



**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE -
21 JANUARY 2025**

SEND AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-2027

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of report

1. The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy, which is a key partnership strategy to support the education, health and care needs of children and young people in Leicestershire with special educational needs and disabilities. The views of the Committee are sought as part of the consultation process.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. The primary legislation regarding children and young people with SEND is the Children and Families Act 2014. This sets out the duties that local authorities and Integrated Commissioning Boards must fulfil. Leicestershire's SEND arrangements were inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission in 2020 and reinspected in 2022, resulting in a Written Statement of Action and an Accelerated Progress Plan. A revised SEND Local Area Inspection framework was introduced in April 2024 and Leicestershire is awaiting an inspection under the new framework. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy outlines local priorities and sets out how the County Council and its partners will improve services and outcomes over the next three years. The Local Area SEND and Inclusion Development Plan in Section 5 of the Strategy identifies five priority areas of activity, incorporating ongoing improvements to deliver the required outcomes from the Accelerated Progress Plan.
3. The 2024-27 Strategy is a refresh of the previous SEND and Inclusion Strategy that was taken to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2020 and agreed by the Cabinet on 18 September 2020. This is the third SEND and Inclusion Strategy and delivers on the ambitions of the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26 and supports the aims of the County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-26, which was approved by the County Council in March 2022.
4. High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) is provided to local authorities for funding pupils with SEND where needs cannot be met in mainstream schools and for other SEN support services such as Specialist Teaching Services and support for pupils at risk or those excluded from schools. The Cabinet, at its meeting on 13 September 2024 considered a report on the Council's Medium Term Financial

Strategy (MTFS) and Budget Monitoring and noted the significant financial challenges facing the Authority. The report highlighted that without new interventions, a deficit in the High Needs Block of the DSG was expected to increase over the next MTFS period, creating a significant and unresolved financial risk for the Authority.

5. The Cabinet, in November 2024 authorised the Director of Children and Family Services to seek permission from the Secretary of State to allow a proposed funding transfer of 0.5% from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) and the creation of a Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Investment Fund. The Secretary of State has subsequently approved the proposals.

Background

6. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027 (attached at Appendix A to this report) sets out the vision and priorities for partners delivering education, health and social care services to children and young people aged 0-25 in Leicestershire with SEND.
7. It will provide the overarching framework for service development in SEND and Inclusion Services across Leicestershire. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been developed in consultation with local area partners and parents and carers. It sets out the aspirations of the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board for the period 2024 to 2027.
8. The strategy provides the strategic steer for the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board. The actions will be resourced through existing staffing or may be delivered as part of a programme of work. For instance, Leicestershire's involvement in the Department for Education sponsored Change Partnership Programme has enabled additional resources to trial new ways of working which are being coordinated through Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire.
9. Over the period of the previous strategy, the local area SEND and Inclusion Partnership have considered what works well and current barriers to achieving its vision for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire. The Partnership has used performance and outcome data and feedback from children and young people and their parents and carers to co-produce priority areas for further development. These include:
 - The child and family are at the heart of all service delivery;
 - The Department will have an accurate understanding of the needs and lived experiences of children and young people with SEND;
 - Children and young people with SEND are prepared for successful transition throughout their life;
 - Leaders across the SEND partnership will work together to plan, deliver and quality assure Leicestershire's offer;
 - The Department will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities.
10. Implementation of the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy would, as with the existing Strategy, be monitored by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board,

reporting to the Children and Families Partnership. The latter comprises the Cabinet Lead Member for Children and Family Services and representatives from the Council's Children and Family Services, Adults and Communities, and Public Health Departments, the Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland Integrated Commissioning Board, the Leicestershire Partnership Trust, Special, Primary and Secondary Schools, Further Education and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

11. The draft Strategy is underpinned by a detailed work plan outlining the workstreams that will deliver the priorities, and which are accountable to the SEND and Inclusion Board. There will be regular reviews of progress against the action plan reported to the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board, and each workstream will include reporting the progress made against outcomes and performance measures. Subsequent reports will be made to the Children and Families Partnership.
12. Progress in implementing the strategy will be communicated to key partners via their representatives on the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board and will be published on the Local Offer [website](#). Feedback from parents/carers and children/young people will be sought on an on-going basis.
13. In November 2024, the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy was presented to the SEND and Inclusion Board. The Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum are active members of the SEND and Inclusion Board and has approved the draft Strategy. The strategy is being presented to the Cabinet for approval in February 2024. Any comments made by the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Cabinet.
14. An Easy Read version of the strategy will be coproduced with children and young people and their parents and carers once the strategy has received final sign-off by the Cabinet.
15. It should also be noted that this strategy is distinct from but aligned to the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Joint Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland. Work has commenced to refresh this LLR Strategy ready for April 2025 and this refresh will take regard of the content of the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Strategy to ensure continued alignment.

Consultation

16. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027 is a refresh of the current SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2020-23 which in itself was based on a number of consultations carried out for use within the SEND Strategy 2017 - 2020 and the development of SEND resource provision across Leicestershire. The Parent Carer Forum surveyed parents and carers during the SEND inspection in February 2020 and the reinspection in 2022, providing an update on issues faced by them.
17. A workshop was held with the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board members in November 2023 to examine existing Strategy and identify areas that needed to go forward into the refreshed version. It also proposed new areas such as the need for a strategy around the use of Alternative Provision and additional support to manage Social, Emotional and Mental Health needs, an emerging area of priority where performance and outcome data and feedback from children and young people with SEND and their families suggested barriers to achieving the vision that all children,

including those with SEND, thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities.

18. The SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board subsequently co-produced five overarching SEND principles which have been used to shape the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2024-2027. These are included in paragraph 9.
19. Feedback from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND gathered during 2023 and 2024 has been crucial to shaping the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027, and Section 3 of the Strategy sets out key themes from engagement and consultation which highlights the areas we need to improve. In addition to feedback captured and shared by the Parent and Carer Forum, feedback has been captured directly from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND using a variety of surveys and engagement events during 2023 and 2024 including our regular Local Offer Roadshows. In addition to the voice of children and young people featuring in their Education, Health and Care Plans, views have been captured through work with the Young Researchers Young Voices project and through a separately commissioned Student Voices Project in January and February 2024.
20. A public consultation on the draft Strategy will seek to confirm that the priorities identified within the Strategy are the right focus for improvement activity to be overseen by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board over the next 3 years.
21. It is proposed to hold an 8-week consultation exercise on the draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027. This will be carried out primarily using an online survey which also be available in accessible print versions on request. Subject to the Cabinet's approval this will commence on 10 February and run until 6 April 2025.

Resource Implications

22. The Strategy is set at a time of unprecedented and growing demand for High Needs support across the SEND system. The financial position of the High Needs DSG is a significant risk to the Local Authority where a financial deficit of £102m in 2027/28 is forecast. This is clearly an unsustainable position.
23. The draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy sets out a shared commitment from the SEND and Inclusion Partnership for partners to work together to tackle the challenges facing the SEND system, including a specific focus on improving inclusion within mainstream educational settings. The County Council faces an increasing level of demand for Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and the Strategy will enable the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership to work on the key priorities to reduce the risk of unnecessary demand for EHCPs, working with parent/carers and children and young people to identify efficient processes and the early identification of SEND to support their needs. This in turn will support the County Council in meeting its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) commitments. The draft refresh of the Council's MTFS is being presented to Children and Families Scrutiny at the 21 January 2025 meeting and to Cabinet at the 7 February 2025 meeting.
24. The Strategy will be implemented using existing budgets, supplemented where available using any additional grant funding aligned to delivering the priorities within

the Strategy such as through the Department for Education sponsored Change Partnership Programme or the Schools Block Transfer noted in paragraph 5.

25. The Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on this report.

Timetable for Decisions

26. Permission to consult publicly on the Strategy will be sought from Cabinet on 7 February 2025. The views expressed by Scrutiny will be included in the report to Cabinet.
27. The Cabinet will receive a further report at its meeting on 17 June 2025 regarding feedback from the consultation exercise and presenting the final Strategy for approval.

Background papers

Report to the Cabinet on 22 November 2024

[Proposed Transfer of Funding from the Schools Block to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant](#)

Report to the County Council on 18 May 2022

[Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2022 - 2026](#)

Report to the Cabinet on 18 September 2020

[Special Educational Needs and Disability \(SEND\) And Inclusion Strategy 2020 to 2023](#)

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2020

[SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2020-2023](#)

Report to the Cabinet on 10 April 2018

[Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Strategy 2017 to 2020](#)

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

28. This report has been circulated to all Members of the County Council.

Equality Implications

29. The development of the Strategy will have a positive impact on equality, diversity, and inclusion for people with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 and more widely. Improvements to partner services will support all children and young people with identified SEND aged 0-25 in Leicestershire. This strategy aims to deliver our vision for all children, including those with SEND to thrive, fulfil their potential, belong, and live their best lives within their communities. Improvements to service provision should also benefit the parents, carers and families of children and young people with SEND.
30. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the draft Strategy and consultation approach which can be found at Appendix B. It concluded that the

Strategy should have a positive impact for all protected groups and other communities which are of special interest to the Council. The EIA will be revised following the consultation and submitted to the Cabinet.

Human Rights Implications

31. There are no human rights implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

Other Relevant Impact Assessments

32. The partnership implications of the draft Strategy are set out in paragraphs 7-12 of this report.

Appendices

Appendix A – Draft SEND & Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment

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