveness.



Variation in quality

With large caseloads, quality varies. Plans written at speed may lack specificity, clear outcomes, or evidence-based provision. This not only affects the child – it also increases the likelihood of dispute, appeal, or breakdown. The best EHCPs are co-produced, well-sequenced, and tailored to each child – but that takes time, insight, and joined-up working.



Impact on schools and providers:

As more children receive EHCPs, schools are navigating growing complexity in classrooms. SENCOs report increased time spent liaising with local authority teams, managing provision, and supporting family communication. The capacity of mainstream settings to meet need varies widely, and the pressure on specialist placements is growing. In some areas, high-cost placements have doubled in two years.



The cost of inaction:

Without new approaches, delays will continue to rise, trust will decline, and statutory breaches will increase. Financially, failure to improve efficiency risks further overspend, diverting resources from early help and inclusion. From a public service perspective, it limits the ability to focus on strengths, aspirations, and community connections.

Without significant changes in practice, resource allocation, or process innovation, local authorities will continue to face escalating pressures. This will negatively impact not just internal operations, but the experiences and outcomes of children, young people, families, and educational providers.

The Case for Intelligent Tools like EHCP Plus



Addressing these systemic pressures requires more than just incremental changes – it instead demands intelligent, innovative tools designed specifically for SEND services.

Here we present **EHCP Plus**, detailing how its integration of generative AI, behavioural science, and deep SEND expertise uniquely positions it to relieve pressures and enhance outcomes.

To manage rising volumes while improving quality and experience, councils need practical, scalable tools. **EHCP Plus is our AI-powered tool** built specifically for SEND caseworkers. It is the **only solution that combines the use of generative AI with deep senior SEND expertise and behavioural and culture change support** to ensure success.

FAST,
ACCURATE
DRAFT
GENERATION

Caseworkers drag and drop relevant documents – advice from professionals, thoughts from the family, and supporting reports. The tool analyses this content and **produces a high-quality EHCP draft within minutes**. The worker then reviews and customises the output using their professional judgement. This transforms a 6-hour writing process into a 1-hour review and editing process.

BUILT
AROUND
STATUTORY
DUTIES AND
GOOD
PRACTICE

EHCP Plus reflects the structure of the Code of Practice, supports SMART outcomes, and includes prompts aligned to relevant standards. It **helps councils reduce delays**, avoid common drafting errors, **and create more coherent, legally sound plans**.

SUPPORTS
IMPROVEMENT
AND
CONSISTENCY

The tool **improves consistency without losing individualisation**. It helps services build a shared understanding of what good looks like, supports internal moderation, and reduces the variation caused by high staff turnover. For new staff, it acts as **a digital coach**; for experienced staff, it provides **a more efficient starting point**.

MORE TIME FOR WHAT MATTERS

Caseworkers using EHCP Plus spend less time writing and more time doing. That includes co-production conversations, annual review planning, quality assurance, and transition support. It also **gives leaders more visibility over workload and progress**, allowing better resourcing decisions.

DESIGNED FOR REAL IMPACT

EHCP Plus is the only solution that combines generative AI with hands-on behavioural change support and SEND service expertise.

The offer includes:

- A four-month onboarding and support programme that builds momentum and embeds impact
- Tailored support and coaching for staff
- Tools and templates to support change across systems
- Direct support from senior SEND professionals throughout the process
- Learning loops to gather feedback and refine local delivery

ACCESSIBLE
TO EVERY
COUNCIL

With founders on a **mission to save 50,000 days of caseworker time**, EHCP Plus has been built to be genuinely accessible. We've designed it for flexibility, responsiveness, and ease of use – whether you're a large county council or a small unitary authority. **Our model is grounded in public service values and aims to remove barriers** to adoption while ensuring meaningful results.

EHCP Plus is not merely a technological solution—it's a **strategic tool for system-wide improvement**. By combining advanced AI with targeted professional and cultural support, it equips councils with a scalable, practical way to respond to demand sustainably, ultimately improving the lives of children and families.



Meeting the Moment: A Practical Way Forward

Faced with undeniable data and clear evidence of mounting pressures, local authorities must act now. Delays in adopting new approaches carry significant risks for communities, budgets, and council reputations.

The data is clear: demand for EHCPs continues to rise – and without the right tools in place, councils will struggle to meet statutory duties while supporting children and families well.

EHCP Plus is the only solution that combines generative AI, behavioural science, and deep SEND expertise into an accessible offer that delivers results in just four months.



We know the **SEND system** isn't broken because people don't care – **it's overwhelmed** because the demand has outgrown the model. With the right tools, there's a way forward.

Adopting **EHCP Plus** represents **not just a response to immediate pressures, but a proactive investment** in long-term service quality, workforce sustainability, and improved outcomes for children and families.

The time to act is now... contact us to find out more: emma@outcomesmatter.co.uk