



CABINET – 7 FEBRUARY 2025

SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) AND INCLUSION STRATEGY 2024-27

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

PART A

Purpose of the Report

1. The purpose of the report is to seek approval for consultation on the Leicestershire Local Area's refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27. The SEND and Inclusion Strategy is a key partnership document to support the education, health and care needs of children and young people in Leicestershire with special educational needs and disabilities.
2. The refreshed Strategy has been produced by the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board which reports to the Children and Families Partnership. The SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board comprises partners working across Leicestershire on behalf of children and young people with SEND. It is made up of education, health and social care senior managers, schools, the Cabinet Lead for children's services and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum. This report provides an outline of the refreshed Strategy, attached as Appendix A, and sets out the approach to the proposed consultation.

Recommendations

(Key Decision)

3. The Cabinet is recommended to approve the draft refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for consultation.

Reasons for Recommendation

4. The revised Strategy will provide a framework for planning, commissioning and delivering SEND services and support by the Council and its partners for children and young people living in Leicestershire. A public consultation on the refreshed Strategy will seek to confirm that the priorities identified are the right focus for improvement activity.

Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)

5. The Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board agreed the draft Strategy, subject to minor amendments at its meeting on 6 November 2024. The amended version was subsequently agreed virtually by the Board on 13 December 2024.
6. The Children and Families Partnership also agreed the draft Strategy at its meeting on 23 January 2024. The Strategy will be noted by the Health and Wellbeing Board on 27 February 2025.
7. It is proposed to hold an 8-week consultation exercise on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy. Subject to the Cabinet's approval this will commence on 10 February 2025 and run until 6 April 2025.
8. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 21 January 2025 and its comments are set out in Part B of this report.
9. It is intended that 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.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

10. One of the primary pieces of 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 Care 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 by the Government 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.
11. The Cabinet in September 2020 agreed the current SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2020-2023.
12. The Cabinet on 23 June 2023 authorised the Director of Children and Family Services to move to the next phase of the Transforming SEND and Inclusion in Leicestershire (TSIL) programme, to improve the service offer and help address the budget deficit.
13. The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27 supports the delivery of 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.

14. The SEND and Inclusion Strategy is distinct from but aligned to the SEND Joint Commissioning Strategy 2021-24 for Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland (LLR). The latter focuses on opportunities for jointly commissioning specific partnership services across LLR whereas the SEND and Inclusion Strategy has a wider focus on improving the experience of children and young people with SEND and their families within Leicestershire. 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.
15. 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.
16. 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 SEND Investment Fund. The funding transfer and creation of a SEND Investment Fund has now been agreed by the Secretary of State and work is underway to agree how this will be implemented.

Resource Implications

17. 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.
18. The refreshed 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 consider how partners can work together to better meet the needs of children and young people with SEND in the County, engaging with parent/carers and children and young people with SEND 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 MTFS commitments. The MTFS is the subject of a separate report on this Cabinet agenda.

19. 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 and the Schools Block Transfer noted in paragraph 16.
20. The Director of Law and Governance and the Director of Corporate Resources have been consulted on this report.

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

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

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PART B

Background

22. The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027 sets out the vision and priorities for the County Council and its partners delivering education, health and social care services to children and young people aged 0-25 in Leicestershire with SEND.
23. It will provide the overarching framework for service development in SEND and Inclusion Services across Leicestershire. The SEND and Inclusion Strategy has been developed in consultation with local area partners, parents and carers and sets out the aspirations and strategic direction of the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board for the period 2024 to 2027.
24. The actions identified in the Strategy will be resourced through existing staffing or may be delivered as part of a programme of work, for example 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 the TSIL programme.
25. Over the period of the previous strategy, the local area SEND and Inclusion Partnership has 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 over the next 3 years. These include:
 - The child and family are at the heart of what we all do
 - We 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
 - We will provide timely and effective support to enable children and young people with SEND to thrive and belong in their communities.
26. 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.
27. The refreshed 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 Partnership 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.

28. 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 through the regular series of Local Offer roadshows taking place around Leicestershire, surveys and engagement events and via the Parent Carer Forum.
29. In November 2024, the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy was presented to the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.
30. An Easy Read version of the Strategy will be developed. This will be available to support the consultation period.

Consultation

31. The 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.
32. A workshop was held with the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board members in November 2023 to examine the existing Strategy and identify areas that needed to go forward into the refreshed version. The Board 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.
33. 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 25.
34. 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 areas for improvement. In addition to feedback captured and shared by the Parent and

Carer Forum, feedback has been received 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 the Council's regular Local Offer Roadshows. In addition to the voice of children and young people included in their EHCPs, 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.

35. A public consultation on the refreshed 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.
36. It is proposed to hold an 8-week consultation exercise on the refreshed 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 2025 and run until 6 April 2025.

Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

37. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation exercise at its meeting on 21 January 2025. The Committee gave its support to the refreshed Strategy.

Equality Implications

38. 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 the Council's 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.
39. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the refreshed 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

40. The EIA concluded that the continued work of the Partnership would benefit all protected groups and is expected to have a positive impact.

Other Implications and Impact Assessments

41. The partnership implications of the refreshed Strategy are set out in paragraphs 26-28 of this report.

Background Papers

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 21 January 2025 “SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=7889>

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”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7511>

Report to the County Council on 18 May 2022 “Leicestershire County Council's Strategic Plan 2022-2026”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=6482>

Report to the Cabinet on 18 September 2020 “Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) And Inclusion Strategy 2020 to 2023”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=5997>

Report to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 September 2020 “SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2020-2023”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=1043&MId=6182>

Appendices

Appendix A – Refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027

Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment