

TITLE	SEND Strategy
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Children's Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 February 2021
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Director, Children's Services - Carol Cammiss

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

1. Provide Members with an update on the revised SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24) for information, subject to outcomes from public consultation (closing 31st January).

RECOMMENDATION

It is recommended that members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

1. Note and support the new SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24)

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Over the previous calendar year, the Council has worked with partners intensively to develop a refreshed SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24).

The Strategy is a local area, partnership strategy. Multi-agency members of the SEND Improvement Board (SIB) have played an active role in steering development of the SEND Strategy, and has tasked one of its Task and Finish Groups to ensure the SEND Strategy is genuinely coproduced and reflects the top priorities and areas for improvement in relation to SEND planning and delivery.

The Council has a vital role to play in terms of leading development and delivery of the Strategy, however, at every stage and at every level, the Strategy has been coproduced with key stakeholders across the local area, including strategic partners across education, health, social care, and the voluntary, community and charity sector, and parents and carers of children and young people with SEND.

This genuinely coproduced approach will continue into delivery.

The Wokingham SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24):

- Sets out four strategic priorities and key actions to achieve the vision of improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families
- Takes a strategic approach to successfully addressing complex challenges such as the need to improve outcomes in the context of significant increases in demands, and sustained pressures on the financial and staffing resources available to local public services in Wokingham
- Responds directly to key requirements in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA) issued following the joint inspection of children’s services between Ofsted and CQC in the Spring of 2019
- Lays the foundation for an ambitious programme of delivery over the next three years, which will improve the lives of some of the most vulnerable children and young people in the Borough; help deliver on the Council’s commitments to deliver

excellence for all children, young people and families in Wokingham, and help to strengthen the sustainability and viability of SEND services in the coming years.

Public consultation on the SEND Strategy commenced on December 18th 2020 and is set to conclude on 31st January 2021. The final version of the Strategy will reflect the outcomes from this public consultation.

Background

As a Council we want to make sure we deliver excellent services for children and young people with SEND and their families, enabling them to access the support they need to achieve the best possible outcomes. The Council understands that needs and the types of support required to address them differ considerably from one child or young person to another, so its Strategy for children and young people must address a broad range of challenges and be comprehensive enough to ensure all children and young people with SEND receive the right type and level of support at the right time.

The aspiration set out in this Strategy is that Wokingham is a great place for children and young people with SEND to grow up. There are already several good services and support locally for children and young people with SEND in Wokingham and their families. There is a good range of public and privately funded resources for Wokingham children and young people with SEND. Parents and Carers of children and young people with SEND in Wokingham benefit from an extremely active and engaged Parent Carer Forum, as well as advocacy, advice and support from outstanding independent, voluntary, community and charity sector organisations.

However, like many local areas, Wokingham faces several challenges which need to be addressed in the coming years in order to improve outcomes for children and young people with SEND. The needs of children and young people are changing and increasing in the context of sustained pressures on public finances. The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic is already being felt in terms of additional pressures on funding for local public services and dramatic shifts in the way that services are provided, which present further challenges for improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Over the years, pressures on funding for SEND support have increased significantly. Increases in demand and the challenges of meeting needs locally has driven increases in placements for children and young people outside Wokingham, which has put additional pressure on available funding. Although investments have been made in strengthening local provision (including expansion of Special provision in the Borough) and further investments are set to follow in the coming years, costs of placements in the Independent and Non-Maintained Sector and with travel assistance for children and young people with SEND accessing education out of borough are significant and unsustainable at their current rate. Trend data show that the demand for SEND support in Wokingham is increasing. Over the last few years there has been a significant upward trend in the numbers of children and young people with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and numbers of children and young people requiring SEN support in schools. There have been notable increases in demand for support in relation to Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) and Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH) in particular. The numbers of younger children (aged 7-11) requiring some form of SEN support has increased significantly over the last three years, partly as a result of changing demographics and needs, and partly as a result of better assessments and more successful early identification and prevention. Strategic partners across Wokingham are committed to putting children and young people at the heart of everything they do. The signatories to this document are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND over the next three years, and the SEND Strategy 0-25 sets out how this will be achieved.

Throughout the process of reviewing and developing a new Strategy for SEND 0-25, the Council has taken into account statutory guidance and extensive legislative requirements including the SEND reforms which came into law in 2014. The Strategy has been coproduced at every level with strategic partners, parents and carers and their

representatives on Wokingham's parent carer forum (SEND Voices Wokingham). Formal public consultation on the proposed new strategy has been undertaken and promoted through the council's website, social media channels and an extensive range of professional and parent-carer networks. The Council has carried out an initial Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) which will be updated following outcomes from the public consultation; the updated EIA will be shared with Councillors to take into account prior to final approval of the SEND Strategy.

Analysis of Issues

The SEND Strategy 0-25 aims to successfully address the key challenges and issues in relation to SEND in Wokingham Borough. A full Needs Analysis is attached as an appendix to the Strategy and sets out the data and information which underpins the selection of the strategic priorities and key actions set out in the body of the Strategy. A summary of some of the key challenges and issues which the SEND strategy seeks to address is as follows:

Some key messages from the Needs Analysis

The Needs Analysis shows that levels of demand for support in relation to SEND have increased significantly over the past three years.

The number of children and young people with an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) in Wokingham has risen significantly in recent years. While the main driver of this relates to the extension of duties brought about by the Children & Families Act 2014, this comes at a time when the local population is also on the increase. Current 2020 data indicates that funded EHCPs have increased by 8% over the first six months of FY20-21, whilst the local population has grown by an estimated 4%. On the basis of this trajectory, it is predicted that over the coming years the number of children and young people with EHCPs is likely to increase, as is the proportion of the school population with an EHCP.

The Needs Analysis sets out that needs have continued to grow in relation to certain types of SEND and SEND-related issues, in particular Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), certain types of Learning Disability (LD) and needs in relation to Social and Emotional Mental Health (SEMH). Practitioners also report that complexity of need is also increasing, as an increasing number of children and young people may require multiple types of support relating to several different types of need.

Demand for SEND support in mainstream educational settings below the thresholds required for EHCPs has also grown substantially over the past three years, particularly in relation to SEMH.

Addressing the outcomes from the Ofsted and CQC joint inspection in Spring 2019

The Spring 2019 joint inspection of Wokingham's local area approach to support for children and young people with SEND found that although there were some key areas of strength in terms of service planning and delivery, there were several areas for improvement, including:

1. Wokingham needs a clearly communicated and co-produced SEND Strategy and accompanying action plan, which are shared and understood across education,

health and care, and which are focused on improving the outcomes of children and young people with SEND.

2. The timeliness and quality of EHCPs needs to improve
3. Co-production at the strategic level to inform effective co-production at all other levels is lacking and needs focused development
4. The quality of management information to inform accurate evaluation and energise service improvement needs to improve
5. Joint working and joined up thinking and delivery between professionals across education, health and social care needs to be strengthened
6. Successful transitions to adulthood also requires focused improvement in Wokingham.

The SEND Strategy 0-25 directly addresses each of these key areas for improvement; the key actions and activities in the Action Plan embedded within the Strategy will deliver against these areas for improvement, and help ensure that stakeholders across the local area build on their successes since Spring 2019 in terms of addressing the required improvements, and deliver better outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Financial challenges

There are several financial challenges arising from the increases in and changing nature of demand for support for children and young people with SEND, and their parents and carers. These are explored in greater detail in the “Financial Implications” Section of this report.

Four strategic priorities and Strategic Actions

Outcomes from the Needs Analysis, and close coproduction with key stakeholders, has established **four strategic priorities** for the SEND Strategy 0-25. These are explained in detail in the Strategy (Appendix 1), but a summary is as follows:

Priority 1: Build local provision to better meet local needs.

- Improving the sufficiency and consistency of local SEND provision
- Defining consistent universal offer and “ordinarily available” provision in education settings
- Establishing the future direction and strategy for inclusion and support offer in mainstream settings
- Improving the value for money (effectiveness and cost) of resource base provision
- Defining the future direction and strategy for in-borough special provision
- Focusing on gaps / issues of concern to parents, carers, children and young people: e.g. mental health and transport services

Priority 2: Delivered through an efficient, effective and well-managed system

- Strengthening “transitions” of all types – into adulthood, between mainstream and special, between school years, “managed moves”
- Embed a consistent graduated approach across Wokingham
- Early intervention, prevention and forward planning is embedded in assessment and decision making
- Strengthening the timeliness, quality and effectiveness of assessments to reflect the points above

- Make it easier for parents and carers to engage with services

Priority 3: Real coproduction embedded at all levels of planning and delivery

- Drive meaningful coproduction at a strategic and individual level
- Strengthen genuine partnership between professionals, children, young people, parents and carers in the way services are planned, delivered and reviewed
- Effective implementation of the SEND Coproduction Charter, with systematic reviews to ensure change is happening on the ground
- Consistently effective approaches to evaluation and management of service user feedback

Priority 4: Enabled through intelligence and strategic commissioning

- Strengthen quality and use of data and evidence-led planning
- Develop a single shared view of local needs across the area
- Genuinely strategic joint commissioning
- Early intervention and prevention central to commissioning
- Strengthen the focus on outcomes / impact on people's lives in performance management, and management of implementation of the SEND Strategy

Outcome and Performance Measures

In order to ensure the SEND Strategy and Action Plan focused on delivering the greatest possible positive impact on outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families, strategic partners and key stakeholders have developed a set of Outcome Measures to help assist with performance management of the Strategy. The

Outcome Measures **are one of several** key sets of information to enable stakeholders across the local area, and service users, to monitor impact on outcomes arising from delivery of the Strategy.

The Outcome Measures have been developed by key stakeholders with support from the Council for Disabled Children (CDC). They are based around "I Statements", with clearly measurable indicators attached to each statement. The "I Statements" are:

1. I am physically and mentally as healthy as I can be
2. I am happy
3. I feel supported
4. I feel safe
5. I am included and active in my local community
6. I am hopeful for the future
7. I am as independent as I can be
8. My family and/or the people who care for me are supported.

Feedback received from stakeholders during the consultation period and at the time of writing indicates that whilst the success measures included in the SEND Strategy should include some outcome measures, these are not necessarily appropriate for *all* children and young people with SEND (e.g. very young children, children and young people who do not communicate verbally), and on their own are not necessarily sufficient to measure and assess the impact of the SEND Strategy.

For these reasons success measures in the final draft of the strategy are likely to additionally include Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) used to measure delivery against statutory requirements and service standards (e.g. performance measures related to the timeliness and quality of EHCP assessments; complaints received and numbers of tribunals).

Performance against these KPIs and Outcome Measures will be monitored and reviewed by the key groups responsible for delivering the Actions set out in the Action Plan. Arrangements for monitoring performance against KPIs, Outcome measures and associated targets will be set out in the Governance Section of the final Strategy.

Programme Management as next step

Ahead of formal approval of the final version of the SEND Strategy, and with steer and input from key stakeholders and strategic partners, work has been undertaken to prepare for implementation and delivery.

At the time of writing, papers have been submitted for the January 19th meeting of the SEND Improvement Board (SIB). These papers include:

- Resubmission of the SEND Strategy submitted for public consultation, along with details of the consultation questions
- Details of **Programme Management** arrangements, to help ensure successful delivery of the SEND Strategy actions and commitments
- Proposals to alter the **Governance** arrangements around the SEND Improvement Board, to ensure the appropriate multiagency Working Groups are in place to manage and oversee delivery of the 4 priority areas within the SEND Strategy. These proposed governance arrangements will build on those in place to address the key areas for improvement set out in the Written Statement of Action (WSOA)

The governance and programme management arrangements proposed to the SIB on the 19th January will ensure a sustained focus on areas for improvement identified in the WSoA, and build upon this to oversee effective delivery of the SEND Strategy priorities and objectives.

Consultation

A public consultation draft of the proposed new Strategy for SEND 0-25 (Appendix 1) was made available to the public via the Council's public consultation webpage on December 18th, 2020, and promoted through the Council's social media platforms; a range of networks including those accessed by parents, carers and service users; professional networks such as the Schools Forum; and promoted by key stakeholders from across agencies who have actively shaped the content of the SEND Strategy. At the time of writing this report the public consultation is still open and closes on 31st January 2021.

The purpose of the public consultation was to enable Wokingham residents, professionals, families and current service users, to read the proposed new SEND Strategy and give their views on any or all aspects.

To assist in this process, a series of consultation questions were prepared. These are attached as **Appendix 2**.

This consultation document set out several questions for respondents, which focused on:

- The most significant content within the Strategy – including the conclusions from the needs analysis; suggested priorities and key actions to address them; approach to monitoring success in particular impact on outcomes
- Questions and prompts designed to help the council understand public attitudes and perspectives on SEND provision and future priorities and areas of focus
- Questions designed to help the Council understand public opinion around opportunities to improve services for children and young people with SEND and their families, and improve the long-term sustainability and viability of these services

The consultation document also enabled respondents to feed back any views they had on any aspects of the consultation draft of the SEND Strategy 0-25.

Outcomes from the public consultation will be reviewed once the consultation has closed on 31st January 2021.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that members of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:

- Note and support the new SEND Strategy 0-25 (2021-24)

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)			
Next Financial Year (Year 2)			
Following Financial Year (Year 3)			

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision

There are several financial challenges arising from the increases in and changing nature of demand for support for children and young people with SEND, and their parents and carers. In summary the challenges arise from issues which affect Wokingham, but which are common to local areas across the country include:

- a) Sustained pressures on the High Needs Block funding available to the Council to address the growing and changing demands for SEND services and support
- b) Sustained pressures on local public service partners' budgets and resources to address local challenges in relation to SEND

- c) Challenges around sufficiency of local SEND provision to meet growing levels of demand, driving the use of out of borough and Independent Non-Maintained Sector provision, particularly in relation to special provision and post-16 provision
- d) Market and cost management challenges relating to costs of provision particularly in terms of Independent and Non-Maintained Sector provision and some inflationary pressures
- e) Complexity of joint strategic commissioning and a complex commissioner and provider landscape; challenges around aligning numerous strategic priorities driving commissioning across the Wokingham and Berkshire West area

In the Summer of 2019 Wokingham was one of 32 local authorities required to submit a deficit recovery plan to DfE in relation to High Needs Block (HNB) funding. Challenges around developing and delivering this plan include significant increases in demand and rising costs for local settings.

In terms of ensuring longer term financial viability, the SEND Strategy has a key role to play in addressing challenges around the resources available to deliver and improve SEND Services in Wokingham. The Strategy will play a vital role in helping to address pressures on HNB funding and other financial resources required to deliver the actions and commitments set out in the Strategy.

Some key actions included in the Strategy which will help to achieve this include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. More effective demand modelling and forecasting, to ensure the best possible services are in place to help manage demand in coming years
2. More effective activity and financial reporting, as a result of better systems and information management, and closer joint working between the Children's Services Finance Team and SEND professionals
3. More effective joint commissioning with other agencies including Health partners (e.g. in relation to a range of Integrated Therapies for children and young people such as speech and language, physiotherapy, occupational therapy), and taking advantage of efficiencies and economies of scale from commissioning some SEND services in partnership with other agencies and/or neighbouring local areas - where there is a clear value for money benefit to Wokingham residents
4. Several actions relating to a substantial review of the use of the Independent and Non-Maintained Sector, to reduce dependency on out of borough provision and ensure the best possible value for money is delivered through use of independent and non-maintained provision
5. Implementation of the "Ordinarily Available" project in Wokingham, designed to ensure a common standard of SEND support provision is available across Wokingham schools, and that a greater proportion of Wokingham children and young people with SEND needs have their needs met within local, mainstream education
6. A substantial review of Resource Base provision to ensure a viable financial model is in place to deliver the right SEND support locally to help ensure that SEND needs are met as far as possible in-borough and within mainstream education (this work is aligned with the "Ordinarily Available" project summarised above)
7. The focus in the Strategy on building local provision will also help to drive reductions in the costs of Home to School Transport and Travel Assistance associated with transportation of children and young people with SEND out of borough to access appropriate education placements

8. Review of key funding models used by the local authority to ensure sustainable funding models are in place for key SEND services in the coming years – e.g. a review of the Foundry funding Model, to help strengthen outreach provision, provision for post-16 pupils who require ongoing support, provision for re-engagement of children missing from education, and some specialist provision for primary pupils with SEMH and secondary pupils with ASD, and development of on-site Alternative Provision for KS4 pupils in vocational and work-related learning
9. Improvements in local special provision – for example in relation to the new DfE-funded Free School at Winnersh Farm for children with Autism which will serve Reading and Wokingham, which will offer an additional 75 places to Wokingham children and young people

Delivery of a comprehensive SEND Sufficiency project, involving a comparison of a comprehensive assessment of current and forecast needs with an assessment of currently available provision, for the purposes of identifying gaps and areas to be addressed in the coming years; development of a clear viable funding model designed to ensure that needs are addressed, and demand is managed within available resources.

Cross-Council Implications (how does this decision impact on other Council services, including properties and priorities?)

Public Sector Equality Duty

An initial Equality Impact Assessment has been carried out on the consultation draft of the proposed SEND Strategy.

Outcomes from this initial assessment are summarised in the points below. These have helped to inform the public consultation document and questions put to service users, parents and carers of children and young people with SEND and the general public, in order to better understand the likely impact on equality and diversity issues that may arise if the Strategy were approved and taken forward into implementation.

Some of the equality issues raised in the initial EIA, and will be considered once the outcomes from formal public consultation are known, include the following:

- The clear potential for the Strategy to impact on groups with protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 (including children and young people aged 0-25 with disabilities)
- The potential for positive differential impacts on the lives of children and young people 0-25 with disability which would arise from successful delivery of the priorities and key actions set out within the Strategy
- Outcomes from the Needs Analysis included within the Strategy indicate that the needs of specific cohorts of children and young people with SEND in Wokingham require particular attention and action; commitments in Priority 1 of the Strategy are designed in part to ensure these needs are met as far as possible through local provision; commitments in Priority 4 of the Strategy are designed to ensure this is delivered in an equitable and financially viable way
- Commitments in the Strategy to coproduction in design and delivery of services for children and young people with SEND are designed to ensure that the SEND Strategy has a positive impact on outcomes for some of the most vulnerable groups within the borough; governance and performance management arrangements are

designed to help ensure that those commissioning and delivering services for children and young people with SEND are aware of the impact on outcomes, and are able to take the actions needed to ensure the Strategy achieves its vision for improved outcomes.

Any additional issues arising from the public consultation which have implications for the Council's responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010 will be presented to the Portfolio Holder prior to final approval of the SEND Strategy for publication.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

None

List of Background Papers

Appendix 1 - Wokingham SEND Strategy 0-25 V5 submitted for public consultation
Appendix 2 - SEND Strategy Consultation questions

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