

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

7th March 2024

SEND Delivery Strategy

For Review and Consultation

Portfolio Holder: Cllr B Quayle, 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

Brief Summary: This paper provides an update on the SEND Capital Strategy within the broader context of the SEND Strategy.

Recommendation:

Our current SEND Strategy is due for formal review this year. We are clear on where we have made good progress for children and young people and where we need to strengthen practice overall. The SEND Capital Strategy is key to delivering our priorities and in meeting the needs of our children and young people. This paper offers a high-level overview of the delivery of our SEND Strategy and the SEND Capital Strategy.

It is recommended that:

- members consider progress made and provide support and challenge to our ongoing work for children and young people with additional needs.

Reason for Recommendation:

The number of children and young people requiring SEND support continues to increase. Since 2022 there has been a national increase of pupils in schools with

education health and care needs of 9.5% and a 4.7% increase in children and young people requiring Special Educational Needs support. In Dorset, 4.8% of our children have an Education Health and Care Plan, compared to 4.4% in 2022.

It is imperative that our local area partnership strategy and our council capital strategy continues to deliver for children and young people needing additional support and specialist provision to realise our ambition for our children and young people to have the best start in life.

1. **Background**

HM's Government's Special Educational Needs (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Improvement Plan (March 2023) has highlighted the need for comprehensive improvement in services for our children and families, to ensure they can access the right help, in the right place and at the right time. Meeting needs closer to home means less education travel required, which reduces the impact SEND has on climate change.

Our Dorset SEND strategy has upheld this ambition since 2020 and we have made good progress as a partnership, in meeting the needs of our children and families. There remains more to do, not least because many of our children have been adversely impacted by the pandemic and the cost-of-living crisis, which can be particularly problematic for families with a child with additional needs.

Our SEND Strategy priorities 2020 – 2024:

- Early Identification and Support
- Inclusion
- SEND Pathway
- SEND Provision and Sufficiency
- Transitions and Preparations for Adulthood
- Managing Money and Resources

The need for continued effort in all priorities is broadly agreed across the partnership, with good progress made in each area.

1.1 **Partnership**

The wellbeing of our children and young people is reliant on effective working relationships. We have a strong approach with jointly commissioned posts and combined workforce development. We also have a framework that supports our commitment to working together.

Through recent changes in the integrated health system, we have sustained effective relationships to enable continuity in key elements of our strategy.

Dorset Council also provides leadership to SEND in the region and hosts the Southwest Regional SEND Coordinator, Dr Vikki Jervis. This enables best practice to be shared within the Southwest and a local approach to some national challenges and those unique to our region.

Our partnership is deeply committed to co-production of services with our children, young people and families and we continue to commission independent advocacy for families through Dorset SEN and Disability, Information and Advice Service (SENDIASS).

We work together to understand the needs of local children, young people and their families, so that we can commission and provide services that are inclusive and make a positive difference.

1.2 **Governance**

Our partnership work is now overseen by our SEND Partnership Board which had its inaugural meeting in summer 2023. The board has membership from across the partnership to enable mutual accountability. The board also reports to the Dorset Education Board. When appropriate, there is additional oversight through the Strengthening Services Board.

1.3 **Early Identification and Support**

Our partnership commitment to *Early Identification and Support* has enabled early and timely support for many children and young people. Our multi-disciplinary locality teams and commitment to providing early help has enabled us to offer support at an early point, with positive impact on children and families.

There is an increasing number of requests for children for an Education Health and Care Needs Assessment. This assessment helps the local authority decide whether we should issue an Education Health and Care Plan.

Our track record for meeting the 6-week deadline of deciding whether to issue a plan is consistently strong and better than regional and national performance.

Our panels that enable decisions to be made in a timely way and authorise spend within the Scheme of Delegation include membership from Dorset Council and the NHS. We are also introducing education settings to decision making panels.

The SEND Partnership Board has provided support and challenge to the partnership, seeking further work on meeting needs early, to include strengthening the offer for babies and children under five and ensuring that children awaiting diagnosis are provided with earlier support. There are initiatives such as “Waiting Well” that are proving to make a difference to families in other areas, and therefore we support these being developed in Dorset.

1.4 **Inclusion**

We also wish to continue the work we have undertaken to improve children and young people’s experiences of *Inclusion*. Our summer conferences on the theme of “Belonging” last summer provided a clear mandate for nurturing a sense of belonging in communities and in educational settings, with guest speakers detailing their own lived experience of how a system can enable belonging to enhance learning and emotional wellbeing.

Mary Myatt gave a keynote speech on the importance of an aspirational curriculum for all children, including those with SEND. In Dorset, academic outcomes for children with SEND is broadly positive. In Key stages 1 and 2, outcomes for CYP with SEND are continuing to improve and sit generally above average levels when compared to national data.

We know that we need to improve outcomes in Writing and Maths at KS2 for children and young people with SEND and their peers.

We have worked closely with our schools to promote belonging and inclusion. Our officers have facilitated collaborative workshops in each locality, to consider ways of meeting increasing needs for our children whilst reducing spend in the High Needs Block. More schools have offered to host Inclusion Hubs because of this work. Having local provision in

inclusion hubs means that children do not have to travel so far and so reduces the impact on the climate in Dorset and beyond.

Our Local Alliance Groups have each held a fund of £100,000 from general funds to support local projects that promote and facilitate inclusion, in its broadest sense. This has enabled innovative projects for communities, often with schools and settings as lead partners. This has led to projects such as walking buses in Weymouth, family cooking sessions, and an improved learning environment at Dorchester Hospital School. This fund will continue next year due to the evidence of positive impact made.

We are exploring ways of developing good quality provision in each area, that will enable our ambition for children and young people, where appropriate, to attend their local setting, close to home. This work is being reported into Schools Forum and the SEND Partnership Board to ensure transparency and robust oversight of the projects emerging from this collaboration. Measures have also been agreed to ensure we track impact on children and families as well as on spend. Reducing travel times, travel cost and environmental and climate impact are also achieved with this approach.

1.5 **SEND Pathway**

We have developed and refined our *SEND Pathway* for children and young people, to ensure help can be accessed at the right time and in the right place. Our leadership of the review of Child Adolescent and Mental Health Services (CAMHS) will enable swifter access to services through our integrated front door, for example. There is now more Mental Health in Schools support and this continues to grow.

We feel this will be further bolstered through the enhanced staffing in our locality teams, to include additional youth workers who will be working closely with schools and our enhanced front door to include the Dorset Education Advice Line.

We have also ensured our officers can focus on Education Health and Care Plan (EHCPs) and the Annual Reviews that are instrumental in celebrating children's achievements and ensuring they have the right provision.

Our partnership working is further strengthened by current transformation programmes including the Speech, Language and Communication Needs Service and the All-age Neuro-developmental Review.

1.6 **SEND Provision and Sufficiency**

Our priority for increasing *SEND Provision and Sufficiency* has enabled 809 places to be considered for development. Of these, 579 are being delivered by Dorset Council and 230 are being delivered by the Department for Education.

We anticipate that in ensuring there are contingencies, we will achieve a better range of provision in Dorset, fit to meet the emerging and changing needs of our children and young people. These are the places agreed through the £40 million authorised through Cabinet, and further places to enhance inclusion in our settings and develop higher quality provision.

Of the 500 agreed as part of the Safety Valve, 281 places have been delivered. These are at The Harbour School, Coombe House School, Ferndown Upper School, Gillingham School, St Mary's Bridport, Yewstock, Beaucroft, Westfield and Bincombe Valley.

We expect to deliver the full 500 required by the Safety Valve by academic year 2024/25. This includes the Department for Education free school at Osprey Quay, which has experienced delays but is now expected to be delivered by September 2025.

The SEND programme goes further than the Safety Valve requirements of 500 places, to have 809 additional places in train across Dorset. The impact of having more local places in inclusion hubs as well as increasing special schools in areas of high need, will reduce the impact of SEND on the climate.

To help realise our partnership ambition for even more inclusion hubs and better learning environments, we submitted a bid for capital funding from the Department for Education, for £13.6 million, for 116 places in January 2024.

1.7 **Transitions and Preparations for Adulthood**

This priority is largely managed and planned through the Birth to Settled Adulthood Programme, that has provided separate reports to committee.

We have a good opportunity to enhance education provision in our further education settings through the merger of Weymouth College and Kingston Maurward. Weymouth College manage a range of programmes that young people with SEND benefit from, including an outreach programme and dedicated provision at the college.

Kingston Maurward has a designated Higher Education base that could potentially be developed further to reach more students and offer exciting higher education options within our county.

We want to enhance skills and increase the employment opportunities for our young people with additional needs. Dorset currently sees a higher proportion of our young people remaining in education than in other similar local authorities and we would like to broaden the range of opportunities young people can pursue as they move into independence and adult life.

1.8 Managing Money and Resources

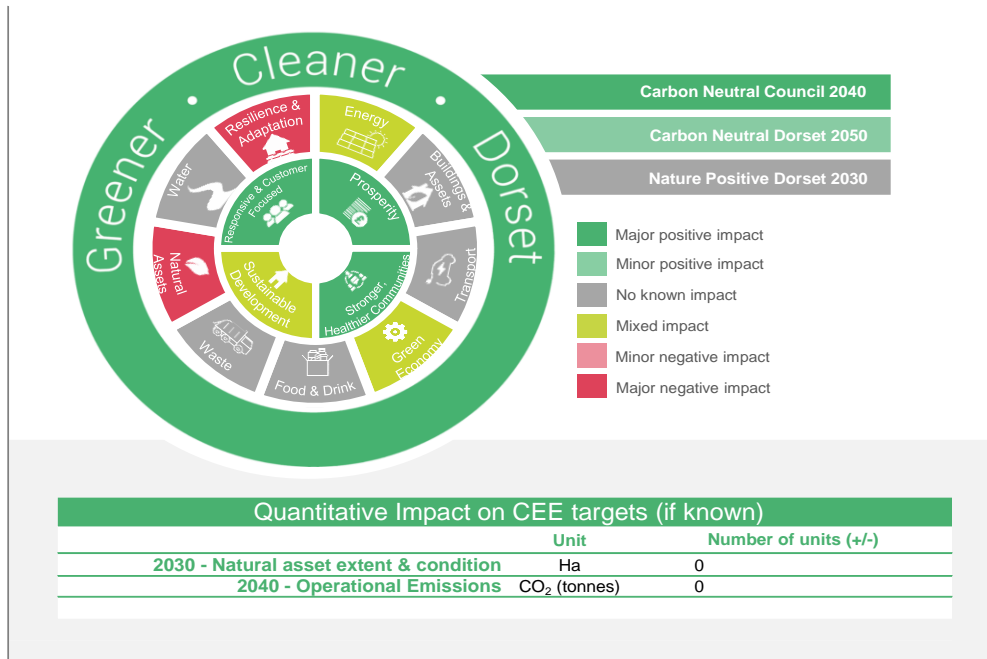
This priority remains a challenge within a broader context of our schools being some of the lowest funded in the country and the national increase in SEND related costs for local authorities. However, our deep collaboration with our settings and the combination of robust financial management, savings realised through our transformation projects and investment through the Families First for Children Pathfinder and Family Hubs has enabled us to remain steady and enhance our early support to families.

The Department for Education and IMPOWER (independent consultants with specialism in SEND) have stated that our plans to reduce spend are suitably ambitious and detailed. IMPOWER have provided support to our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators in schools in the West of the county and are now working with schools in the East to expand the successful approaches to supporting children and families at an early point.

2. Financial Implications

There are no new financial implications for the council as capital funding was previously agreed to support the projects described. Our bid to the Department for Education will enable further growth in specialist places if we are successful.

3. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications



Please see SEND Capital Strategy 2020 – 2025 (Appendix 2) to see detail on capital builds.

The impact of having more provision and more *local* provision, will impact on the travel needed to access these places and so reduce the impact on the environment.

In the development of each project environmental and climate impact is considered. For example, pursuing new build options over remodelling and refurbishment means that the future impact of the building is minimised and the use of renewable sources of energy can be included. With new build it is easier to minimise future energy consumption by the building and its operation.

The impact of constructing new build can be mitigated by adopting Modern Methods of Construction and off-site approaches that improve the quality of the completed building and reduce environmental and climate impact.

4. Well-being and Health Implications

The purpose of the SEND Strategy is to enhance the health and wellbeing of our residents and to ensure their needs are met, wherever possible, within our county and close to home.

5. Other Implications

None

6. **Risk Assessment**

6.1 HAVING CONSIDERED: the risks associated with this decision; the level of risk has been identified as:

Current Risk: LOW

Residual Risk: LOW

7. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

The purpose of the SEND strategy is to have a positive impact on our residents and to enhance equity and equality.

8. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – SEND Strategy 2020 - 2024

Appendix 2 – SEND Capital Strategy 2020 - 2025

9. **Background Papers**

[Partnership Framework](#)

[Children, Young People and Families Plan 2023 – 2033](#)

[The SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Plan](#)

10. **Report Sign Off**

11.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Executive Director for Corporate Development (Section 151 Officer) and the appropriate Portfolio Holder(s)