

Surrey Education Strategy to 2030

I am pleased that work on the Surrey Education Strategy which includes the School Organisation Plan and Sustainability Strategy is progressing well and I will present this to the next Cabinet meeting in January.

The School Organisation Plan sets out the policies and principles underpinning both mainstream and specialist school organisation in Surrey. It highlights the likely demand for school places projected over a 10-year period and sets out any potential changes in school organisation that may be required to meet the council's statutory duty to provide sufficient places.

The Sustainability Strategy is intended to support the Skills Strategy and Plan launched on 10 November 2022 at the Skills Summit. It will also set out the implications of the White and Green Papers for Surrey education settings and for their learners and the key challenges for Surrey in terms of levelling up education outcomes.

Although I am the Cabinet member for Education and Learning, it is important to remember that local authorities do not run schools, Headteachers are accountable to school governors. Our role as a local authority and mine as Cabinet member is to be a '**Champion for all Learners**' in Surrey. To fulfil this, we will continue to work with key stakeholders to shape a shared set of ambitions for learners of all ages in Surrey which support the delivery of the Community Vision 2030 to ensure that no one is left behind.

Update on SEND improvement work and our Safety Valve Agreement

Over the summer months, Surrey's Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership Board conducted a self-evaluation exercise, reflecting on areas of strength and areas for development. Importantly this activity included a strong use of data and insight and was carried out with third sector and user voice partners (such as Family Voice Surrey, Surrey Youth Focus and ATLAS) who held a mirror up to our partnership evaluation. This self-evaluation is now informing the refresh of our Partnership, Inclusion and Additional Needs Strategy, which is being co-produced with partners, families and communities. Once the draft strategy has been reviewed by the Partnership Board and Select Committee, I look forward to bringing it to Cabinet early next year for your endorsement and support.

Some of our key priorities for Additional Needs and Disabilities improvement include improving sufficiency and improving inclusion and progress in these areas is outlined below:

Sufficiency: As of September 2022, around 800 new specialist school places for children had been provided across Surrey through 35 capital projects. This has created more than 280 additional places for academic year 2022/2023 and includes places that have also now been phased in from projects delivered in 2020 and 2021. Five 2022 projects have final works deliverable between Dec 22 and early spring 23, but Sep 22 and Jan 23 place availability has been secured. 14 more projects are on track for delivery 2023/24, and these will deliver around 350 more new places, of which 190 are expected to be available for September 2023.

The impact of improved sufficiency can be seen not just in the new specialist places that children and young people are benefiting from, but also the reduced use of non-maintained independent specialist schools from 12.5% in 2020 to 9% this year, which means that we are securing better value for money for this council and enabling more children and young people with additional needs and disabilities to be educated closer to their homes and communities.

Inclusion: Our work with schools to strengthen inclusion has also continued to embed, with improvements to the Local Offer information, a new Request for Support option for families and professionals seeking help and advice, and the launch of new Ordinarily Available Provision guidance this term. This information and guidance has been co-produced with partners and the roll-out has considered the importance of the role that schools' SENCos play in helping schools and families alike to navigate support. Although these improvements have only been introduced recently, we are starting to see growth in requests for support which we hope will reduce the rate of growth in demand for Education Health and Care assessments. We will be monitoring this closely and adjusting our offers as appropriate.

Safety Valve Agreement: Surrey's Safety Valve Agreement is completely aligned with the Additional Needs and Disabilities strategy and transformation plans, so it includes the initiatives already described, as well as others such as the Team Around the School, for which will be evaluated at the end of the year to inform our future plans.

Despite significant risks, such as workforce shortages and inflationary pressures, which are risks being experienced by SEND systems nationally, Surrey remains on track with the financial trajectory agreed with the Department for Education (DfE). This projects that the council will reach a position of financial sustainability in 2026/27. So far this year we have submitted two Safety Valve monitoring reports, and both have been approved by the DfE, so we have received further payments to reduce the High Needs Block deficit. By the end of the year, we expect to have received £52m in Safety Valve payments from government.

Home to school travel assistance

The home to school transport service came under immense pressure to process higher numbers of applications this academic year. At the time of writing, there are 24 active applications. There are 48 active stage 1 appeals in progress and 25 stage 2 appeals in progress are being heard in line with SLAs. This year, a new Home to School Travel Assistance policy was introduced which rebalances expectations about provision, offers different choices to families and revises the eligibility arrangements. Taken together with the higher numbers of applications, this led to delays in eligibility assessments and responses to parental queries, which in turn impacted on the Council's ability to arrange travel assistance for some eligible children for the start of the academic year. I again apologise for the disruption and inconvenience to parents and families this year because of these interlinking factors.

A significant programme of improvement is underway, to address the underlying challenges experienced this year, so that we can learn from these and implement major changes to improve this service for the academic year 2023/24. These will focus primarily on the customer journey and service improvement to ensure that all applications are processed and delivered promptly, and that transport is in place for eligible children and young people when they need it to get to school or college.