

Cabinet

8 November 2021

Dorset SEND Strategy 2021 - 2024

For Decision

Portfolio Holder: Cllr A Parry, Children, Education, Skills and Early Help

Local Councillor(s): All

Executive Director: T Leavy, Executive Director of People - Children

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Report Status: Public

Recommendation: That the Committee note and approve the revised Dorset Strategy for children and young people (CYP) with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) and the accompanying High Needs Block Management Strategy.

Reason for Recommendation:

Our SEND strategy has been updated to reflect the significant progress and changes in Dorset's SEND services over the last three years. The previous strategy which was launched in 2018 is due to expire and as a Council it is the right time to refresh this in light of the significant progress that has been made with our partners.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 This is a refreshed strategy for Dorset's SEND services. The previous strategy was launched in 2018 with a supporting three-year timeline which is due to expire this year. The Local Authority and its strategic partners are currently awaiting the findings of the national SEND review and these

will be discussed across the partnership so that any significant changes can be incorporated into this strategy as required.

1.2 Our SEND strategy has been updated to reflect the significant progress and changes in Dorset's SEND services over the last three years. As this is a Dorset wide strategy, the document has been co-authored by Local Authority Officers and Officers from Dorset's Clinical Commissioning Group. Most importantly, in order to ensure that the views of our children, parents and carers with SEND are at the heart of our strategic intent we have worked closely with our Dorset Parent Carer Council (DPCC) throughout the creation of this strategy, this has ensured that the views of parents and families it supports were taken into consideration for the key priority areas and associated actions. Our strategic priorities have also been created taking into consideration feedback from the Dorset wide Parent Carer Survey for our SEND families which was carried out earlier this year.

1.3 Our vision for our SEND children is:

“We want our children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) to be healthy, happy and safe, and able to achieve their potential to lead a fulfilling life. We want them to have, and to expect, the same opportunities in life as other children and young people.”

This vision is within the context of Dorset's Children's and Young People's plan 2020-25, which sets out that:

- We want Dorset to be the best place to be a child, where communities thrive and where our families are supported to be the best they can be. Our partnership has a bold and courageous vision to deliver the best education for all our children and young people;
- To prepare our young people for independence (adulthood); and
- For our children and young people to experience the best possible health and wellbeing.

1.4 The Dorset SEND Strategy has six clear priority areas for attention. Each priority has associated supporting actions, these actions, in the first instance, are focused on the first year of delivery and will be reviewed each quarter through the Best Education for All Governance structures.

The six strategic priorities are:

1. Early Identification and Support;
2. Inclusion;
3. SEND Pathway;
4. SEND Sufficiency and Provision;
5. Transitions and Preparation for Adulthood and;
6. Managing Money and Resources.

For each of these priority areas the strategic plan sets out a vision, intended outcomes and associated actions for the partnership to deliver against.

- 1.5 The SEND Strategy focuses on improving outcomes for children and young people and to achieve financial sustainability. The strategy proposes to achieve the shift in focus of support for children and young people with special educational needs and disability to an earlier intervention and support stage and reduce our reliance on high cost placements in the non-maintained and independent sector, keeping our children in Dorset and in mainstream provision as much as possible.
- 1.6 **Governance and Accountability of Progress of the Strategy** Between 23 January and 27 January 2017, Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) conducted a joint inspection of the Dorset local area to judge its effectiveness in implementing the special educational needs and disability (SEND) reforms set out in the Children and Families Act 2014. As a result of the findings of the inspection, Her Majesty's Chief Inspector (HMCI) determined that a Written Statement of Action was required to address four areas of significant weakness in the local area's practice. The former Dorset County Council (DCC) and the NHS Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) are jointly responsible for submitting the written statement.
- 1.7 As part of Ofsted's revisit in February 2019, inspectors were of the opinion that local area had made sufficient progress in two of the four areas identified, however the local area had not made sufficient progress to improve the two remaining areas of weaknesses and sustained the Written Statement of Action.

The Department for Education met with the Local Area the on 11 January 2021 to discuss progress against the Local Area's Accelerated Progress Plan. In response to the progress made by the Local Area, the Department for Education stated that:

- “We are reassured that the strength and commitment of current leaders within the LA and CCG will continue improvements across the SEND system throughout Dorset.”
- “Based on the evidence provided, the Department and NHS England have concluded that you have demonstrated clear and sustained progress. This means that Dorset no longer requires formal monitoring of its SEND system.”

1.8 The consensus of the Department for Education’s view with that of the Local Area’s own self-assessment of the progress made since monitoring began, demonstrates the strength and commitment of the local area leadership to continue improvements across the SEND system throughout Dorset.

Progress against the delivery of this new strategy will be reviewed on a quarterly basis through the Dorset Best Education for All (BEFA) group. This is a multi-agency group and is a sub-group of the Strategic Alliance Group for Dorset. The Strategic Alliance Group is responsible for the delivery of the Children and Young People’s Partnership Plan (2021-25).

2. Financial Implications

2.1 The Dorset’s High Needs Block Management Strategy sets out our strategy for change to support bringing the budget into balance and balancing of the deficit over time, but also to ensure that the funding we are providing to our schools is appropriate for their needs in educating our children and young people with SEND.

The management strategy sets out our position and proposals for:

- resourced provisions attached to mainstream schools (for both the expansion and the funding of them),
- our proposals for changes in alternative provision within our learning centres (numbers commissioned and funding)
- our commitment to reduce places at non-maintained and independent specialist provision through the creation of more specialist places within our own schools.
- the expansion of places in schools through the DfE free schools capital programme (The Harbour School and Osprey Quay site) and at the former St Marys school site.
- our commitment to support expansion of programmes to enable young people with SEND to gain post 16 qualifications to enable them to

prepare for adulthood through greater independence and employment, again at settings closer to home.

- 2.2 This strategy has been presented to the High Needs Subgroup of the Dorset Schools' Forum and will be presented for endorsement by the full Schools Forum on 5 November 2021. The High Needs Subgroup welcomed the report, its range and the overarching nature of it. The strategy will remain under review by the Council and Schools Forum to both monitor progress but also consider new initiatives to improve the financial position.
- 2.3 We have also commenced consultation with the existing resourced provision schools and separately with the learning centres and are currently listening to their feedback. This may result in adjustments to the proposals set out in this document but remains a key priority for the Council to ensure it can expand places and meet the needs of children with SEND in mainstream settings in their communities.
- 2.4 The High Needs Block Management Strategy sits alongside the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Strategy for 2020 to 2025 approved by Cabinet in December 2020 in which funding was set aside to enable the expansion of local provision to support our management of the revenue funding for children and young people with SEND.
- 2.5 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for 2021-22 for Dorset is £280.2m this is the money we receive to support Education in Dorset. The DSG comprises four blocks of grant:
 1. The Schools Block which is funding for mainstream schools;
 2. the Early Years Block which is funding for 3 and 4 year olds and the 40% most deprived 2 year olds entitlement to 15 or 30 hours of free nursery education;
 3. the High Needs Block, which for 2021-22 is £42.3m for pupils with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities; and
 4. the Central Schools Service Block which provides funding of some local authority services for schools to support maintained schools.

3. Well-being and Health Implications

- 3.1 Emotional health and wellbeing of children and young people with SEND is a priority for our services. Colleagues from across Adults and Public Health have been engaged with this document and will form part of the governance structures in order to review progress against the strategy. The actions within the strategy also link to further developing our transition work with Adults for our young people with SEND and these are detailed within the strategic approach.

4. Climate implications

No climate implications have been identified in this report.

5. Other Implications

No other implications have been identified.

6. Risk Assessment

Having considered the risks associated with this decision, the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

- 6.1 The key risks associated with the strategy remain the significant financial deficit in the High Needs Block which is set out in Appendix 2. Much focus and progress has been made to mitigate this risk.
- 6.2 The High Needs Block has been overspending for five years. As at 2020-21 the cumulative deficit totalled £39.1m, and this was held in the accounts as a negative reserve, in accordance with The Local Authorities (Capital Finance and Accounting) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2020.
- 6.3 The current statutory instrument that allows the deficit to be held as a negative reserve is scheduled to end in 2022-23, meaning that from April 2023 responsibility for accounting for and funding the deficit will transfer to Dorset Council. It is important to note that this policy position is the case for all local authorities incurring a high needs block deficit.

This scenario has brought a continued focus and urgency to the implementation of the High Needs Block management strategy.

7. Equalities Impact Assessment

The Equalities Impact Assessment is attached to this report in Appendix 3.

8. Appendices

Appendix 1 – Dorset SEND Strategy 2021 – 2024

Appendix 2 – High Needs Block Management Strategy

Appendix 3 – Dorset SEND Strategy EQIA

9. Background Papers

None

Footnote:

Issues relating to financial, legal, environmental, economic and equalities implications have been considered and any information relevant to the decision is included within the report.