

**Title:** Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27

**Date:** 06 March 2024

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**Job Title:** Head of SEND and Inclusion

**Scrutiny Panel:** Children and Young People Scrutiny Panel

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## Recommendation for action

### The Scrutiny Panel is recommended to:

1. Endorse the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-27 (appendix 1) and recommendations detailed in cabinet report (appendix 2).

### Questions for Scrutiny Panel to consider:

1. Scrutiny Panel are satisfied that the SEND and Inclusion Strategy consultation has been shared widely despite responses being low.
2. Scrutiny Panel feel that the pressures on the high needs block have explained more clearly.
3. Scrutiny Panel feel able to agree to sign off the current draft strategy.

## Purpose

This report responds to the queries raised by Councillors at the Children's and Young People's Scrutiny Panel held on 31.01.24, regarding the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027. The paper offers further explanation of the consultation process and the financial pressures as requested by the panel.

## Background

The strategy was presented to scrutiny on 31.01.2023 to share how the Local Authority and Partners of the SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board will fulfil their statutory duties for SEND in the Children and Families Act 2014 and the SEND Code of Practice to secure a continuum of provision and support for pupils aged 0-25 with SEND.

During this item matters were raised regarding the effectiveness of the co-production and consultation process, as well as the need for the panel to further understand the pressures on the High Needs Block. It was agreed that these items will be represented to Scrutiny prior to the strategy being adopted. It was also felt that the strategy was not sufficiently ambitious for children and young people with SEND. Terminology in the document has been amended to address this concern.

## Progress

### Co-production and public consultation

During 2022/23 Voice 4 Parents, (Wolverhampton's Parent Carer Forum) completed a parent/carer survey (appendix 3). The survey is completed independently from the Local Authority and Integrated Care Board; and focuses on the needs of children and young people with SEND living in the City of Wolverhampton. The survey ran for 3 months and closed December 2022. It was completed by 406 families.

In June to September 2023, a young people's questionnaire that was coproduced with HY5! was shared to look at the how children, young people and young adults with SEND feel about living within Wolverhampton. This ran for 3 months and closed in Sept 2023 and received 102 responses (appendix 4).

The survey results from both of the consultations were shared with the SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board. It was agreed at this time that the concerns raised within the results would set the basis of the new SEND & Inclusion Strategy.

Whilst the strategy has adopted the national 'priorities' as aligned with the SEND & Alternative Provision Improvement Plan, and the 'outcomes' aligned with that of the Areas SEND Inspection criteria; the areas of concern highlighted from the parent carer & young people's survey were used to identify the areas within the 'what needs to happen to achieve this' within each of the priority areas, and as such the concerns raised are firmly embedded within the strategy.

The Local Authority and Integrated Care Board worked closely with our strategic partners, V4P and HY5! to ensure that it responded to the concerns that had been raised. Whilst individual respondents' concerns were not added verbatim into the strategy, the themes were mapped against the issues raised, to ensure that these were reflected. V4P and HY5! gave their endorsement to these themes and have signed the strategy to confirm this. It was acknowledged that that the strategy offers only high-level themes and that a co-produced action plan will respond to the concerns raised in further detail, once the strategy has been agreed and adopted by all stakeholders.

The consultation questions that were developed for the public to respond to the SEND Strategy were taken from templates and adapted from other strategic consultations. These were then shared with the SEND & Inclusion Partnership Board for amendments and agreement prior to the consultation being undertaken between October and November 2023. The list of partners and stakeholders can be seen on page 17 of the strategy. (appendix 2)

The consultation was distributed through 44 consultation routes that are highlighted with the communications plan (appendix 5). These were purposefully chosen to ensure that we were able to focus on children, young people; young adults and their families who require inclusion support, Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP), or a Health Care Plan (HCP) and agreed through the SEND and Inclusion Partnership Board.

The full results of the online public consultation were provided to the Children and Young People's Scrutiny, showing that despite the wide reach that the consultation was distributed that there was only 66 respondent via the form that included 35 individual parent carers, 24 individual professionals, 4 providing a response on behalf of a groups (the size of the groups are unknown) and 3 additional individuals including (other family member, grandparent and autistic adult).

In the last 6 months Wolverhampton has consulted on 10 strategies across a wide range of areas. The responses from these have varied with those at the lower end with less than 50 responses

have tended to be related to specific business area such as Direct Payments and Advocacy Services; with up to 500 on strategies that affect the whole community such as 'Your Priorities for Wolverhampton, where the responses help inform the budget for 2024/25 that reflects residents priorities'.

SEND and Inclusion affects 17% of the pupil population only and as such the response are in line with other strategic consultations across the city.

### **Financial pressures on the High Needs Block**

The previous briefing note explained that there are continued pressures locally and nationally on high needs block funding. Priority 5 of the strategy aims to deliver a financially sustainable system for delivering improved outcomes.

The workstream that will be delivered around this priority will be supported initially with advice from the Association of Directors of Childrens Services (ADCS), Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) and the Department for Education (DfE) who will offer advice on financially sustainable options as we respond to the strategy, and firmly embed sustainability within our strategic outcomes.

The first of these meetings has taken place with the ADCS on 25<sup>th</sup> January 2024, where it was acknowledged that the City of Wolverhampton Council have only had a small annual High Need deficit until recently. This picture contrasts with the situation in many other local authorities where annual and cumulative high needs budget deficits are considerable. However, overspend this last year has increased and the officers within the Local Authority recognise if the spend continues to grow at current levels, it could move to a more significant deficit position very quickly.

High Needs funding nationally has grown by around 10% per annum over the recent period. The Government has indicated that this will fall to just over 4% from 2024/25.

It is important to note the Wolverhampton currently receives the highest High Needs Block per 2-18 age resident population of all authorities in the West Midlands region. This partly reflects the higher levels of need in the local community.

The finance section of the Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027 Cabinet Report 21 February 2024, shows that there are significant pressures on the High Needs Block (HNB) of the Designated School Grant due in part to the continued growth in demand for and complexity of Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and children requiring specialist SEN provision.

A key priority of the SEND and Inclusion Strategy is to enable more children to be educated where appropriate, within the city's maintained and academy school settings, alongside their peers. This will enable children and young people to access the right support, at the right time, and in their local community, but also offer a cost-effective option. This could include rethinking how we support our maintained schools, resource base, and specialist schools locally to support children where they live. This will enable those who need high support provisions to be able to access them more easily.

This will also help to reduce the pressure on the SEN home to school transport budget which is funded through the council's general fund.

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027  
Cabinet Report 20 March 2024

Appendix 2: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy 2024-2027

Appendix 3: Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) and Inclusion Strategy Easy Read  
Version