

# Tower Hamlets Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion Strategy

**2024-29**



## A message from the Tower Hamlets Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion partnership

Welcome to our partnership SEND and Inclusion strategy for Tower Hamlets. This strategy is all about making sure that our children and young adults with special educational needs, disabilities and additional needs are able to thrive and fulfil their potential. Over the past few months, we have listened to what parents, young people and professionals have to say about our SEND services in Tower Hamlets and worked with them to develop our six strategy priorities.

As leaders, we are determined to work together to deliver for children and young people with SEND and their families. There is a lot to celebrate in Tower Hamlets. The love and care of families and the dedication of our professionals is at the heart of our strategy. However, we must do better. Our priorities are ambitious, and we will translate them into action with annual delivery plans. There are many pressures on our SEND and alternative provision, and we acknowledge that the pace of implementation will need to reflect the available budget and the capacity of our workforce. We are committed to making progress and our SEND Improvement Board will report annually to the Health and Wellbeing Board.

Signed:

**Lutfur Rahman**, Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

**Councillor Maium Talukdar**, Deputy Mayor of Tower Hamlets,  
Cabinet member for Education, Youth and Lifelong Learning

**Steve Halsey**, Chief Executive, LB Tower Hamlets

**Steve Reddy**, Corporate Director, Children's Services, LB Tower  
Hamlets  
and Chair of the SEND Improvement Board

**Samantha Gager**, Chair, Independent SEND Forum Tower  
Hamlets

**Sornnaly Hossain**, Our Time All Ability Youth Forum

**Zina Etheridge**, Chief Executive, NHS North East London

**Lorraine Sunduza** OBE, Chief Executive Officer, East London Foundation Trust

**Veronica Armson**,  
Executive Headteacher Phoenix School, Chair of Special Schools Consultative Group

**Danny Lye**, Chair of Secondary Heads Consultative

**Shoshannah Thompson**, Chair of Primary Heads Consultative

**Gerry McDonald**, Principal of Tower Hamlets College

**Dr Neil Ashdown**, Chief Executive of Royal London and Mile End, Bart's Health NHS Trust and Chair of Tower Hamlets Together

## A message from Lutfur Rahman, Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets

We want Tower Hamlets to be a place where every child fulfils their potential.

I am privileged to be the Mayor for all residents in Tower Hamlets. We all want the best for our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities. We are committed to working together as a partnership to deliver this strategy and the right support for our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities, and their families.

Lutfur Rahman, Executive Mayor of Tower Hamlets



# Tower Hamlets Special Educational Needs, Disabilities and Inclusion Strategy: 2024–29

As a Children and Families Partnership we want Tower Hamlets to be:

*A child-friendly borough where children and young people from all backgrounds thrive, are listened to, achieve their best, and have opportunities. (Accelerate! The Tower Hamlets Children and Families Partnership Strategy 2024-2029)*

We are so proud of our children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). As a partnership, we are committed to championing equality and co-production. We are determined that our vision of a child-friendly borough is inclusive, where the focus is on meeting children's needs, and children of all abilities are welcome, and are nurtured to fulfil their potential.

As a partnership, we have agreed seven outcomes that we all want to see for children and young people with SEND in Tower Hamlets:



To achieve these outcomes, our SEND and Inclusion Strategy sets out six priorities for 2024 – 29 that we believe will deliver the right support at the right time for children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities and their families. It applies to children and young people with SEND living in Tower Hamlets aged 0 to 25 years, including those who have an Education, Health and Care Plan and those receiving SEND support, and also to our children who are educated in alternative provision settings

These priorities were developed in discussion with young people, parents, carers and the professionals who make up our SEND Local Area workforce. They told us that there is lots to celebrate. We have great schools in Tower Hamlets and pupils with SEND achieve well. The young Our Time Ambassadors are passionate advocates for the rights of young people with SEND. Working together, we have made progress in meeting statutory requirements for assessments, Education, Health and Care Plans, and annual reviews. Families and professionals strive to do the best for children and young people, and there is a wealth of expertise and professionals who have worked in Tower Hamlets for many years.

But we don't always get things right for children and young people with SEND. Our overriding priority is delivering the right support at the right time, working closely with children and young people, and those that know them best – their families. We will focus on providing early support so that children can fulfil their potential. We have also listened to what young people have told us and included a focus on the things that make for a good childhood : fun with friends, and inclusive play, sport, leisure and youth services.

At the same time, this strategy looks to the future. As a partnership we need to make sure we have the right services, staff and funding for the next ten years. The number of children and young people needing SEND support has been rising in Tower Hamlets and beyond. Through early support and the right education placements in local schools and colleges, our strategy sets out how we intend to meet this growing need with high quality and financially sustainable services for our children and young people with SEND.

Support for SEND in Tower Hamlets is on a five year improvement journey. The pace and direction of change will need to respond to the availability of resources and national direction on SEND. However we are absolutely committed to the improvement journey for children and young people with SEND and will work with them, their families and professionals across Tower Hamlets as we collectively respond to change.

Inclusion is everyone's business. Our SEND Improvement Board brings together young people and family representatives in partnership with local decision makers from education, health and children's services. The Board is accountable to the Tower Hamlets' Health and Wellbeing Board. It will lead delivery of our SEND strategy and work with other organisations to make sure Tower Hamlets is an inclusive and child-friendly borough for every child and young person.

## Children and young people with special educational needs, disabilities and additional needs in Tower Hamlets

There are 4,463 0–25 year-olds living in Tower Hamlets who have an Education, Health and Care Plan, up from 2,842 in 2019 – a rise of 57% over five years. Of these children and young people:

- **72%** are male and **28%** are female.
- **43%** are from an Asian background – including **40%** from a Bangladesh background; **8%** are from a Black background; **6%** from a Mixed ethnic background; **14%** from a White background; **2%** from another ethnic group; and **28%** from an unknown background.
- The most frequent primary needs are **speech, language and communications** (1550), **autistic spectrum disorder** (1172), **social emotional and mental health** (504), and **moderate learning difficulty** (447). However, it is widely recognised that many children and young people have a range of different needs.
- **54%** are being educated in a mainstream school; **21%** in a special school; **17%** are in further education; **1%** are in alternative provision; **4%** are not in education, employment or training; and the rest are in other settings, including apprenticeships, home education, and so on.

(January 2024 data. Source: [Education, health and care plans: England 2024](#))

In Tower Hamlets schools:

- Nearly **1 in 5 pupils** (19.2%) have SEND: **6.8% of pupils** have an Education, Health and Care Plan and a further **12.4% of pupils** are receiving SEND support.
- The number of pupils in Tower Hamlets schools with an EHCP grew by **around 75%** between 2015/16 and 2023/24: from **1850 to 3251** pupils.
- There are **262 pupils** on local authority funded alternative provision placements, **42 pupils** in school arranged alternative provision, and **96 pupils** in a state-funded alternative provision school (London East Alternative Provision).

(January 2024 data. Source: [Special educational needs in England, 2023/24](#))

## Developing the strategy

The strategy development was led on behalf of the partnership by the Tower Hamlets SEND Improvement Board. It was informed by an extensive evidence base including a robust self-evaluation of the SEND partnership's strengths and challenges, the findings of our LGA SEND Peer Challenge in 2023, a SEND survey for parents as part of our Family Hubs development, and evidence gathered as part of the Delivering Better Value programme design including case review analysis and a survey of more than 100 parents.



Strategy priorities were developed in late 2023 and early 2024 through initial discussions with young people, online engagement sessions with professionals, and surveys with SENCOs and parents. These were followed by an in-person multi-stakeholder workshop to which more than 50 people were invited including parents/carers, young people health, education, local authority and voluntary and community sector representatives, where participants prioritised strategy objectives.

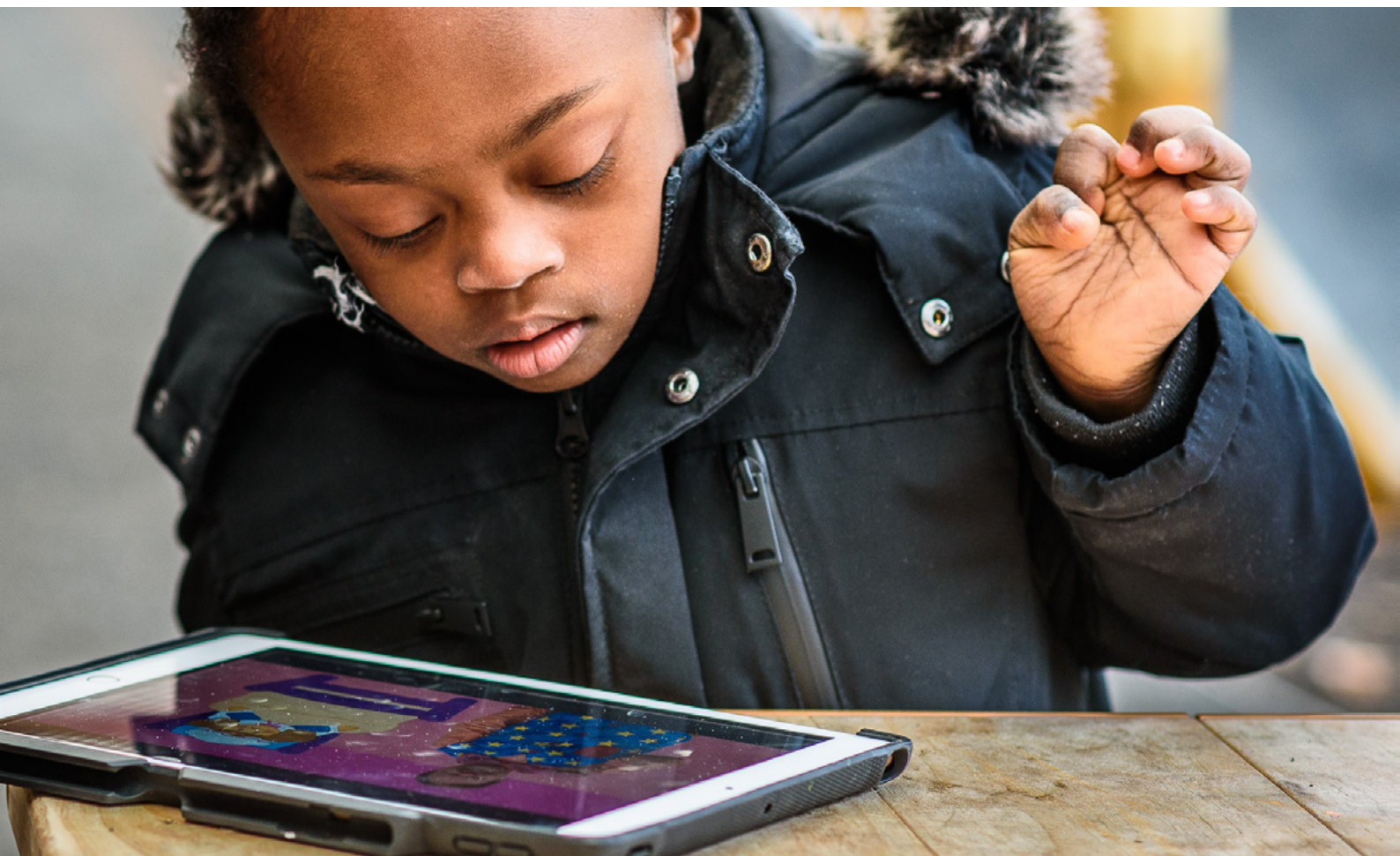
The strategy was further developed in response to consultation feedback in summer 2024 from residents, schools and health professionals, and the Children and Education Scrutiny sub-committee. Full details can be found in our consultation report.

## Priority 1

# Timely, effective and well-coordinated support for children and young people with SEND

### What we want to see

1. Strong leadership and governance, positive relationships and clear communications which build confidence and drive improvements for children with SEND and their families.
2. A whole system approach to delivering the right care, in the right place at the right time for early years, school-age children and young people through graduated pathways which everyone understands.
3. A range of provision available which is available to meet children's and young people's needs as they emerge, including for children in care and children in the justice system.
4. High quality case management and comprehensive management reports that are used by all partners to improve performance and make strategic decisions.
5. Statutory timelines met for all children and young people who need assessments, EHC Plans and annual reviews, with improvements in quality and the voice of the child reflected as appropriate throughout.





## What will we do together?

1. Reform the SEND Improvement Board to provide strategic and focused leadership.
2. Co-produce a shared understanding of a graduated response and inclusion across the local partnership. This will inform the universal offer, targeting of additional support, strategic commissioning and a consistent approach to growing needs.
3. Improve joint working between health, education and social care to achieve more strategic and efficient commissioning and a greater focus on prevention.
4. Develop and implement a proactive SEND and Alternative Provision Improvement Communications plan to build parental confidence and ensure that families and professionals feel part of our improvement journey.
5. Through the new Designated Social Care Officer, deliver and implement high quality social care input into early intervention strategies, needs assessments and EHC plans.
6. Develop a rigorous SEN quality assurance framework to support high quality interventions and EHC plans.
7. Invest an added £400,000 to deliver high quality Education, Health and Care Plans for children who need them within statutory timeframes, with a co-production meeting as part of every EHC plan and amendments at each Key Stage and during education transitions.
8. Improve our case management system through a 'hosted' system and an online SEN module which can be accessed by the SEN Service, parents and carers, and selected professionals in the Local Area.
9. Improve the SEND Management Information Report to inform decision-making, with performance measures across the partnership, benchmarked to assess progress
10. Use data from health visitor reviews and section 23 notifications to develop an understanding of emerging need and plan for future service provision.
11. Conduct a SEND Joint Strategic Needs Assessment and use insights together with management information data to identify, understand and address inequalities in identification and support.

## Priority 2

# User-friendly services for children and young people with SEND and their families

### What we want to see

1. Everything from individual support to the strategic ambition for Tower Hamlets is shaped by the voices and views of children and young people with SEND and parents and carers.
2. Families and young people from all backgrounds can find out what they can expect from services and how the SEND system works, particularly at important moments for them.
3. Services and the professionals that work in them have a good understanding of the support on offer, the role of different organisations, frameworks and timelines.
4. The number of times families and young people have to repeat information to different professionals and services is reduced.

### What will we do together?

1. Launch and roll-out our SEND Co-production Charter, and review annually with professionals, parents and young people to ensure that meaningful coproduction at strategic and individual level is happening and involves those from diverse backgrounds.
2. Introduce a new SEND 'front door' so that families can access information about available support for children .
3. Provide clear and consistent messages on SEND across all information platforms for families, developing our SEND Local Offer so that it is accessible and supported by increased engagement, use of new technologies, and regular 'Let's Talk SEND' events.
4. Increase the impact of the independent Tower Hamlets and City SEND Information, Advice and Support Service through work with Family Hubs to ensure staff working directly with families have information about SEND services.
5. Develop support for 16 – 25-year-olds as laid out within the Minimum Standards for Information Advice and Support Services
6. Learning from current initiatives, develop proposals for health passports for children and young people with SEND.
7. Gather annual feedback from children and young people with SEND about their lives, experiences and aspirations.

## Priority 3

# Early identification and support for the under-fives

### What we want to see

1. Children's needs identified earlier and more consistently across different needs and characteristics.
2. Evidence-based support for young children so that needs do not escalate while they wait for an assessment
3. Parents and carers of babies and infants with SEN supported and empowered by a confident, skilled workforce and through peer support, including before birth.
4. Fewer families feel they need to undertake lengthy statutory assessment procedures to secure the support their child needs.

### What will we do together?

1. Develop and sustain a SEND Early Intervention approach and front door model, building on Family Hubs and bringing together different services in multi-disciplinary teams to meet children's needs as early as possible, through a graduated approach and increased use of group based interventions.
2. Develop and roll-out early identification and support programmes for infants as part of our Start for Life programme including a universal 12 month review, and a programme of parent-led therapy to support social, communication and language development in infants displaying early signs of autism.
3. Collaborate across our Early Help partnership to identify and contact families of young children who may have additional needs but are not regularly accessing services for under-fives.
4. Adapt and extend the Inclusion Framework, self-assessment tool and training to early years education settings.
5. Co-produce and implement a programme of speech and language therapy for 2 to 5 year-olds.
6. Development of pathways, skills development and communication for parents and professionals for supporting children, to include children with social communication needs as well as other areas of development.

## Priority 4

# Effective education and support for school-age children with SEND and additional needs

### What we want to see

1. Expanding Tower Hamlets' successful inclusion model so that as many children as with SEND as possible are educated in a local mainstream school.
2. Education in state-funded settings for children who need specialist placements and an extended local alternative provision offer.
3. Well planned and supported transitions when children start primary, secondary and post-secondary education.
4. Reductions in absences, suspensions and exclusions for pupils with SEND and additional needs
5. Reductions in the number of children with SEND and additional needs entering the criminal justice system.
6. Effective planning for the long term so that current and future needs for specialist placements can be met through high quality provision in state-funded schools and alternative provision





### What will we do together?

1. Implement an Inclusion Framework and self-assessment tool to support inclusion for children with SEND in mainstream primary and secondary schools for whole class and SEN support levels, supported by technology where appropriate.
2. Introduce a more consistent and transparent approach to top-up funding and expected levels of support in mainstream schools and alternative provision.
3. Introduce and pilot specialist Additionally Resourced Provision attached to mainstream schools in key areas where there is a shortfall in specialist placements..
4. Continued work to develop and deliver a pipeline of appropriate support and placements for children and young people with more complex needs.
5. Support and learn from programmes such as the Phoenix Specialist Classrooms project where expertise in the borough is shared to benefit children and professionals.
6. Introduce an integrated therapies package for children in school, delivering a core offer with quality-assurance and monitoring.
7. Work together to deliver holistic and evidence-based interventions and advice to support attendance and reduce suspensions and exclusions for pupils with SEND, including delivery of effective outreach from special schools and alternative provisions.

## Priority 5

# Opportunities and support for young adults with SEND and additional needs



### What we want to see

1. Planning for adulthood starting at age 14 for young people with SEND.
2. More local education places at young people aged 16 and over with SEND.
3. More options for vocational learning or part-time alternative provision for young people with SEND
4. Timely and well-planned transitions for our young people who will need support from adult social care and health services including our children in care and care leavers.
5. Support for life skills such as travel training, welfare entitlements and wellbeing for young adults.



### What will we do together?

1. Increase in-borough places available to young people over the age of 16 years, especially in Autism, SEMH and Profound and Multiple Learning Difficulties.
2. Review the offer in sixth forms to ensure inclusivity for young people working below level 2.
3. Extend the Inclusion Framework and self-assessment tool to 16+ education and college settings.
4. Invest an additional £900,000 in support and vocational education for 18 to 25 year-olds and young adults with SEND as they transition to adulthood.
5. Implement the Transitions Protocol and pathways for young people with EHCPs who will transition from support from Children's Social Care to Adult Social Care and adult health services, with oversight by the Transitions Board, and learning from regular quality assurance audits.
6. Conduct and implement the recommendations from a Preparing for Adulthood Audit with key stakeholders.
7. Develop a wider range of support options for young people with EHCPs who do not receive support from Children's Social Care.
8. Develop and implement a three-year action plan for supported internships and apprenticeships to meet the demand from young people with SEND for pathways to employment.
9. Strengthen the offer for children with EHCPs who are within the youth justice or probation service so they receive the support, care and education they need, whether they are in a community or a secure setting.

## Priority 6

# Children and young people with SEND and neurodiversity are valued, celebrated and supported to thrive

### What we want to see

1. Children and young people with SEND are visible and celebrated in Tower Hamlets
2. A SEND workforce that promotes inclusion and has appropriate skills to enable children and young people with SEND to meet their potential.
3. Children and young people with SEND and their families feel connected with friends, peers and the wider community.
4. Children and young people have fun and improve their wellbeing by taking part in play, youth, leisure, and holiday activities.
5. Children and young people with SEND feel safe and supported.





## What will we do together?

1. Support for the Our Time SEND Ambassadors forum, Independent SEND Parent Carer Forum, and Parent SEND Ambassadors, and establish wider forums to hear the voices of all children and young people with additional needs to advocate for inclusion at a local, regional, and national level.
2. Recognise and celebrate our children and young people with SEND and additional needs.
3. Agree a coordinated workforce development plan to enhance appropriate skills and capacity for all professionals across the SEND partnership.
4. Consider how best to meet the needs of children and young people who may have undiagnosed SEND and use other local services.
5. Work with partners to meet the needs of children and young people with SEND as part of the borough's Child Healthy Weight Programme.
6. Co-produce and implement an inclusive play programme which covers infrastructure, play sessions and communications.
7. Ensure a minimum of 50% of new play equipment in park upgrades is accessible.
8. Co-design and deliver an inclusive Young Tower Hamlets service which is open to all abilities, offers dedicated sessions for young people with SEND and additional needs, supported by well-trained staff.
9. Improve accessibility through environmental improvements, workforce development and more inclusive and holistic offer for people with disabilities, as part of bringing leisure services under council management.
10. Increase the number and range of free and low cost holiday activities that are accessible for children and young people with SEND and additional needs.
11. Ensure the needs and experiences of children and young people with SEND and additional needs are addressed in the Tower Hamlets Safeguarding Children Partnership's work programme around keeping children safe.

## How we will deliver the strategy together

All organisations in the partnership are determined to deliver improvements for families and children and young people with SEND and additional needs. There is much to do, and the pace of implementation will need to reflect the available budget and the capacity of our workforce.

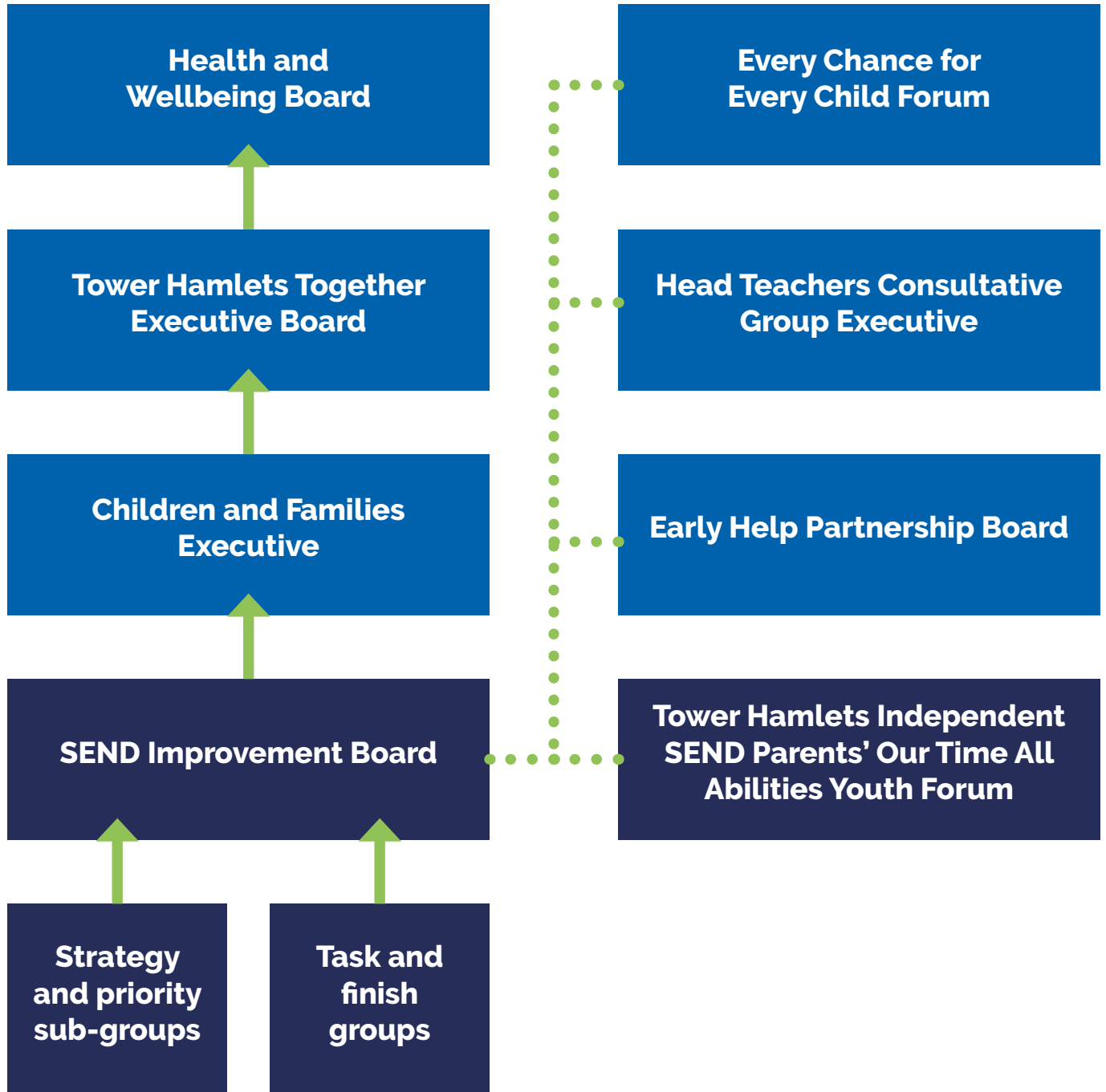
Each year, the partnership will agree a delivery plan with clear, timebound and achievable actions for different organisations. While multi-agency working is important across the SEND system, we will be mindful of the need for focused coordination in key development areas with the greatest potential for positive impact.

Each priority area will be taken forward by a sub-group of the SEND Improvement Board. Where needed, task and finish groups will be assigned to complete focused actions in a short time.

Our annual delivery planning process will allow the SEND Improvement Board to keep our priorities up to date. The partnership will need to adapt to meet emerging local needs, to reflect feedback from the strategy consultation and identified inequalities, to deliver new SEND and Alternative Provision policy requirements, to build on innovation and insight, and to implement recommendations from inspections and external reviews. We are a learning partnership that will adapt as change occurs and we will let our community know about these changes and consult with them as we go through change.

The annual report of the SEND Improvement Board will report on progress and the strategy performance measures.

## The SEND Partnership



## How we will measure change

We will measure progress on outcomes by working to develop a survey to understand how children and young people feel about their lives and to assess progress against our shared outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

Performance measures for the strategy priorities have been selected because data is collected routinely. These will be supported by operational monitoring of delivery plans, and supplemented by feedback and surveys at regular Let's Talk SEND events and focused engagement to understand children and young people's experiences.



## How we will measure change

	Priority	Measures
1	Timely, effective and well-coordinated support for children and young people with SEND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % EHC plans completed within 20 week timeframe (excluding exceptions) annually</li> <li>• Appeal rate to the SEND Tribunal</li> <li>• Number and time on waiting lists for ASD assessments.</li> <li>• Children and young people assessed by CAMHS within 5 weeks.</li> <li>• Therapy Referrals (all therapies excl. CAMHS): average waiting time after referral (weeks)</li> <li>• Number children on learning disability register that have received an annual health check.</li> <li>• Outcomes of quality assurance of EHC plans</li> <li>• Families and professionals' knowledge/feedback on outcomes achieved</li> </ul>
2	Services that are user-friendly for children and young people with SEND and their families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Findings from annual feedback survey from children, young people and parents</li> <li>• Surveys conducted at Let's Talk SEND events</li> <li>• Percent young people and parents who rate the Local Offer as good or excellent.</li> </ul>
3	Early identification and support for the under-fives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % children with SEN with good level of development at EYFS</li> </ul>
4	A great education and support for every school-age child with SEND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• % of children and young people with EHCPs being educated in Tower Hamlets.</li> <li>• % children and young people on SEN support requiring alternative or specialist provision receiving education in Tower Hamlets</li> <li>• % of children and young people with SEN support and EHCPs who are excluded, subject to fixed term suspension or on a reduced timetable.</li> <li>• Absence and persistent absence rates for children and young people with SEN Support/EHCPs</li> <li>• Academic progress and attainment for children and young people with SEN support and EHCPs</li> </ul>
5	Opportunities and support for young adults with SEND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Audit against Transitions protocol</li> <li>• % young adults with EHCPs receiving education in Tower Hamlets</li> <li>• % of 16 – 17 year olds with an EHCP and on SEND support who are not in education, training or employment</li> <li>• Transition for children with SEND into the probation service</li> </ul>
6	A borough that welcomes and celebrates children and young people with SEND	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Annual Feedback from children and young people with SEND.</li> <li>• Number of children and young people with SEND accessing young Tower Hamlets services.</li> </ul>

For more information or to get in touch:

**Tower Hamlets and City SEND Information, Advice and Support Service**  
[www.towerhamletsandcitysendiass.com/pages/home/information-and-advice](http://www.towerhamletsandcitysendiass.com/pages/home/information-and-advice)

**Tower Hamlets Independent SEND Parents Forum**  
[www.thsendforum.co.uk](http://www.thsendforum.co.uk)

**Our Time Youth Forum**  
[www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/organisations/23749-our-time-youth-forum](http://www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/organisations/23749-our-time-youth-forum)

**Children and Adolescent Mental Health Service**  
[www.elft.nhs.uk/camhs/where-we-work/camhs-tower-hamlets](http://www.elft.nhs.uk/camhs/where-we-work/camhs-tower-hamlets)

**Tower Hamlets Local Offer**  
[www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/pages/local-offer/send/send](http://www.localoffertowerhamlets.co.uk/pages/local-offer/send/send)

