

Cabinet

23 June 2026

SEND Inclusion Hubs, Phase 2

For Decision

Cabinet Member:

Cllr R Biggs, Regeneration, Economic Growth & Strategic Assets

Local Councillor(s): All

Senior Leadership Team:

J Britton - Executive Director – Economy and Environment

Report author and job title:

Helen Heanes, Operational Assets Business Partner (Adults & Children)

Email: helen.heanes@dorsetcouncil.gov.uk

Statutory Authority:

Report status: Part Exempt Para 3

1. Executive summary (maximum of 500 words)

- 1.1 Dorset Council will be able to receive a High Needs Stability Grant in 2026/27 covering up to 90% of its eligible high needs related Dedicated School's Grant (DSG) deficit accrued up to the end of 2025/26, provided the Council secures approval for the Local SEND Reform Plan from the Department for Education (DfE) and evidences delivery against the Reform Plan. SEND Inclusion Hubs form a key part of the Council's SEND Reform Plan and Implementation Plan.
- 1.2 SEND Inclusion Hubs combine specialist teaching, adapted curriculum pathways and high-intensity support with continued participation in a mainstream school community. This model strengthens outcomes academically, socially and emotionally, reduces escalation to more restrictive placements, and aligns strongly with Dorset's Belonging Strategy and the national SEND reform agenda, which promotes early, local, effective and shared responses to need.
- 1.3 Approval and Delegated Authority is sought to proceed with an additional 6 Inclusion Hub projects in mainstream schools as part of the Council's Special

Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme. The details about these Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs are set out in the Business case at Appendix A.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 That the capital budget of £4.3 million and funding allocations to projects set out in the Business Case within Appendix A of this Cabinet Report dated 23 June 2026 be approved.
- 2.2 That authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Economy and Environment in consultation with the Executive Director, Children's Services, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, Economic Growth and Strategic Assets and Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education and, together with the Director Resources to procure and award contracts or release agreed funding to third parties delivering projects, for any Phase 2 Inclusion Hub as set out in the Business Case at Appendix A of this Cabinet Report, provided the project costs are contained within the programme budget.
- 2.3 That the High Needs Block revenue allocation of £2m per year recurrent, as set out in the Business Case within Appendix A of this Cabinet Report dated 23 June 2026 be approved. This has been factored into Dorset's High Needs Block SEND reform modelling. Inclusion Hub places are approximately £19.5k per annum compared with an independent placement in the region of £64k per annum.
- 2.4 That authority be delegated to the Executive Director, Children's Services, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education and the Director, Resources to release high needs revenue funding to third parties operating any Phase 2 Inclusion Hub as set out in the Business Case at Appendix A of this Cabinet Report, provided the funds are within the high needs revenue allocation.

3. Reason for the recommendation(s)

- 3.1 To ensure that the projects can move forward at pace, to provide cost savings and improve the sufficiency of SEND placements and support.
- 3.2 To ensure appropriate oversight and authority is in place to allow projects to progress through from inception to delivery.
- 3.3 To evidence delivery against the SEND Local Reform Plan.

4. The report

- 4.1 In September 2022 the SEND Capital Strategy Implementation Plan was agreed by Cabinet to enable the delivery of increased SEND specialist provision across the County. This was to support the mitigation of the deficit on the High Needs Block and support more children being educated locally in their communities. Since then, additional external funding has been allocated to the SEND Capital Programme through the Department for Education (DfE) High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA).
- 4.2 Following the SWAP report, a review of capital projects, decisions and delegation was undertaken in late 2025, with these being formalised in the November 2025 Cabinet Report entitled “Children’s Services Capital programme”, which included SEND Inclusion Hubs.
- 4.3 Inclusion Hubs combine specialist teaching, adapted curriculum pathways and high-intensity support with continued participation in a mainstream school community. This dual-offer model strengthens outcomes academically, socially and emotionally, reduces escalation to more restrictive placements, and aligns strongly with Dorset’s Belonging Strategy and the national SEND reform agenda, which promotes early, local, effective and shared responses to need.
- 4.4 Phases 2 and 3 of the Inclusion Hub programme forms part of Dorset Council’s Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Capital Programme, which includes the DfE’s HNPCA. These Phases form a key part of the Council’s SEND Reform Plan and Implementation Plan. This report relates to the Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs, within mainstream schools as detailed in the Business Case at Appendix A, which has been reviewed by Capital Strategy Asset Management Group.
- 4.5 All local authorities with a Dedicated School’s Grant (DSG) deficit will be able to receive a High Needs Stability Grant in 2026/27 covering up to 90% of their eligible high needs related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025/26, provided the local authority secures approval from the Department for Education for their Local SEND Reform Plan. If the Local SEND Reform Plan does not provide sufficient evidence of working towards the agreed outcomes as set out in Government’s Memorandum of Understanding for HNPCA, then the Council’s will have their HNPCA withheld or reduced under future year grant conditions.

5. **Alternative options considered**

- 5.1 The Council's SEND Reform Plan has considered what are the most appropriate ways to address the SEND situation in Dorset. Inclusion Hubs form a successful, tried and tested part of SEND delivery in Dorset.
- 5.2 The development of Inclusion Hubs locally sits firmly within, and gives practical effect to, the national direction of travel set out in the SEND White Paper *Every Child Achieving and Thriving (2026)*. The White Paper is explicit in its ambition to shift the system away from over-reliance on statutory processes and high-cost specialist placements, towards stronger, well-resourced mainstream provision that can meet a wider range of needs earlier, more consistently and closer to home.
- 5.3 The decision on the preferred locations for the Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs is based on engagement between capital commissioning, pupil place planning and educational practice colleagues, to identify the best-fit locations, as set out in the Business Case at Appendix A.

6. **Legal considerations**

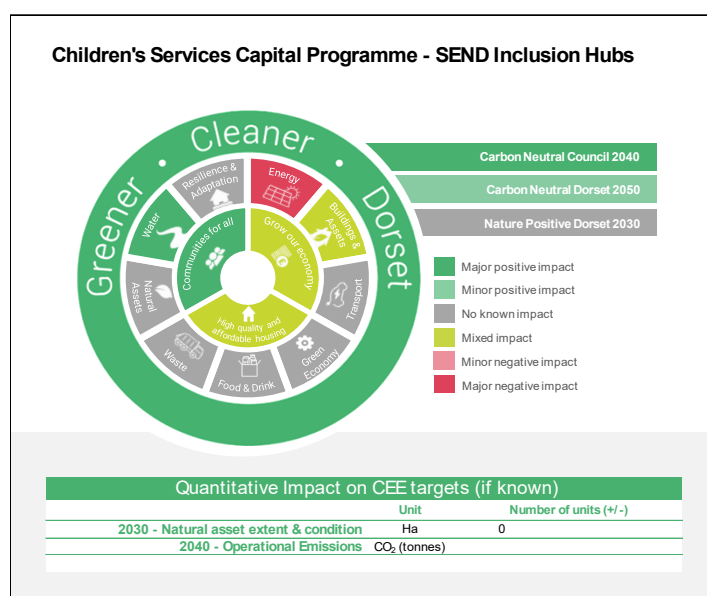
- 6.1 Additional funding to support the Council's SEND Capital Programme, comes from the High Needs Provision Capital Allocations (HNPCA). Dorset Council is the accountable body for HNPCA funding, with the Section 151 Officer required to sign off Capital Grant Assurance returns certifying spend to date, has provided good value and that it has been used for capital purposes.
- 6.2 Dorset Council (S151 Officer) has signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Department for Education (DfE) for the HNPCA for financial year 2026/27. The MoU agreement will be updated annually, in advance of payments being issued for the financial year in question. Local authorities that sign and return the MoU but fail to evidence the outcomes may not receive funding in future years or may receive a reduced level of funding.
- 6.3 The contractual arrangements with the individual Multi Academy Trusts, as responsible bodies, are set out in the Business case at Appendix A.

7. Financial implications

- 7.1 The Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs are to be funded from Dorset Council's SEND Capital Programme, which includes the 2026/27 HNPCA of £5,544,672. The MoU with Government links the outcomes and expectations of this funding to the Local SEND Reform Plan. Approval from DfE for the Local SEND Reform Plan will enable the Council to receive a High Needs Stability Grant in 2026/27 covering 90% of the eligible high needs related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025/26.
- 7.2 The high needs revenue financial case for the Phase 2 Inclusion Hubs is set out in the Business Case at Appendix 2. Details of the capital allocation for the Phase 2 Inclusion Hub projects are also provided in the Business Case.

8. Natural environment, climate & ecology implications

- 8.1 The Dorset Council Natural Environment, Climate and Ecological decision wheel is a tool used to identify the climate and ecological implications of the programmes. The results of using the tool in consideration of approving this paper are presented below:



- 8.2 All building projects contained within these programmes will be designed to carefully consider environmental impact, although mitigation measures may be limited as projects progress as they will involve refurbishment of existing buildings.

9. Well-being and health implications

- 9.1 All Well-being and health implications will be reviewed within the individual projects.

10. Other implications

- 10.1 None Identified.

11. Risk implications

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

Current Risk: Medium

Residual Risk: Medium

- 11.2 Phase 2 of the Inclusion Hubs programme is part of the Council's SEND Reform Plan, approval of which will enable the Council to receive a High Needs Stability Grant in 2026/27 covering 90% of the eligible high needs related DSG deficit accrued up to the end of 2025/26.
- 11.3 Capital funding is in place to support the Phase 2 of the SEND Inclusion Hubs programme. Delays in delivery could result in the outcomes required under MoU for HNPCA not being evidenced sufficiently. Local authorities that sign and return the MoU but fail to evidence the outcomes may not receive funding in future years or may receive a reduced level of funding.

12. Equalities

- 12.1 This proposal will increase the number of places available in specialist inclusion Hubs, located in mainstream schools, which are available to Dorset pupils, with the intention of reducing the number having to be placed outside the Council area and in independent special schools. An equalities impact assessment was completed as part of the original SEND Capital Strategy. Progression of projects will continue to improve the outcomes for children in schools, increase the number of SEND places available to Dorset pupils and support children and families in the community

13. Appendices

- 13.1 Appendix A: Business Case, SEND Inclusion Hubs, Phase 2 (Exempt)
- 13.2 Appendix B: Natural Environment Climate and Ecology Implications - Accessible Impact Assessment and Table of Recommendations

14. Background papers

- 14.1 Children's Services Capital Programme, Cabinet November 2025
- 14.2 SEND Capital Strategy Implementation Plan, Cabinet September 2022

15. Report sign-off

- 15.1 This report has been through the internal report clearance process and has been signed off by the Director Assurance and Governance, the Director Resources and the appropriate Portfolio Holders.

**Appendix A:
(Exempt)**

**Dorset Council Business Case
SEND Inclusion Hubs, Phase 2.**

Appendix B: Climate & Ecology,**Accessible Impact Assessment, and Table of Recommendations****ACCESSIBLE TABLE SHOWING IMPACTS**

Natural Environment, Climate & Ecology Strategy Commitments	Impact
Energy	major negative impact
Buildings & Assets	mixed impact
Transport	No known impact
Green Economy	No known impact
Food & Drink	No known impact
Waste	No known impact
Natural Assets & Ecology	No known impact
Water	major positive impact
Resilience and Adaptation	No known impact

Corporate Plan Aims	Impact
Grow our economy	neutral
High-quality and affordable housing	neutral
Communities for all	strongly supports it

TABLE OF RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations	Responses -will this be incorporated into your proposal? How? And if not, why not?
Energy	
Ensure all electrical equipment is the most energy efficient	
Maximise energy efficiency of the building fabric (e.g. Loft & wall insulation, triple glazing)	
Buildings & Assets	
No recommendations found for this category	
Transport	
No recommendations found for this category	
Green Economy	
No recommendations found for this category	

Food & Drink	
No recommendations found for this category	
Waste	
No recommendations found for this category	
Natural Assets & Ecology	
No recommendations found for this category	
Water	
No recommendations found for this category	
Resilience & Adaptation	
No recommendations found for this category	