

**CABINET – 17 JUNE 2025****SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES (SEND) AND  
INCLUSION STRATEGY 2025-2028****REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY  
SERVICES****PART A****Purpose of the Report**

1. The purpose of this report is to advise the Cabinet of the outcome of the consultation on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy and to seek approval of the Strategy, attached as Appendix A to this report. The 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. The Board comprises partners working across Leicestershire on behalf of children and young people with SEND and is made up of education, health and social care senior managers, schools, and the Leicestershire Parent Carer Forum.

**Recommendations**

3. It is recommended that the Cabinet:
  - (a) Notes the outcome of consultation on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy;
  - (b) Approves the SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025-2028.

(Key Decision)

**Reasons for Recommendation**

4. To note the consultation feedback which has informed the final Strategy.
5. 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.

### **Timetable for Decisions (including Scrutiny)**

6. The refreshed draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy was considered by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board in November 2024.
7. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 and its comments were reported to the Cabinet on 7<sup>th</sup> February 2025, when the draft Strategy was approved for consultation.
8. An 8-week public consultation exercise on the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy was held from 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025 until 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025.
9. The Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board agreed the final version of the Strategy on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2025.

### **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 (NHS bodies) 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 setting out action needed to improve services. 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 refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy outlines local priorities and sets out how the SEND and Inclusion Partnership 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. In September 2020, the Cabinet agreed the current SEND and Inclusion Strategy.
12. On 23<sup>rd</sup> June 2023 the Cabinet 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 2025-28 supports the ambitions set out in the Children and Family Services Department Plan 2024-26 and 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 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 during 2025 and this will seek to align with the Leicestershire SEND and Inclusion Strategy.

15. On 7 February 2025 the Cabinet agreed the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for consultation.

### **Resource Implications**

16. The Strategy is set at a time of unprecedented and growing demand for High Needs support across the SEND system nationally. Funding from the Department for Education given to Local Authorities to support children and young people with more complex SEND through the High Needs block of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) has not kept pace with demand which has led to significant and growing budget deficits. The High Needs DSG in Leicestershire is forecast to have a financial deficit of £117.5m in 2028/29.
17. Since 2020, Councils have been allowed to accumulate deficits in their High Needs DSG budgets without this impacting their wider Council budgets through a Statutory Accounts override. The accounts override legislation is due to end in March 2026. Unless further legislation changes this, from April 2026 local authorities will be required to make financial provision for the deficit. The lack of clarity from government on the future of the statutory override, or any alternatives, presents a significant risk to the Council's financial sustainability.
18. The refreshed Strategy sets out a shared commitment from the SEND and Inclusion Partnership to improvement outcomes for children and young people with additional needs, including a specific focus on improving inclusion within mainstream educational settings. The Strategy will support the SEND and Inclusion Partnership to respond more efficiently and effectively to the increasing demand for SEND services and engage with children and young people, their parents and carers to enable early identification of SEND and provide the right support at the right time.
19. The Strategy will be implemented within existing resources, supplemented where available by any additional grant funding such as through the Department for Education sponsored Change Partnership Programme.
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.

**Officer(s) to Contact**

Jane Moore, Director of Children and Families Services

Telephone: 0116 305 2649

Email: [Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Jane.Moore@leics.gov.uk)

Tim Browne, Assistant Director Education and SEND

Telephone: 0116 305 0546

Email: [Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk](mailto:Tim.Browne@leics.gov.uk)

## **PART B**

### **Background**

22. The refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2025 to 2028 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. It will provide the overarching framework for service development in SEND and Inclusion Services across the County.
23. 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.
24. The SEND principles that will drive the work of the SEND and Inclusion Partnership, and which provided a focus for the development of the Strategy, 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 and Inclusion 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.
25. The number of children and young people with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) has grown annually at a national and local level since the introduction of the SEN Code of Practice changes in 2014. Based on the latest published data, the number of EHCPs in England rose 125% between 2016 and 2024; Leicestershire saw a 113% increase from 2,995 to 6,377 EHCPs over the same time period.
26. Despite substantial increases in government funding for high needs, funding has not kept pace with the increase in children and young people with EHCPs. The Institute for Fiscal Studies in their [report](#) of December 2024 noted that nationally, per-EHCP funding has fallen by around a third in real terms between 2015/16 and 2024/25.

### **Engagement and Consultation**

27. The SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board co-produced five overarching SEND principles which have been used to shape the refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy for 2025-2028. These are included in paragraph 24 above.

28. Feedback from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND has been crucial to shaping the Strategy: 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, responses have been received directly from parents and carers of children and young people with SEND through a variety of surveys and engagement events during 2023 and 2024 including the Council's regular Local Offer Roadshows. In addition to children and young people's views included in their Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), their opinions have been captured through work with the Young Researchers Young Voices project and a separately commissioned Student Voices Project in January and February 2024.
29. Public consultation on the refreshed Strategy took place between 12<sup>th</sup> February 2025 and 8<sup>th</sup> April 2025. This sought to confirm support for the proposed SEND principles, ensure the Strategy reflected what works well and the barriers and challenges for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire, and that the priorities identified provided the right focus for improvement activity over the next 3 years (to be overseen by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board). The full consultation report setting out both the activity undertaken and the findings is attached as Appendix B and a summary is given below. An Easy Read version of the Strategy was also available to support the consultation.

### **Consultation Feedback**

30. There were 1,362 views of the consultation web page during the consultation period. Following closure of the formal consultation, 60 responses had been submitted.
31. Overall, 92% of responses were from Leicestershire residents, with 84% a parent/carer of a child or young person aged 18 or under. Parents or carers of children with SEND made up 57% of responses. Teachers, governors, trustees and other school staff were 25% of respondents.
32. Table 1 below sets out support for the SEND principles, a key component of the Strategy ("Overall to what extent do you agree or disagree with our SEND principles?"), and support for the Strategy as a whole ("Overall, to what extent do you agree or disagree with our draft SEND and Inclusion Strategy?").

Table 1: Support for the SEND Principles and overall Strategy.

"Support" includes responses that strongly agree, tend to agree, and neither agree nor disagree.

Respondent type	Number of responses	Support for the SEND Principles	Number of responses	Support for the Overall Strategy
All respondents	59	91%	58	89%
Parents and carers of a child or children with SEND	33	88%	34	85%
Teachers, governors, trustees or other school employees	15	93%	13	92%

There were less than 5 responses from the following respondent types, and responses are incorporated into the total for “all respondents” in Table 1 to avoid identifying individuals:

- Interested members of the public
- Representatives of voluntary and community organisations
- Other stakeholders
- Leicestershire County Council employees
- Other

33. Table 2 sets out the agreement to the improvement priorities (“To what extent do you agree or disagree with this priority?”). Respondents were overwhelmingly positive.

Table 2 - Agreement with the improvement priorities set out in the Strategy.

“Support” includes responses that strongly agree, tend to agree, and neither agree nor disagree.

Improvement priority	Number of responses	Support for each priority
Transitions	54	100%
Engagement, coproduction, feedback and voice	58	97%
Identification and assessment of needs	60	92%
Outcomes for children and young people with SEND	59	95%
Commissioned services	58	95%
Attendance and inclusion	57	88%
Strategic leadership and improvement	58	95%

34. A majority of all respondents agreed that “the draft strategy describes what currently works well for children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire” (68% strongly agreed, tended to agree or neither agreed nor disagreed).

35. A majority of respondents also agreed that “the draft strategy describes the barriers and challenges that children and young people with SEND in Leicestershire currently face” (77% strongly agreed, tended to agree or neither agreed nor disagreed).
36. In addition to the responses to the survey, a range of comments was provided by respondents; key trends from this feedback have been reviewed and are included in the detailed consultation analysis (Appendix B).
37. Themes from the comments received are summarised below:
  - General agreement with the SEND principles, although some qualified this with concerns around the ability to implement and uphold the principles in practice.
  - Respondents gave feedback on existing barriers and challenges with personal examples of inclusion in mainstream settings not working well for all and of the system not working effectively, including performance issues across partners and difficulty for families navigating across partner services.
  - Broad agreement to the improvement themes with some feedback reflecting personal experiences of challenges relevant to specific themes.
  - Overall agreement with the Strategy including ambition and areas of focus, with some reflections on the challenge of implementation within the context of demand and funding.

#### Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

38. The Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report as part of the consultation process at its meeting on 21<sup>st</sup> January 2025 and supported the refreshed Strategy.

#### **Amendments made to the Draft Strategy**

39. Following a review of the feedback received during the consultation, some amendments have been made to the draft Strategy, as follows:
  - (a) The Strategy will cover the period from 2025 to 2028, in recognition of feedback on the ambitious nature of the Strategy and consultation being concluded in 2025.
  - (b) In Section 2, Leicestershire Context, Health – Information on the Teen Health service has been added to this section.
  - (c) In Section 3, What our children, young people and families tell us:
    - i. Joint working across Education, Health and Social Care to develop an easier to navigate system – A sentence added to acknowledge the challenges of current waiting times across partner agencies and the difficulty families report in finding



information to identify the right services to support their children and young people.

- ii. Support for inclusion of children and young people with SEND in mainstream schools – This section has been reworded to acknowledge that whilst mainstream educational provision works well for many children and young people with SEND, this is not universally the case. A continued focus is required to ensure all mainstream schools in Leicestershire are able to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND where this is a suitable educational setting.

### **Implementation of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy**

- 40. Implementation of the refreshed Strategy will be monitored by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board (the composition of which is outlined in the introduction to this report). This Board reports to the Children and Families Partnership which comprises 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.
- 41. The refreshed Strategy is underpinned by a detailed Partnership Improvement Plan with workstreams that will deliver the priorities. Progress will be monitored by the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board and each workstream will include reporting against outcomes and performance measures. Progress will be published on the Local Offer [website](#) (the Local Offer brings together in one place all information about health, education, and social care for SEND services).

### **Equality Implications**

- 42. An Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed on the refreshed Strategy and consultation approach (attached as Appendix C). 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. 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.

### **Human Rights Implications**

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

### **Other Implications and Impact Assessments**

44. The partnership implications of the refreshed Strategy are set out in paragraphs 40 to 41 of this report.

### **Background Papers**

Report to the Cabinet on 7 February 2025 “Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27”

<https://cexmodgov01/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=7873>

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>

### **Appendices**

Appendix A – Refreshed SEND and Inclusion Strategy 2024 to 2027

Appendix B – SEND and Inclusion Strategy Consultation Report

Appendix C – Equality Impact Assessment