



## PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

**Subject Heading:**

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities and Alternative Provision (SEND & AP) Strategy

**ELT Lead:**

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**Policy context:**

The Local Area Partnership (LAP), comprising education, health and social care services, working with families, educational settings, and voluntary / third sector, has a range of statutory responsibilities to deliver services to children and young people with SEND and in AP, and is evaluated by Ofsted in regard to the effectiveness of the LAP arrangements and the outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.

### SUMMARY

The Local Area Partnership, comprising education, health and social care services, working with families, educational settings, and voluntary / third sector, has a range of statutory responsibilities in regard to the delivery of services to children and young people with SEND and in AP, and is evaluated by Ofsted in regard to the effectiveness of the LAP arrangements and the outcomes and experiences for children and young people with SEND.

In September 2024, Cabinet agreed the SEND & AP Strategy 2024 -2028, and this strategy sets out the partnership's programme for the next five years to improve the lives of Havering families with SEND, organised around six priorities which together represent the vision for Havering's SEND and AP system.

The strategy, and the Local Area Partnership Self-Evaluation, have been made available publicly, as the primary audience for these documents is Havering families. This is reflected in the language, tone, and level of detail included.

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Members are asked to note the strengths across the partnership, and the focus of current improvement activity.

**REPORT DETAIL**

**Local Context**

Havering has seen significant change over the last 10 years, with a 10.5% increase in our overall population, and a 15.2% increase in the number of children, between censuses. As well as the fastest growing child population in London; Havering saw the second highest growth in the 0-4 age group in England.

Unlike most other London Boroughs, Havering continues to see an increase in pupil numbers, which has required a continuation of the school expansion programme across primary, secondary, special schools.

These shifts, coupled with the on-going cost of living challenges, have had a sustained impact on demand for all our services as well as an increase in the complexity of families needing support.

Like many other Local Area SEND Partnerships, Havering also faces the challenge of recruiting and retaining a skilled workforce with competition from neighbouring boroughs for permanent staff across health, education and social care.

Alongside this, the demands of rising costs of placements and transport, and a 40% increase in Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) since 2019-20 (from 1,534 in total to 2,182 in 2023-24) is placing significant pressures on our stretched budgets due to funding formulae issues. Havering remains the least well-funded borough per pupil in London, and among the lowest LA's funded nationally.

The Council has continued to make substantial investment in Children's Services (£11.2m growth in 2024-25 and £15.7m growth in 2025/26) with further investment expected into Health services in 2025/26. However, it remains extremely challenging to meet the significant demand we are facing, even after securing a second capitalisation direction to avoid issuing a Section 114 notice. Our total budget gap now exceeds £70million.

Despite the significant rises, Havering remains lower than national comparators for rates of EHCP's. In 2023-24, 4.4% of Havering's children and young people had an EHCP compared to the national average of 4.8%. A further 9.9% of Havering's children and young people receive SEN Support, lower than the 13.6% national average. In Havering children and young people with EHCPs have strong

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academic outcomes at all ages, as do all pupils with SEND at Key Stage 4. However, children at SEN Support in Early Years and Primary do not achieve as well.

Over 61% of Havering pupils with an EHCP are in mainstream schools, well above the London average of 49.8%. As stated the number of Havering children and young people with EHCPs has risen significantly between 2020 and 2024. The biggest growth has been seen among children whose main area of need is communication and interaction, including autism, and social, emotional and mental health needs.

In 2024, 28% of EHC Needs Assessments were completed within 20 weeks, however this figure fell significantly by the end of 2024 due to a lack of Educational Psychologist capacity which has been seen both regionally and nationally.

### **Key Partnership Strengths**

- A permanent leadership team across the partnership works well together, enabling maintenance of strong relationships between education services, schools, other educational settings, with our Parent-Carer Forum (Havering SEND Family Voice), and with the Voluntary and Community Sector. Our Children's Services Improvement Plan, supported by recent and ongoing investment and newly appointed permanent staff, is supporting improvements in collaboration across health and social care with all stakeholders.
- Havering Place has been formed, bringing together ICB health and local authority commissioned services into one integrated team structure. In December 2024, the borough's first integrated plan for children was published - Happy, Healthy Lives - developed across the ICB and local authority. SEND is a priority for Havering Place, with £0.912m additional investment agreed for 2025/26 including specialist nursing and increasing therapies capacity.
- 99% of the borough's maintained schools are rated Good or Outstanding using the Ofsted Framework prior to September 2024 changes. Many inspection reports praise inclusive practice and partnership working between schools and external agencies.
- A high proportion of pupils with complex needs attend their local school: 61% of pupils with EHCPs attend mainstream schools compared to 50% nationally. Havering's schools and colleges embrace inclusion, with attainment and attendance for pupils with EHCPs meeting or exceeding the national average at all phases from KS1 to KS5.
- We have comprehensive, highly regarded support from SEND education services, free at the point of delivery, to all Havering schools and settings. This is further supported by recently enhanced advice, guidance and

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training for parents and carers, jointly commissioned with our Parent-Carer Forum and aligned with support for schools and settings, to improve parent/carer confidence.

- Havering has the highest comparative proportion of children aged 0–5 with EHCPs in London (8.79% in 2024). This demonstrates that identification and support for SEND in the Early Years is strong, enabling excellent education, health, and voluntary sector support and strong practice in nurseries and preschools.
- Strong engagement with families and other stakeholders to inform our self-evaluation, strategy, and guide improvement activity, is including as part of new governance arrangements. Investment in our Havering Youth Wellbeing Census, Mind of My Own platform, along with new roles including our SEND Communication and Engagement Officer (Education), Service User Engagement Lead (NELFT) and Young Advisors Participation Coordinator (Early Help) have all helped establish a ‘co-production revolution’ with stakeholders including families reporting that it feels different, and positive.
- As a partnership we know ourselves, we have clear sense of priorities, a credible, ambitious plan of action, and strengthened governance to deliver it. Our self-evaluation, strategy, and new governance arrangements has been highlighted as an example of good practice to other LAs by our DfE partners.
- Our recently embedded Multi-Agency Resource Panel and funding protocol for children with disabilities allows us to jointly fund care packages between the Local Authority and ICB and ensure that those with the most complex needs receive timely, appropriate support.

### Focus of Improvement Activity

- Last year, Havering had the 2nd highest increase in EHCPs in London (18.4%) and the projected 64% rise in EHCPs between 2021/22 and 2026/27 is also the 2nd highest in London. This huge increase in need/demand has impacted timeliness, quality and the effectiveness of communication. Over £1.5m has been invested in the Council’s Assessment & Placement and Educational Psychology teams between 2022 and 2025. By 2025/2026 we will reduce caseloads to bring us in line with our comparators, while also increasing management capacity which will enable an enhanced focus on quality assurance and co-production of individual plans, and improve timeliness of EHC Needs Assessments.
- The rapid increase in population and need/demand necessitates an ambitious plan to nearly double local specialist places over the next three years to over 700, which will be delivered through an ambitious school expansion programme, including the opening of a fifth special school.

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- The Local Authority has commissioned a Strategic Review of its Alternative Provision (AP) which was undertaken by the national lead on the DfE's Change Programme (Olive Academies) and is delivering an improved offer of high quality AP in response to local needs and increasing need/demand.
- Integration across health and local authority services has developed and a joint commissioning approach and strategy will deliver additional investment from April 2025 and a joint strategy following, in mid-2025.
- Capacity issues with assessment and intervention from therapy teams have been identified and informed a successful growth bid for 2025-26, building on the launch of the new Children's Autism Service which has seen improvements in wait times for neurodevelopmental assessment.
- We are focused on creating stronger, more purposeful recording on our case management system and improved information sharing via portals, in line with recommendations made through our Sector Led Improvement Partner. This is also being supported through the introduction of AI Tools (Beam Magic Notes and Co-Pilot) to support staff and managers in their work.
- We have invested significantly in increasing capacity and management oversight within the Children with Disabilities (CwD) & Short Break teams, including collaboration with the Integrated team at Havering Place on improvements to both the range and experience for families of our local Short Breaks offer. This work is being carried out alongside our co-production work with parents and partners.
- Following the recommendations of a dedicated board led by the Director of Living Well, additional investment has been agreed to deliver improved processes and capacity around transition from Children's to Adult Services. This includes the proposed implementation of a new Transitions Pathway in the case management system to ensure that identification and tracking is as accurate and visible as possible to all relevant social care and ICB professionals.
- A priority work stream targeting all aspects of 'community access' for children and young people with SEND and their families is achieving improvements, making links to the development of the partnership's Preparing for Adulthood (PfA) Strategy and Supported Internship Action Plan, in collaboration with NDTi.
- While those with EHCPs achieve well, survey feedback saw 52% of parents/carers of pupils with SEND express concerns about mainstream schools' capacity and capability to meet children's needs. Our DBV action plan has focused on better communicating the support given to schools on SEND, and allowed us to develop a range of resources and frameworks

(SEND Handbook, SEND Peer Learning Review Framework, extending Ordinarily Available Provision) to 'raise the bar' on inclusive practice to that of our most inclusive schools. This includes in particular, a focus on identification and provision for pupils at SEN Support, an issue also informing changes to SEN funding.

- Over 100 stakeholders from across the local area partnership, including children, young people and families, attended a series of workshops to co-produce our SEND Working Together Promise, and SEND Outcomes Framework, facilitated by the Council for Disabled Children (CDC). These workshops and this engagement showcased the improvements to information, communication, and engagement, and consequently improved trust and experiences for children and young people with SEND and their families, all of which is also supported by a renewal and of our Local Offer.

## **IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

### **Financial implications and risks:**

*Funding for Special Education Needs and Disabilities comes from two distinct sources. Direct Education funding including funding for Special Schools and Alternative Provision and additional learning support comes from the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant while other services including home to school transport, EHCP assessment and planning and social care support are funded from the Council's General fund budget. Capital funding for educational provision is funded by the DfE.*

*Education funding is provided largely based on a funding formula and so has increased in recent years. However at both a local and a national level the rate of increase in funding has not kept pace with the increased demand, complexity and cost of services. Havering, along with the overwhelming majority of Education authorities has a deficit on its High Needs Block. At the end of 2024-25 this was £36m and is forecast to rise every year. This deficit is currently part of a national override mechanism monitored by the section 151 officer.*

*The Council's general fund budget is also under extreme financial pressure and although growth funding has been put into Home to School transport and Starting Well staffing budgets there have been significant overspends in these areas.*

*Many of the actions set out in the SEND and AP strategy have the potential over time to improve value for money by achieving better outcomes for children at similar or even lower cost while others may be deliverable within existing resources or through additional funding being made available by central government. However it is likely that there will be very limited resources for the next few years and new investment will need to be strictly prioritised. This financial situation will be*

a significant constraint that unfortunately is likely to limit the scope and pace of delivery of the strategy.

**Legal implications and risks:**

*The Authority has various duties under education and children's legislation to provide suitable education and services for pupils with special educational needs and disabilities.*

*The SEND and AP Strategy sets out how the Authority, with the assistance of partners in some cases, seeks to provide a comprehensive and well-functioning SEND service, however, it is aspirational and will require significant investment if it is to be successful.*

*Many of the specific plans set out within the Strategy will need to be subject to separate decision making procedures whether that be by way of officer decision or through Members/Cabinet. Legal advice will be provided as and when appropriate in terms of individual decisions.*

*It should also be noted that some of the actions within the Strategy are outside the Council's control as they require action by partners.*

*The risk in terms of setting out challenging objectives as this Strategy does is that it can create a legitimate expectation on the part of stakeholders and the general public that certain actions will be taken, when the reality is that they will still need to be the subject of separate executive decision making arrangements and will have to be considered in the context of a very challenging financial landscape.*

*Sometimes such legitimate expectations can be utilised in support of legal challenges in relation to specific cases.*

*Whilst there is no statutory obligation to produce this Strategy it is good practice. It should not be confused with the legal requirement to produce a Local Offer which is a separate document covering the specific services that will be provided by the Council for pupils with SEND.*

*There is no requirement with the proposed governance arrangements to devolve any decision making powers to third parties and these will be retained by Council officers who attend the various Panels.*

**Human Resources implications and risks:**

*Apart from the establishment of new roles and strengthening of existing roles (both of which will be managed in accordance with the Council's HR policies and procedures), the recommendations made in this report do not give rise to any identifiable HR risks or implications that would affect either the Council or its workforce.*

**Equalities implications and risks:**

*The strategy aims to improve the outcomes and experiences of all children and young people with SEND and in AP and their families, including those with Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and those identified with SEN but without an EHCP known as receiving 'SEN Support'. The strategy includes children and young with SEND and in AP aged 0 to 25 in accordance with the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice.*

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**ENVIRONMENTAL AND CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS AND RISKS**

None arising from this report.

**BACKGROUND PAPERS**

1. Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Alternative Provision Strategy 2024 -2028
2. London Borough of Havering Local Area Partnership Special Educational Needs, Disability (SEND) and Alternative Provision (AP) Self Evaluation March 2024