


Notice of Meeting

Cabinet



<u>Date and Time</u>	<u>Place</u>	<u>Contact</u>	<u>Web:</u>
Tuesday, 24 September 2024 2.00 pm	Council Chamber, Surrey County Council, Woodhatch Place, 11 Cockshot Hill, Reigate, Surrey, RH2 8EF	Huma Younis or Sarah Quinn huma.younis@surreycc.gov.uk or sarah.quinn@surreycc.gov.uk	Council and democracy Surreycc.gov.uk  @SCCdemocracy

Committee Members:

Natalie Bramhall, Clare Curran, Kevin Deanus, Matt Furniss, Marisa Heath, David Lewis, Sinead Mooney, Mark Nuti, Tim Oliver, Denise Turner-Stewart, Maureen Attewell, Steve Bax, Paul Deach and Jonathan Hulley

If you would like a copy of this agenda or the attached papers in another format, e.g. large print or braille, or another language, please email Huma Younis or Sarah Quinn on huma.younis@surreycc.gov.uk or sarah.quinn@surreycc.gov.uk.

This meeting will be held in public at the venue mentioned above and may be webcast live. Generally the public seating areas are not filmed. However, by entering the meeting room and using the public seating area or attending online, you are consenting to being filmed and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes. If webcast, a recording will be available on the Council's website post-meeting. The live webcast and recording can be accessed via the Council's website:

<https://surreycc.public-i.tv/core/portal/home>

If you would like to attend and you have any special requirements, please email Huma Younis or Sarah Quinn on huma.younis@surreycc.gov.uk or sarah.quinn@surreycc.gov.uk. Please note that public seating is limited and will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

AGENDA

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

To note any apologies for absence.

2 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: 23 JULY 2024

(Pages
1 - 16)

To agree the minutes of the last meeting as a correct record of the meeting.

3 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

All Members present are required to declare, at this point in the meeting or as soon as possible thereafter:

- (i) Any disclosable pecuniary interests and / or
- (ii) Other interests arising under the Code of Conduct in respect of any item(s) of business being considered at this meeting

NOTES:

- Members are reminded that they must not participate in any item where they have a disclosable pecuniary interest
- As well as an interest of the Member, this includes any interest, of which the Member is aware, that relates to the Member's spouse or civil partner (or any person with whom the Member is living as a spouse or civil partner)
- Members with a significant personal interest may participate in the discussion and vote on that matter unless that interest could be reasonably regarded as prejudicial.

4 PROCEDURAL MATTERS

a MEMBERS' QUESTIONS

The deadline for Member's questions is 12pm four working days before the meeting (18 September 2024).

b PUBLIC QUESTIONS

The deadline for public questions is seven days before the meeting (17 September 2024).

c PETITIONS

The deadline for petitions was 14 days before the meeting, and no petitions have been received.

d REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED ON REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE

To consider any representations received in relation why part of the meeting relating to a report circulated in Part 2 of the agenda should be open to the public.

5 REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEES, TASK GROUPS AND OTHER COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL (Pages 17 - 54)

To consider any reports from Select Committees, Task Groups and any other Committees of the Council. For Cabinet to consider the following reports:

- A. Home to School Travel Assistance (H2STA): Children, Families, Lifelong Learning And Culture Select Committee.
- B. Report Of The Additional Needs And Disabilities: Parent And Carer Experience Task Group: Children, Families, Lifelong Learning And Culture Select Committee.

6 LEADER / CABINET MEMBER/ STRATEGIC INVESTMENT BOARD DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST CABINET MEETING (Pages 55 - 58)

To note any delegated decisions taken by the Leader, Deputy Leader, Cabinet Members, Strategic Investment Board and Committees in Common Sub-Committee since the last meeting of the Cabinet.

7 CABINET MEMBER OF THE MONTH (Pages 59 - 66)

To receive an update from Marisa Heath, Cabinet Member for Environment.

8 2024/25 MONTH 4 (JULY) FINANCIAL REPORT (Pages 67 - 78)

This report provides details of the Council's 2024/25 financial position, for revenue and capital budgets, as at 31st July 2024 (M4) and the expected outlook for the remainder of the financial year. In addition, the report proposes minor changes to the operation of the Your Fund Surrey small projects capital scheme.

9 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC

That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information under the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

PART TWO - IN PRIVATE

10 PROJECT LIBRA

(Pages
79 -
106)

Cabinet is asked to consider the Project Libra business case which recommends the discontinuation of two discretionary services.

(The decisions on this item can be called-in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

11 PUBLICITY FOR PART 2 ITEMS

To consider whether the item considered under Part 2 of the agenda should be made available to the Press and public.

**Terence Herbert
Chief Executive**

Published: Monday 16 September 2024

MOBILE TECHNOLOGY AND FILMING – ACCEPTABLE USE

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The use of mobile devices, including for the purpose of recording or filming a meeting, is subject to no interruptions, distractions or interference being caused to any Council equipment or any general disturbance to proceedings. The Chairman may ask for mobile devices to be switched off in these circumstances.

Thank you for your co-operation.

QUESTIONS AND PETITIONS

Cabinet and most committees will consider questions by elected Surrey County Council Members and questions and petitions from members of the public who are electors in the Surrey County Council area.

Please note the following regarding questions from the public:

1. Members of the public can submit one written question to a meeting by the deadline stated in the agenda. Questions should relate to general policy and not to detail. Questions are asked and answered in public and cannot relate to “confidential” or “exempt” matters (for example, personal or financial details of an individual); for further advice please contact the committee manager listed on the front page of an agenda.
2. The number of public questions which can be asked at a meeting may not exceed six. Questions which are received after the first six will be held over to the following meeting or dealt with in writing at the Chairman’s discretion.
3. Questions will be taken in the order in which they are received.
4. Questions will be asked and answered without discussion. The Chairman or Cabinet members may decline to answer a question, provide a written reply or nominate another Member to answer the question.
5. Following the initial reply, one supplementary question may be asked by the questioner. The Chairman or Cabinet members may decline to answer a supplementary question.

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**MINUTES OF THE MEETING OF THE CABINET
HELD ON 23 JULY 2024 AT 2.00 PM
IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, WOODHATCH PLACE, 11
COCKSHOT HILL, REIGATE, SURREY, RH2 8EF.**

These minutes are subject to confirmation by the Cabinet at its next meeting.

Members: (*present)

- *Tim Oliver (Chairman)
- *Natalie Bramhall
- *Clare Curran
- *Matt Furniss
- *David Lewis
- *Mark Nuti
- *Denise Turner-Stewart
- *Sinead Mooney
- *Marisa Heath
- *Kevin Deanus

Deputy Cabinet Members:

- *Maureen Attewell
Paul Deach
- *Steve Bax
- *Jonathan Hulley

Members in attendance:

Catherine Baart, Local Member for Earlswood and Reigate South
Jonathan Essex, The Green Party Group Leader
Fiona Davidson, Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee
Bob Hughes, Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee
Steven McCormick, Vice Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee
Keith Witham, Chairman of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee
Trefor Hogg, Chairman of the Adults and Health Select Committee

**PART ONE
IN PUBLIC**

97/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE [Item 1]

Apologies were received from Paul Deach.

98/24 MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING: 25 JUNE 2024 [Item 2]

These were agreed as a correct record of the meeting.

99/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST [Item 3]

There were none.

100/241 PROCEDURAL MATTERS [Item 4]

The Leader made the following statement:

In February 2024, Cabinet considered a report on the provision of Primary School Places in the Planning Area of Reigate and agreed two actions:

- The creation of an education working group to explore school reorganisation possibilities in the Reigate area.
- To pursue the determination of the live planning application to re-locate Reigate Priory Junior School to Woodhatch Place to establish if this is a viable option.

The working group includes school leaders and education professionals and also a small reference group for parents and carers to ensure their views are also factored into plans. The group has met on a number of occasions, and we now expect the group to continue its work through into the start of the Autumn Term.

It was also recommended by Cabinet to pursue the determination of the planning application for a new school building for Reigate Priory Junior School on the Woodhatch site. Officers have now submitted additional planning documentation to address the issues raised by the planning committee.

That application will be subject to public consultation and details can be found on the Surrey County Council website. Once this work is fully completed, findings from both the education working group and the decision of the planning committee will be brought back to Cabinet, to consider all conclusions and decide next steps and that is likely to be in the Autumn.

100/24 MEMBERS' QUESTIONS [Item 4a]

There were eight member questions. A response to the questions were published in a supplementary agenda.

Catherine Baart had a supplementary question in relation to collision data provided by Surrey Police but would contact the Cabinet Member by email for a response.

Jonathan Essex asked for assurances that the new temporary library in Redhill would be larger than the current temporary library which was quite small. The Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities assured the member that both the land and property team and libraries team would be ensuring continuity in library provision.

101/24 PUBLIC QUESTIONS [Item 4b]

There were none.

102/24 PETITIONS [Item 4c]

There were none.

103/24 REPRESENTATIONS RECEIVED ON REPORTS TO BE CONSIDERED IN PRIVATE [Item 4d]

There were none.

104/24 REPORTS FROM SELECT COMMITTEES, TASK GROUPS AND OTHER COMMITTEES OF THE COUNCIL [Item 5]

The DB&I task group report was introduced by the Vice Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee, Steven McCormick who explained that the task group had been set up to consider the SAP Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) replacement project, why the programme had overrun, what had gone wrong, and what lessons could be learned from the project. The Vice-Chairman thanked officers, witnesses and members for their support with the work of the task group. The task group was not looking for someone to blame but looking at lessons that could be learnt and taken on board going forward. The complexity of the programme was understood and the work of the teams supporting the delivery of the programme was recognised. The Leader thanked the task group for the comprehensive report. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources thanked the task group for the report stating that the report was very balanced and recognised the challenges associated with delivering a programme of this scale. The Cabinet accepted the recommendations of the task group and had responded to each of these in detail. The Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee thanked the Vice Chairman of the Select Committee for leading the task group and welcomed Cabinet's endorsement of the recommendations. He explained that the report focused on what could be learnt from the past when major projects were agreed and thanked officers for their support and advice.

The report regarding Mindworks and the Neurodevelopmental Pathway was introduced by the Chairman of the Adults and Health Select Committee, Trefor Hogg who explained that neurodivergent traits were much more frequent than generally appreciated, and that children,

young people, families and adults can all be affected, often without it being identified. This had resulted in higher volumes than anticipated for Mindworks which was now also a national issue. The recommendations relate to transformation of the service to a more community based model where parents can be supported locally and where help, support and treatment can happen in advance of a formal diagnosis. The Chairman asked the Cabinet to use every opportunity it had to lobby government for resources in this area. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning stated that at the meeting where this item was being discussed there seemed to be a great deal of frustration from families and schools regarding the neurodevelopment pathway and although the service wasn't delivered by the council there was a recognition of the impacts delays had on families and children. The Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee also spoke on the item. The Chairman explained that parents and schools felt abandoned by Mindworks who seemed to have given up on providing frontline neurodevelopmental screening and assessment and had effectively handed over this responsibility to schools. There was a recognition that Mindworks had been overwhelmed by requests for assessments, diagnosis and treatment but that their response to this had been unacceptable. Mindworks were promising a transformation strategy and plan in the autumn. The Chairman requested that the Leader and Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning ensured that the two Integrated Care Boards and Mindworks are reminded of their responsibilities as laid out by NHS England as they were appearing to ignore them. Despite a requirement that ICBs do not restrict or withhold access to an autism diagnosis, today in Surrey, access is being rationed. The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning explained that Mindworks was producing a transformation plan on how they will improve their performance and the council would be ensuring this plan was published. The Cabinet Member and Leader had been in constant dialogue with Mindworks Leadership about this issue. The Leader stated that as Chairman of the Surrey Heartlands ICP he would be raising this issue with the Health and Wellbeing board in September and that a number of conversations had already taken place with Mindworks and Surrey and Borders partnership.

The remaining two Select Committee reports would be considered when the relevant item was introduced on the agenda.

RESOLVED:

That the Select Committee reports be noted and the recommendations considered.

105/24 DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST CABINET MEETING [Item 6]

There were two decisions for noting.

RESOLVED:

That the decisions taken since the last Cabinet meeting be noted.

106/24 CABINET MEMBER OF THE MONTH [Item 7]

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing, and Public Health. The following key points were made:

- The Mental Health Improvement Fund was coming into its final phase and the council would be partnering up with the Community Foundation for Surrey to maximise the council's investment with some match funding to support innovative projects helping mental health well-being across children's and adults.
- In recent months there had been a focus on measles following the request by UK Health Security Agency (UKHSA) to prepare for outbreaks and widespread community transmission as the number of measles cases rises across the country. Together with partners, public health was working to encourage people to take up the offer of the Measles, Mumps, Rubella (MMR) vaccine, particularly in children and those aged 19-25 years, although anyone of any age is eligible for the free vaccines.
- Work was being undertaken to reduce the number of smokers in Surrey and work was ongoing with various universities in Surrey around the importance of sexual health. It was important that we did not see a rise in the number of sexually transmitted diseases. The Cabinet Member explained that free contraception was available in pharmacies and doctors surgeries.
- A suicide prevention policy for Surrey had just been launched and work was ongoing with partners to reduce the number of suicides in the county.
- The Surrey Academic Health and Care Partnerships had been launched to look at prevention and integration of care across Surrey. The Partnership would be looking at innovation, technology and new ways of helping residents.
- The Cabinet Member stated the importance of changing our direction to more prevention and early intervention. Communities and individuals needed to be empowered to live better, healthier and longer lives. Communities need to be more resilient and more aware of the benefits of eating well and being more active. This would result in less reliance on services and people receiving the right care when they need it. Councillors were asked to promote the public health services that were available in Surrey.

RESOLVED:

That the Cabinet Member of the Month report is noted.

107/24 CUSTOMER TRANSFORMATION [Item 8]

The item was introduced by the Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities who explained that the report sets out the ambition and business case for the transformation of customer experiences and outcomes, to support the Council's guiding ambition that 'No one is left behind'. The programme will enable the needs of Surrey County Council's residents and wider customers to be better met, with a focus on understanding and supporting those with the greatest need. The programme will enable consistently good customer experience across all council services, including customer 'contact points' (e.g. libraries, registry offices, social care interactions etc.). The programme will work closely with all services and teams within the Council to achieve this and will streamline current processes. Cabinet was asked to approve in principle £11.3m investment over four years for this work.

The Chairman of the Resources and Performance Select Committee spoke on the item recognising the enormity of the programme and the absolute need to ensure we properly engage with residents and customers. The Select Committee understood that this was an important matter for the Council. Some members of the Select Committee had reservations about the programme which was borne from concerns around IT issues which had occurred with the My Surrey acquisition and the potential cost of the programme. The Select Committee had therefore requested updates on the programme. The Deputy Leader welcomed the support from the Select Committee and the setting up a member reference group on the programme.

The Leader explained that progress of the programme and checks on value for money would be vigorously reviewed by the Cabinet. It was vital the council modernised the ways it engaged with residents especially those that were digitally excluded.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet approves the customer transformation ambition and approach, and the in principle £11.3m investment requirement over four years.
2. That Cabinet approves the use of financial revenue reserves of £3.5m (included in the £11.3m request) to support the 2024/25 activity. Further draw down of funding will be released in phases from 2025/26 onwards, following appropriate evidence of benefit realisation in the updated business case and approval of the Executive Director, Customer, Digital and Change in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member.

3. That Cabinet approves the Dynamic Customer Operating model (D-COM) and its delivery as an essential countywide priority to ensure customer outcomes and experiences are improved.
4. That Cabinet notes the inter-relationships of the transformation programme with cultural and digital change, the data strategy, service specific improvements, Core Function Redesign and the Towns and Villages/Team Around the Community programmes.
5. That Cabinet delegates authority to the Executive Director, Customer, Digital and Change, in consultation with the Lead Cabinet Member to refine the Dynamic Operating Model as it evolves over time, responding to changing needs.

Reasons for Decisions:

The Council is determined to improve the customer experience in line with our mission and organisational priorities. This will be achieved through the design and implementation of a new Customer Service Operating Model, supported by systems, processes and ways of working that will provide a seamless customer journey, build customer trust, confidence, and satisfaction; reduce cost and maximise efficiency and effectiveness.

(The decisions on this item can be called in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

108/24 A NEW DRAFT VISION ZERO ROAD SAFETY STRATEGY AND 20 MPH SPEED LIMIT POLICY [Item 9]

The item was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Economic Growth who explained that the report presented an updated version of the Surrey RoadSafe Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy and 20 mph speed limit policy for Cabinet approval. The strategy had been amended following an extensive ten-week public consultation and engagement period, and with reference to updated guidance published by central government as part of their “Plan for Drivers”. This latest version of the strategy had been approved by the Surrey RoadSafe Board and was subject to scrutiny by the Communities Environment and Highways Select Committee on 17 July. The Cabinet Member explained that the new 20 mph policy unequivocally does not advocate a blanket approach, proposing instead to adopt a localised approach to decision making. The aim of the strategy would be to reduce road death and injury throughout Surrey.

The Chairman of the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee explained that the Select Committee was in broad support of the strategy and would like to see progress on the strategy monitored including progress on the delivery plan. The Chairman highlighted that

the Select Committee would like to see more resources channelled into delivering the strategy. The current sum allocated over the next five years did not seem sufficient. Clarity was sought on the role of the divisional member and the consultation process when adopting a 20mph policy. The committee was broadly supportive of the strategy and looked forward to working with the Cabinet Member to implement the strategy. The Cabinet Member stated that resourcing was always a concern but Members could use their own member allocation to support this work and the central budget had also been increased by £500,000.

The Deputy Cabinet Member for Strategic Highways explained that the policy and strategy was about safer streets. The new 20mph policy did not advocate a new blanket approach, proposing instead a new localised approach to speed reduction decision making which would require local engagement and consultation. Councillor Jonathan Essex welcomed the new strategy and the additional resource being put into this area.

The Leader explained that the Local Member would be closely involved with the implementation of the strategy and the current levels of Member allowance and central funds should be sufficient to make sure that those areas that want a 20 mile per hour zone can have them.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet approves the Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy that has been amended following feedback from public consultation, and with reference to updated guidance from central government as part of their “Plan for Drivers”.
2. That Cabinet approves the County Council’s more flexible approach to implementing new 20 mph Speed Limits.

Reasons for Decisions:

A new Surrey RoadSafe Partnership Vision Zero Road Safety Strategy, incorporating a new 20mph policy, based on best practice is crucial to reducing road death and injury throughout Surrey.

(The decisions on this item can be called-in by the Communities, Environment and Highways Select Committee)

109/24 THE WINSTON CHURCHILL SCHOOL- REPLACEMENT CURTAIN WALLING & FIRE STOPPING WORKS [Item 10]

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure who explained that Cabinet was being asked to approve capital expenditure to undertake the replacement of the existing non-fire rated infill panels with a fire rated curtain walling system and provide fire stopping to the 4-storey block and 2-storey main building to

provide a safe building environment at the Winston Churchill School in Woking. Surrey Fire and Rescue Service visited the building on 6 June and provided details of their findings in a fire safety matter letter. Since then Surrey Fire and Rescue Services Area Inspecting Officer had visited the building and advised that due to the high level of automatic fire detection and regular fire drills organised by the school, pupils would be able to exit the building within safe time scales. Work was due to start in August.

The Leader confirmed that there were no imminent fire safety risks with the school and if there were the school would have been closed immediately.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet approves capital funding allocated within the School Capital Maintenance Budget for the Capital Maintenance Programme 2024/25 to provide a safe building which currently has no fire breaks between the floors and which the Fire Officer has requested to ensure no enforcement notice is issued deeming the buildings to be unsafe for occupation at The Winston Churchill School. The capital funding required to develop the new facilities is commercially sensitive at this time and is set out in the Part 2 report.
2. That Cabinet approves procurement of appropriate supply chain partners to deliver the design, build and installation of the new structures in accordance with the Council's Procurement and Contract Standing Orders.
3. That Cabinet agrees to delegate to the Executive Director for Environment, Infrastructure and Growth in consultation with the Director of Land and Property to award such contracts, up to +/- 10% of the budgetary tolerance level and any other legal documentation required to facilitate the approvals within this report.
4. That Cabinet authorises Legal Services to seal any awarded contracts where required.

Reasons for Decisions:

The recommendations in this report:

- Provide a safe learning and working environment in keeping with the existing school design, ensuring the building has the required compartmentation to contain any fire risk.
- Reduce the risk to life of pupils, staff, and other stakeholders.

- Reduce the risk of extensive collateral damage in the event of a fire.
- Ensure that the Fire Officer does not issue an enforcement notice and the insurance broker is willing to provide cover for the building.
- Make an essential contribution towards the Council's strategic objective to empower communities, in line with the 2030 Community Vision to ensure everyone benefits from education, skills and employment that help them to succeed in life.

(The decisions on this item can be called in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

110/24 CONSORT HOUSE, REDHILL [Item 11]

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure who explained that Consort House was a former administrative office of Surrey County which was vacated on the relocation of services to Woodhatch Place, Reigate. Following an extended period of marketing since September 2022, no acceptable commercial proposals for a freehold sale had been received. Cabinet was therefore asked to approve the letting of the building. The Leader added that letting the building would provide a steady income stream for the Council and that a tenant had already been found.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet approves the details of the letting of Consort House as outlined in the Part 2 report.
2. That Cabinet delegates authority to the S151 Officer in consultation with the Director of Land and Property to conclude best value terms and complete all associated legal documentation.
3. That Cabinet notes the Financial and Value for Money implications recorded in this Part 2 report.
4. That Cabinet formally declares the asset surplus to operational service requirements, and upon completion of the letting, to hold the asset for Investment purposes pending any future Cabinet or Strategic Investment Board decisions on its future.

Reasons for Decisions:

A letting of the entire building now provides an opportunity for the Council to not only mitigate its void holding costs, but to secure a long-term rental income stream enabling the asset to be held as an investment property, pending any future decisions of the Council.

The proposed tenant is a significant provider of services supporting Surrey communities.

Consort House has remained largely vacant since late 2022, other than the current temporary occupation by library services for storage and a short term click and collect service. The Council has incurred void holding costs on the building and has a rental liability for some related car parking. Marketing of the building, on either a freehold or leasehold basis, has been pursued against the background of a very depressed office market over the past 2 years.

There have been no recent commercial proposals received for the freehold interest that would be recommended to Cabinet.

(The decisions in this item can be called- in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

111/24 CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES RECOMMISSIONING PROGRAMME [Item 12]

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning introduced the report explaining the report provided details on the procurement phase of the Children's Community Health Services recommissioning programme. The procurement phase had now been completed and the report required a Council decision on the contract negotiation, which will lead to the final award of the contract. Once the award of the contract was approved by all parties the programme would move into the mobilisation phase so that the new service model for children's community health services can be delivered from the 1st of April 2025. The contract for the Children's Community Health Services is jointly commissioned by the Council and also by Surrey Heartland's ICB, Frimley ICB and NHS England Southeast. Each of these four commissioning parties would be taking a similar decision to the one being taken today through their own governance processes. The Leader explained that the report would come back to Cabinet subject to detailed contract discussions in September.

RESOLVED:

Decisions and Reasons for Decisions taken in Part 2 of the meeting.

112/24 2024/25 MONTH 2 (MAY) FINANCIAL REPORT [Item 13]

The report was introduced by the Cabinet Member for Finance and Resources who explained that at Month 2, the Council was forecasting an overspend of £15.3m against the 2024/25 revenue budget. Directorates were working on developing mitigating actions to offset forecast overspends and deliver services within available budgets. The Cabinet Member explained where these overspends were and stated that a member and officer oversight group had been set up to tackle the forecast spend increases in Home to School Travel Assistance. The

2024/25 Capital Budget was approved by Council on 6th February 2024 at £404.9m. The Capital Programme Panel, alongside Strategic Capital Groups, had undertaken an assurance review of the capital programme to ensure deliverability. This has resulted in a re-phased budget being recommended for 2024/25. At Month 2, capital expenditure of £313.4m is forecast for 2024/25, in line with the re-phased budget.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet notes the Council's forecast revenue budget and capital budget positions for the year.
2. That Cabinet notes the additional grant funding secured by Public Health and Communities & Prevention services in the Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships Directorate as set out in paragraphs 6, which will be allocated to the AWHP Directorate to spend in line with the grant conditions.
3. That Cabinet approves the re-phased capital budget of £313.4m for 2024/25.

Reasons for Decisions:

This report is to comply with the agreed policy of providing a monthly budget monitoring report to Cabinet for information and for approval of any necessary actions.

(The decisions on this item can be called in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

113/24 EXCLUSION OF THE PUBLIC [Item 14]

RESOLVED: That under Section 100(A) of the Local Government Act 1972, the public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of the following items of business on the grounds that they involve the likely disclosure of exempt information under the relevant paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

114/24 THE WINSTON CHURCHILL SCHOOL- REPLACEMENT CURTAIN WALLING & FIRE STOPPING WORKS [Item 15]

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure asked Cabinet to approve the capital funding for the project which was agreed.

A separate part 2 minute was done for this item.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet approves capital funding of [E-11-24] allocated within the School Capital Maintenance Budget for the Capital Maintenance Programme 2024/25 to provide a safe building which currently has no fire breaks between the floors and which

the Fire Officer has requested to ensure no enforcement notice is issued deeming the buildings to be unsafe for occupation at The Winston Churchill School.

Reasons for Decisions:

The recommendations in this report:

- Provide a safe learning and working environment in keeping with the existing school design, ensuring the building has the required compartmentation to contain any fire risk.
- Reduce the risk to life of pupils, staff, and other stakeholders.
- Reduce the risk of extensive collateral damage in the event of a fire.
- Ensure that the Fire Officer does not issue an enforcement notice and the insurance broker is willing to provide cover for the building.
- Make an essential contribution towards the Council's strategic objective to empower communities, in line with the 2030 Community Vision to ensure everyone benefits from education, skills and employment that help them to succeed in life.

(The decisions on this item can be called in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

115/24 CONSORT HOUSE, REDHILL [Item 16]

The Cabinet Member for Property, Waste and Infrastructure gave details of the terms of the lease including the new tenant and rental costs.

A separate part 2 minute was done for this item.

RESOLVED:

1. Approves the details of the letting of the building to [E-12-24] as outlined in this Part 2 report.
2. Delegates authority to the S151 Officer in consultation with the Director of Land and Property to conclude best value terms and complete all associated legal documentation.
3. Notes the Financial implications recorded in this report.
4. Formally declares the asset surplus to operational service requirements, and upon completion of the letting, to hold the asset for Investment purposes pending any future Cabinet or Strategic Investment Board decisions on its future.

Reasons for Decisions:

A letting of the entire building now provides an opportunity for the Council to not only mitigate its void holding costs, but to secure a long-term rental income stream enabling the asset to be held as an investment property, pending any future decisions of the Council.

The proposed tenant is a significant provider of services supporting Surrey communities.

Consort House has remained largely vacant since late 2022, other than the current temporary occupation by library services for storage and a short term click and collect service. The Council has incurred void holding costs on the building and has a rental liability for some related car parking. Marketing of the building, on either a freehold or leasehold basis, has been pursued against the background of a very depressed office market over the past 2 years.

There have been no recent commercial proposals received for the freehold interest that would be recommended to Cabinet.

(The decisions on this item can be called in by the Resources and Performance Select Committee)

116/24 CHILDREN'S COMMUNITY HEALTH SERVICES RECOMMISSIONING PROGRAMME [Item 17]

The Leader asked for the following additional recommendation to be agreed by the Cabinet,

1. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children, Families & Lifelong Learning in consultation with the Leader and the Lead Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning to enter into the contract following the detailed contract discussions.

The Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning introduced the report and gave details on the compliant bid. The Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee also spoke on the item. The recommendations were agreed. A separate part 2 minute was done for this item.

RESOLVED:

1. That Cabinet ratify the completion and outcome of the procurement process (Procurement Report attached as Appendix 1).
2. See Exempt Minute E-13-24.
3. See Exempt Minute E-13-24.

- 4. See Exempt Minute E-13-24.
- 5. That Cabinet delegate authority to the Executive Director of Children, Families & Lifelong Learning in consultation with the Leader and the Lead Member for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning to enter into the contract following the detailed contract discussions.

Reasons for Decisions:

See Exempt Minute E-13-24

(The decisions on this item can be called-in by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning & Culture Select Committee)

117/24 PUBLICITY FOR PART 2 ITEMS [Item 18]

It was agreed that non-exempt information may be made available to the press and public, where appropriate.

Meeting closed at 3.32 pm

Chairman

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CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE (H2STA)

Date Considered: 30 July 2024

- 1) Home to School Travel Assistance has received a high level of scrutiny throughout and following a 2022 Learning Review. The Committee was brought an update in July 2024 and draft minutes can be found [here](#). In addition to the budget deficit, the Committee remains concerned in the area of communication, both with parents and between Council teams.
- 2) The H2STA budget was overspent by 19% in 2023/24, that is £10.35m over. This is mainly due to an increase in both price, due to driver shortages and increasing complexity of need, and volume due to the Recovery Plan work on EHCPs. This shows the importance of the travel assistance and school place planning teams being joined up with the inclusion and additional needs teams. An overspend is also forecast for 2024/25, of £7.4m with a further £2.5m risk. This reflects a multitude of factors, including growth in pupil numbers exceeding the assumptions applied at the time of budget setting. This year saw a significant increase in the number of in-year SEND applications compared with 2023. The average annual cost of a travel arrangement for a child or young person with additional needs and disabilities is almost £7,000 more than that of mainstream – and nearly half (49.5%) of pupils qualifying for assistance have additional needs and disabilities – so the forecast demand for SEND school placements does need to be considered when budgeting for Home to School Transport.
- 3) It is discretionary to pay for travel assistance for children below compulsory school age. Despite Surrey County Council's policy being that, in the absence of exceptional circumstances, it does not, this had not been robustly implemented and last year SCC transported about 165 four-year-old children in reception year. Looking for cost efficiencies, the Council decided to apply its under 5s policy more stringently, but despite this some parents were advised by SEND and Commissioning Officers that they may get transport. The Assistant Director for H2STA told the Committee lessons had been learned and the policy has now been communicated directly to parents and through schools and Family Voice. Members believe confusion may still exist amongst parents about what is classed as extenuating circumstances.

Recommendations

The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee recommends that:

- 1) The Surrey School Travel and Assessment Team (SSTAT) prioritises communications to parents and carers when changes to policy and practice

are finalised and ensures that these communications are widely shared in advance of the change being implemented.

- 2) In order to further improve communication,
 - (a) the SEND and Admissions team take the transport implications of a placement into account, and pro-actively discuss it with families prior to a placement being discussed, agreed and named in a plan, including for those Children and Young People outside of statutory school age.
 - (b) The updated parent guide to travel assistance – developed in collaboration with Family Voice Surrey – is given to parents when an EHCP application is made and is included in the Key Stage Transfer paperwork.
 - (c) SSTAT makes it clear to families, before the next academic year’s applications, what extenuating circumstances will be considered for Children and Young People under-5 and post-16.
 - (d) As Family Voice suggests, SSTAT provides regular engagement sessions/surgeries throughout the summer that parents and carers can book onto.
- 3) The forecasting of demand and the budget for Home to School Transport takes account of the forecast demand for SEND school placements.
- 4) SSTAT undertakes a cost benefit analysis to identify whether a higher standard Independent Travel Allowance would incentivise uptake, what the implications for parents and carers would be, and what Surrey can learn from other local authorities who have implemented this strategy.
- 5) In order to come up with potentially innovative solutions, SSTAT looks further at what other local authorities are doing to manage home to school transport costs.

Fiona Davidson, Chairman - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee

Background papers

Report to Children, Families, Lifelong Learning Select Committee 30 July 2024, Item 7:

<https://mycouncil.surreycc.gov.uk/documents/g9216/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2030-Jul-2024%2010.00%20Children%20Families%20Lifelong%20Learning%20and%20Culture%20S.pdf?T=10>

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: REPORT OF THE ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES: PARENT AND CARER EXPERIENCE TASK GROUP

5

Date Considered: 12 September 2024

1. Many parents and carers of children with additional needs and disabilities in Surrey have lost trust and confidence in Surrey County Council's ability and willingness to meet the needs of their children. That is the finding of a task group set up to determine how the Council can better support them.
2. Finding out parents and carers' experiences, views and feelings lent itself to a qualitative study and a series of focus groups was carried out. Eight hours of rich data were systematically analysed. Although the sample of 25 cannot be generalised to the population, triangulation was used to strengthen insights. A focus group with SEND case officers, data on complaints relating to the SEND Service, and the volume and nature of SEND cases highlighted in a survey of Members, all reinforced that problems described by parents were not isolated incidents. These included not having an SEN school place and their calls and emails not being responded to.
3. The Task Group concluded that, if the SEND Service is to achieve its strategic ambition of hearing and involving families in the decisions that affect them, it must do more to embrace the principle of co-production.
4. The report of the Task Group was presented to the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on 12 September 2024. The Chairman of the Task Group said that despite being affected by their research they had kept the response proportionate. To contribute to the Council's customer engagement transformation programme, the 81 key engagers in this Service needed to be given the correct tools for the job. He applauded pockets of very good practice but reflected that these did not appear to be widespread, and proposed that partnering with schools to upskill staff in SEN should be the future.
5. The Committee Chair recognised there were many issues with SEND at a national level, however the task group's recommendations set out what could and should be done at a local Surrey level to make a difference to parents and children. She advocated that these were done without delay to avoid further loss of trust.
6. The Committee wholeheartedly and unanimously agreed all recommendations put forward by the Task Group.

Recommendations

It is intended that, should Cabinet agree them, all the recommendations that follow are implemented over the next 12 months.

The Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee recommends that:

1) **Staffing and training**

The AND workforce must be appropriately sized to meet demand and better equipped to cope with the challenges of the role:

- (a) All officers in the Inclusion and Additional Needs teams should have compulsory (i) training in SEND legal obligations from IPSEA and (ii) training in neurodiversity and needs of families from a charity with lived experience, such as National Autistic Society.
- (b) Increase the number of permanent, customer-facing case officers by 50% to 120, to help ensure EHCPs are both child-centric and timely.
- (c) Revise the case officer job description so that it reflects the need for difficult and complex interaction with customers, to ensure recruitment is geared towards the needs of the role.
- (d) Given that case officers are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds, a more thorough induction in the first month of employment should include: (i) clear guidance in how staff are expected to deliver and what is held to be important, (ii) the Code of Practice, (iii) the self-presented real-life experiences of parents and carers to foster empathy and (iv) how to de-escalate aggression stemming from personal trauma.
- (e) Make a level 3 qualification in SEND casework compulsory for all case officers to be completed in their first 12 months, and provide them with appropriate study time to achieve this.
- (f) Provide therapeutic supervision for case officers, a supported space in which they can reflect on the impact of the work on them.
- (g) Award a new senior practitioner role to experienced and resilient case officers who display excellence in customer focus, who will move around Surrey quadrants and not be tied to a particular school-based area.

2) **Communication**

Support for families must be more personal and easier to access:

- (a) SEND case managers must improve the attention they give to parental experience. They should be trained in a person-centred approach to support, develop and spread good practice, and relieve pressure on the front line to afford case officers the time to consider how to communicate with parents and carers in a way that avoids conflict, and for example,
 - (i) Communicate through face-to-face conversations at every stage possible;

(ii) Individualise communication plans based on parental preference e.g. some prefer to hear from the case officer regardless of progress, while others do not want regular contact reporting no news;

(iii) Add a more personal and empathetic narrative to the automated holding response that emails will be responded to within 5 working days.

(b) The guide for parents and carers of children with AND should:

(i) Include a jargon-free explanation of the statutory EHCP process, making clear what roles different officers do at each step of the way;

(ii) Be distributed by schools termly with their newsletter (SEND Support Advisors to request);

(iii) Be digitally distributed by Member Services to all Surrey county councillors to assist them in their casework and help in their role facilitating communication.

(c) Produce an easy-read version of the EHCP Governance Board (EGB) Terms of Reference, simplifying language wherever possible to aide understanding, and automatically make available to parents and carers in good time before a Panel decision is due.

3) Timeliness monitoring

The system used by Inclusion and Additional Needs teams needs to enable full monitoring of Key Performance Indicators:

(a) Develop a way SEND case managers can monitor the response times of parent and carer communications with case officers, and review performance monthly at Director level.

(b) Such monitoring may require a reduction of the multiple and varied means of contact to leave only those which can be sent to a centralised database. This would enable communications to be distributed between colleagues to cover when the recipient is not at work.

4) Quality assurance

To mitigate a decline in quality during the clearance of the backlog, annual reviews due in the next 12 months are brought forward to the earliest possible opportunity.

5) Process

The excessively complicated EHCP procedure needs to be improved, for example:

(a) Create more opportunities for co-production with families, including checking with parents before the EHCP Governance Board makes a decision, that it is privy to all information they were expecting.

(b) The Task Group supports the exploration of AI technology to support with internal admin and free up case officers to focus on relational work, but stresses this should be non-customer facing. It recommends a comparison of performance before and after its introduction.

6) Dispute resolution

When only 2% of Local Authority decisions are being fully upheld at tribunal, there is a need to reduce the number reaching that stage. For example,

(a) A Tribunal Officer should be assigned to familiarise themselves with case law and reflect on common causes of tribunals, in order to ascertain swiftly following a case being registered if it is worth pursuing.

(b) A business plan should be prepared to evidence the merits of expanding the mediation and dispute resolutions pilot and extending it beyond 12 months.

7) Training for schools

SCC should lobby the Government to continue the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) in the future, and should encourage more schools to take up the offer. SEN and building relationships with families should not be the sole responsibility of one person in a school. To achieve this:

(a) When the PINS programme ends, neurodiversity advisors in conjunction with Family Voice Surrey facilitated parent groups should continue to work with schools to upskill ALL teaching staff (not just the SENCo, and including senior leadership) and help them to instil (i) a strong understanding of neurodiversity and inclusive education principles and mental health and (ii) the importance of engaging with parents and carers of CYP to incorporate their perspectives into classroom activities.

(b) Training should reflect that the primary needs of CYP aged 2-25 with SEN are autism and speech, language and communication, closely followed by social, emotional and mental health needs for six to 25-year-olds. Training should be varied in order to reflect the autistic spectrum, include Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), and be followed up by checking that knowledge taught has been acquired.

(c) Data on key indicators and outcomes of the PINS pilot needs to be collected and analysed to make an evidence-based plea to extend the DfE's programme funding beyond March 2025.

(d) The pilot's achievements need to be vigorously promoted amongst education settings, involving families in its promotion.

**Fiona Davidson, Chair - Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture
Select Committee**

Background papers

[Report of the Additional Needs and Disabilities: Parent and Carer Experience Task Group 12 September 2024, Item 6](#)

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THURSDAY 12 SEPTEMBER 2024

THE REPORT OF THE ADDITIONAL NEEDS AND DISABILITIES: PARENT/CARER EXPERIENCE TASK GROUP

Purpose of report: To provide the findings and recommendations of the Additional Needs and Disabilities: Parent/Carer Experience Task Group, which was tasked with considering what changes could improve the Council's support of parents and carers of Children and Young People (CYP) with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND), and ensure it strives to put families at the centre of the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) process to as far as possible meet the needs of CYP.

Executive Summary and Recommendations

The Select Committee has noted the profound dissatisfaction of some parents and carers with the way in which Surrey County Council (SCC) administers the Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) procedure. It set up a task group to understand how SCC supports and communicates with service users, to discover the main themes of complaint, and consider what is best practice and how barriers to this might be overcome.

Primary data was collected through focus groups with 25 parents and carers and triangulated by conducting a survey of Members' AND casework and reviewing complaints and appeals data. There were discussions with young people, SCC case officers, management and caseworkers in the Learners' Single Point of Access (LSPA).

On examining the EHCP process, Members found conflict built into the system, with 'hand-off' points that contribute to communication issues. This results in Member involvement at various stages and a survey of Members showed that poor communication from SCC was a key factor in disputes. Parents and carers who participated in the focus groups, already burdened with child worries, are further stressed by a system they enter into looking for support. A focus group with case officers illustrated the pressures of an individual helping around 200 parents negotiate an excessively complicated system, in a role where the parent expects an advocate while the law expects compliance with a timeline, in an environment lacking sufficient places of the type sought by families. The result can often be emotional overload on both sides.

Seven recommendations endeavour to better support the family in their aim to meet the educational needs of a child with additional needs, by improvement in the following areas: staffing and training, communication, monitoring of timeliness, quality assurance, process, dispute resolution and training in schools.

Recommendations

1) Staffing and training

The AND workforce must be appropriately sized to meet demand and better equipped to cope with the challenges of the role:

- (a) All officers in the Inclusion and Additional Needs teams should have compulsory (i) training in SEND legal obligations from IPSEA and (ii) training in neurodiversity and needs of families from a charity with lived experience, such as National Autistic Society.
- (b) Increase the number of permanent, customer-facing case officers by 50% to 120, to help ensure EHCPs are both child-centric and timely.
- (c) Revise the case officer job description so that it reflects the need for difficult and complex interaction with customers, to ensure recruitment is geared towards the needs of the role.
- (d) Given that case officers are recruited from a diverse range of backgrounds, a more thorough induction in the first month of employment should include: (i) clear guidance in how staff are expected to deliver and what is held to be important, (ii) the Code of Practice, (iii) the self-presented real-life experiences of parents and carers to foster empathy and (iv) how to de-escalate aggression stemming from personal trauma.
- (e) Make a level 3 qualification in SEND casework compulsory for all case officers to be completed in their first 12 months, and provide them with appropriate study time to achieve this.
- (f) Provide therapeutic supervision for case officers, a supported space in which they can reflect on the impact of the work on them.
- (g) Award a new senior practitioner role to experienced and resilient case officers who display excellence in customer focus, who will move around Surrey quadrants and not be tied to a particular school-based area.

2) Communication

Support for families must be more personal and easier to access:

- (a) SEND case managers must improve the attention they give to parental experience. They should be trained in a person-centred approach to support, develop and spread good practice, and relieve pressure on the front line to afford case officers the time to

consider how to communicate with parents and carers in a way that avoids conflict, and for example,

- (i) Communicate through face-to-face conversations at every stage possible;
 - (ii) Individualise communication plans based on parental preference e.g. some prefer to hear from the case officer regardless of progress, while others do not want regular contact reporting no news;
 - (iii) Add a more personal and empathetic narrative to the automated holding response that emails will be responded to within 5 working days.
- (b) The guide for parents and carers of children with AND should:
- (i) Include a jargon-free explanation of the statutory EHCP process, making clear what roles different officers do at each step of the way;
 - (ii) Be distributed by schools termly with their newsletter (SEND Support Advisors to request);
 - (iii) Be digitally distributed by Member Services to all Surrey county councillors to assist them in their casework and help in their role facilitating communication.
- (c) Produce an easy-read version of the EHCP Governance Board (EGB) Terms of Reference, simplifying language wherever possible to aide understanding, and automatically make available to parents and carers in good time before a Panel decision is due.

3) Timeliness monitoring

The system used by Inclusion and Additional Needs teams needs to enable full monitoring of Key Performance Indicators:

- (a) Develop a way SEND case managers can monitor the response times of parent and carer communications with case officers, and review performance monthly at Director level.
- (b) Such monitoring may require a reduction of the multiple and varied means of contact to those which can be sent to a centralised database. This would enable communications to be distributed between colleagues to cover when the recipient is not at work.

4) Quality assurance

To mitigate a decline in quality during the clearance of the backlog, bring forward annual reviews due in the next 12 months to the earliest possible opportunity.

5) Process

The excessively complicated EHCP procedure needs to be improved, for example:

- (a) Create more opportunities for co-production with families, including checking with parents before the EGB makes a decision that it is privy to all information they expect.
- (b) The Task Group supports the exploration of AI technology to support with internal admin and free up case officers to focus on relational work, but stresses this should be non-customer facing. It recommends a comparison of performance before and after its introduction.

6) Dispute resolution

When only 2% of Local Authority decisions are being fully upheld at tribunal, there is a need to reduce the number reaching that stage. For example,

- (a) A Tribunal Officer should be assigned to familiarise themselves with case law and reflect on common causes of tribunals, in order to ascertain swiftly following a case being registered if it is worth pursuing.
- (b) A business plan should be prepared to evidence the merits of expanding the mediation and dispute resolutions pilot and extending beyond 12 months.

7) Training for schools

SCC should lobby the Government to continue PINS in the future, and should encourage more schools to take up the offer. SEN and building relationships with families should not be the sole responsibility of one person in a school. To achieve this:

- (a) When the PINS programme ends, neurodiversity advisors in conjunction with FVS-facilitated parent groups should continue to work with schools to upskill ALL teaching staff (not just the SENCo, and including senior leadership) and help them to instil (i) a strong understanding of neurodiversity and inclusive education principles and mental health and (ii) the importance of engaging with parents and carers of CYP to incorporate their perspectives into classroom activities.
- (b) Training should reflect that the primary needs of CYP aged 2-25 with SEN are autism and speech, language and communication, closely followed by social, emotional and mental health needs for six to 25-year-olds. Training should be varied to reflect the autistic spectrum, include Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA), and be followed up by checking that knowledge taught has been acquired.

- (c) Data on key indicators and outcomes of the PINS pilot needs to be collected and analysed to make an evidence-based plea to extend the DfE’s programme funding beyond March 2025.
- (d) The pilot’s achievements need to be vigorously promoted amongst settings, involving families in its promotion.

Introduction

1. In 2023/24, nearly one in five Surrey pupils (19.5%) had identified special educational needs (SEN). In the same year, 27.1% of Surrey pupils with SEN had an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), an increase of 4 percentage points in five years. Requests continue to increase year-on-year for an EHCP, a legal document setting out how a child’s SEN should be met if they cannot be met by Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP). In the county, need is rising faster than the national average, and more of those with need are awarded an EHCP.

2. Surrey County Council’s response to Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) - the preferred terminology for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - is a source of discontent for some Surrey residents. The 1,225 complaints to Surrey County Council’s complaints team, 502 enquiries from Councillors and MPs, and 157 complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman in 2023/24 in relation to AND, all demonstrate a level of dissatisfaction with the Council in this Service. A major source of tension has been the number of EHCPs being issued outside the statutory timeline of 20 weeks. This reached a critical low in 2023 as increased demand coincided with a national shortage of Educational Psychologists (EP) who contribute to assessments. It prompted a Recovery Plan to address timeliness and in July 2023 the Cabinet approved a £15 million investment, which has succeeded in reducing more than 1,000 overdue EP advice requests to 31 a year later. More than one third (36%) of the complaints received in the first four months of 2024/25, however, related not to timeliness but to poor communication and not being kept informed.

3. The Local Area SEND inspection outcome published in November 2023 asked for improvements in both communication and timeliness, as well as a review of the Alternative Provision offer and improvement of interventions monitoring. Although Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission said leaders “have put in place important actions that are starting to make a difference”, they described Surrey’s children and young people with SEND as having “variable” and “inconsistent experiences and outcomes”. This Task Group aims to support the Council and its partners to ensure the experiences and insights of parents and carers are taken into consideration in its strategic plan. It is hoped it will complement the findings of an end-to-end review by the Service since May 2023 of the statutory processes of the EHCP needs assessment and annual review.

Acknowledgements

4. The Task Group would like to take this opportunity to thank all who have given their time to help shape the findings of this review, particularly the parents and carers who spoke openly about very difficult experiences.

Objectives

5. A Task Group was established by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee in January 2024.

Membership of the Task Group was agreed as follows:

- Jeremy Webster, Chairman
- Jonathan Essex
- Bob Hughes
- Mark Sugden

6. The Task Group's purpose was to answer the following: How can the Council improve its support of parents and carers of Children and Young People (CYP) with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND)? Its agreed objectives were:

- Build a comprehensive picture of how SCC supports and communicates with parents of CYP with AND at each stage of the process.
- Understand the main themes of complaint, if there are any problematic stages in particular, what problems are endemic and what the root causes are.
- Investigate what makes a good experience for parents of CYP with AND, what the barriers are to the Council facilitating this and how/if these barriers can be overcome.
- Hear the CYP's views on support from Council.
- Compare Surrey County Council's current policy and documented procedure with what families report having experienced. If these are not in alignment, discern how and why they differ.
- Understand if there are barriers that prevent the Council from following policy and if so, if and how these could be overcome.

7. While the Task Group recognises the impact of the Council's health partners on parents and carers, it limited the scope of its scrutiny to the Council's role, where it could be most influential. The scope originally included education settings as witnesses but this was later revised as it was found to be too ambitious within the timeframe and, similarly, schools sit outside Surrey County Council's ability to directly lead change.

Evidence gathering

8. All of the evidence that was received in the course of this enquiry with permission for publication can be found in the appendices of this report.

Primary data was gathered from the following sources:

- Survey of Members on their SEND casework conducted 23 February to 29 March 2024
- Four focus groups with parents and carers held on 18 March, 20 March, 22 April and 24 April 2024
- Discussion with young people hosted by ATLAS in May 2024
- Focus group with case officers in May 2024
- Witness session with SCC SEND leadership and management in June 2024
- Visit to LSPA (single point of access for CYP with AND) to speak with caseworkers and managers in July 2024

The Task Group met with the following staff members on the dates stated:

- 24 January 2024, 21 February 2024 and 12 June 2024: SEND County Service Planning & Performance Leader – to examine EHCP process
- 1 May 2024: SEND Recruitment, Retention & Workforce Development Manager and four SEND Case Officers, one from each quadrant
- 24 June 2024: Assistant Director for Inclusion & Additional Needs - SEN Recovery and Educational Psychology; SEND County Service Planning & Performance Leader - SEN Recovery; Service Manager for SEND Practice; Service Manager for Learners' Single Point of Access
- 18 July 2024: Service Manager for Learners' Single Point of Access; SEND Support Advisors and Senior Case Managers in the LSPA Early Intervention Team; Neurodiversity Advisors involved in the Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) pilot.

Focus groups with parents and carers

Method

9. A series of four focus groups was held, totalling eight hours and involving 25 participants, to hear parents' and carers' own accounts of their experiences. These were held in both West and East Surrey as well as remote evening options to enable equity of access. Participants were recruited by Family Voice Surrey and although it was a convenience sample, the parent-carer forum was asked for an equal mix of those with an EHCP and those on SEN support without a Plan, as well as a variety of key stages and quadrants.

10. Participants were asked the following questions:

- What assistance, and what barriers, have you encountered in accessing support for additional needs and disabilities for your child?
- What are your key areas of concern with regard to the Council specifically?
- What might the Council do differently to make your lives easier and build confidence and trust with parents and carers?

The Task Group was mindful of the words of counselling psychologist Dr Joanna Griffin: “The emotional cost to parents of recounting difficult and often traumatic experiences must not be underestimated. Yet it is critical that decision makers up to the highest levels hear directly from these families. They can have no doubt that the SEN and school systems are having a devastating impact on the lives of many, particularly for ND [neurodivergent] individuals and their families.” (Griffin et al., 2024).

11. Thematic analysis was carried out to identify patterns in opinions and feelings (Appendix 3). This was inductive with codes emerging from the data, so as not to predetermine what might be said. Codes were cleaned up to give consistency within and across transcripts and allow similar concepts to be counted. These were then grouped into five themes:

- Where support was found
- Perceived bad practice
- Consequences of bad practice
- Barriers to Local Authority providing good support
- Suggestions for improvement

All of those who participated in the focus groups gave permission for their anonymised contributions to be shared (Appendix 2).

What parents and carers experience

12. An ‘us against them’ mentality was evident in the adversarial language used, with parents and carers viewing the Council not as a source of help but as a barrier to what they want. They describe their experience in terms of a fight or a battle; these words were used 16 times, with the concept also expressed as “trying to get blood out of a stone”, “If you want anything done in Surrey you have to force them” and the perception of the Council as “gatekeepers”. The Council is viewed as part of a system that blocks parents at every turn:

“It's like being on a roundabout and nobody gives way to you. You try every avenue but doors shut everywhere you go.”

“You don't even know how to find out something. It's fundamentally about, your day is hard enough. Why can it not just help you?”

13. About two thirds maintained they were not listened to or not involved in the EHCP process.

“They just think the parents are bonkers and they know better.”

“We just want to be listened to and anxiety taken seriously.”

“A mother’s instinct is something that is real, but a lot of the time we get labelled as neurotic individuals.”

“When you first identify that there's a problem, nobody really takes it seriously. And as parents, you kind of know. And so, when you're starting to say we need a bit of help, we need a bit of support, we need a bit of flexibility, nobody takes you seriously until you've got many letters from doctors and assessment and things. Actually, if you could just get that bit of flex quite early on, some of these problems wouldn't maybe even occur.”

This is at odds with the first of five pillars of partnership in the Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy: “We will seek to co-produce our individual assessments as well as systemic changes alongside children, young people, parents, carers and partners.”

14. About half of participants referred to the quality of EHCPs, ranging from assertions of a lack of clarity and precision or measurable goals to specific errors such as text inserted into the wrong section of the Plan, resulting in the outlined provision not being fulfilled.

15. Between the 25 people there were 43 mentions of poor timeliness, most commonly relating to delays in receiving a response, closely followed by issuing the Plan and getting an assessment.

16. Many had experienced frequent changes of personnel; one mother with four children said she had had 30 case officers.

“Half the time I didn't know who my case worker was.”

“The average a caseworker was staying was two weeks, they were joining and then I think realising what they'd got themselves into and then going on sick leave.”

“You get a caseworker and then they disappear off the face of the planet. No one tells you that they've left. No one tells you who the replacement is.”

17. The word communication was used negatively 20 times, with 27 specific mentions of not being replied to, updated or informed of information, ranging from the general remit of the Council and how the process works, to entitlement to Alternative Provision or the outcome of a Panel.

“The lack of communication is extraordinary, frustrating, and it makes the journey so much harder for everyone.”

“I’m being ignored, I think I’m on a list for Surrey of ‘Don’t reply to this crazy woman’. I copied in the manager 64 days ago and I haven’t had a reply. I might be persona non grata.”

“I have no idea what’s happening with my daughter’s education. She’s got an EHCP issued, but no school named. So, who’s going to provide the provision on it? And you speak to them, and they say, oh, that’s a good question. I’ll ask my manager, I’ll get back to you tomorrow. And then you wait another three months and you cannot get hold of a person, and you get hold of the department heads, you email them, it bounces back saying this person’s on long term sick leave or this person no longer works for the Council.”

In October 2023, the Select Committee recommended that line managers ensure leavers have a handover meeting with their successor and remind leavers to set up an out of office reply that includes the identity and contact details of their successor. The Communications Protocol was subsequently revised.

18. It was not just the timeliness but also the tone of some communication that irked parents and carers, with some declaring they felt it lacked empathy and compassion.

“There isn’t a recognition in the people that are processing the EHCP, those case officers, they don’t know the struggle that as a parent of a seriously disabled child, that you go through every single day, just to get up in the morning and get your other children out the door to their school.”

In addition, some gave examples of language used that could be described as incendiary.

“She phoned up her case worker who said, Have you got a new number? I wouldn’t have answered if I’d known it was you.”

“I’ve been told by a duty case officer to go away and I’m a pushy mother.”

“I did a subject access request and I actually laughed when I heard the things he was saying about me, he said I was “doing his head in”.”

19. A significant number spoke of feeling blamed or accused when trying to access support.

“They have no understanding of it [autism], they just have no idea. So in their frame of reference all they can reason is that it must be bad parenting, they think it must be a broken home. They are defaulting to what the majority of the population would assume in their position. Their child probably hasn’t kicked them.”

“Do this course do that course, it is very demoralising and demeaning; you do question your own parenting and sanity.”

“I thought we were, you know, one of the goodies. It was like, we did the right thing. Then all of a sudden your child starts to struggle, and you think, okay, my child's struggling, so now the system will help me. So the medical system and the school system and all the people out there will say helpful things and know what we need and help us. And it was like, it wasn't even that there was a lack of support. It was that we were suddenly being targeted, we felt like we were being treated like criminals. It was, really, I'd say it was frightening. It was really frightening.”

20. From some it came across that there was an expectation that decisions should be accepted without being explained. They said the complicated language used in EHCPs was not explained to them and suggested, because of confusion in the process, they would find the equivalent of a union representative useful.

“It's been a no at every single turn and a slammed door and no explanation.”

“No one's really gone through with me what the EHCP means. There's loads of stuff in it, I don't really understand half of it.”

“Parents are educated by other parents, not by the LA, on the SEN code, definitions etc.”

There was a sense that parents and carers can feel powerless and kept in the dark.

“Panel could be Mickey Mouse and friends for all we know.”

More information could be empowering, but would need to be in layman's language to have a positive effect. Having someone take the time to explain it on the phone, or even better in person, would be desirable. Expectations can be managed if people are informed honestly from the start.

“I don't care how long it is but I just want an honest answer on what the timeframe will be and all I ever received was that generic response, which rubs you up the wrong way.”

21. Parent groups were valued because, *“You finally found someone who understood where you were coming from, and you weren't crazy”*. The third sector was applauded by multiple people, but at the same time others were not aware of the help available from charities. Several mentioned not being signposted to other support and only hearing what there was *“through the grapevine”*. Facebook groups were mentioned multiple times as a source of information and support. If this is not forthcoming or timely from professionals, parents will seek it from social media, where it may not be accurate and which an LSPA officer referred to as a *“Wild West of information”*.

How does this impact parents and carers?

22. The high turnover of case officers has consequences for communications, parents' experiences of SCC and their emotional wellbeing. The trauma of an already emotionally draining situation can be exacerbated if the Council's response is not understanding, transparent and easily navigable. Fifteen of the 25 people volunteered the emotional impact it had on themselves.

"I really can't tell you what utter Hell we've been through in the last 18 months. It's nearly broken us as a family."

"It's driven me to absolute madness."

"I can only describe it as emotional torture. The provision had started, other children were attending, my daughter was saying, Am I gonna go, am I not gonna go?"

23. Nearly half spoke about the negative consequences for their child's health and wellbeing. Some had developed alopecia and psoriasis and this was attributed to the stress of the drawn-out and byzantine process. The idea of reaching a crisis point that could have been avoided by an earlier intervention was not uncommon. Parents described an escalation of their child's needs while waiting, leading to, for example, Emotionally Based School Non-Attendance and tragically also suicidal ideation. Parents told how in the meantime their child spent time out of school, in some cases considerable time, and the harm this was doing to their opportunities in life, their confidence and their mental health.

"Later on she simply says, 'There's no point in living if I can't get an education because I'm not worth it'."

"Families have been ripped apart by the pressure of trying to get an EHCP. What do they think these children are not sensitive, they don't know what's going on? They take it on themselves and think, if I didn't have this brain, you wouldn't be fighting."

24. Parents also spoke about the financial impact on their family, taking out bank loans and struggling to pay bills after spending tens of thousands of pounds on tribunals and private assessments trying to speed up the process. Tribunals were particularly damaging for families. Those resulting from a refusal to assess were perceived to be unjustified in view of the proportion finding in favour of parents, and it was suggested the money spent on these would be better directed into education and that all children starting school should be assessed, something the Service said it would not have enough practitioners to do.

25. There was a perception by some that by refusing to assess, the Council was acting illegally. This may stem from a lack of clarity in the statutory framework, which says a Local Authority must secure a needs assessment (EHCNA) if it is “*of the opinion that the child or young person has or may have special educational needs, and it may be necessary for special educational provision to be made for the child or young person in accordance with an EHC plan*” (Children and Families Act 2014, section 36(8), emphasis added). The legislation does not specify the type or severity of SEN that would constitute the need for an EHCP, thus creating the potential for adversary. A third of participants expressed a suspicion that decisions were motivated by budgetary constraints.

What good looks like

26. Explaining the process or reason for a decision, being responsive, empathetic, honest, and owning mistakes were all valued. There were several examples given of good practice in schools and by various parts of the Local Authority, including many LSPA caseworkers / SEND case officers. This shows there is good practice to be found, but it cannot be relied upon; such a lack of consistency was pointed out in the Local Area inspection in September 2023. The common factors leading to satisfaction were when the professional themselves had lived experience and so a first-hand understanding, and when the professional met with the parent face-to-face. This could also be a video call, but involved a two-way conversation having sight of the person.

“She was amazing, she had SEND kids herself so that definitely helped. She was able to communicate with the schools and she was empathetic.”

“She was good because she had a kid with special needs. She would answer the phone.”

“Because we were speaking to her, we weren't just a number, she could see who we were. She could see what our child was like, and it felt more personal.”

This can be compared to a situation made worse because a conversation was lacking, leading to frustration:

“Because she didn't speak to me, I was heightened; I was probably up here and the actual reason was probably there.”

“If I could have spoken to her and had that honest conversation, we could have spoken like humans.”

Conversing can lead to an understanding on both sides – the reason for saying no as well as the reason for asking. If the parent feels that they have genuinely been acknowledged and that someone cares, and that whatever decision is taken is an informed one, the decision may well be easier to bear.

“If somebody explains to you why it happened, you can understand it better. You don't have to love what somebody saying to you, but if they talk to you and you feel like you've got some kind of rapport then makes it a lot easier.”

Barriers to good practice: Lack of funding, sufficiency and knowledge

27. There was a palpable sense that parents felt they were competing for scarce resources. Being underfunded, and in particular short of staff, was brought up 30 times by 17 parents and carers, and this was believed to impact standards.

“They [case officers] are not consuming it, because they don't have time to have a proper look, step back and understand the case.”

“Her [EP] report four years ago and her report one-and-a-half years ago is hugely vastly different in quality, and I'm sure that's down to pressure.”

28. It was stated that provision was not provided despite it being on the child's Plan, something 41% of respondents to the Member survey said they had been contacted about. The importance placed on an EHCP as an end goal was apparent, for example: *“I want an EHCP for my daughter whatever the cost. I don't care if we have to remortgage the home. We're doing it to future-proof her.”* Unfortunately availability will remain an impediment regardless of whether a child's needs are set out in a legal document. The sufficiency of specialist school places was raised as an issue, particularly for autistic girls. Surrey is having to rely on the more expensive Independent sector to educate some of its pupils with EHCPs, which is not financially sustainable. SCC has a capital programme to expand specialist provision but numbers have had to be contained due to rising construction costs. Parents and carers will continue to feel shortchanged as long as they do not feel their child's school is meeting their needs, and this was an issue raised by almost half of participants. Two secondaries said they were not suitable despite being named on their child's EHCP.

29. The effectiveness of a placement in parents' and carers' eyes very much depends on how well teachers know the child and understand the child's diagnosis. After timeliness, communication and lack of resources, the barrier brought up more times than any other issue, was a belief that teachers (including SENCos), and also SEND officers, lacked sufficient knowledge of SEND in general and autism/Pathological Demand Avoidance (PDA) in particular. A mother who works as a teacher noted the limited training in SEND during her teacher training. There were also comments on the limited uptake of training for teachers that is made available by the third sector. One father spoke of how his daughter's behaviour at home improved once he utilised this and became more educated in her condition. A lack of knowledge amongst teaching staff can lead to children incorrectly being labelled as 'naughty', which risks becoming a self-fulfilling prophecy leading to the child not reaching their potential. Notably, several mentioned the need for teachers to understand the different presentations of autism spectrum disorder (ASD), including anxiety, with help not being given to children (particularly girls) who mask.

“When I have educators who say, ‘We have 30 years in education and we know autism’ - in the last 30 years, autistic girls have been deeply traumatised and marginalised in schools. What you should say is, ‘I took courses in new research every one of those 30 years’.”

What parents and carers say they want

30. A full list of improvements suggested by parents and carers can be found at the end of Appendix 3. The following quotes are representative of the focus groups and illustrate that co-production is not working in these cases.

“I can’t repeat this often enough but communicate, communicate, communicate; even if it’s bad news, just tell me. I can take bad news; constant no news where I have to chase 10 people is a waste of my time and my blood pressure goes up.”

“What I would have loved was someone I could speak to face-to-face, to tell me what my legal rights were, what the obligations of schools were, what the Council’s obligations were.”

“Understand the families they’re working with and take the time to get to know their families. My children are not just their EHCPs.”

“Putting child front and centre is forgotten so much. They are treated like pieces of paper objects; it’s not just their education, their mental health, it’s their life on the line.”

Conclusions

31. There is a widespread feeling amongst the participants of being failed by the Council, and of not being understood by SCC staff. Parents and carers value case officers who talk from experience and empathise with their situation. Discrimination legislation would prohibit a requirement for staff to have lived experience of AND, but case officers should have mandatory training in neurodiversity and be educated in the lived experience of families by inviting parents and carers to present their experiences as part of their induction. This could be done by video to avoid reliving trauma, though if there was a bank of willing parents, it could be more impactful in fostering empathy if done in person.

32. Staff need to build trusted relationships to enable parents and carers to feel involved and have their confidence in the system restored and this is done best through face-to-face conversations, particularly, but ideally not just, when delivering an unwelcome decision. The relational work of the new Family Communication Officers (FCO) is an example of good practice. Before SCC created the role in December 2023, a ‘no to assess’ decision would have been communicated to the family by anyone in the LSPA team and either by phone or email. Now, it will always be by telephone from an FCO,

which is important because the accompanying letter has a necessarily legalistic tone which is impersonal but cannot be changed. A 'no to issue' decision should similarly be communicated face-to-face by the case officer. How a decision is received by parents is not just about whether they agree with it, but whether it is relayed with compassion.

33. Parents and carers need to be better supported to understand the system and be better informed about how and why decisions are made. Greater transparency could help to counter an apparent lack of trust in the system. When the Local Offer and Guide for Parents and Carers were mentioned, some were not aware of their existence. The guide has a useful explanation of different types of additional needs and some helpful contact details for organisations that can help. What it does not do is explain the statutory EHCP process and what the case officer does and does not do. Parents are not notified of the whole process and its length at the point of an EHCNA request. This can be found with a timeline on the Local Offer website, which is easily navigable from the home page; however, providing it outright instead of directing them to where it can be found if asked would remove an obstacle, albeit slight. Not offering information unless it is requested may prompt preventable phonecalls to LSPA. It is possible to give a full picture of what to expect – such as is provided at the point of a 'yes to assess' decision – without giving the impression that it will always proceed to assessment. Being fully informed from the start can empower, alleviate anxiety and foster trust.

34. Having such a long drawn-out process is detrimental to both the child's education and the family's wellbeing. Another common theme was that later intervention exacerbated the funding required long-term by the Local Authority. The SEND Communications Protocol does set out the expectation to respond to an email within five working days (with an acknowledgement email sent within one working day) and a phonecall within two working days. However, despite having Key Performance Indicators in place, there is currently no way of monitoring compliance.

35. Furthermore, the lack of flexibility in the statutory timeline is not supportive of the family. The Code dictates a decision on whether to assess must be made within six weeks and this is met by SCC 99% of the time. However, it should be considered whether this is at the expense of timeliness overall, because if critical evidence is received even just one day after Panel takes place, there can be a very long delay once the appeal process begins. If it looks like there is evidence is missing when the EHCP Governance Board is due to meet to recommend whether a Plan should be issued, it should be referred to a senior manager to decide whether it is fundamental enough to warrant postponement (with parental consent), thus avoiding the longer delay of an appeal. However, this would require a national change in legislation.

36. There will inevitably be tension whilst an EHCP is considered to be the SEN 'holy grail' at the same time the Council's policy is to reduce the number of EHCP requests, only engaging a child in the EHCP process 'if necessary' in an attempt to make the model sustainable. The Council will understandably only convince parents an EHCP is not necessary if schools are able to meet children's individual needs without one. From

the parents' perspective, this requires the upskilling of teaching staff as well as national investment to be sufficiently resourced.

37. The Task Group also heard how parents and carers often already feel failed by Mindworks by the time they get to contacting the Council. SCC must continue to find routes to improve partnership working with mental health services.

ATLAS discussion with children and young people

38. ATLAS (Accept, Teach, Listen, Access, Support) is Surrey's participation group of children and young people, whose co-production work was described by SEND Local Area inspectors as a "shining beacon". They welcomed the Task Group Chairman, who asked the following:

1. What, or who, has made a positive difference to your education?

"The head teacher at my primary school was really fantastic and she made a really big difference to my mental health and my experience. She used to help me out a lot."

"For me it was my SENCo at secondary school who just listened to me and saw me as a person, they stood at my side and fought for what I needed. Some teachers would fight against reasonable adjustments, but they were always by my side."

2. What barriers exist for children and young people with additional needs and disabilities in education?

- *not enough specialist places*
- *lack of knowledge and understanding from teachers and TAs*
- *there wasn't as much help during the unstructured times (break and lunch) and the social aspect of these could be overwhelming.*

3. If you could change one thing about the education system, what would it be?

- *More specialist schools "for people in the middle", autism friendly with enough quiet spaces and sensory rooms*
- *Don't treat people differently*
- *Fairness, kindness, empathy, support*
- *Flexibility and understanding.*

It was clear that what left a positive impression on the young people was someone who was responsive and available to them when needed.

39. As complained of by parents, ATLAS reported problems with staff turnover in March 2023:

“We would like to be informed if our caseworker changes, so that we don’t spend time with trying to chase someone who doesn’t work there anymore.”

“At every annual review I have a new case worker and I am never informed about this in advance. I was chasing my case worker up for my apprenticeship only to find out that it had gotten changed again.”

They also raised, on behalf of an alternative learning provision, that young people with additional needs and disabilities do not understand what EHCPs are for or what is expected from them in a review. Guidance was made available here: [Young people | Surrey Local Offer](#)

Survey of Members’ AND casework

40. To build up a more overarching picture of what AND issues parents and carers are contacting their councillors for help with, from 23 February 2024 to 29 March 2024, the Task Group ran an online survey for all Surrey County Council Members, on the volume and nature of their AND casework since the beginning of 2023. This was a way of triangulating the qualitative data collected from parents and carers and checking (a) if an issue they mention is an isolated incident or apparently more common and (b) if an issue that may have happened to their family historically appears to still be relevant if it is commonly being flagged to councillors in the recent past. The response rate was 42 per cent (34/81 councillors). Full results can be found in Appendix 4.

How many councillors are contacted about AND issues?

41. Members were asked how many parents and/or carers contacted them to seek help for their child with additional needs and disabilities in the calendar year 2023. Only one councillor who responded received none. Most - more than two thirds (68%) - were asked for help by up to eight parents and carers; half were contacted by between five and 12. A few heard from more than 20 though this was rare (9%).

Over half of respondents said they were contacted by more parents on the subject in 2023 than in 2022. For just over a third it was about the same, while contacts decreased for just one person.

For what kind of issues are parents and carers seeking help?

42. Councillors were asked to indicate all reasons why parents/carers of children and young people with AND had made contact with them, from the start of 2023 to date. The reasons provided to choose from were the result of a brainstorming exercise by Select Committee Members from their own casework. Respondents could select as many as they wished. Table 1 presents the reasons given, in order of how many councillors were contacted about them.

Table 1. Reasons for contacting councillor about AND

Option	Total	Percent
EHCP - delay in issuing plan	25	73.5%
Child out of school because no placement arranged	23	67.7%
Communication with case officer(s)	21	61.8%
Assessment to determine if Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) is needed - declined or delayed	21	61.8%
Child not allocated preferred type of school (mainstream/special)	18	52.9%
Home to school travel assistance - delay in communicating/putting in place	18	52.9%
Communication with LSPA/SEND team	17	50.0%
Communication with school(s)	15	44.1%
Support outlined in EHCP not being provided to child	14	41.2%
Home to school travel assistance - dissatisfied with arrangement offered	10	29.4%
EHCP - plan declined following assessment	9	26.5%
Not knowing how to go about accessing support for their child	8	23.5%
Unclear wording in EHCP about what support child is entitled to	6	17.7%
None of the above	1	2.9%
Not Answered	0	0.0%

The issue that more councillors got contacted about than anything else was a delayed EHCP. This was closely followed by their child having no school placement, communication with case officer and the assessment needed to get an EHCP being declined or delayed.

Respondents also had the opportunity to add other reasons and submitted the following:

- EHCP inaccurate
- Time they are having to commit to reworking the EHCP
- Delays in commencing EHCNA even when it is clear that a mainstream setting isn't going to work
- Inability to hire / difficulty in retaining Personal Assistants
- Lack of respite
- Constant change in officers dealing with them, abrupt and inaccurate communication and apparent inability to read the file before contact
- Short breaks provision not being continued [children's social care remit]
- Parents at breaking point as kids not attending school due to no support in place.

43. The most common reason for making contact was communication with case officers. When answering this they were asked to discount home to school travel assistance, since this has a separate recovery plan assigned to it and is not within the scope of the

task group's project. Many councillors felt unable to pick any one reason in particular and indicated they were being contacted about multiple issues.

How are Members dealing with contacts and are they being supported?

44. A specific inbox dedicated to children's services and education related enquiries from Members went live in November 2023, with the intention of directing them to the appropriate team for a timely response and reducing the duplication that can arise when the same case is copied to a number of different officers. However, only just over a quarter of the councillors who responded to the survey are using the Council's intended means of reporting as their usual procedure, and half had never used it. A more common first response was to email the Cabinet Member, although the most common usual procedure, for almost one third, was to email a named Children, Families, Lifelong Learning (CFL) officer. Comments displayed reluctance on behalf of some councillors to change, and an enthusiasm for using the same email address for all queries regardless of what directorate the issue relates to.

When asked for the response time when emailing the dedicated inbox, the number of responses was limited because many had never used it. Of the 16 who had, 56.3% were responded to within two weeks more than half the time. For 43.7%, it took more than two weeks to reply more than half the time. The majority (62.5%) found it generally very or reasonably helpful, though comments revealed a lot of variation in the quality of responses received.

Conclusions

45. Nearly three-quarters of councillors (74%) who responded were contacted between January 2023 and February/March 2024 about a delay in issuing an EHCP. Sixty-eight per cent were contacted because a child did not have a school placement and 62% were contacted by a parent or carer complaining about communication with a case officer.

This supports timeliness and communication as the main sources of frustration for parents and carers. Twenty-one councillors said they were contacted by at least five parents and carers last year, showing the issues reported in focus groups were not isolated incidents.

The email address for CFL Member enquiries was reported to be helpful by most; improved timeliness in responding may encourage its use.

Focus group with Surrey County Council SEND case officers

Findings

46. Case officers described how parents can become exasperated when left wondering if their case is progressing because it is not possible for them to answer their calls, texts,

emails and messages left with LSPA straight away, or often even in a reasonable timescale, due to the sheer number of parents attempting to make contact. Holding around 200 cases is currently a normality, yet the Task Group heard from management they consider around 130 to be manageable. For staff this is mentally and emotionally draining, not just because of the workload, but because the constant grind does not allow them job satisfaction and some feel like they are letting down the families, who they are aware can be left worrying and waiting for answers. Assessment delays are out of their control but they are the ones having to deliver bad, or no, news. They receive varying levels of pastoral support and some have seen colleagues or have themselves been 'named and shamed' in online parent forum groups. It is not unusual that this strain leads to long-term sick leave, or voluntary turnover (24.4% in 2022 but reduced by half in 2024), which in turn increases the workload of other staff and perpetuates the strain on them, as well as leaving parents without continuity. All can be traced back to an unmanageable volume of cases.

47. Case officers spoke of teams never being fully staffed. The quick turnover of managerial staff – in 2023 most noticeably 21.6% for SEND senior case managers and 50% for Area SEND managers - is unsettling for case officers and may result in a vacuum of support and lack of direction. The top two reasons given in exit interviews for case officers and their managers leaving are work/life balance and lack of opportunities. Joint third is child dependents and health, which would include work-related stress.

48. Since October 2023, SEND case officer staffing has increased to 81 case officers in the core team, 30 case officers in the EHCNA recovery team and 18 case officers in the Annual Review recovery team. It may be problematic for communication that those in recovery teams are not contracted to be customer-facing and therefore do not have phones. The team of agency staff working to clear the backlog were said to be prioritising quantity over quality of plans and adding to the workload of permanent staff who had to redo them. Management recognises that trying to finalise so many has diminished a person-centred approach. They say that, critically, the description of need and provision against need is found on the whole to be accurate, but concur they do not meet their preferred standards on describing the child and their journey through education.

49. Other points of note are as follows:

- Frustration was said to also stem from a lack of knowledge about how the process works. It was suggested parents could be better informed from the start of who makes decisions, to counter feelings of helplessness and set realistic expectations.
- The Task Group heard there was friction when the Panel and a school disagree over whether the school can meet the child's needs. Some schools were said to be reluctant to accept SEND children for fear of impacting their results.

- Officers spoke of a shortage of specialist places leaving nowhere suitable for children to go. Parents had seen their children blossom in small class sizes during lockdown, something not realistic outside of a pandemic.
- The system was said to be an unequal playing field that prioritises those who “shout the loudest”. Case officers admitted being tempted to encourage this behaviour because they want the best for the child.
- The case officers said they know the relevant parts of the Code of Practice and have access to legally trained staff who can provide answers when required, but it could be problematic that the Code is open to interpretation in different ways.
- Case officers informed that problems with the implementation of a new digital case recording and management system was contributing to, rather than easing, their workload. Management say EHM (Early Help Module) and Wisdom have required changes to ensure they are fit for purpose but they are essential to provide a single view of the child.

Orbis audit of case officer communications

50. Following a recommendation by the Select Committee in October 2023 to carry out an audit on the quality and timeliness of communication on the subject of EHCPs, Orbis reviewed a sample of communications over the course of 2023. Auditors found that a significant number across all four quadrants were not being stored in the assigned place according to the Council’s SEND Communications Protocol (they were held on the service’s I-Drive rather than on EHM). In one instance, a document relating to a different child was placed amongst correspondence relating to a different case, which could have led to a data breach. Some phonecalls and Teams meetings were not logged anywhere. This is problematic where turnover and sick leave is high, because if new recruits and/or alternative staff members do not have a complete record to refer to, this could cause delays in the system, and frustration if parents are having to repeat information and/or requests.

51. In the majority of communications reviewed in the audit, staff had responded to communications according to the Key Performance Indicators stated in the Protocol. There was no way of quantifying the percentage this represented, however, as the system does not enable the volume of phonecalls or emails in and out of the service to be measured. Orbis advised developing a system that enables team and management oversight, putting in place arrangements for communications to be maintained on the occasion of staff absence, and more clarity in the Protocol to avoid confusion and encourage compliance.

Conclusions

52. The following sources of tension, which emerged from the discussion with case officers, corroborate those raised by parents and carers:

- Unmanageable volume of cases
- High staff turnover
- Lack of understanding amongst parents and carers of process and case officer role
- Shortage of specialist places
- Mainstream schools disagreeing they can meet the child's needs
- Lack of SEND knowledge amongst some teachers
- Variance in the quality of assessment reports
- Some poorer quality plans when Recovery Team prioritise speed.

53. Both case officers and parents/carers voiced concerns about plans' quality, supported by auditors, reflecting the speed at which they have been issued under the Recovery Plan. The downstream consequences of poor quality EHCPs can be traumatic for the family and lead to more tribunals. There is a need to help SEND staff, and colleagues providing advice, to better represent the voice of the child, and involving parents and carers more in the process would both help to ensure their child is humanised and reduce the scope for error. A meeting to check with parents that no information is missing before the EHCP Governance Board would be greatly welcomed, as currently a co-production meeting comes after the panel decision when it is too late to influence it.

54. To maintain 15,500 EHC Plans at a manageable level, the number of case officers would need to increase from its current core of 81 to 120. Case officers recruited have a very diverse range of backgrounds and although the person specification mentions knowledge of the Code of Practice, this is not tested and as such would not be guaranteed, a bone of contention amongst parents. It takes two to three years for a case officer to become fully experienced in the variety of casework, and on average they are leaving Surrey after 3.6 years, so it is important to the quality of EHCPs that they are incentivised to stay. To make this happen, officers need to feel valued, which can be demonstrated through (a) development opportunities and (b) emotional support.

(a) Nasen level 3 is currently optional and although take-up is 73%, the completion rate is low. Making a relevant course mandatory should increase knowledge of neurodiversity and the Code of Practice as parents advocate, and also help to foster pride in the role to help retention.

(b) Management supervision should include working through the projection of parent/carer trauma. Case officers need supported time to reflect as an outlet for the trauma they are dealing with on a regular basis, espoused by Griffin et al (2024): "Professionals can also be affected by vicarious trauma so ensure you have reflective time and space to gain support on these issues."

55. There appears to be several different means of contacting a case officer (call to mobile, email, text, Teams message, letter, messages left with LSPA), which does not seem very manageable. The Communications Protocol says case officers should

prioritise answering phonecalls but also to respond to emails as a priority so it is not clear which should in fact be prioritised.

Complaints

56. The complaints team received 1,225 complaints about SEND in 2023/24, comprising 179 early resolution, 728 stage one and 318 stage two. In addition, in the same year, SEND was the subject of 502 enquiries from Councillors and MPs, and 157 complaints to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman.

57. An EHCP Recovery Plan has been working to bring Education, Health and Care Needs Assessment (EHCNA) timeliness in line with the Council's statutory duties, a significant source of tension amongst parents. Timeliness in issuing plans within the statutory 20 weeks has risen steadily since a low of 10% in December 2023 (compared to a national average across 2023 of 50%) and reached 71% in July 2024. This has reduced the volume of complaints on this particular issue; 36% of those to Surrey County Council's complaints team so far in 2024/25 related not to timeliness but to communication.

As illustrated in Figure 1, however, data for this financial year shows no overall downward trend despite the clearance of the backlog.

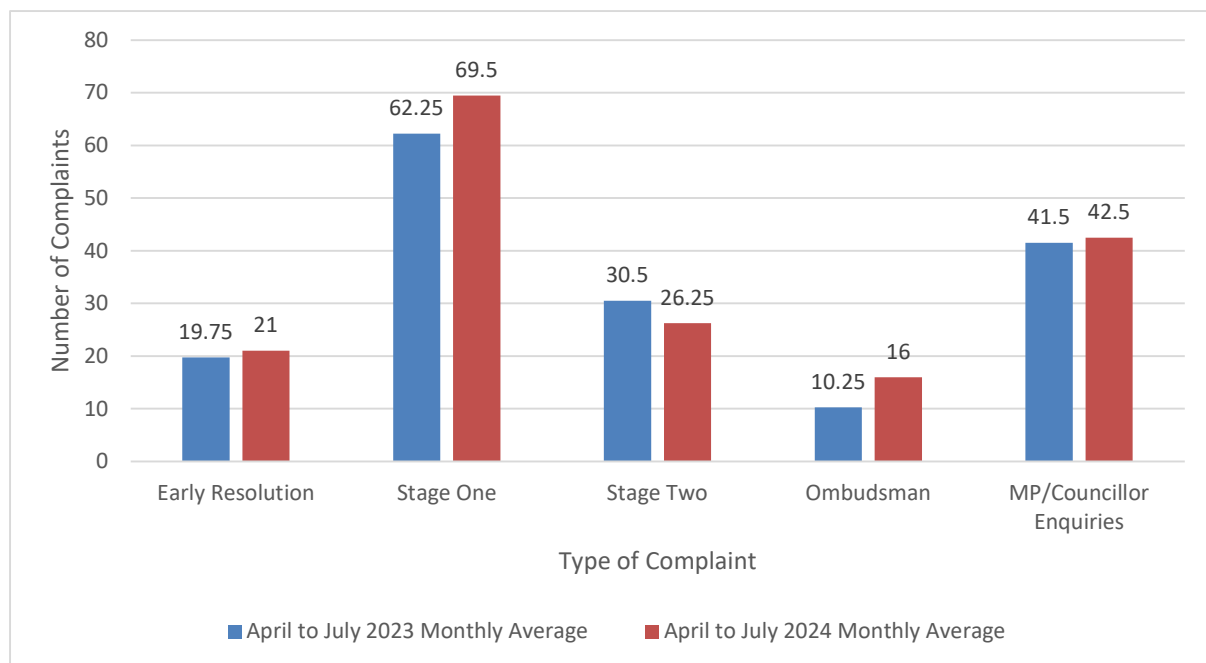


Figure 1: Complaints to SCC about SEND services

Although the proportion of complaints relating to EP advice timeliness has very significantly reduced as a result of the Recovery Plan work over the past year, these have been replaced by different types of complaints, such as delays in getting annual reviews done.

58. In June 2024 16% of EHCPs were graded outstanding or good during auditing, suggesting that the focus on reducing the number of Plans issued late as part of the

Recovery Plan may have resulted in the quality of the EHCPs suffering. It may also have affected how many annual reviews are done on time, which was 36% at the start of 2024 and rose to 55% in July 2024.

59. The main themes in the four months of the current financial year, in order of prevalence, are:

1. Continually chasing for updates
2. Emails not responded to
3. Calls not returned
4. Delay finding a school place (SEN)
5. Young Person out of school
6. Delay responding to Annual Review
7. EHCP not completed to time (once they have said yes to issue)
8. Exceeding statutory timeframe (EHCP request) (not yet agreed to issue)

Conclusions

60. Complaints data corroborates the common issues raised in the Task Group's focus groups. The fact that the first three themes, all relating to not being kept informed, comprise 36% of all SEND complaints received, suggests that despite operational improvements there will continue to be complaints, unless there is improvement in communication.

Appeals

61. More parents in Surrey take a Council decision on SEND to tribunal than other parts of the country – 4.7% of appealable decisions in 2023 compared to an England average of 2.5%.

Current annual staffing costs associated with tribunals are £517,602; legal representation is sought only in very rare cases meaning legal fees are said to be minimal.

62. There were 594 appeals registered during the 2022-23 academic year. With regard to how they were disposed of,

- 20% were heard at tribunal. Quarter of these (about 30 cases) were agreed by consent – although classed as 'heard' and some were taken to a hearing, most were agreed in the five days leading up to the hearing date, described by parents as "*the eleventh hour*" and "*causing headaches*".
- 45% did not progress to a hearing because they were resolved at least five days before the hearing date.
- 34% were ongoing because delays within SENDIST, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Tribunal, meant at times there was a 12-month wait for a hearing date (these delays remain in 2024).

Of the heard tribunals, 2.3% found in favour of the Local Authority, which is in line with the national picture, and 10% were part in favour of the LA and part in favour of the parent.

63. This is the latest available Surrey data, however since the period it relates to there are two things of note. Firstly, the number of appeals in the county is rising significantly, while at the same time the size of the tribunals team has not grown. In the first half of 2024, 653 appeals had been received, compared with 340 in the first half of 2023. This was partly the result of an increasing tendency to say no to assess – 40% rather than 20% last year. Secondly, a pilot of two Mediation and Dispute Resolutions Officers is demonstrating success in achieving early resolution. They worked on a sample of 105 families' cases between January and August 2024 and resolved 53 of those, in each case avoiding a hearing.

Conclusions

64. The SEND Service needs to address the high number of disputes being taken to tribunal and allowed, causing weeks or months of potentially preventable worry for families. Studying precedents would present an opportunity for lessons to be learned and help to circumvent last minute agreement which infuriates parents and carers. The work of the Mediation and Dispute Resolutions Officers in 2024 is very welcome and, if it continues to be effective, should be extended and expanded to all cases.

Schools

65. In order to keep its scope manageable the Task Group did not interview schools in the course of its research. Keeping in mind the Task Group has not heard schools' perspectives, so cannot know if schools feel they are being well-supported by SCC, it was given a flavour of the challenges from LSPA staff (SEND support advisors) who work closely with SENCOs in schools:

“Schools are telling us they spend as much time supporting the parents as the children and heads are worried that they don't always have the skills to do that.”

“They [SENCOs] may only have quarter of a day a week to dedicate to the role. Their head is scrambled. The smallest thing can reduce you to tears because your cup is so full.”

It also heard children and young people's experiences of school from their parents, for example:

“The SENCO is also deputy head. And so the time is a challenge. They're doing a really great job, but actually the number of cases that go through one person and become a bottleneck.”

The statutory requirement is one SENCo per school, and they may be shared between schools in the same trust. Members of the Association of School and College Leaders described their schools as the ‘fourth emergency service’ due to the ever-expanding expectations on them (ASCL, 2023).

66. The previous and current government focus is on improving inclusivity in mainstream schools, but parents and carers told the Task Group the expertise there is lacking. A SENCo does not have to have an SEN qualification until they’ve been in the post for three years, which explains the apparent variation in their level of knowledge flagged by both parents and case officers. When nearly one in five (18.4%) of all pupils in England and 19.5% in Surrey have identified SENⁱ it cannot be right to leave it to one person in a school to have a thorough knowledge of special educational needs.

67. According to the Children and Families Act, it is the governing body of a maintained school or nursery/the Academy proprietor/management committee of a Pupil Referral Unit that “must use its best endeavours to secure that the special educational provision called for by the pupil’s or student’s special educational needs is made” (Part 3 Section 66). Therefore it is the responsibility of *schools* to prioritise training in this area for all staff. It is, however, in the best interest of SCC to train mainstream school staff to meet need, for the following reasons:

- It is expected to improve the skills of staff in mainstream schools to support children with SEND as part of the Safety Valve Agreement with the Government;
- The LA has a legal duty to secure the provision detailed in an EHCP (Part 3 Section 42);
- It is a Local Authority function under the 2014 Act to support the child “to help him or her achieve the best possible educational and other outcomes” (Part 3 Section 19);
- If a child needs more support than nursery, school or college can give, the LA must carry out an EHC needs assessment (Part 3 Section 36(8)), so to avoid this route – in accordance with its policy - and ensure the success of its policy to meet need wherever possible through Ordinarily Available Provision (OAP) in mainstream;
- A school can put child on the SEN register but this gives the school extra work and, unlike an EHCP, no extra money. Since there is no financial incentive for a school to engage with OAP and the policy relies on altruism, the LA should do all in its power to make it easier for the overworked schools.

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS)

68. PINS is a pilot initiative led by the Department for Education, Department for Health and Social Care, and NHS England where integrated care boards (ICBs) work in partnership with schools and parent carer forums to foster inclusive educational environments for neurodiverse students. Schools will get five days of support to develop learning, from ND advisors recruited by SCC and sitting in the LSPA team. Through having a parent participation group for each school, facilitated by FVS, PINS recognises that parents are experts through their experience, something that parents in the Task

Group's focus groups asked for. The Neurodiversity Advisors have created an online resource on Padlet.com with information on a wide range of needs, an example of good practice which will be useful to both settings and parents.

Conclusions

69. A recurring complaint from parents was a lack of knowledge among school staff. It is of concern that it was offered to 157 schools which had relatively high referral rates to ND services, but only 43 agreed to be involved. There are 357 mainstream schools in Surrey, of which 299 are primary, so only 12% of mainstream schools and 14.4% of primaries will benefit from the exemplar programme. The LA's neurodiversity advisors should be made 'business as usual' and made available to all schools. Outcomes data should be analysed and achievements promoted to encourage schools to take up the offer.

Task Group Conclusions

70. The current strategic plan, Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy (2023 to 2026), sets out SCC's ambition that all Surrey children and young people with additional needs and/or disabilities and their families:

- are heard and are involved in the decisions that affect them;
- learn and achieve their educational potential.

The Task Group's research found that SCC does not appear to have fully realised these ambitions. In terms of being heard, in the parents' feedback there was little evidence of the child and their parent being fully involved at every stage of the EHC needs assessment and plan development, which is also the intention stated in the Code of Practice. Families already experiencing huge emotional difficulties report feeling let down by the system they looked to for help. The relationship between SCC and parents and carers needs to be made a priority, with more opportunities for co-production throughout to keep the process humanised. If the mothers' assertion they are labelled as neurotic are well-founded, it will require a cultural change to recognise them as subject matter experts on their children and fully embrace the principle of co-production in order to achieve the ambition of involving and hearing families.

71. In terms of achieving educational potential, 35% for pupils in Surrey with an EHCP, and 25% of those on SEN support, were persistently absent from school in 2023/24. As the system stands, the Council is held accountable for a child's learning outcomes yet has no direct control over education settings. A policy built on pushing the merits of SEN support without an EHCP is unfortunately setting itself up to fail unless all schools are well-equipped to provide that support. The Local Authority will only win the trust of parents when they can see that their children's needs are being met - and what the focus groups show is that at the moment parents do not have faith in schools to be able to do this, for various reasons suggested by parents including a lack of funding, training

and in some cases an aversion to harming results. Therefore, helping Surrey schools to upskill is a critical part of fixing the AND system.

72. Despite the considerable efforts of its staff, and although Surrey has invested in and successfully reduced the backlog, the system is still not fit for purpose. It is understaffed and confrontational, reflected in the 2% of cases at tribunal being found fully in favour of the LA. Having more constructive engagement via informal mediation would better support parents and carers and help prevent such heavy financial and emotional investment; the positive results of the new Mediation and Dispute Resolutions Officers show what can be achieved.

73. From the focus group with case officers, it can be understood how mistakes can come about in an underfunded environment of immense pressure. The focus groups with parents and carers provide powerful examples of the distressing impact a mistake can have on a child, such as a forgotten assessment meaning the start of another long wait, or not updating need meaning a school considers itself unsuitable. The small sample of 25 cannot be generalised to the population but does produce valuable insight into some parents' and carers' experiences, particularly when viewed in conjunction with the Member survey and complaints data. Across all three sources, communication is the predominant issue, with families requesting more timely responses as well as more compassion. To parents, staff can appear uncaring. To case officers, they are troubled by not having enough time to show they care. It is not just a matter of more resources or administrative improvement, though these efforts do need to be made in order to afford staff the space to imbue the system with more warmth and increase opportunities for involving and supporting parents and carers.

Next steps

74. The Task Group's report will be considered by the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee on 12 September 2024, with recommendations submitted to Cabinet on 24 September 2024.

75. It is intended that, should Cabinet agree them, all recommendations are implemented over the next 12 months.

Councillor Jeremy Webster, Chairman of the Additional Needs: Parent/Carer Experience Task Group

Report author: Julie Armstrong MRes (Ed), Scrutiny Officer, Democratic Services

Contact details: julie.armstrong@surreycc.gov.uk

Sources/background papers

[Towards an effective and financially sustainable approach to SEND in England, ISOS Partnership, July 2024](#)

[House of Commons Library Research Briefing, Special Educational Needs: Support in England, 19 July 2024](#)

[Explore education statistics, Education, health and care plans, 13 June 2024](#)

SCC presentation on EHCP statutory processes end-to-end review, June 2024

Parent Carer Trauma: A discussion paper on trauma and parents of children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (Parent Carers), Griffin et al., May 2024

Mindworks EBSNA Project Group Session with Dr David Damon, Educational Psychologist SABP NHS Trust, 3 May 2024

SCC's SEND Communications Protocol, April 2024

Orbis internal audit on Education Health and Care Needs Assessments Communications, March 2024

[Surrey Local Area SEND Partnership improvement plan, \(January 2024\)](#)

[Association of School and College Leaders \(ASCL\) Manifesto for the General Election, 2023](#)

Reports to Select Committee on EHCP Timeliness, responses to actions and recommendations, July 2023 & October 2023

[Area SEND Inspection of Surrey Local Area Partnership \(25-29 September 2023\)](#)

[Special Educational Needs and Disabilities \(SEND\) and Alternative Provision \(AP\) Improvement Plan: Right Support, Right Place, Right Time \(March 2023\)](#)

ATLAS discussions (Council's participation group of young people with additional needs and disabilities) on EHCPs and case workers, February & March 2023

Family Voice Surrey's case officer survey, March 2023

Surrey Inclusion and Additional Needs Partnership Strategy 2023-2026, [p361](#), approved by Cabinet January 2023

SCC's annual parent-carer survey, September 2022

SEND Review: Right support, right place, right time. Government consultation on the SEND and alternative provision system in England, March 2022

[SEND Code of Practice, January 2015](#)

[Children and Families Act, 2014](#)

[Surrey Local Offer website](#)

A guide for parents and carers of children with additional needs and/or disabilities

SCC Case Officer job description and person specification

[All-Age Autism Strategy 2021-26](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Task Group Terms of Reference

Appendix 2 – Transcripts of focus groups with parents and carers, between March and April 2024

Appendix 3 – Coding and themes of focus groups with parents and carers

Appendix 4 – Collated responses to the Member survey, conducted 23 February-29 March 2024

Appendix 5 – Transcript of focus group with case officers, on 1 May 2024

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL**CABINET****DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2024****LEAD OFFICER: TERENCE HERBERT, CHIEF EXECUTIVE****SUBJECT: LEADER/CABINET MEMBER/ STRATEGIC INVESTMENT BOARD AND COMMITTEE-IN-COMMON DECISIONS TAKEN SINCE THE LAST CABINET MEETING****SUMMARY OF ISSUE:**

To note the delegated decisions taken since the last meeting of the Cabinet.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

It is recommended that the Cabinet note the delegated decisions taken since its last meeting as set out in Annex 1.

REASON FOR RECOMMENDATIONS:

To inform the Cabinet of decisions taken by Cabinet Members, the Strategic Investment Board and the Committee in Common subcommittee under delegated authority.

DETAILS:

1. The Leader has delegated responsibility for certain executive functions to individual Cabinet Members and reserved some functions to himself. These are set out in Part 3, Table 2- Scheme of Delegation.
2. Delegated decisions are scheduled to be taken on a monthly basis and will be reported to the next available Cabinet meeting for information.
3. Annex 1 lists the details of decisions taken since the last Cabinet meeting.

Contact Officer:

Huma Younis, Committee Manager, huma.younis@surreycc.gov.uk

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Delegated Decisions Report

Sources/background papers:

None

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CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS

CABINET MEMBER FOR CUSTOMER AND COMMUNITIES – 23 JULY 2024

1. YOUR FUND SURREY APPLICATION FOR FARNCOMBE COMMUNITY GARDEN HUB, GODALMING

Resolved:

The Cabinet Member APPROVED the funding of the full amount requested of £114,000 comprised of:

- a. £114,000 of capital funding towards the development of the community hub building to be paid in staged payments, on evidence of spend.
- b. 5% of which, to be held by SCC until final evidence of income, expenditure, and completion provided.

Reasons for decision:

This application has been the subject of a rigorous assessment process by officers, who consider the project to meet the aims and published criteria of the fund and to satisfy the requirements to award funding.

The project aims to build a Community Hub building within the garden that will be used all year round by the community for activities in the garden that will support their health and wellbeing.

CABINET MEMBER FOR PROPERTY, WASTE AND INFRASTRUCTURE DECISIONS – 23 JULY 2024

2. DISPOSAL OF THE COTTAGE, (OLD SWAINS FARM) SMALL HILLS ROAD, LEIGH, REIGATE RH2 8RQ

Resolved:

The Cabinet Member:

1. Formally declared the asset surplus to operational requirements (in consultation with The Leader and Deputy Leader).
2. Approved the sale of The Cottage (Old Swains Farm), Small Hills Road, Leigh, Reigate, RH2 8RQ to the party, at the price and subject to the conditions, noted in the Part 2 report. The sale is conditional upon the simultaneous surrender of the headlease held over the asset by HGR which has been agreed by the HGR Board.
3. Approved the HGR premium for the surrender of its interest from the gross receipt and notes there is debt aligned to this asset, with both parties bearing their own costs and appointments of their own professional team.
4. Delegated authority to the Section 151 officer in consultation with the Director of Land and Property to finalise the transaction and enter into all associated legal agreements.

Reasons for decision:

- Following an open marketing campaign of the vacant property known as The Cottage (Old Swains Farm), Small Hills Road, Leigh, Reigate, RH2 8RQ terms have been agreed to sell the freehold interest to the party, and at the price, noted in the Part 2 report.
- The asset was part of an early tranche of residential properties transferred by the Council to HGR in February 2021, with a premium paid by HGR to SCC for a head-leasehold interest. In accordance with the emerging Company Strategy to divest of certain assets, HGR have requested it be handed back to the Council and sold.
- The Cabinet Member is asked to formally declare the asset surplus to operational requirement under the Council's constitution.
- The property is not required for any operational purposes.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND LIFELONG LEARNING – 23 JULY 2024**3. FAIR ACCESS PROTOCOL 2024/25****Resolved:**

The Cabinet Member APPROVED the proposed Fair Access Protocol for 2024/25.

Reasons for decision:

- The local authority is required to have a Fair Access Protocol (“the Protocol”) in place that all schools must participate in.
- The proposed Protocol meets the requirements of the 2021 DfE School Admissions Code and supporting guidance.
- The Protocol will ensure that vulnerable and unplaced children can be placed in school quickly where they are unable to secure a place through the normal in-year admissions procedure.
- When seeking to place a child under the Protocol, no school will be asked to take a disproportionate number of children who have been permanently excluded from other schools, who display challenging behaviour, or who meet one of the other categories set out in the Protocol.

Name: Marisa Heath

Portfolio: Environment

Supporting Nature Recovery and improving our natural environment

Work to develop Surrey's Local Nature Recovery Strategy, which is a new statutory responsibility under the Environment Act, is continuing. Resident and community engagement is a crucial part of this process and 8 workshops have been held to-date with over 140 Surrey residents, including farmers and landowners. Three more workshops are planned, including a Surrey Nature Day on 28th September where there will be the opportunity for residents to meet representatives from some of the important organisations involved in nature recovery in Surrey, and talk to them about what they are doing to help 'bring wildlife home.' Events include Wild Walks, an original piece of theatre directed by the Guildford Shakespeare Company, designed to bring to life the concept of habitat restoration in an engaging, easy-to-understand way.

**2024-25 tree planting programme and success in achieving a fourth round of funding**

Following the success of last years tree planting programme where we planted 43,603 new trees, which included 1952 metres of hedgerows, a planting collaboration with Bronzefield women's prison's horticultural qualification and 7300 new trees at Bocketts Farm. We have just been successful in receiving **£273,323.08** in our 4th round of grant funding. Consequently, the programme has now successfully achieved **£1,234,694.77** of grant funding contributions since 2021. This coming season has a target of 48k trees, with projects planned at Ashford Hospital, over 60 surrey schools and planting more than 350 fruit orchard trees.



Ash dieback - turning a negative into a positive, improving our woodland areas

As nesting bird season concludes, we will be working to address Ash dieback as part of our proactive approach to managing woodland across Surrey's Countryside Estate. In the interest of public safety, felling of diseased and dying ash trees is planned in higher-risk areas around the county throughout the autumn and early winter.

7 Whilst the loss of ash trees from disease will have a noticeable effect on our landscape, removal of the dead and dying trees is likely to result in indirect benefits to our woodlands. Many of Surrey's woodlands have been unmanaged for some time, resulting in species such as bramble and ivy flourishing, and sensitive woodland specialist species declining. Ash dieback works will create a more open canopy in our targeted areas that allow more daylight to reach the forest floor. This is a critical component for many of our woodland specialist wildflowers and will help their populations to recover. The planned restoration for each site will help us to protect these new glades, whilst also working to ensure recovery of scrub and woodland edge habitats. Our most sensitive sites are being completed under protected species licences to avoid, reduce, and manage potential impacts caused by the tree felling. As part of these licences we are committed to providing enhancements for species such as bats, hazel dormouse and roman snail, and have incorporated all of these features into our long-term management plans.

On the Countryside Estate, works are planned around targeted areas of Norbury Park (Leatherhead/Dorking), Chittys and Stringers Commons (Worplesdon), Shere Woodlands (near Guildford), and Newlands Corner (Guildford). Necessary works will also take place at Markedge Shaw (Merstham), Beech Avenue (Effingham), near Witley and Rodborough Commons (Milford), Dorking Road (Leatherhead) and Jacks Copse (Burpham). Start dates will be staggered throughout the autumn.

In addition to sharing information via newsletters and on-site signage, an engagement programme including "Walk and Talk" sessions with the Council's arboricultural team and "Drop-in" sessions providing opportunities for informal discussion has been taking place at key locations throughout September. More information on Ash dieback can be found on the Council's [dedicated webpages](#).

Basingstoke Canal Centre

Residents and users are being asked for their thoughts on the Basingstoke Canal Centre in Mytchett, and ideas they might have for improvement in the future. A short public survey has been created to improve our knowledge of how people currently use the centre, when they visit, which facilities they use, but also what opportunities may encourage them to use the centre more often.

Survey results will be used to guide thinking around potential improvements that could not only enhance the Centre's value to the community but help it become more financially sustainable and fit for the future. The [survey](#) is being hosted on the Council's Commonplace platform, but hard copies are also available, while posters are also being distributed in the local area with QR codes that direct people to the survey.

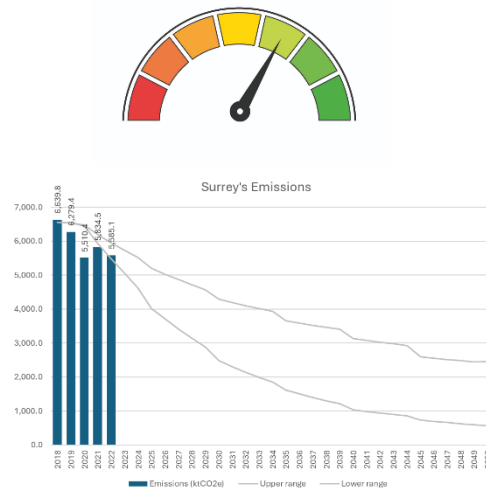
Meeting our net zero targets

Early indications show that Surrey County Council continues to be on track to meet its 2030 net zero target. Since 2021 until present, officers have brought in £14M in Government grant funding to decarbonise the estate, focusing on switching buildings with end-of-life boilers to low emission heat pumps. Officers are also focusing on solar installation, which will save the Council money on energy bills as well as contributing to the 2030 target. A further programme of rooftop solar installation will commence in 2025, seeing installations on approximately 30 buildings. In addition, the installation of the solar canopy at Woodhatch is now completed (image below).



7

The Surrey's 2050 net zero target also remains on track but there are significant challenges ahead to scale up action to reduce emissions in a financial environment that has never been more challenging for residents, businesses and the public sector.



Since the start of the plan, our actions, working with key partners, have resulted in huge benefits under all four strategic priorities - making it possible for residents to reduce energy, get skilled in jobs, enabling businesses to decarbonise, allowing pupils to walk and cycle safely to school and encouraging residents to be empowered to take action on the environment, plant trees and much,

much more.

<p>Growing a sustainable economy so everyone can benefit</p> <p>259</p> <p>Businesses have benefitted from grants to reduce costs and be more sustainable</p> <p>507</p> <p>Subsidised retrofit skills courses to fill the green skills gap</p> <p>New service</p> <p>To support businesses to develop, including on sustainability</p>	<p>Tackling health inequality</p> <p>1264</p> <p>fuel poor households treated with insulation and PV, reducing bills.</p> <p>68,286</p> <p>Visitors to 84 warm welcome services and energy efficiency advice</p> <p>580</p> <p>Households received free home energy surveys and advice</p>	<p>Empowered and thriving communities</p> <p>2177</p> <p>Households participated to purchase solar panels, reducing bills.</p> <p>31,969</p> <p>Pupils received cycling and walking training, building confidence for active travel.</p> <p>2802</p> <p>Active travel users being rewarded through the Betterpoints app</p>	<p>Enabling a greener future</p> <p>558,267</p> <p>Trees planted, absorbing carbon and providing climate resilience</p> <p>TBC</p> <p>Woodland under improved sustainable management, improving biodiversity</p> <p>New service</p> <p>Being developed to support biodiversity and nature recovery</p>
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Supporting residents to save energy and stay warm

We continue to support residents struggling to heat their homes, mindful that Government’s restrictions on the winter fuel allowance will put more pressure on some over 60s. 46,000 residents were assisted by the Fuel Poverty programme’s work last winter, and with additional targeted projects planned for this year, we are ensuring the most vulnerable residents in Surrey have a support network and a lifeline. Funding from the programme enables prevention projects in SFRS, Adults, Wellbeing and Health Partnerships, Citizen’s Advice, Surrey Coalition of Disabled People as well as many others which are funded through the £1m grant we receive. We will also be running our Warm Welcome scheme once again this winter, with approximately 80 venues across the county.



A Warm Welcome cooking class at the Hope Hub, Camberley

Since 2022 we have installed almost £9M of Government funded energy efficiency measures in 346 fuel poor homes, creating annual energy savings of approximately £310,000 for these residents. Our HUG2 scheme will continue to run to March 25 after which further funding will be available. Surrey is one of the most successful local authorities in delivering Government funded fuel poverty schemes in the country.



Surrey resident Bob had solar installed on his home

The third phase of Surrey Solar Together has just launched. Solar Together offers residents subsidised costs for solar installations through a bulk purchase scheme which is supported and promoted by the Council. To date, the Solar Together programme in Surrey has enabled 10 MW of renewable energy capacity installed, saving 50,452 tonnes of CO2 across the next 25 years. 2274 installations have been completed, equating to £17.1m of private investment and offering an average 34% saving to residents on their energy bills. This programme is cost neutral to the Council.



Surrey resident Ruth accessed solar through Solar Together "I've wanted solar panels forever because for one environmentally it's the right thing to do... I felt I would have confidence in their due diligence... Obviously satisfied with the actual installation itself!"

Also launching in September is the Council's Home Energy Improvement One-Stop Shop. Working with expert delivery partner FurbNow, this pilot offers Surrey households a centralised, streamlined and simplified platform through which to upgrade their homes by installing energy saving 'retrofit' measures to save money and carbon.

Supporting our residents to be more resilient to climate changes especially flooding

We recently published our first annual [Impact Report](#) into the steps SCC and our partners have been taking to manage the risk of flooding across the County. The report sets out the approach taken by risk management authorities to deliver against the objectives of Surrey's Local Flood Risk Management Strategy and includes some of the achievements and challenges faced.

One area set out in the report is how we support Flood Action Groups. These groups are led by the community and supported by the risk management authorities to help improve our collective understanding of the causes and impacts of flooding on residents but also to build community resilience to future floods. A recent example of where this approach has been successful is in Worplesdon. The Worplesdon Flood Forum was created in 2005 by the Parish Council and has held regular meetings with authorities. The group have fed back that this has recently helped to facilitate a collaborative approach with SCC teams resulting in the resolution of a long-standing flooding problem in the area.

7

We are continuing to carry out statutory investigations into the flooding that resulted from Storm Henk earlier in the year. We are also managing the Flood Recovery Framework grants for householders who flooded internally. Affected residents can claim a grant of up to £5000 to pay for "Property Flood Resilience" improvements to reduce the impact of future flooding to their property. So far, we have received 52 applications and are proceeding with surveys for 31 properties.

Following heavy rain on the 1st August, we received 51 reports of flooding, including 36 reports of properties flooded internally and 15 external. The Friary Centre in Guildford and The Square Shopping Centre in Camberley both experienced flooding from surface water. 53.7mm of rain was recorded as having fallen between 17:30 and 20:00 in Oxted. SCC teams continue to investigate reports and pass on details to the relevant authority as appropriate.

Supporting businesses to cut costs, carbon and grow their business

Following the success of the EU funded LoCASE programme, which offered grants to SME businesses for energy efficiency and low carbon measures, the Council will be launching Surrey's first SME decarbonisation loan scheme in September in partnership with 6 Boroughs and Districts, who are supporting with Government Shared Prosperity funding. This pilot will run to March 25, with the potential to extend for a further year. The pilot will offer loans of up to £15k to small and medium sized businesses in Guildford, Waverley, Woking, Reigate and Banstead, Spelthorne and Surrey Heath. Officers will also provide support and free training for businesses wishing to reduce energy bills and carbon emissions.

Officers are continuing to deliver grant funding to support rural SME businesses, charities and community groups in Tandridge, Guildford and Waverley. Organisations can apply for a grant of up to £50,000, and up to 50% of capital projects costs. The objectives are to support rural development, help job creation, environmental benefits and community enterprise. The Wheatsheaf pub in Grayswood (below) had been operating for over 120 years but sadly closed during covid. With more than 80 pubs a month closing in the UK, Mark Mizerotti and his family recognised the need for a pub in the village. There were no village amenities once the pub had closed so they set about refurbishing it. REPF funding has helped considerably with the refurbishment by awarding £50,000 towards the installation of a professional, energy efficient kitchen. This pub is now open and serving high quality, locally sourced food to all of its customers.



Supporting communities to improve their local environments

Parish and town councils: Over the coming months officers will be providing dedicated resource to support Surrey's parish and town councils to develop their own local carbon and nature recovery strategies and action plans. There is much that can be achieved by these councils, particularly to encourage local activities that have an environmental benefit. Parish and town councils are already well networked in Surrey through SALC and our intention is to support a handful of these councils to develop a strategy and action plan, providing them with the tools they need to start delivering local action and then for these councils to support others to develop similar tools and approaches.

Eco Schools: Surrey County Council continues to lead in England in environmental education, boasting the largest number of Eco-Schools Green Flag awards for the second consecutive year. 98 schools across the county have earned this internationally recognised award.

The Eco-Schools programme is the largest education programme globally, providing a structured framework for embedding sustainability into schools. It empowers students to take the lead in environmental action, encouraging them to become champions of positive change both now and in the future.

This year over 50,000 pupils were part of a school that achieved the Green Flag with support from SCC. Approximately 2,200 of these students have played an instrumental role in their schools' journey to achieving the Green Flag, dedicating time and effort to initiatives that range from reducing waste, conserving energy to promoting biodiversity, conserving water, picking up litter, keeping local water ways clean, growing food, promoting sustainable transportation and more.



St Peter's CofE Primary in Farnham were recently awarded Green Flag status with support from SCC.

Supporting our Farmers: In September we are hosting our second networking event for Surrey farmers at Woodhatch Place. The last event was well received and focused on supporting our farmers to access funds through environmental land management schemes. This month, we have speakers on sustainable farming incentives, a case study on regenerative farming and discussions on nitrate and water management. These events are aimed at offering a warm welcome to Woodhatch Place, building relationships with our farmers and offering a networking opportunity.

SURREY COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET



DATE: 24 SEPTEMBER 2024

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER: DAVID LEWIS, CABINET MEMBER FOR FINANCE AND RESOURCES

LEAD OFFICER: ANNA D'ALESSANDRO, INTERIM EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES (INTERIM S151 OFFICER)

SUBJECT: 2024/25 MONTH 4 (JULY) FINANCIAL REPORT

ORGANISATION STRATEGY PRIORITY AREA: NO ONE LEFT BEHIND / GROWING A SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY SO EVERYONE CAN BENEFIT / TACKLING HEALTH INEQUALITY / ENABLING A GREENER FUTURE / EMPOWERED AND THRIVING COMMUNITIES / HIGH PERFORMING COUNCIL

Purpose of the Report:

This report provides details of the Council's 2024/25 financial position, for revenue and capital budgets, as at 31st July 2024 (M4) and the expected outlook for the remainder of the financial year. In addition, the report proposes minor changes to the operation of the Your Fund Surrey small projects capital scheme.

Regular reporting of the financial position underpins the delivery of all priority objectives, contributing to the overarching ambition to ensure No One Left Behind.

Key Messages – Revenue

- Local government continues to work in a challenging environment of sustained and significant pressures. **At M4, the Council is forecasting an overspend of £15.5m against the 2024/25 revenue budget.** The details are shown in Annex 1 and summarised in Table 1 (paragraph 1 below).
- **Directorates are working on developing mitigating actions to offset forecast overspends, to deliver services within available budgets.**
- In order to ensure ongoing financial resilience, the Council holds a corporate contingency budget and over recent years has re-established an appropriate level of reserves. These measures provide additional financial resilience should the residual forecast overspend not be effectively mitigated by corrective actions before the end of the financial year.

Key Messages – Capital

- The Capital Programme Panel, alongside Strategic Capital Groups, has undertaken an assurance review of the capital programme to ensure deliverability. This has resulted in a re-phased budget for 2024/25, approved by Cabinet in July 2024.
- At M4, capital expenditure of £318.1m is forecast for 2024/25. This is £3.3m more than the re-phased budget. Further details are provided in paragraphs 9-11.

- Proposals to increase the maximum value of an individual capital project funded via the Your Fund Surrey Small Projects Fund from £50,000 to £100,000 and the delegated approval levels are included at paragraphs 12-15.

Each quarter, key balance sheet indicators are reported; these are set out in Annex 2.

Recommendations:

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- Notes the Council's forecast revenue budget and capital budget positions for the year.
- Approves the changes to the Your Fund Surrey small project fund allocation to increase the maximum value of a single capital project from £50,000 to £100,000.
- Approves the proposed amendments to the current delegated authority levels for Your Fund Surrey large project fund to include Director level Director level, in consultation with Cabinet Member for Customer and Communities, for projects up to £100k.

Reason for Recommendations:

This report is to comply with the agreed policy of providing a monthly budget monitoring report to Cabinet for information and for approval of any necessary actions.

Executive Summary:

- At M4, the Council is forecasting a full year overspend of £15.5m against the revenue budget. This is a £2.6m improvement on the M3 position. Table 1 below shows the forecast revenue budget outturn for the year by Directorate (further details are set out in Annex 1):

Table 1 - Summary revenue budget forecast variances as at 31st July 2024

	M4 Forecast	Annual Budget	Forecast Variance
	£m	£m	£m
Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships	515.7	511.8	3.9
Children, Families and Lifelong Learning	307.0	298.1	8.9
Environment, Infrastructure & Growth	187.8	185.2	2.6
Surrey Fire and Rescue Service	44.2	44.1	0.1
Customers, Digital & Change	49.6	49.5	0.0
Finance & Corporate Services	27.4	27.4	(0.0)
Communications, Public Affairs and Engagement	2.8	2.8	0.0
Central Income & Expenditure	89.4	89.4	0.0
Directorate position	1,223.8	1,208.4	15.5
Contingency	0.0	0.0	0.0
Corporate Funding	(1,208.4)	(1,208.4)	0.0
Overall	15.5	(0.0)	15.5

- The forecast overspend relates primarily to the following:

Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships - £3.9m overspend, £3.2m decrease from Month 3 position. The decrease is due to incorporating refreshed efficiency plans agreed by the Senior Leadership Team. These plans now forecast a £1.1m overachievement against the Directorate's original budgeted efficiencies for 2024/25, primarily related to

further managing the cost of inflationary uplifts on care packages, together with £1.8m of additional efficiencies for securing increased income related to Section 117 Aftercare and Continuing Health Care, targeted reviews of existing care packages and managing the impact of assessed charges debt below the budgeted cost. These additional measures are anticipated to have a full year impact of £10m. Close monitoring of delivery with rapid action to address variances will be important to ensure delivery. A small reduction in ASC staffing budget pressures and a small underspend for the Communities & Prevention service also contributed to the improvement.

The overall overspend of £3.9m relates to two main areas of pressure:

- £3.3m relating to increased care packages spending commitments, due to growth in the latter part of 2023/24, mainly relating to Older People care packages.
- £1.4m pressure on staffing budgets due to £0.5m underachievement against the £1m 2024/25 workforce reconfiguration efficiency target, £0.5m of pressures related to statutory responsibilities for Deprivation of Liberty Safeguard assessments and the remaining £0.4m due to improved recruitment and retention to deliver core statutory duties.

These pressures are partially offset by underspends for wider support services and additional grant funding.

Children, Families and Lifelong Learning - £8.9m overspend, £0.1m increase from Month 3 position. The overspend relates to £7.4m of Home to School Travel Assistance pressure (no change from the previous month's forecast). The Home to School travel assistance cost pressure reflects several factors, including growth in eligible SEN pupil numbers exceeding the initial assumptions. New modelling taking account of current trends has led to increases in demand profiles, which has in part been led by additional in year placements being made through the EHCP recovery work. Also contributing to the spend pressures is the continued increases in rates, due to supply and demand issues in the driver market. There continues to be a significant number of solo route arrangements, which are regularly reviewed to maximise shared arrangements on compatible routes. There are multiple activities in hand to tackle the forecast spend increases in Home to School Travel Assistance. A Member and officer oversight group has been set up to review, monitor and target proposed mitigations.

Further pressures of £2m have been identified in placement costs, due to additional costs in external fostering and health contributions currently being forecast lower than budget. There are a number of underspends partly offsetting these pressures, including reduced costs in relation to care leavers of £0.4m and staffing underspends due to vacancies. The increase in projection of £0.1m relates to changes in external placements.

Environment, Transport & Infrastructure - £2.6m overspend, £0.2m increase from Month 3 position. Waste management continues to forecast an overspend of £1.3m after mitigations, primarily due to market costs of managing dry mixed recyclables. In addition, Land & Property continues to forecast a pressure of £1m due to the cost of soft facilities management (including additional cleaning and security costs) and increased utility costs

linked to usage and backdated electricity distribution costs. Additionally, there is c£0.3m of other smaller pressures.

Whilst Highways and Transport is forecasting no variation overall, this is after pressures totalling £1.9m relating to parking and traffic enforcement, staffing and income have been mitigated by planned drawdown of prior year parking surpluses.

There are smaller mitigations in other service areas. The Directorate continues to review options to mitigate or offset these pressures including contract meetings to address facilities management costs and reviewing energy usage.

Surrey Fire and Rescue Service - £0.1m overspend, £0.1m increase from Month 3 position. The overspend is due to operational pressures of £0.7m, including additional water training requirements of £0.2m, Fleet costs of £0.2m, and abortive prior year capital costs of £0.2m which are being investigated for possible third-party recovery. These have been partly offset by a net staffing underspend of £0.3m and efficiencies generated through shared support costs of Joint Fire Control of £0.3m.

3. In addition to the forecast overspend position, emerging risks and opportunities are monitored throughout the year. Directorates have additionally identified net risks of £17.8m, consisting of quantified risks of £20.3m, offset by opportunities of £2.5m. This is a reduction in net risks of £0.2m from M3. These figures represent the weighted risks and opportunities, taking into account the full value of the potential risk or opportunity adjusted for assessed likelihood of the risk occurring or opportunity being realised.
4. Directorates are expected to take action to mitigate these risks and maximise the opportunities available to offset them, to avoid these resulting in a forecast overspend against the budget set.

Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) update

5. The table below shows the projected forecast year-end outturn for the High Needs Block.

Table 2 - DSG HNB Summary

2024/25 DSG HNB Summary	Budget £m	Forecast £m	Variance £m
Education and Lifelong Learning	237.0	237.0	0.0
Place Funding	23.1	23.1	0.0
Children's Services	2.3	2.3	0.0
Corporate Funding	2.0	2.0	0.0
TOTAL	264.4	264.4	0.0
FUNDING	-225.4	-225.4	0.0
In-Year Deficit	39.0	39.0	0.0

6. The Council remains within the spending profile of the Safety Valve and is currently forecasting to be within the budget profile for 2024/25.
7. The first monitoring report for the Safety Valve agreement in 2024/25 was submitted to the Department for Education at the end of May 2024. In line with the deadline, the first instalment payment of £1.91m was received at the end of June. The next monitoring return is due at the end of August.
8. To date, the Council has received £78.18m in Safety Valve payments (78% of the total DfE contributions) with a remaining £21.82m due to be paid over the next three years. Our

Safety Valve monitoring report confirmed that the Council remains on track with its agreed trajectory, although also noted continued pressures both from demand within the system and through cost inflation.

Capital Budget

9. The 2024/25 Capital Budget was approved by Council on 6th February 2024 at £404.9m. The Capital Programme Panel, working alongside Strategic Capital Groups, has undertaken a detailed review of the programme to validate and ensure deliverability. The re-phased capital programme reduces the 2024/25 budget to £314.8m, as approved by Cabinet in July 2024.

10. The month four forecast is £318.1m, which is £3.3m more than the re-phased budget.

Strategic Capital Groups	Annual Budget	FY Forecast at M4	M4 Forecast Variance	M3 Forecast Variance	Change from M3 to M4	Movement
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	
Property						
Property Schemes	131.2	131.2	0.0	0.0	0.0	Unchanged
ASC Schemes	1.6	1.6	0.0	0.0	0.0	Unchanged
CFLC Schemes	2.7	2.7	0.0	0.0	0.0	Unchanged
Property Total	135.5	135.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	Unchanged
Infrastructure						
Highways and Transport	125.2	131.2	6.0	(0.2)	6.2	Increase
Infrastructure and Major Projects	29.0	27.1	(1.9)	(1.5)	(0.4)	Decrease
Environment	8.7	8.7	0.0	0.3	(0.3)	Decrease
Surrey Fire and Rescue	2.5	2.5	0.0	0.0	0.0	Unchanged
Infrastructure Total	165.4	169.5	4.1	(1.4)	5.5	Increase
IT						
IT Service Schemes	13.9	13.1	(0.8)	(0.8)	0.0	Unchanged
IT Total	13.9	13.1	(0.8)	(0.8)	0.0	Unchanged
Total	314.8	318.1	3.3	(2.2)	5.5	Increase

11. The overall variance is attributable to the following:

- **Infrastructure - £4.1m variance over budget**, this includes £5m of accelerated and additional surface dressing and safety defect spend, including the A24 emergency works which it is assumed will be recovered through Damage to County Property processes, and other smaller changes to road safety and improvement schemes.

These are partly offset by a delay to part of the Farnham Town Centre programme (£1.0m) and the early termination of a National Highways scheme (£0.5m) for improved air quality on the A3.

- **IT - £0.8m variance under budget**, caused by a further reprofile of the WAN / Wi-Fi refresh programme that has reprofiled spend into future years. This is due to a recent change in the scope and sites at which the work will take place this financial year.

Your Fund Surrey

12. The capital pipeline budget includes £30m for Your Fund Surrey for the period 2024/25 – 2025/26. This includes a £100,000 allocation available to each Councillor for the small project fund, aimed to enable Councillors to support capital projects in their local community. A whole range of projects have been funded from this scheme to date,

including refurbishment of village halls, new pathways, community gardens and improved playground facilities.

13. The small project fund will close in Spring 2025 and in order to build on its success and ensure it supports projects that make the most difference to local communities, it is proposed, as a recommendation via a Select Committee, to increase the maximum value of an individual capital project from £50,000 to £100,000. This represents an increase in the amount allowable for a single application and not an increase in the overall funding, which will remain within the budget allocation.
14. All projects above this level, or any applications deemed by officers as complex, will continue to follow the YFS Large Community Projects process, which includes robust officer reviews to ensure the required rigour regarding assessment. In addition, it is proposed to amend the current delegated authority levels to approve funding awards for the Your Fund Surrey large project fund. For projects up to £100k, the current delegation is to the appropriate Executive Director. It is proposed to amend this to include an appropriate Director or Executive Director, for administrative purposes.
15. All projects over £100k are currently approved by the appropriate Cabinet Member, with any over £500k requiring approval of Cabinet. There are no changes proposed to these levels.
16. All projects continue to be assessed by a range of officers and given due consideration by the Your Fund Surrey Advisory Panel, comprised of Members from all political parties.

Consultation:

17. Executive Directors and Cabinet Members have confirmed the forecast outturns for their revenue and capital budgets.

Risk Management and Implications:

18. Risk implications are stated throughout the report and each relevant director or head of service has updated their strategic and or service risk registers accordingly. In addition, the Corporate Risk Register continues to reflect the increasing uncertainty of future funding likely to be allocated to the Council and the sustainability of the Medium-Term Financial Strategy. In the light of the financial risks faced by the Council, the Leadership Risk Register will be reviewed to increase confidence in Directorate plans to mitigate the risks and issues.

Financial and Value for Money Implications:

19. The report considers financial and value for money implications throughout and future budget monitoring reports will continue this focus.

Section 151 Officer Commentary:

20. The Council continues to operate in a very challenging financial environment. Local authorities across the country are experiencing significant budgetary pressures. Surrey County Council has made significant progress in recent years to improve the Council's financial resilience and whilst this has built a stronger financial base from which to deliver our services, the cost of service delivery, increasing demand, financial uncertainty and government policy changes mean we continue to face challenges to our financial position. This requires an increased focus on financial management to protect service delivery, a continuation of the need to deliver financial efficiencies and reduce spending to achieve a balanced budget position each year.

21. In addition to these immediate challenges, the medium-term financial outlook beyond 2024/25 remains uncertain. With no clarity on central government funding in the medium term, our working assumption is that financial resources will continue to be constrained, as they have been for the majority of the past decade. This places an onus on the Council to continue to consider issues of financial sustainability as a priority, in order to ensure the stable provision of services in the medium term.
22. The Council has a duty to ensure its expenditure does not exceed the resources available. As such, the Section 151 Officer confirms the financial information presented in this report is consistent with the Council's general accounting ledger and that forecasts have been based on reasonable assumptions, taking into account all material, financial and business issues and risks.

Legal Implications – Monitoring Officer:

23. The Council is under a duty to set a balanced and sustainable budget. The Local Government Finance Act requires the Council to take steps to ensure that the Council's expenditure (that is expenditure incurred already in year and anticipated to be incurred) does not exceed the resources available whilst continuing to meet its statutory duties.
24. Cabinet should be aware that if the Section 151 Officer, at any time, is not satisfied that appropriate strategies and controls are in place to manage expenditure within the in-year budget they must formally draw this to the attention of the Cabinet and Council and they must take immediate steps to ensure a balanced in-year budget, whilst complying with its statutory and common law duties.

Equalities and Diversity:

25. Any impacts of the budget monitoring actions will be evaluated by the individual services as they implement the management actions necessary. In implementing individual management actions, the Council must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 which requires it to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Act; advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it; and foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.
26. Services will continue to monitor the impact of these actions and will take appropriate action to mitigate additional negative impacts that may emerge as part of ongoing analysis.

What Happens Next:

27. The relevant adjustments from recommendations will be made to the Council's accounts.
-

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Consulted: Cabinet, Executive Directors, Heads of Service

Annexes:

Annex 1 – Detailed Outturn position

Annex 2 – Prudential Indicators

Detailed Revenue M4 Position

Annex 1

Service	Cabinet Member	Net budget	Forecast	Outturn variance
Public Health	M Nuti	£37.8m	£37.8m	£0.0m
Communities & Prevention	M Nuti	£3.2m	£3.1m	(£0.1m)
Adult Social Care	S Mooney	£470.8m	£474.7m	£4.0m
Adults, Wellbeing & Health Partnerships		£511.8m	£515.7m	£3.9m
Family Resilience	C Curran	£68.3m	£68.5m	£0.2m
Education and Lifelong Learning	C Curran	£31.7m	£31.7m	(£0.0m)
Commissioning	C Curran	£2.1m	£2.0m	(£0.0m)
Quality & Performance	C Curran	£87.2m	£94.4m	£7.3m
Corporate Parenting	C Curran	£112.0m	£113.4m	£1.4m
Exec Director of CFLL central costs	C Curran	£-3.1m	£-3.1m	£0.0m
Children, Families and Lifelong Learning		£298.1m	£307.0m	£8.9m
Highways & Transport	M Furniss	£71.1m	£71.1m	£0.0m
Environment	M Heath/ N Bramhall	£82.8m	£84.3m	£1.6m
Infrastructure, Planning & Major Projects	M Furniss	£2.5m	£2.6m	£0.1m
Planning Performance & Support	M Furniss	£3.4m	£3.4m	£0.0m
Land & Property	N Bramhall	£24.0m	£25.0m	£1.0m
Economic Growth	M Furniss	£1.4m	£1.4m	£0.0m
Environment, Infrastructure & Growth		£185.2m	£187.8m	£2.6m
Surrey Fire and Rescue	K Deanus	£40.4m	£40.5m	£0.1m
Safer Communities	K Deanus	£1.2m	£1.2m	£0.0m
Emergency Management	K Deanus	£0.7m	£0.7m	£0.0m
Trading Standards	D Turner-Stewart	£1.8m	£1.8m	£0.0m
Surrey Fire and Rescue Service		£44.1m	£44.2m	£0.1m
Armed Forces and Resilience	K Deanus	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.0m
Comms, Public Affairs & Engagement	T Oliver	£2.7m	£2.7m	£0.0m
Communications, Public Affairs and Engagement		£2.8m	£2.8m	£0.0m
Active Surrey	D Lewis	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.0m
Coroners	K Deanus	£4.6m	£4.6m	(£0.0m)
Customer Services	D Turner-Stewart	£3.2m	£3.3m	£0.1m
Customer Experience	D Turner-Stewart	£0.2m	£0.2m	£0.0m
Customer and Communities Leadership	D Turner-Stewart	£0.5m	£0.5m	£0.0m
Design & Change	D Lewis	£3.3m	£3.1m	(£0.2m)
Heritage	D Turner-Stewart	£0.9m	£0.9m	£0.0m
Information Technology & Digital	D Lewis	£21.1m	£21.1m	(£0.0m)
Libraries Services	D Turner-Stewart	£7.8m	£7.8m	£0.0m
People & Change	T Oliver	£9.3m	£9.4m	£0.1m
Registration and Nationality Services	D Turner-Stewart	£-1.7m	£-1.7m	(£0.0m)
Surrey Arts	D Turner-Stewart	£0.4m	£0.4m	£0.0m
Transformation Programmes	D Lewis	£0.0m	£0.0m	£0.0m
Customers, Digital & Change		£49.5m	£49.6m	£0.0m
Finance	D Lewis	£9.2m	£9.2m	£0.0m
Joint Orbis	D Lewis	£6.0m	£6.2m	£0.2m
Legal Services	D Lewis	£6.2m	£6.2m	(£0.0m)
Democratic Services	D Lewis	£3.9m	£4.0m	£0.0m
Director of Resources	D Lewis	£0.1m	£0.2m	£0.1m
Leadership Office	D Lewis	£2.1m	£1.9m	(£0.3m)
Corporate Strategy and Policy	D Lewis	£1.2m	£1.1m	(£0.0m)
Pensions	D Lewis	£-0.7m	£-0.7m	£0.0m
Performance Management	D Lewis	£0.2m	£0.2m	£0.0m
Procurement	D Lewis	£0.1m	£0.1m	£0.0m
Twelve15	D Lewis	£-1.0m	£-1.1m	(£0.1m)
Finance & Corporate Services		£27.4m	£27.4m	(£0.0m)
Central Income & Expenditure	D Lewis	£89.4m	£89.4m	£0.0m
Directorate position		£1,208.4m	£1,223.8m	£15.5m
Corporate Funding		-£1,208.4m	-£1,208.4m	£0.0m
Overall		-£0.0m	£15.5m	£15.5m

Prudential Indicators (capital expenditure, borrowing and commercial & service investments)

1. All Prudential Indicators have been adhered to and the Authorised Borrowing Limit and Operational Boundary have not been breached during the period.
2. The Council measures and manages its capital expenditure, borrowing and commercial and service investments with reference to the following indicators, which are reported to Cabinet on a quarterly basis.

Table 1: Estimates of Capital Expenditure

	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget	2028/29 Budget
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Capital Programme - Budget	298	318	344	231	164	147
Capital Programme - Pipeline	-	60	250	127	60	53
Sub-total Capital Programme	298	378	594	359	223	201
Capital investment	1	23	3	-	-	-
TOTAL	299	401	597	359	223	201

Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement

3. The Council's cumulative outstanding amount of debt finance is measured by the Capital Financing Requirement (CFR). This increases with new debt-financed capital expenditure on service delivery and on investments and reduces by the annual Minimum Revenue Provision and capital receipts used to replace debt.

Table 2: Estimates of Capital Financing Requirement

	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget	2028/29 Budget
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Capital Programme	1,064	1,386	1,709	1,858	1,936	2,012
Investment Programme	439	453	446	437	428	420
TOTAL CFR	1,503	1,840	2,155	2,295	2,364	2,432

Proportion of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

4. This is an indicator of affordability and highlights the revenue implications of existing and proposed capital expenditure by identifying the proportion of the revenue budget required to meet financing costs. The net annual charge is known as financing costs; this is compared to the net revenue stream i.e. the amount funded from council tax, business rates and general government grants.
5. In February 2024, the Council approved an ambitious Capital Programme to 2028/29, continuing the significant investment in infrastructure and assets to support key services. As table 3 illustrates, the mid-term financing costs are forecast to increase over the medium term (3.6% in 2023/24 to 7.5% in 2028/29). This means that financing costs will reduce the percentage of the revenue budget available for other uses, unless the revenue budget increases more than forecast and / or capital expenditure funded by borrowing is less than forecast. As part of the 2025/26 – 2029/30 Medium Term Financial Strategy Planning a review of all capital commitments is underway.

Table 3: Proportion of Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream

	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget	2028/29 Budget
Ratio of Net Financing Costs to Net Revenue Stream	3.6%	3.3%	4.7%	5.9%	6.8%	7.5%

Net Income from Commercial and Service Investments to Net Revenue Stream

6. This is an indicator of affordability and highlights the net financial impact on the authority of its entire non-treasury investment income.
7. The Council's reliance on non-treasury investment income is forecast to remain at 1.6% over the mid-term. This is a small proportion of the total net revenue stream and demonstrates that the Council has limited exposure to external commercial market forces.

Table 4: Net Income from Commercial and Service Investments to Net Revenue Stream

	2023/24 Actual	2024/25 Forecast	2025/26 Budget	2026/27 Budget	2027/28 Budget	2028/29 Budget
Total net income from service and commercial investments	21	19	19	19	19	19
Proportion on net revenue stream	1.9%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.6%	1.5%

Treasury Management – Borrowing

8. The Council borrows to finance its capital spending that is not funded from grants, third party contributions, capital receipts or reserves. The Council's long-term debt stands at £461.0m and has not increased this year.
9. As at 30 June 2024, the weighted average interest rate of the Council's long term debt portfolio is 3.66%. The Treasury Strategy, approved by County Council in February 2024, continued the policy of internal borrowing and where necessary, to borrow short-term to meet cash flow liquidity requirements. Table 5 below shows a net £106.6m increase in the Council's short-term borrowing activity since 31 March 2024.

Table 5: Short term borrowing as at 30 June 2024

	£m
Debt outstanding as at 31 March 2024	246.4
Loans raised	374.7
Loans repaid	(268.1)
Quarter movement	106.6
Current Balance as at 30 June 2024	353.0

Note: Figures are for Surrey Council only and do not include Surrey Police

10. The weighted average interest rate of the Council's short term external debt is 5.33% at 30 June 2024 (4.06% at June 2023).

Investments

11. The Council's average daily level of investments has been £48.1m during 2024/25 (up to the end of Q1), compared to an average of £76.5m during 2023/24 (up to the end of Q1). The lower cash investment balances reflect management of the Council's cash flow and the higher borrowing costs incurred currently for short-term borrowing.
12. The Bank of England (BoE) base rate did not increase during the quarter and remained at 5.25% (although subsequently was reduced to 5% in August 2024). The Council invests temporary cash surplus exclusively through the use of money market funds (MMF). Other investment facilities are available, including: brokers, direct dealing with counterparties through the use of call accounts or direct deal facilities, or with the government's Debt Management Office (DMO). No new fixed term deposits have been agreed during 2024/25, MMF investments ensure sufficient liquidity and to reduce credit risk exposure.
13. Table 6 shows the weighted average return on all investments the Council received in the quarter to 30 June 2024 is 5.23%. This compares to a 5.25% average Bank of England (BoE) base rate for the same period.
14. Table 6: Weighted average return on investments compared to Bank of England (BoE) base rate.

	2024/25		2023/24		2022/23	
Period	Average BoE Base Rate	Weighted return on investments	Average BoE Base Rate	Weighted return on investments	Average BoE Base Rate	Weighted return on investments
Quarter 4 (Mar)	-	-	5.25%	5.27%	3.85%	3.67%
Quarter 3 (Dec)	-	-	5.25%	5.29%	2.82%	2.56%
Quarter 2 (Sep)	-	-	5.16%	5.02%	1.61%	1.48%
Quarter 1 (Jun)	5.25%	5.23%	4.44%	4.33%	0.95%	0.77%

Note: All numbers in all tables have been rounded - which may cause a casting difference

Debt

15. During the three months to 30 June 2024, the Council raised invoices totalling £59.5m. Overdue debt is the total debt less those balances not immediately due (i.e. less than 30 days old). There was a total of £52.2m of overdue debt at the end of June 2024, a decrease of £0.6m since the last quarter. General debt has reduced by £0.9m since the last quarter. Integrated Care Board debt has also increased by £0.3m since the last quarter.
16. Unsecured social care overdue debt has increased by £0.3m over the quarter. The Financial Assessments & Income Collection Team in ASC responsible for the recovery of social care debt take a range of actions to recover unsecured debts. In addition to undertaking probate searches, the team agree instalment arrangements, pursue recovery action, including via the Council's legal services team if necessary, and take action to secure the debt where possible.

Table 7: Age profile of the Council's debt as at 30 June 2024

Account group	<1	1-12	1 to 2	over 2	Gross	Overdue	Q4 Overdue	
	month	months	years	years	debt	debt	debt	Change
	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m	£m
Care debt – unsecured	5.5	11.6	6.4	5.9	29.4	24.0	23.7	0.3
Care debt – secured	0.5	5.6	2.8	4.7	13.7	0.0		
Total care debt	6.0	17.2	9.2	10.6	43.1	24.0	23.7	0.3
Schools, colleges and nurseries	1.1	0.6	0.3	0.0	2.1	1.0	1.4	(0.4)
Integrated Care Boards	8.9	11.0	2.5	0.8	23.1	14.2	15.2	(0.9)
Other local authorities	3.2	1.0	0.1	0.0	4.4	1.1	1.6	(0.4)
General debt	4.8	9.2	1.5	1.2	16.7	11.9	11.0	0.8
Total non-care debt	18.0	21.8	4.4	2.0	46.2	28.2	29.1	(0.9)
Total debt	24.0	39.0	13.6	12.7	89.4	52.2	52.8	(0.6)
Q4 2023/24	22.4	40.3	12.8	11.9	87.3	52.8		
Change	1.6	(1.2)	0.8	0.8	2.0	(0.6)		

* Secured care debt does not become due until either the property is sold or after 90 days following the death of the resident, whichever is earlier. Note: All numbers have been rounded - which might cause a casting difference.

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3, 4, 6a of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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