

People and Health Scrutiny Committee

16 April 2026

EHCP Working Group – Final Report and Recommendations

For Recommendation to Cabinet

Cabinet Member:

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

Local Councillor(s):

All

Senior Leadership Team:

P Dempsey, Executive Director of People - Children

Report author and job title:

Cllr Toni Coombs, Chairman of People and Health Scrutiny Committee

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Statutory Authority: Local Government Act 2000

Report status: Public Choose an item.

1. **Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)**

- 1.1 This report outlines the work of the People & Health Scrutiny Committee's working group on Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP's) chaired by Cllr Toni Coombs. The working group has completed its inquiry and made a final inquiry report setting out its findings and recommendations. The working group is seeking support from the full People and Health Scrutiny Committee to agree its final report and recommendations.

2. **Recommendation(s)**

- 2.1 To consider the final report of the working group and to agree the recommendations to Cabinet.

3. **Reason for the recommendation(s)**

- 3.1 For the committee to support the recommendations of its working group and to enable Cabinet to respond to the recommendations.

4. The report

- 4.1 The People and Health Scrutiny Committee established a working group at their meeting on 24 October 2024, following a discussion on the revised SEND Strategy for 2024 – 2027.
- 4.2 The working group was established to address the committee's concerns with EHCP's in the form of an inquiry day. The concerns raised by committee members included:
- i. That the council was failing some children by not meeting the deadlines required to provide EHCP assessments.
 - ii. There were delays in diagnosis from health partners. Therefore, health partners should be involved in an enquiry day.
 - iii. The time taken for a support package to be put into place, and the targets for this.
 - iv. Ofsted has recommended that data needed to be used more effectively to improve outcomes through the SEND Inclusion and Partnership Board
 - v. The 20-week period for EHCP's was not being met and this was not a priority for improvement.
- 4.3 The working group produced a scope for the review and considered the need to involve a wide range of witnesses during the review. Witnesses included Dorset Council officers, NHS Dorset employees, SENCO's and school representatives, and parents and carers. The full list of witnesses for the Inquiry Day can be found in Appendix 2 and further details of witnesses are included in the final inquiry report.
- 4.4 Key sessions for the scrutiny inquiry took place on the following dates:
- 12 May 2025 – EHCP Inquiry Day
- 19 June 2025 – Inquiry Day summary report presented to People and Health Scrutiny Committee
- 21 November 2025 – Meeting with parents on lived-experiences of EHCP's
- 26 January 2026 – Meeting with NHS Dorset
- 4.5 Following each of the key sessions with witnesses, the group had follow-up sessions to consider the emerging themes, request any additional data or written information, and the next steps needed for the review.

- 4.6 The working group members have written a final inquiry report setting out their findings and 9 recommendations to Cabinet. The final inquiry report is attached as Appendix 1.

5. Alternative options considered

- 5.1 The working group have considered the findings of the inquiry and drafted the recommendations based upon their findings.

6. Legal considerations

- 6.1 The Local Government Act 2000 enables scrutiny committees to make recommendations to the council's executive and to responsible persons, which includes NHS organisations. The Act requires the executive to consider reports and recommendations from the scrutiny committee and for them to respond to recommendations indicating what (if any) the executive proposes to take.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The cumulative Dedicated Schools Grant deficit, at the 31 March 2025 was £95.63m (31 March 2024 the total was £59.6m) with a forecast cumulative deficit reaching £150.261m by 31 March 2026. A significant driver for the historic deficit in the High Needs Block is the continued rise in the number of children and young people who require an Education, Health, and Care Plan (EHCP).

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 There are no implications as a result of this report.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 The recommendations are designed to be able to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 No other implications identified.

11. Risk implications

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

12. Equalities

- 12.1 The recommendations in this report have not been equality impact assessed. The recommendations seek to enhance equality and equity for young people with SEND and their families.

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix 1 – Provision of EHCP Support Inquiry Final Report and Recommendations

Appendix 2 – Inquiry Day Timetable and Witnesses

14. Background papers

- 14.1 SEND Strategy and Progress report and the meeting minutes from the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 24 October 2024 - [Agenda for People and Health Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 24th October, 2024, 11.00 am - Dorset Council](#)
- 14.2 Inquiry Day update report and minutes from the People and Health Scrutiny Committee on 19 June 2025 - [Agenda for People and Health Scrutiny Committee on Thursday, 19th June, 2025, 10.00 am - Dorset Council](#)

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 As the EHCP Inquiry Report represents scrutiny findings and recommendations arrived at by members rather than officer advice it has not been through the officer internal report clearance process and signed off by the Director for Legal and Democratic (Monitoring Officer), the Corporate Director for Finance and Commercial (Section 151 Officer).