



EXECUTIVE BOARD DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Children, Young People and Education
LEAD OFFICERS:	Strategic Director of Children & Education (DCS)
DATE:	Thursday, 12 September 2024

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Children, Young People and Education
WARD/S AFFECTED:	(All Wards);
KEY DECISION:	Y

SUBJECT: SEND Partnership Strategy

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this report is to outline Blackburn with Darwen's refreshed and updated Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Strategy for 2024-2027, which is attached as Appendix 1.

The Strategy clearly sets out the SEND Partnership's vision, principles, and priorities for the next 3 years, with a clear focus on improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND and their families.

This Strategy builds on Blackburn with Darwen's previously co-produced 2018 SEND Strategy which was reviewed after a SEND Partners Stocktake Event in 2019 and updated again following an Outcomes Based Accountability Masterclass in 2020.

Following the pandemic, the SEND Strategic Partnership Board agreed it was the right time to commence a full SEND Strategy review, given the national and local rise in numbers of children and young people presenting with SEND alongside Social, Emotional and Mental Health (SEMH) needs. The Board commissioned the Council for Disabled Children (CDC) to support this review exercise and following a programme of stakeholder engagement 4 priority areas for improvement were agreed: -

- Preparation for Adulthood (especially transition from children to adult services).
- Aligning commissioning priorities to ensure they reflect and meet local needs.
- Ensuring sufficiency of SEND educational specialist places to meet needs.
- Securing strong multi-agency working to accurately identify and meet children and young people's needs without delay.

The review also resulted in the development of a refreshed SEND Strategy for 2024-2027. This strategy has been fully co-produced with children, young people with SEND and their families, alongside professionals across education, health and social care. The SEND Strategy is also aligned with the Council's Corporate Plan, showing that we are: -

'Ambitious for all our children and young people and determined to ensure that no one is left behind'.

Furthermore, the Strategy has been produced with regards to national policy context, including the Children and Families Act 2014, the SEND Code of Practice (2015), the Department for Education's Special Educational Needs 'Green Paper' (2022), and the Government's SEND and alternative provision improvement plan (2023), ensuring our children and young people access ***'the right support, at the right time, in the right place'***.

The SEND Strategic Partnership Board is accountable for delivery against the SEND Strategy. Board representation consists of senior leaders from Social Care, Health, and Education and Blackburn with Darwen's Parent/Carer Forum.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board:

- Approve the revised SEND Strategy and, in doing so, acknowledge and support the principles and desired outcomes of the revised Strategy.
- Continue to champion the work of the SEND partnership, noting its journey so far and how the partnership will continue to drive forward improvements for children and young people with SEND in Blackburn with Darwen.
- Note the need to undertake a medium-term financial assessment of the impact of the continuing pressures on SEND provision on the High Needs DSG budget and the Council's General Fund.

3. BACKGROUND

The strategy clearly outlines our commitment to work together to realise our vision that children and young people with SEND in Blackburn with Darwen: -

Will live happy, healthy, and fulfilled lives wherever possible within their local community and that it is a place where they will have every opportunity to:

1. *Achieve their goals for being independent.*
2. *Be and feel safe.*
3. *Be and feel respected and supported.*
4. *Achieve their best health and wellbeing.*
5. *Belong and enjoy being in their community.*
6. *Learn and achieve in everything they can do.*
7. *Find a job that they want to do.*

These form the seven strategic outcomes of our SEND Strategy and were coproduced with families and professionals. Their final wording was directed by children and young people themselves.

Values

In Blackburn with Darwen we value the views, wishes and feelings of children, young people and their families, and we believe they should be as fully involved in decision making about their lives as possible.

We have worked closely with our local families to develop our 'Co-Production Charter'. This sets out our co-production values and details how we will support children and young people and their families with SEND to participate through: -

- *Communication*

- *Accessibility – Inclusivity*
- *Respect, Recognition and Understanding*
- *Honesty, Transparency and Accountability*
- *Focusing on Strengths*
- *Working in Partnership, Valuing Everyone*

The SEND Strategy also provides detail about our local context and the Partnership’s governance arrangements and how we will know we are making a difference to include by: -

Seeing:

- More young people in employment, education, and training.
- More children and young people using public places and spaces.
- More children and young people having fun with friends and family.

Children and young people saying:

- They have lots of different things to do that they enjoy.
- They are happy to go to school/college and that they’re learning lots.
- Their thoughts and ideas really matter and help to make a difference.

Children and young people feeling:

- Happy, healthy, and safe.
- They get the right help and support, when and where they need it.
- Positive about their futures and reaching their goals.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The risk to ensuring effective strategic oversight and delivery of SEND activity is mitigated by the production of this three-year co-produced partnership Strategy as it builds on the good progress of the previous SEND Strategy.

There are strong governance arrangements in place with clear roles and responsibilities as well as communication channels that enable all stakeholders to work collaboratively, fostering a coordinated effort towards achieving our 4 key priority areas for improvement and our seven strategic outcomes.

Next steps:

- Continue to support the work of the SEND Strategic Partnership Board through the fostering of collaborative working practice and helping them to achieve against their priorities over the next three years.
- Continue to support the SEND Partnership to direct, monitor, challenge and assure the delivery of continued improvement across the SEND agenda
- Continue to highlight best practice across services, reducing and addressing potential barriers for children and young people with SEND.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Blackburn with Darwen’s strategy for SEND has been written with regards to the Department for Education’s Special Educational Needs ‘Green Paper’ (2022), and the Government’s SEND and alternative provision improvement plan (2023).

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no financial implications arising directly from the revised SEND strategy as such, but

fulfilling our statutory duties for children and young people with SEND has significant financial implications for the Council going forward due to ongoing increases in SEND needs.

One element of the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) which the Council receives each year from the Education and Skills Funding Agency (ESFA) is the High Needs Block (HNB) funding. This element (HNB) is used to pay for special schools and resource provision places, and top up the funding which is allocated per child to both mainstream schools and special schools based on their needs outlined in an Education Health Care Plan (for the education element only). The grant also pays for the Special Education Teams within the local authority, who support children right through from Early Years to Post 16 (0-25) with their wide-ranging needs, including services such as visual and hearing-impaired services.

The High Needs DSG allocation for 2024/25 is £33.758m and additional funding allocated from the schools block of £0.780m gives a total allocation of £34.539m. The Council is currently forecasting that all the allocated funding will be spent in 2024/25 but this position will be subject to regular monitoring throughout the financial year.

In line with the national trend, the Borough is experiencing a rise in the number of special school places required for our children. The increase in demand for provision given the complexity of SEND needs has led in the past year to an increase in the number of children taking up independent special school places both in and out of borough. This situation is having a negative impact on our High Needs Block funding and causing financial pressures. As a consequence of this, there is a need to understand better the medium term financial position on the High Needs Budget to ensure that the Council's activities remain within the funding made available by the ESFA.

Whilst the Council is facing financial pressures, it is also important that the Council and Lancashire and South Cumbria Integrated Care Board (L&SC ICB) work jointly in securing the best possible outcomes for our children, taking into account value for money, from our pooled resources across the health and care system.

In addition to the increased demand and increased level of complexity in need, the costs of the assessment process, travel and provision is increasing, which is leading to a significant pressure for the Council's General Fund.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

The Strategy itself does not give rise to any legal implications. As detailed, it has been co-produced with children and families which helps facilitate the discharge of the Council's duties under Children and Families Act 2014 particularly sections 27 and 30 of that Act. These sections require local authorities to keep their educational and social care provision for children and young people with SEND under review, and to publish and keep under review their Local Offer of provision for 0-25 year olds with SEND.

The Strategy also follows the Code of Practice 2015 which provides statutory guidance on duties, policies and procedures relating to the Children and Families Act 2014 and associated regulations.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct resource implications as the SEND Partnership Board is responsible for the delivery of this strategy building on and using the well-established structures and collaborations across partners to work towards better outcomes for all children and young people with SEND. However, the increase in complexity and need is leading to an increase in the cost and level of resources required to meet the children's need, with a consequent increase in the demand for services from the statutory assessment team and the Legal Department.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 x Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA link here*)

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. (*insert EIA attachment*)

10. CONSULTATIONS

As outlined above a full review of the SEND strategy has taken place supported by the Council for Disabled Children. The content of the SEND Strategy has been co-produced following a full programme of stakeholder engagement with children and young people with SEND and their families, alongside wider partners and other key stakeholders including: -

- Education settings and providers
- Local Authority representatives across Children’s and Education Services, Adults’ Services, Public Health and Early Years,.
- Health Colleagues from the Integrated Care Board, Lancashire and South Cumbria NHS Foundation Trust and East Lancashire Hospitals NHS Trust

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council’s Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded in the Summary of Decisions published on the day following the meeting.

VERSION:	1
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CONTACT OFFICER:	Michelle Holt
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BACKGROUND PAPER:	
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