



Department  
for Education

# **Sustainable high needs systems: case studies**

**July 2021**

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## **1. Strategic planning with education and finance colleagues – Safety Valve LAs**

As covered in the commentary, the ‘safety valve’ local authorities (LAs) ensured that education and finance leadership worked collaboratively on their plans to reach an in-year balance. The Chief Executives of the authorities were fully engaged and up to date with the development of the plans, supporting their Director of Children’s Services (DCS), S151 officers and other senior leaders throughout the process.

As a result, the local authorities were able to recognise drivers of their deficit position more quickly, and work to find solutions that were appropriate for the LA and its children and young people. Solutions identified were viable and ambitious, and LAs were able to recognise where they might require additional expertise or focus to deliver. Each LA went about this in its own way, but all plans were reinforced through the creation or strengthening of robust governance structures and project management capability.

## **2. Strategic planning with education and finance colleagues – Southwark**

Southwark has developed a high level, strategic plan that focuses on co-production. Internally the SEND and finance team have worked hand in hand to set realistic goals to make savings and to avoid future costs. Externally, the LA has gained high levels of support for the proposals by creating a high needs sub group of the Schools Forum. This forum has representatives reflecting the make-up of the whole sector, including schools and academies from all phases, Pupil Referral Units, early years, further education providers and special schools. Representatives from the LA include the Head of SEN, director of commissioning and senior SEN/Inclusion advisor as well as the director of education and finance managers.

A budget recovery board was chaired by the council’s Strategic Director of Finance and Governance (S151 officer) and membership included: Strategic Director of Children’s and Adults Services, Director of Education, Director of Commissioning, Departmental Finance Manager, Legal, Communication, Governance and relevant officers of the council including Public Health and HR. This board provided financial assurance for the Strategic Directors of Finance & Governance and Children’s and Adults Services about the budget recovery plans to bring the budget back into a balanced position. External consultants were engaged to provide independent assurance and challenge on the recovery plans and assurance to the Chief Executive and Cabinet on the progress of these plans. The outputs of the meetings were communicated to the Chief Executive and Lead Members on a regular basis. There were regular updates to the Cabinet on the progress of the budget recovery board, as well as sharing with the Schools Forum High Needs sub-group.

The LA has engaged well with colleagues from the department, seeking out challenge and acting upon this quickly to keep up the momentum of the plan within the authority. Colleagues from SEND as well as finance have had regular informal correspondence to discuss proposals and challenge where appropriate.

Southwark works with their various stakeholders on strategy, approach and chosen developments to ensure best possible outcomes. This includes:

- Focused co-production with local parent and carers forum, Southwark Independent Voice (SIV).
  - SIV has a history of positive working relationship with Southwark SEND and the LA in general. SIV is consulted on all the strategic work that is being undertaken, and is fully involved in the boards and project groups set up to address the DSG management plan.
  - SIV provide the parents reference group for any pathway redesign as part of the 16-25 working group, overseen by the 16-25 board.
  - Southwark is holding a review of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) within the borough that is nearing completion. SIV provided the parent groups interviewed as a part of this and they will be involved in the resulting strategy and workplan.
- Work with children and young people, facilitated by the authority's schools, to consult on changes to services or provision. The LA collaborates with school leads to design questions for school-led focus groups to collect pupils' views and feedback.
- Southwark's Information and Advisory Service (SIAS) team facilitates engagement with young people. The team has worked with a number of young people referred to as SEND Champions. This has included conducting a 'mystery shop' exercise during which the young people contacted different services on the LA Local Offer and provided feedback to the LA.

### **3. Appropriately managing demand for EHCPs – Sunderland**

Sunderland launched SEND "ranges" in September 2019, which set out descriptions of types of need and likely required support, such as children and young people's likely education setting. The ranges provide a core framework for all professionals working with children and young people who have SEND. They provide clarity for parents and carers in terms of each child's needs and what support each child is receiving, and ensure all schools are consistent in their approach.

The ranges are a guide to SENCOs and schools to identify the needs of children early and to put in place the appropriate support. Each 'range' provides a description of the child or young person's needs and provides suggestions for interventions and the impact these have through provision-mapping. The provision mapping gives a detailed overview of the interventions set out in the ranges which have been put in place and the impact these have had, as well as the outcomes. The ranges were co-

produced with SEND colleagues in other authorities, incorporating parent and carer views.

The authority provided detailed training to schools and professionals to enhance skills around identifying needs, ensuring that children and young people with SEND are identified more quickly and their needs met within appropriate settings. Schools have also taken part in moderation activity to ensure consistent application. The authority also provided training to parents and carers and the relevant support groups. The SEND ranges are readily available on the authority's website.

## 4. Appropriately managing demand for EHCPs – Warrington

The characteristics of Warrington's SEND system include a focus on early intervention, a commitment to inclusion and the graduated response, with all developments planned through a co-production approach. In the period 2018-21, the total number of EHCPs in England rose by 34.6%. In Warrington, the rise was just 3.1%<sup>1</sup>.

Warrington led a project, focusing on effective decision making around statutory assessments and issuing EHCPs. During this time, the LA was able to demonstrate tangible benefits throughout the trial period. There were 62 fewer requests for statutory assessment and the number of deferred cases also reduced to nil. The EHCP assessment panel's operating costs reduced by £24,779 in the trial period and changes to provision prevented £295,220 of additional spend and saved the council £46,256. Warrington have maintained a strong 20-week assessment rate of 86% in 2020, improving to 91.5% in April 21.

Warrington supported three other LAs in 2018 which then reduced their numbers of initial requests.

In Warrington, Early Years staff and health professionals are co-located in children's centres. The centres also have strong links with the neonatal unit at Warrington Hospital. In addition, an Early Years inclusion panel acts as a single point of entry for all early concerns. This often leads to early identification of children's needs and early support, through a co-ordinated multi-agency approach.

Effective staff training has led to schools and other education settings becoming increasingly adept at identifying whether needs relate to SEND. Warrington's Specialist Teacher Programme has supported 71% of pupils to remain in their current education setting. The area's schools have embraced the operating principle that "every school is a school for pupils with SEND, and every teacher is a teacher of

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<sup>1</sup> <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england>

SEND pupils”, supported by a clearly articulated graduated response to meeting the needs of children and young people with SEND. The outreach support from their special school and specialist teaching programme supporting children and young people with autism and social, emotional and mental health needs (SEMH) supports inclusion and the graduated response. Children’s needs are met through the universal offer, maintaining lower levels of requests for statutory assessment. Co-ordinated support from early help who work closely with SEND and early years has also promoted access to early intervention and prevents escalation of need.

The Warrington Parents and Carers group (WARRPAC) is valued by both parents and the LA. It provides a focal point for the local area’s work to co-produce services with parents and carers. The SEND strategy was co-produced by parents, carers and leaders. Parental involvement in decision making and parental satisfaction in Warrington are high, with many parents particularly appreciating the broad variety of support offered by special, mainstream, maintained and independent schools.'

Warrington is one of the department’s Sector Led Improvement Partners- providing help, support and training to other local authorities to provide both SEND and Children’s Social Care services.

## 5. Appropriately managing demand for EHCPs – Leeds

Leeds has historically tracked data and monitored high needs type, provision and spend. This allows the LA to react to trends much more quickly.

Leeds uses a mechanism called Funding for Inclusion (FFI) to support children and young people with high needs. This uses a set of criteria and provision mapped out in the FFI handbook, and settings are able to apply for this funding whether a child or young person has an EHCP or not. This means not all children and young people will need an EHCP, and the mechanism has had a significant impact in reducing the demand for statutory assessment processes.

A robust graduated approach is key to quality SEND practice. The LA works proactively with its SENCOs, teachers and practitioners to support children and young people within SEND support. SEND teams work in partnership with schools to deliver a core offer which supports and develops quality SEND and inclusive practice. A focus of the new SEND and Inclusion Strategy is to enhance skills and resilience of the workforce to identify needs and plan effectively, ensuring that children and young people are identified accurately and their needs met within appropriate settings.

The LA has a Special Educational Needs Statutory Assessment and Provision Team (SENSAP) who offer a range of services. Within the highly experienced team, the SEN casework advisers carefully monitor and quality assess the requests for EHCPs, ensuring children receive the right level of support to achieve their life aspirations. The SEN caseworkers work closely with schools and practitioners and provide tailored packages of support.

The LA works with SENCOs to keep an open dialogue with parents and carers. This ensures the right level of support is in place for the child or young person. SENCOs regularly review each child's progress with teachers, parents and carers. They make plans tailored to each child's needs, agreeing progress and milestones with extra support in place to measure progress. Plans are reviewed regularly, agreeing next steps, to enable better outcomes.

## 6. Early intervention focus – Barnsley

Barnsley has developed its SEND Improvement Plan to encourage partners to identify and meet needs of children and young people at the earliest possible stage, improving outcomes and reducing demand for high-cost specialist provision. Barnsley has an established SEND Oversight Board which oversees the delivery of the SEND Improvement plan. Key stakeholders on the board include representatives from mainstream schools, special schools, the Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and public health. This ensures that the highest level of challenge is applied to each judgement, fostering robust decision making.

Barnsley has worked with Barnsley Schools Alliance, which is a strategic partnership for improving the quality and learning standards of the borough. An Education Improvement Strategy was approved by the council in November 2019 to review and improve both early identification and assessment of needs alongside quality and inclusion within mainstream schools. The work of this partnership has enabled the council to issue fewer EHCPs than predicted.

This plan started with a review of the current procedures and in particular gained feedback from the children, young people and their families that were accessing SEND services.

The strategy sets out a holistic approach, providing opportunities for engagement and participation at all levels, making sure children, young people and their parents and carers are at the heart of discussions and decisions. The strategy has been developed by Barnsley Council and Barnsley Clinical Commissioning Group, working with the SEND Youth Forum and SEND parents and carers to ensure their views are reflected.

The Children and Young People's SEND plan centres around increasing inclusion within mainstream and developing early intervention strategies. Both of these aim to properly support children and young people with additional needs within mainstream. The aim of this work is to support children, young people and their families, meeting their needs in mainstream, which will lead to a reduction in the demand for EHCP assessments.

Engagement and participation are achieved through building an alliance, to reach as many children, young people, parents and carers as possible. The process is value and outcome led: where a shared and common purpose, achieving the best for children and young people in the borough, is what drives and unites the partnership.

## **7. Increase SEN support offer – Cheshire East**

Cheshire East created a Toolkit for SEND which is aimed at all educational providers and settings supporting Cheshire East children and young people aged 0-25 years.

It was developed with a number of interested stakeholders, including a team of SENCOs who were seconded into the LA SEND service to ensure that the concerns and issues felt on the ground were reflected and adequately addressed by the Toolkit. Alongside SENCOs, the Toolkit was co-produced with local post-16 representatives, parents and carers, and a wide range of specialist education, health and care services, ensuring a range of views were taken into account.

The Toolkit outlines the provision and support that is expected from all educational settings which support children and young people within the LA. The aim of this is to meet the needs of the child or young person at an earlier stage, ensuring that both the families and educational colleagues providing support are confident in the provision that is being made. This early identification and the strategies provided allow for a consistent graduated approach from Quality First Teaching right through to the more complex and specialist levels.

The Toolkit provides detailed guidance on how educational settings can identify children and young people with different types and levels of need, and information on appropriate steps and strategies to support them. It sets out a graduated response which empowers teachers and SENCOs to deliver best practice at a First Concerns /SEN Support level and beyond. It also gives information about when a request for an Education, Health and Care needs assessment, or specialist services, may be required.

Cheshire East has copywritten this package of support. The LA has sold this to other local authorities and provided support for other LAs to create their own.

## **8. Increase SEN support offer – The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham**

The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham is working with its key partners and providers to deliver a strengthened speech, language and communications needs (SLCN) offer with a focus on early intervention and support. This will ensure children and young people get the right support at the right time, and only escalate through the EHCP process if necessary.

The SEN support offer will be strengthened through a range of activity. This will include developing the borough's mainstream school offer through the creation of an in-house team. The team will focus on early identification and intervention through a multi-disciplinary speech, language and communications service as a single 'front door' for children and young people.

By ensuring a consistent and accessible SEN support offer, Hammersmith and Fulham will address inequalities in access to intervention for children and young people with SLCN, as highlighted in its Local Area SEND inspection. The LA expects this work to increase the number of children and young people whose needs can be met and prevented from escalating without the need for an EHCP.

The LA will continue to work with parents and carers, the community and schools to ensure children and young people's needs are identified and can be met in a responsive and flexible service offer across both SEN support and through EHCPs.

## **9. EHCP assessment processes: plan cessation – The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames**

The London Borough of Richmond upon Thames has undertaken a review of its EHCPs to ensure that plans were relevant and fit for purpose. This review focused on ensuring that children and young people were achieving ambitious outcomes in provision that appropriately met their needs. It enabled the LA, in consultation with families, to cease plans where children and young people's needs could be met without the need for an EHCP. In particular, the LA focused on key transition points for children and young people, such as the transition into adulthood, linking closely with other agencies such as adult social care, the clinical commissioning group and local employers to increase local provision.

The review also identified the need to improve internal systems to strengthen the annual review process. As the legislation sets out, the annual review process for EHCPs will subsequently be used by the LA to ensure that plans are assessed for continued relevance. For many children and young people, effective support should enable their needs to be met and managed so that an EHCP is no longer required. This is reinforced through appropriate investment into the local SEN Support offer, and other work to support children and young people with SEND.

## **10. Culture change and work with school leaders – Thurrock**

Thurrock, working in partnership with all educational providers, has managed to move to a position where the early years, schools, alternative provision provider, post-16 providers and Schools Forum recognise that there is a collective responsibility to meet the needs of the children and young people who require additional provision within the borough. Representatives from schools and colleges are brought in at every opportunity to share knowledge, information, and challenge where appropriate. Some examples of this include:

- Being open and transparent with the Schools Forum including reporting on the financial position and actions to manage the LA's deficit position. The Schools

Forum, chaired by the CEO of a Multi Academy Trust, is fully on board with the LA's plans to appropriately manage cost and provision within the borough.

- Thurrock has worked and continues to work to ensure parents of pupils with SEND feel supported. This includes holding regular meetings and structured opportunities to raise issues, listen to feedback and promote good news stories. Thurrock has a communication and pupil/student engagement strategy which sets out its offer, including both informal and formal feedback routes.
- The LA has invested in training to support schools to better understand and discharge its responsibilities to meet the needs of children at SEND support level. This includes providing training and advice, as well as having challenging conversations.
- A strong emphasis is placed on person-centred planning and ensuring that Thurrock is capturing the strengths of children and young people within their EHCPs.
- Peer-to-peer challenge at inclusion panels ensures robust decision making for children and young people that are being permanently excluded from schools and placed into alternative provision/new schools.

## **11. Appropriate and thorough provision mapping – Rotherham**

In 2017 the Rotherham carried out a mapping exercise to gather a more detailed picture of where the pupils with EHCPs within the borough were being educated. The LA looked at population data to map and understand what type and where new provision was needed. This SEND sufficiency strategy was carried out over three phases.

The SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2017-19 (Phase 1) has resulted in the development of an additional 125 new places within special schools and inclusion units. These developments targeted reducing the numbers of children and young people being placed in expensive out-of-authority placements by meeting needs within the LA.

Phase 1 is now complete and all places are full. This was achieved by providing support to mainstream schools from a range of inclusion services, and from primary and secondary outreach teams specialising in SEMH and supporting children and young people with autistic spectrum conditions.

Phase 2 focused on meeting the needs of children through the creation of inclusion resource units linked to mainstream schools, as well as providing targeted investment to support children with profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD) and increasing the number of post-16 places in the borough. This included 111 places in total across 10 schools. This work will include post-16 provision to ensure that pathways are in place to prepare young people for adulthood, including

independence, employment opportunities and both further and higher education provision. The SEND Sufficiency Strategy 2019 Phase 2 developed the use of SEND inclusion units within mainstream school settings to ensure that vulnerable pupils were able to access a mainstream curriculum but also receive high quality support, care and preparation for adulthood alongside this curriculum. This was specifically added into the plan due to the population data and projected growth over the next 10 years, which indicated a significant increase in the number of children and young people with autism, moderate learning difficulties and SEMH difficulties who will require additional support.

Phase 3 is underway and focuses on creating sufficiency for children with SEMH needs (where planning data shows there is evidence of significant growth).

The creation of additional in borough provision that matches the need of the LA has already led to savings in the high needs block, as in-borough placements cost on average £30k per annum less than out-of-authority placements.

Rotherham has annually reviewed its long-term sufficiency plan to ensure that it still meets the needs of the authority and ensuring that it takes into account the changing picture of demand.

The projected annual cost savings on the high needs budget of developing the SEN units on mainstream school and academy sites is estimated to be in the region of £1.5m (based on a cost saving of £30k per place per annum) through reduction in the number of high-cost placements. The savings have reduced, and will continue to reduce, pressures on the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG).

## **12. Appropriate and thorough provision mapping – Thurrock**

Thurrock has developed key messages for children and young people around key transition points, specifically around years 9, 11 and 13. The LA has provided a range of information brochures and held a series of events and activities to encourage participation at primary, secondary and post-16 levels. This is both to support children and young people to manage key transition points, and for the LA to listen to young people using SEN services about what they need as they prepare for adulthood.

The LA has focused on access to further/higher education and moving towards employment. Initiatives include:

- Working with local businesses and organisations to create voluntary and paid opportunities for young people, ensuring that they have had the opportunity to interact and engage with people in real workplace situations within their local community.
- Working with adult colleges to develop programmes that will enhance the essential

skills, wellbeing and personal development, employability and confidence of the young people. Similarly post-16 providers support SEND young people on tailored programmes.

- The LA has a Preparing for Adulthood team who support learners with SEND to access education, employment or training. These caseworkers provide high-quality career education, information, advice and guidance to young people and their parents and carers – individually and in groups. This enables them to make and implement effective decisions in the areas of learning, employment and personal development. They attend annual reviews for EHCPs and are able to give advice on appropriate pathways for the young people, ensuring the best possible outcomes.



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