

Select Committee Task and Finish Group Scoping Document

<p>Review Topic: Additional Needs and Disabilities: Parent/carer experience</p>
<p>Select Committee(s)</p> <p>Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee</p>
<p>Relevant background</p> <p>Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND) - the preferred terminology for Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) - is a source of discontent for some Surrey residents.</p> <p>SEND services are undergoing a transformation programme at Surrey County Council (SCC) as a means to achieve the strategic aims outlined in its SEND Partnership Strategy 2019-2022 and the later AND Partnership Strategy 2023-2026. This is delivered by the Additional Needs and Disability Partnership, which must work within the statutory requirements of the Children and Families Act 2014 and have regard to the guidance within the associated SEND Code of Practice.</p> <p>The Council recognises that it is not best value for money to rely on the Non-Maintained Independent sector, which educates just over 13% of Surrey pupils with an EHCP. A key part of containing costs within the revenue budget is a capital investment to expand capacity of local maintained specialist places, to ensure all children and young people with SEND have access to provision locally. A £140.4m investment is proposed across the 2024-2027 financial years, contributing to the strategy’s aim of bringing about just under 2,500 new specialist school places before 2027.</p> <p>In addition to increasing internal capacity, the Council's strategy aims to make SEND spending sustainable by reducing demand through early intervention and support, which critically should also result in better outcomes for children and young people (CYP).</p> <p>For CYP whose needs cannot be met through ‘ordinarily available provision’, the Council is not meeting its statutory obligations in the timeliness of Education, Health and Care needs assessments and annual reviews. Timeliness reached a critical point in 2023 as increased demand coincided with a shortage of professionals who contribute to assessments; as a result the Council is now in the second phase of a recovery plan.</p> <p>According to the Education and Skills Funding Agency’s High Needs Benchmarking Tool, 5.06% of young people aged up to 25 in Surrey have an SEN statement or an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP), which is more than the England average (4.47%) and the South East average (4.76%).</p> <p>SEND is a significant area of ongoing financial pressure due to a rising demand for services and central government funding not covering the costs the Council incurs. As a result, since 2018/2019 SCC has accumulated debt on its Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block in the region of £25m-35m per annum, and at the end of the 2021-2022 financial year this deficit totalled £118.4 million.</p>

The Council therefore entered into a five-year Safety Valve Agreement with the Government in which it receives annual financial contributions and in exchange is expected to reduce its deficit year on year, with a view to reaching a point of sustainability by the end of 2026-2027.

The Safety Valve Agreement involves a DSG management plan which sets out various expectations on the Council. As part of this it must improve the skills and capacity of staff in mainstream schools to support children with SEND, in order to reduce the escalation of need, a principle that is echoed in the Government's 2022 green paper and subsequent improvement plan.

Why this is a scrutiny item?

Everyone should benefit from education opportunities that help them achieve their potential and succeed in life. The Council, whose purpose is to tackle inequality and make sure that no one is left behind, has identified SEND as a key transformation plan.

A recovery plan is underway to address the severe backlog of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs). Members are frequently contacted by parents of children with additional needs seeking help, and a survey by Family Voice has highlighted a significant number of issues with their case officer. The number of tribunals and the protests staged by parents outside council offices over the past year also show a level of dissatisfaction with the Council.

The Local Area SEND inspection outcome published in November 2023 found Surrey's children and young people with SEND have inconsistent experiences and outcomes and required the local area partnership to jointly update its existing strategic plan based on inspectors' recommendations.

A Task Group can support the Council and its partners to ensure the experiences and insights of parents and carers are taken into consideration.

What question is the task group aiming to answer?

How can the Council improve its support of parents and carers of Children and Young People (CYP) with Additional Needs and Disabilities (AND)?

Aim

To improve the Council's support of CYP with AND and their parents/carers and ensure it strives to put families at the centre of the EHCP process to as far as possible meet CYP's needs.

Objectives

- 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.

Scope (within / out of)

In scope:

Council interactions across the whole SEND process, both within SCC (e.g. between L-SPA, SEND and H2STA teams) and between SCC and its educational and health partners

Selection of school placements (maintained and non-maintained)

EHCPs from the perspective of how well SCC supports parents and carers in this area (but not a review of the EHCP process per se, which external consultants have been commissioned to do)

The Additional Needs and Disabilities Partnership strategic plan

Out of scope:

Scrutiny of the Council's partners e.g. MindWorks

Amount of overall budget allocated to SEND

Outcomes for Surrey / Benefits

KPIs that could be improved include no. of complaints as % of EHCPs, no. of active tribunals and proportion of pupils with EHCP / on SEN support who are persistently absent. This could provide a better experience for the family, better value for money for the Council and an enhanced reputation. Improving educational outcomes for CYP with AND will help achieve Surrey County Council's Community Vision for Surrey 2030, particularly its ambitions to enable everyone to achieve their full potential and ensure no one is left behind.

Proposed work plan

Timescale	Task	Responsible
17 January 2024	Planning workshop with Task Group Members to agree scope, work plan and desired outcomes	Scrutiny Officer, Task Group
24 January & 21 February 2024	Meet with SEND County Service Planning & Performance Leader to map out macro level SEND process	SEND County Service Planning & Performance Leader, TG
26 February – 11 March 2024	Poll Surrey county councillors, via Surrey Says, on key areas of concern encountered in their SEND casework	TG, SO
w/c 18 March 2024	In-person roundtable discussions with people with lived experience of accessing SEND support (one in Woking and one in Reigate in school hours, one online in evening)	TG, SO, FVS Support from CFLL Officer(s) to facilitate (UVP and/or co-production officer)
w/c 22 April 2024	Witness sessions with Council's educational partners	TG, SO
w/c 29 April 2024	Witness session with Council Officers	TG, SO
May 2024	Workshop with Task Group Members to identify potential recommendations	TG, SO
May w/c 3&10 June	Compile report Report sign-off	SO, TG Chairman
27 June 2024 (Publish 18 June)	Report back to Select Committee	TG spokesperson
10 July 2024	Recommendations presented at 23 July Cabinet meeting	TG spokesperson

Potential Witnesses

1.

Parents/carers (to include a range of those with an EHCP issued, those who received no to issue, those who are awaiting a decision and those with SEN Support who have not made an EHCP application, with a mix of nursery/primary/secondary ages)

2.

SENCOs across all sectors

CEO of Learning Partners Academy Trust/Academies Learning Trust MAT and Chair of Schools Forum

Vice-Chair of Schools Forum and Joint Primary Phase Lead (maintained school lead)

Executive Principal at The Howard Partnership Trust MAT and Co-Chair of Secondary Phase Council

Specialist School Phase Lead (maintained)

Early Years Phase Council lead (maintained nursery)

Community school lead from SCC's Inclusion & Innovation Working Group

3.

Executive Director for Children, Families and Lifelong Learning

Director for Education and Lifelong Learning

Associate Director – Inclusion and Additional Needs

SEND County Service Planning & Performance Leader – Recovery Plan

Project Manager – SEND

CFL Strategic Finance Business Partner

Cabinet Member for Children and Families, Lifelong Learning

Useful Documents

CFLL's annual parent carer survey

Cohort reports of ATLAS discussions

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

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

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

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

(Ofsted and CQC inspection of statutory partners Surrey County Council, NHS Surrey Heartlands Integrated Care Board (ICB) and NHS Frimley ICB)

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

[SEND Code of Practice](#)

[Community Vision for Surrey in 2030](#)

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

[Surrey Local Offer website](#)

[DfE Dedicated Schools Grant 'Safety Valve' Agreement: Surrey \(March 2022\)](#)

Potential barriers to success (Risks / Dependencies)

Member and Officer availability
Engagement amongst parents and carers
Time availability of school staff

Equalities implications

The services within the scope of this Task and Finish Group will provide support to residents with 'protected characteristics', as defined by The Equality Act 2010, many of whom have complex levels of need and support.

Task Group Members	Jonathan Essex Bob Hughes Mark Sugden Jeremy Webster
Co-opted Members	N/A
Spokesman for the Group	Jeremy Webster
Scrutiny Officer/s	Julie Armstrong