

# People and Health Scrutiny Committee

## SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) Strategy

24 October 2024

### For Review and Consultation

**Cabinet Member and Portfolio:**

Cllr. C Sutton, Children's Services, Education & Skills

**Local Councillor(s):**

All

**Executive Director:**

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People – Children

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**Report Status:** Public (the exemption paragraph is N/A)

**Brief Summary:** This report provides an overview of the updated SEND Strategy and our delivery plan.

**Recommendation:** That committee provides oversight and scrutiny of the Strategy.

**Reason for Recommendation:** This will enable us to assure members and the council that we have a robust strategy to provide good outcomes for children and young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This is within a challenging national context.

## **1. Partnership and Governance Arrangements**

- 1.1. The Local Area SEND Strategy describes the outcomes we are seeking for our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families and describes the activity we undertake to achieve our aims. This is underpinned by a detailed plan that is regularly monitored and reviewed by officers across the partnerships.
- 1.2. This activity is overseen by the Dorset SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board, which monitors performance and impact and provides support and challenge to the partnership.
- 1.3. The most recent 3-year strategy was set out in 2021, to be reviewed in 2024. This paper provides the opportunity to scrutinise the revised strategy and plan as part of broader oversight of education in Dorset.
- 1.4. The strategy has been coproduced by the local area partnership. An agreed framework across the Dorset Council area was developed for all key strategic partners (see background papers) and this enables us to hold each other to account for delivery of our strategy and plan.
- 1.5. Our partnership ensures that children, young people and their families have ongoing opportunity to meaningfully participate in decisions that affect them. Key officers across the partnership 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 supportive, always keeping children and young people at the heart of all we do.
- 1.6. Our strategic partners are Dorset Council, NHS Dorset Integrated Care Board, and the Dorset Parent Carer Council. Collectively, we are ambitious for our children and young people with SEND and committed to providing and the best education and care, supporting good life outcomes.
- 1.7. In addition, Dorset Council commissions an advisory service to support parents and carers and professionals; Dorset Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Advice Service (Dorset SENDIASS). Every local authority provides such a service.

## **2. How we created and revised our strategy**

- 2.1. We have been working with our partners to review and update the strategy, considering the outcome from our last Ofsted and CQC Inspection and a range of other data and intelligence

- 2.2. A broad range of activity has been undertaken to ensure the voices of children and young people are at the heart of our strategy, including the voices of children in a range of settings and living within a variety of different contexts, including children in care or care experienced, children who are educated at home, and young carers, for example.
- 2.3. We have also taken on board the results of the parent/carer survey in 2023, as well as ongoing qualitative and quantitative data that informs us about the lived experiences of children and families.
- 2.4. We were Inspected by Ofsted and the Care Quality Commission (CQC) in March 2024. Inspectors found that children and families experiences were ‘typically positive’, the highest level of outcome that can be achieved. We feel this offers us a clear mandate for our strategy and enables us to strengthen it further, to achieve even better outcomes for more children.
- 2.5. Whilst the detail of activity has been updated, it has been agreed that our current areas of priority are still the right areas of focus and form the structure of the revised strategy.
- 2.6. These 6 priority areas are:
  - a) Early Identification – we identify need early and put in plans to support
  - b) Inclusion – our children and young people feel like they belong at home, at school and in their community
  - c) SEND Pathway – everyone understands what services are available and how to access them
  - d) Next Steps and Preparation for Adulthood – young people move into adulthood successfully with the right support
  - e) Sufficiency and Provision – we have access to enough resources to meet need
  - f) Managing Money and Resources – we spend our money sensibly to meet need
- 2.7. The updated SEND Strategy covers the period between 2024 and 2027, alongside Dorset’s Education Strategy (linked as a background paper). The SEND Strategy is attached as Appendix 1.

### 3. **The National Context**

- 3.1. The Local Government Association recently commissioned a report that calls for a national review of the SEND system and asserts that it is

fundamentally broken (see Background Papers). The report cites increasing costs, increasing need and complexity of need as well as unintended consequences of curriculum policy and Ofsted inspection framework for schools as causal factors. It asserts that outcomes for children and young people have not been helped by well-meaning legislation.

- 3.2. Many local authorities are experiencing budget pressures in the High Needs Block and Dorset is not alone in being faced with the challenges as described in the report mentioned above.
- 3.3. We are proud of the findings of Ofsted and CQC and remain highly ambitious for all children and families. We recognise that reform of the SEND system is highly likely and anticipate that this will take time to design and implement. Therefore, it remains imperative that we continue to develop and deliver best practice across the partnership.

#### 4. **Financial Implications**

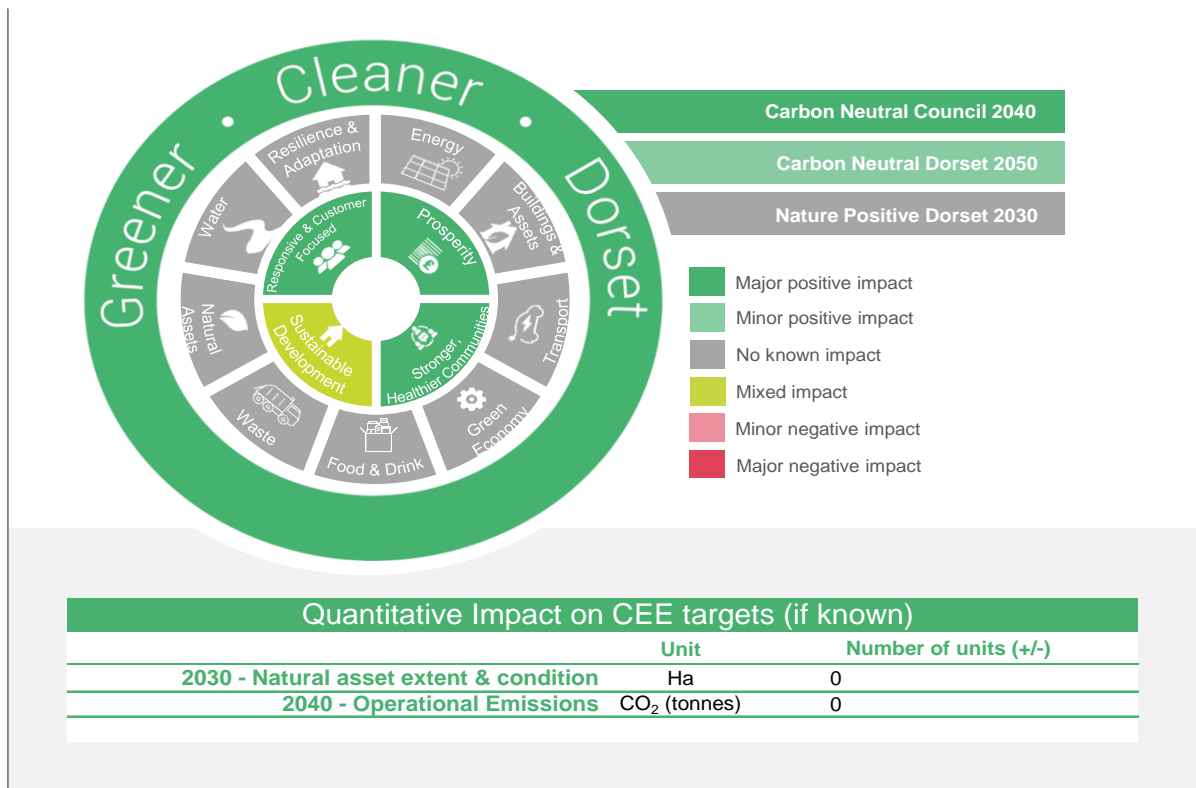
- 4.1. There are no significant financial implications to general funds as the actions we have proposed are predominantly met through the High Needs Block, a block within the ring-fenced Dedicated Schools Block (DSB). As described above, this is an area of national challenge and concern. We believe our robust plan will deliver better value for money in the longer term, whilst supporting even better outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.2. Dorset is one of 38 Local Authorities in the DfE 'Safety Valve' programme demonstrating this is a national challenge. The Society of County Treasurers (SCT) conducts regular analyses of council high needs block deficits and the results of their most recent survey, undertaken in March 2022 show that the total deficit facing those councils that responded stands at £1.36 billion, rising to £2.6 billion in 2024/25. Extrapolating those figures for all councils gives an estimated deficit of £1.9 billion in March 2022, rising to £3.6 billion by 2025.
- 4.3. The 'Safety Valve' is a DfE programme where the local authority has agreed to develop a revised DSB Deficit management plan to achieve a sustainable financial position for the DSB budget, particularly the High Needs Block. In return, the DfE will provide the local authority with additional funds as set out in the published plan. Agreements run for around five years
- 4.4. Dorset Council signed a £42m 'Safety Valve' agreement with the Department for Education in March 2022 to help eradicate the cumulative DSB deficit and support a return to a balanced in-year DSB position by

2026-27. Dorset Council will contribute £33m as part of the agreement. Additionally, Dorset are investing £47m into capital schemes across the county.

- 4.5 Despite significant operational improvement, Dorset is not on track to meet the financial position stated in the original 'Safety Valve' agreement. Dorset have therefore submitted a revised recovery plan. This recovery plan is part of the Council's Enhanced Monitoring and Support programme and is supported by DfE advisors and has involved independent external scrutiny. This work seeks to identify a revised future year HNB break-even point and therefore cumulative deficit position.
- 4.6 The SEND strategy seeks to help rebalance the financial position through delivering better value for money and improved outcomes for children and young people.
- 4.7 However, this is only part of the financial solution; national reform, for example as described in the ISOS report referenced in the background papers, is required to deliver full financial stability.

**5. Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Implications**

5.1. There are no significant implications



## 6. **Well-being and Health Implications**

- 6.1 The outcomes within the Strategy are explicitly designed to have a positive impact on wellbeing and health, particularly for children, young people, and families with SEND.

## 7. **Other Implications**

- 7.1 None

## 8. **Risk Assessment**

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

Current Risk: Low

Residual Risk: Low

## 9. **Equalities Impact Assessment**

- 9.1 The recommendations and actions seek to support and enhance equality and equity for children and young people with SEND and their families.

## 10. **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Dorset Local Area SEND Strategy 2024-2027

## 11. **Background Papers**

- [Local Offer - You said, we did 2023 - Dorset Council](#)
- [Partnership Framework](#)
- [ISOS Report](#)
- [\(Public Pack\)Agenda Document for Cabinet, 11/06/2024 18:30 \(dorsetcouncil.gov.uk\)](#)
- [Education Strategy 2024 to 2027 - Dorset Council](#)

## 12. **Report Sign Off**

- 12.1 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)